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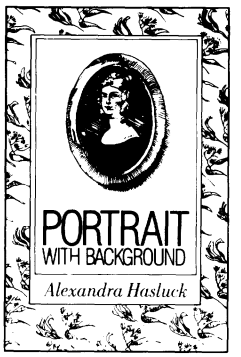

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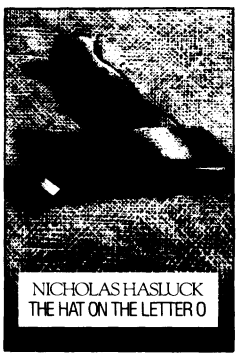

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KEEPING MUM:
Australian representations of motherhood

In recent years *Westerly* has published at least one special issue per year, generally devoted to a topic in Australian cultural life which has received little critical discussion. That this should be the case with Motherhood comes as a surprise. We are so used to the notion that we don't notice that the representation of motherhood in Australian texts has rarely been analysed, even by feminist critics.

When the media and politicians raise issues which are seen to be incontrovertibly good, often as camouflage for other moves, they are usually described as "motherhood issues". In the tough world of politics the phrase has pejorative connotations, precisely because motherhood is seen to be natural, wholesome and undeniably good.

Feminist social and literary critics have long since established the difference between sex (a biological category) and gender (a set of roles and values ascribed to a biological duality). Similarly, motherhood can be seen as a physical function and as a social construction, as the "motherhood issue" metaphor makes all too clear. The creative and critical writing which follows examines meanings and values attributed to and inscribed in motherhood in a range of poetry, prose and painting, particularly in Australia between the late nineteenth century and the present.

New York critic E. Ann Kaplan, currently a visiting scholar at the Australian National University's Humanities Research Centre, is one of the first feminist theorists to have written on the representation of motherhood. Here she considers the roles and values attributed to mothers and mothering in recent American films and culture. The issues raised have an equal relevance to Australia.

Delys Bird, in an article originally given at the 1988 conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, analyses the presentation of motherhood in four well-known Australian novels, and discovers a "cultural ambivalence towards the mother", shown most starkly in either-or choices: a mother is either idealised or is culpably negligent.

Kieran Dolin examines Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford*, noting the use and creation of social and psychological myths. A mother-son relationship becomes the vehicle for "representing the struggle between creativity and destructiveness in society and between aspiration and sorrow in the individual."

Jennifer Strauss considers the relative lack of elegies for mothers in Australian poetry compared with the number for fathers, and goes on to compare the well-known elegies for their mothers written by Gwen Harwood and Les Murray. The relationship between death and motherhood (with its implications of new life) is also considered by Singaporean poets, Wong Phui Nam and Jan Kemp, and in stories by Julie Lewis and Carmel Bird.

Brenda Walker looks at mothers and "the process of becoming a mother: pregnancy, birth and bonding", in a number of Australian women's novels. Susan Rowley provides a substantial analysis of the divisions between men and women's

work, and the spaces allotted them for that work, with reference to Australian literature and painting before and just after 1900. Given the major role that bush mythology plays in so many notions of Australian identity, the exclusion of motherhood from the meanings of active bush work gains considerable significance.

Drusilla Modjeska provides autobiographical and biographical meditations on herself and her mother, as a narrative and using techniques common to fiction. Joan Kirkby offers a Kristevan exploration of Barbara Baynton's little studied novel, *The Human Toll* which concludes that "motherhood is 'the human toll.' "

Amongst some sharply varied creative work, Singaporean poet Agnes Lam explores how expectations of motherhood impinge on the imagination of a childless woman; Jennie Fraine copes with a child's will; Elizabeth Jolley presents a first person narrator who has just become a mother; Marion Campbell provides eerie explorations of motherhood in poetry and prose; while Joan Bartlett explores the potency of motherhood as an image for other forms of female caring.

Susan Rowley's article looks at the arguments put forward for increasing Australia's birth rate just after the turn of the century. In an essay on bad Australian verse Kenneth Slessor gleefully noted the work of an unnamed Australian poet who wrote:

> Ye girls of British race
> Famous for your beauty
> Breed fast in all your grace
> For this is your duty.
>
> . . .
>
> As Anzacs gave in war
> So daughters at your call
> Will quick respond the more
> To replace those that fall.[1]

And that was before the pill! The construction of motherhood as a woman's duty is only one of many explored in this issue of *Westerly*. Some are comic, some are pleasurable, some make you feel that motherhood is, as the title of Lawson's story goes, "no place for a woman."

Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell

MARION CAMPBELL

The Feral Queen

A feral cat of huge frame and ugly, the doctor said, a threat to small marsupials, no one's puss, not even deserving of a vet's syringe, must have inspired in me this serial litter. Three "bondings" had occurred, she said, from separate couplings with the tom. In black and white I saw my letter screened, paws waving like anenomes on the ultra sound. I must say I was touched. I'd give birth at length to different selves, but not the writer, already tried, cast off. The adolescent painter long denied would re-emerge, brush in paw, and simply *do it*. A month later, it would be the singer of all feral tunes outside the quarter acre plot. The third would be the Feral Queen herself, electric furred and fierce, too quick for supermarket sightings, at best a paw print swallowed by the mop near Pet Foods, a fading yowl as trolley riders stage small tantrums and mothers stray from shopping lists, skidding on the trail of spat lollies, sucked biscuits, mangled language.

MARION CAMPBELL

Time Inside

In the sun-slatted room, listen:
the little cat licks, purrs,

stops absent-mindedly.
Eyes narrowed, she suspends you

in amber warmth, lets day fold over you
until, in any mother's belly, dark,

you're less alert to sharp vowels
of children in their bright space,

far from yours. Now deep inside the water bowl,
receiving only mirrored skies,

you hold at bay all that's compass slavery:
sextant, vector, set course.

Somewhere else, heaping up,
are punctual calls unheeded,

terminal clauses tangling.
Here, only tidal intentions:

Sea's surge and trough or wave slap.
Glad within this time sack

that is your life
turned back so future edge, edge past

touch to make the loop now
time out, you are

amniotically buoyed
and rhythmed with the not-you

beating in your belly,
humming in the traffic's wake.

CARMEL BIRD

The Breast of the Black Madonna

Each day the mournful whistle of the lollypop lady sounds from the school crossing outside my house. When the whistle blows the lady in her white coat with orange sash steps onto the road and stops the traffic with her STOP sign on a stick. Then the children standing at the side of the road, holding their mothers' hands, let go and rush across the road to school. They do not look back. Books and bags of sandwiches and apples bounce on the children's shoulders. The mothers watch until the children have gone behind a wall and then they stand leaning in towards each other for a comment, a farewell word, a heart-string strand of fellow feeling.

When I look out the window after the mothers have gone I can see the red and white poles that mark the crossing. Through the glass, across the garden, behind the branches of the trees, the striped poles, I fancy, tell me I am in Venice. The road is a canal; the lollypop lady is whistling sadly for a gondola. It comes. The lady steps in carefully and off they go, the lady in white and the cheerful gondolier.

My mother used to belong to the Friends of Venice. She wanted to see Venice before she died or before Venice sank into the sea. She would be the lady in the gondola; she would see the lions of St Mark, listen to the orchestras playing the Strauss waltzes in the open air. My mother never saw Venice.

Beneath my garden runs a seeping weeping band of grey and orange clay. On wet days a sheet of water used to cover the surface of the garden, extending the canal right up to my front door. The water has gone now because I asked Jack to dig a drain across the garden. I was not home on the day when Jack came to dig the drain. I opened the front gate and saw a neat strip of flat new earth leading from one side of the garden to the other; and I saw Jack sitting on the verandah drinking beer and reading. The book he was reading was called *The Cult of the Black Virgin*. When we had discussed the beauty of the drain, we talked about black madonnas.

I told Jack about the day I went to Montserrat where I joined the queue of pilgrims going to touch the orb in the hand of the black virgin.

'You touch the orb and ask for the Virgin's blessing,' I said.

'Then what happens?' Jack said. 'What happened to you?'

'I had a daughter,' I said, and we laughed.

I showed Jack a photograph of pilgrims in a book I got at Montserrat. Under the photograph it said:

> "Influx of pilgrims at the monastery-sanctuary of the patroness of Catalonia. This is a Benedictine monastery with a Marian sanctuary, situated on a characteristic mountain."

Jack and I looked at the picture of the statue. The wise and smiling childs sits, a shrunken king on the knee of his mother the queen. He appears to be attached to her in such a way that he could never be *de*tatched.

Once I had a dream in which the black madonna appeared. She was naked and alone, her breasts the breasts of smooth black Aphrodite. As I slept, and as the Virgin slipped like black magic into my dream, Teresa died. My eyes opened on the breathless darkness of knowledge in my bedroom, and I heard the telephone as it began to ring.

'Teresa has died.'

Teresa was only thirty when she died, sucked inward by black cancer of the uterus where her three young daughters had grown. The youngest daughter, three years old and solemn when her mother died, seemed to have acquired the gift of being able to take life as it comes.

'I take life as it comes,' I over-heard a man say in a car-park. 'Well not exactly as it comes,' he said. 'To tell the truth it's not so much taking it as it comes. You have to get in there,' he said, 'and take life by the throat.'

The week after Teresa died, I took her three year-old daughter to the milk bar for an ice-cream. The child had not been well, and the woman in the milk bar commented.

'Have you been sick, darling?' she said.

'Yes,' said the little solemn one. 'Yes, I was sick.' And then she added in quiet, conversational after-thought: 'And Mum died.'

Queen Bee

The bee man says it doesn't matter about the workers or the drones, unless you get the Queen you are wasting your time. The bees have found a split in the asbestos sheeting and are swarming in the cavity of the wall. The house smells ripe with honey.

You wouldn't want the children to be stung.

There aren't any. Not any longer.

You know what I mean.

Not really.

My friend Abigail says she would hate to think of her children without a mother, even though they are now adult. We talk about mortality.

I never knew my father or my grandfather. There were no men in my life until I was fourteen — only women. I lived in a household of women. My grandmother was the boss. She kept a fedora on the hat stand in the hall, just in case it was assumed she had no-one to protect her. She didn't need that kind of insurance. I once tried the same sort of thing in reverse — to make a different statement about power — but the idea misfired. The man at telecom described them as nuisance calls and after the third enquiry about my black knickers, I decided to change the entry in the phone book. Initials avoid that kind of confusion.

My aunt found an old photograph album that chronicles the first few years of my childhood, and before. As a form of documentation photographs have become cliched, but in this instance, they are useful. There is my mother as a young woman. It is a shock to realise that your mother existed before you knew her. Yet here is the evidence. She is much younger than I am now, looking haughty in her army uniform and with a full mouth. I used to think she was boasting when she said young men went wild about her. Now I'm not so sure. There she is again, taken just after my father died. She was still younger than I am. There is a small child looking up at her. Me.

Nick says, bees can be tricky.

He dances on one foot, pounding at his head, thumping his ear, shaking the feather duster of his hair from side to side. I can't stop laughing.

It's not funny.

I pat at the swelling with a tissue soaked in ammonia (the matron of a hospital died after thieves had trussed her up and stuffed her mouth with an ammonia soaked rag).

You frightened it.

I frightened *it*?

Leaping about like that.

Nick often makes me laugh but we don't share the same sense of humour. My friend Abigail says that our crazy sense of humour is one of the things she and I have in common. We laugh about the same things.

You never know if you're allergic, says Nick. I read about a man who was set upon by bees — they stung him over a thousand times. He swelled up like a blow fish and died.

Must be rare that sort of thing.

Just my luck.

Well, it's probably dead now. They die, you know, after they've stung.

Mm.

(The sound of bees can be very reassuring. Only after you have been stung are you wary of bees.)

My friend tells me she is dying. She says it may take a long time, that it has already been going on a long time.

Yesterday I drove down the street where I lived for twenty years of my life. The whole block had been bulldozed for redevelopment. Not a stone left. Not a brick. Only a single Cape Lilac — a tree that didn't belong there anyway; yet it had been allowed to survive. Our place, the Grays, Dingles, two semi-detached that had a whole string of tenants, the Browns' place and the Tillers'. No relic of all those lives and the lives of those who lived there before — and after — our occupancy. Just the soil. (After the bombings, so my mother said, plants grew that had not been seen for centuries). This land will not be left fallow. Already trenches have been dug; concrete poured. The earlier house, the house my grandmother built, has also gone. Now there's a slice of bread lawn, crusted with concrete in front of the duplex where her sturdy limestone cottage once made its statement among the figs and loquats, the black prince vine and loganberries — and the sickly scented bugle lilies. There were bees there, too. The evidence is in the photographs. Draped in gauze, thick cotton shirt and gloves, I am a three year old. The sting is trapped in honey from the comb. My mother, holding the comb, wears black.

I think about the meaning of power. The shifts in any relationship. I see my grandmother. Then my mother. I wonder about Nick. Some people will say that the best you can hope for is some kind of equilibrium. They don't see that as dull. Just hassle-free. On the other hand, the subtle moves one way and another as the balance shifts, set up a kind of tension, an unpredictability that holds you together. When it's weighted towards you, there's a kind of exhilaration. Nick doesn't think about it. He takes things as they come.

Nick says my friend Abigail is too intense. What he means is that her intellect frightens him. He refuses to acknowledge that she is dying. He says he likes women who are soft and warm and feminine. Motherly types. Some of the best mothers I have known have none of these qualities. They are strong and intransigent. They have had to be.

The bees are confused. Instead of their regular to-and-fro between the white blossoms of the mallee tree and the black gap in the asbestos, they collide, swerve, turn back, hurtle, drop. Some make it into the cavity. The rest are frenzied. I wouldn't get too close, says the bee man.

Oh?

The fumes. She's lethal stuff.

How long does it take a queen to die. Nestling there, her wings folded neatly, slotted into her special cell?

My friend's children sit by her bedside. Her transparent hand plucks the sheet. Her daughter stills it with her own soft palm.

Her lower body is gripped by jaws — the teeth clamped around her waist. She can feel the teeth — the incisors penetrating that vulnerable spot each side of the spine, just above the kidneys. The pressure increases. She can not escape. It is a powerful terrible creature that holds her. It will not let her go. She has no power. She knows she is dreaming and that if she tries hard enough she can will herself free. The teeth are moving, grinding. It is not pain, but terror, she feels. Her torso arches, wrenching to release itself from the grip. The effort of mind is as exhausting as the physical effort. Suddenly she is free. Then, chilled, she knows she has not escaped into consciousness but into another more terrifying dream. A vice more tenacious than the giant jaws. Her heart, her dreaming heart, is thumping. She can not breathe. Her limbs will not move. She gropes upwards, fighting through layers, trying to surface. When she awakens, to darkness, she tries to call out, but is voiceless. The word thumps in her head — Mummy. Mummy.

They say that fish are cold-blooded and feel no pain. I wonder if bees are the same. Fish are arthropods. How do you classify bees? Lepidoptera? No, they're butterflies. Hymenoptera, that's it. Anyway it doesn't matter. The Queen will be embalmed in Royal Jelly. One whiff and generations have been done for.

Miss Knox knew everything. She gave you answers to the questions you had to have explained theoretically. Later, you would find these things out for yourself. She would draw the cross-section of a flower on the board and start to label it.

These are the petals — colourful and often sweet-smelling. This is the calyx — the throat of the flower. It is full of sticky nectar. Bees will forage there, nuzzling the syrup, probing and sucking.

She would go on about fruit and seeds and stamens heavy with pollen. We would pretend not to understand so that she would go through it all again.

Isn't there another way, Miss Knox?

I'm afraid not.

It bothers me that she has to die.

There's always another queen on the way, says the bee man.

Oh?

They pick one specially, you know and fatten her up on Royal Jelly. She has a special cell. She gets fatter and fatter until one day she is strong enough to challenge the old queen.

Not in this hive, she won't.

No . . . well . . .

I was ten when the aunt I was named for died in childbirth. My mother had a dentist's appointment the day the cable arrived. She said she once had a terrible reaction to the anaesthetic and that I should go with her. For an hour the whole right side of her face had been paralysed (Oh, Margie) and she just wanted to be sure, this time, that she had someone with her, (Margie. Margie. Margie) in case the same thing happened. We walked all the way to the dentist's, past the monastery, and the Baptist Church on the corner and past the house where her Jewish friend from the office lived. In between little sniffs, she said my name over and over. Margie.

Margie. Oh, Margie. I thought I must have done something to upset her, but then she told me about her sister dying.

When I changed my name to Peg my mother thought it was defiance. That wasn't the reason at all. I just wanted to break any jinx.

They still look pretty lively.

Don't you worry. Two squirts is all it takes. They'll be gone soon.

Gone? I thought . . .

Some'll find another hive, and another queen. The rest'll stick by this one and destroy themselves.

What about the honey?

His face changes colour slightly.

Don't touch it.

I mean . . .

You can't eat it. He says the words slowly in case I have misunderstood.

What a waste.

He looks shocked.

I was thinking of the Queen. All that effort. I mean, producing all those bees.

He looks at me strangely.

That's what she's there for.

My mother died six years ago. We buried her in her husband's grave. Side by side after thirty-four years. We got them to chip *'Re-united'* on the headstone. When my father died my mother had spent a lot of money on his grave and between the glass domes filled with white china flowers there were scatterings of marble chips.

This week, for the first time since she was buried, I visited her grave. (The authorities had written to ask permission to turn the place into a lawn cemetery. A tidying-up rationalisation policy was what the letter said, I think. I wrote back to say, okay, go ahead. A grave is a grave.) The neatly designed grave edge is gone. The marble chips are gone. The only surviving dome leans against the headstone. The names at least remain.

Some time after the bee man has gone, Nick says, The Queen is dead. She must be.

He sounds relieved. Around him kami-kazi bees are dropping, their soft bodies plummeting. There is an autumn-toned carpet of bees on the ground. Nick shuffles them gingerly with a toe. They float, weightless and impotent.

Inside the cavity, the destruction has already begun. Royal Jelly, comb wax and honey melt and slide, flowing like lava from a volcano, sweeping away the dead Queen and her consorts. It spreads like treacle. Rats and cockroaches, silverfish and mice, the house's predators, who can't believe their luck, swim in the stickiness, absorbing its substance through every orifice, every pore, abandoning themselves in a deadly orgy. In a few days the mass will harden to toffee, mummifying them all.

I walk up the path and into the house away from the suiciding bees. The beeman after all, held the power — in those quick squirts. He will be pleased to know he got the Queen. That he didn't waste his time after all.

The survivors have already left to find another Queen.

My friend's daughter rings to say her mother is dead. Abigail has requested that her body be cremated and her ashes scattered. Her daughter asks whether she should follow these instructions or not.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER

Last Afternoon

The wards whirred:
nurses peering in
my turn to keep watch —
feeling your child
now more than ever,
all our conversations
down to whispered assurances.

You gripped my hands,
you had come so far
at this hard pace.
I wanted to carry you away
as you had carried me Mother,
hearing you again
Always a new baby
never time to hold you . . .

Now the pain swallowing —
your voice still real
as in a telephone-call
twelve thousand miles away.
Wanting you Mother,
angry with you because
it wasn't your fault —
angry with myself
for not having said more often
how I loved you.

It would have been simple
a small thing to do,
yet suddenly important
with the lights going out
too quickly and me carrying you
on my shoulders this final time
such a long way in the dark.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER

September Afternoon, Jubilee Lake

Cootamundra,
golden wattle
blaze in rings of light.

I watch my mother
watching
this scene,

she and my father
often brought us here.
Now

lakeside-gums
reach tall, taller
shadows embracing

cool. Reflections
summon her
like memories.

Would she take her years
back, knowing what
they've brought?

I pour our tea,
wait, listen
hang on her words:

I the wandering daughter
trace her steps,
store this sky.

The Birth

It is the only day
    it is time out of time   light out of light
the pattern (clenched hands knuckles tight)

It is the work day
all that waxes and wanes
is formed is movement is flow
is beauty
fine hair line moist hair hugging-
flowers of toes

It is the only day
trace of the vein pulse-
thrust-
the first cry

Chagall Windows, Fraumünster, Zürich

for my mother, Mother's Day, May 10, 1987

I

Figures in blue glass, yellow glass, red glass
fall through shafted sunlight like voices pitched beyond
ear-pitch, tumbling into sound.

Staining the air
they leap and hover
free-flying as prisms.

The ear's eye, eye's ear follow them
together, *zusammen*, two senses
acrobatic as bodies, loving,

while each yet curves its lineage.
The voices cross and kiss
in slow polyphony as they pass

those long narrow beds of light
letting the invisible into the morning chapel
through warmed walls of stone.

Which one mind conceived
Mozart's "Great Mass"? So attuned
it plunged through his ears like light

patterning the stainings in the glass
with kyries, with glorias. Beneath the windows,
Zürich *Frauen* fuss over table-cloths, the morning-tea

as in the cathedral the choir rehearses.
A solo soprano wanders an exultant way
above the organ loft.

II

A child signed with water at the font is folded
into the family — God is *Gott*, children *Kinder*
in this foreign, not unfamiliar tongue.

My first day in Europe I have gate-crashed a Baptism
slipped in at the wrong end of the church.
They smile, make room for me.

I sing from a Waikato childhood's stainings
early Communion and Evensong on Sundays,
a hemisphere and thirty years away.

The soprano lifts the roof.
Chagall floats in through the great rose window.
Mozart somersaults the colours.

My Cerebral Child

On the walls
of my cerebral womb,
you are knocking.

You scratch on my inner membrane
as I am about to sleep,
tickling me through my dreams,
wanting to be fed.
On the morning bus,
you want to chat.
Between classes,
you whine for patting.
You nudge me
when I do laundry,
chuckle to yourself
during dishes
and prattle incessantly
as the news reel . . .

Let me out,
You are thirty.

Child of my imagination,
what do you know
of the wombless world?

Tonight on live TV
the Challenger explodes
before schoolchildren's eyes
an earthquake in South America
leaves babies behind
muddied all over
with laval debris
from California
two kindergarten matrons
are charged with child abuse
and here in Singapore
we are talking
of Total Defence
midst streaming exams.

Child of my imagination,
what have I to offer you
beyond my uterine walls?

How should I reply
if you should ask
why we are eating
strawberries on vanilla
when infants in Ethiopia
are starved hollow
of bone marrow?
Should I offer you charity
and comfort in eternity
as an answer?
And would you then ask —
Why didn't you
let me remain
timeless from the start?

Child of my imagination,
would it be enough
for me to say

there in my womb
I have loved you,
I have hoped
you will make this world
more livable?

Or would you regret
and rather be fed,
clothed and loved
always in my imagination,
my cerebral home?

Tell me,
I am thirty.

Prettiest of our Cousins

Prettiest of our cousins, of all the girls
who have found their way into this our generation . . .
I have heard how each night towards the end,
shut out from sleep, you failed to work your way back
from the fire lodged in collar, neck,
and, most fiercely, in jaw-bone. You sat for hours
in your darkened kitchen and held to yourself
in cupped hands that monstrous fruit, your head —
no ripening pomegranate cracking open
at the cheek would show more cleanly, such flesh,
such seeds as your gums and teeth pushed out
at the lip by a stony, igneous, live thing
swelling in the bone.
In time, you could get used
to grey wisps left to you of brittle hair
that no longer matched what you could remember
of your eyes; even the thought the children
could not come near for the scent — but not
that strange life struggling each night to be born
erupting through bone and gum, through turned up
soft tissue boiling over, breaking into flame,
bright sodium metal at the touch of air.

Crying did not help.

As long ago . . .
When Uncle arrived for Father's funeral
he brought with him his violent row with your mother.
Lost in his cloud of anger at what he thought
disgrace you brought upon the family,
his shouting showed that he saw only obscurely,
even if he had come close enough to smell
the shut-in face of death,
new life beginning . . .
Unmarried and afraid, you saw even then
crying was no help. You could not but be rich earth
in whose waters the unborn strained to shape itself —
head, spine, torso, limbs, nails to grope its way
toward the break for air.

What words now, what comfort,
what had there been that would have softened for you
your fearful dream of body, of carrying new life
or being edged out of life, or merely hanging on
as flesh in pain in the face of all unreason?
Now that you have quite vanished with that dream,
what had there been that had mattered,
what had there been that had not mattered?

E. ANN KAPLAN

Discourses of the Mother in Postmodern Film and Culture

Near the end of the 1980s in North America, the change in both dominant and feminist motherhood discourses is startling. When in the 70s, as an active feminist and mother of a young daughter, I began focussing on the mother, the topic was not being researched by humanists or cultural studies scholars. Meanwhile, in the larger society, a traditional mother-discourse prevailed and was being defended as a result of radical feminist challenges.

In the ten years from 1978 to 1988, then, dramatic alterations in motherhood discourses have taken place. Briefly, these are a result of a complex combination of new scientific developments, the 60s-70s feminist movement itself, and political and social changes. The alterations amount to a North American mother-paradigm shift analogous to that which took place in the 1830s in the wake of the first Industrial Revolution. The present shift emerges in the context of a second-stage industrial revolution marked by the move from the machine to the electronic age that postmodernism signals. The entire semiotic field comprising post-Reagan America contains the dramatic alterations in technologies and the decentering effects of the multi-corporate capitalisms that have developed in the past thirty years or so. Thus, even when textual devices seem to echo certain modernist ones (such as those by a Marcel Duchamp or a René Magritte), or when they use what seem like worn-out realist conventions (as in the motherhood texts I will look at here), the entire apparatus in which works are enmeshed makes a discursive difference that critics signify by the term "postmodernism".

Anxiety about mothering signals the mother-paradigm shift. The new discourse, in which childbirth and child-care are no longer an automatic part of woman's life cycle, itself creates anxiety. In previous centuries, women's biological and reproductive roles were unquestioned. Now, this "given" has been irrevocably put into doubt: anxiety emerges just because there is a "question" as to whether or not a woman should mother; if so, of *how* to reproduce (a question occasioned by the choice of new reproductive technologies); and of what context is necessary or desirable for mothering (heterosexual marriage? single motherhood? lesbian relations?). The whole previously conceived "natural" terrain is adamantly self-reflexive, self-conscious and problematized in the 80s, giving rise to a plethora of contradictory and heterogeneous motherhood ideologies and unconscious fantasies. Historical subjects, caught up in a traditional North American individualist discourse, cannot keep pace with developments; legal, medical and other institutions also grapple with the plethora of competing, contradictory discourses the new developments have produced.

I am here concerned with the co-existence in this period of reactionary and resisting motherhood discourses, examples of which I will explore. Significantly,

dominant media forms tend to favour the reactionary discourses. At best, these take the form of a nostalgic return, if not to Jameson's Cold War 50s (often in other contexts, "the privileged lost object of desire"[1]), then to a modernist 60s. There are resisting impulses, which I will explore in a few films, but even these avoid confronting the full dimensions of institutional constraints that still construct women's lives as mothers — a move that would expose the underlying political and economic forces that work against refiguring mothering.

Dominant American popular forms always mask their relation to prevailing changes rather than addressing them directly. So, as the decade gets under way, instead of narratives dealing head-on with the impact on middle-class women of their entry into the workforce in unprecedented numbers, we have images of the nurturing *father* forced into the role by the mother's absence. Films and tv programmes criticized the mother who abdicates her role as wife and mother to pursue her own ends, leaving the domestic realm to the father. The archetype for this paradigm, *Kramer Versus Kramer* (1981), spawned many a repeat. Increasingly, cultural products focussed on the father as nurturer, as desiring to participate in child-rearing, and, further, as necessary in child-rearing. Accounts of custody cases in which the father won custody were frequent in popular materials, as were psychological studies of the new roles fathers were adopting. Attention to fathers' rights in abortion cases is one recent example of a continuing trend of an adversarial Father-position: but cases regarding custody, now not of the *child* but of eggs and embryos a couple had isolated prior to divorce, are the latest examples of the Father pitted against a Mother once again blamed for whatever is going on.

As the decade ends, the *Kramer Versus Kramer* discourse is taken up once more, only now in the "yuppie" idiom of the period and in the comedy genre. *Three Men and A Baby* (1988) typifies what has become a common theme: a remake of the earlier French film, *Three Men* shows how three single men, leading typically "yuppie" lives, grow to love the baby (fathered by one of them) that has been dumped on them by the girlfriend desiring to pursue her career rather than motherhood. The discourse surrounding the offending mother (who, in this case finally reneges on her decision to leave the baby) has greatly softened from that in the *Kramer* cycle with which the decade began, leading one to ask what the function of all these discourses has been? Why did they happen?

We could explain such images in terms of first, their indicating a cultural reaction to the 70s, when women's liberation had been a main concern; and second, displacing threat of the mother into desire for the baby (which, in *Three Men* is female and, to an unsavoury degree, sexualized).[2] The desire to control or take-over mothering from women is at least in part functioning here, perhaps along with a new and healthy interest on the part of males to share in child-rearing.

But this new interest cannot be innocent, given the prevailing semiotic codes within which such interest emerges. Nor do these explanations ultimately suffice, as will be clear after analysis of some texts: for now, it is important to note that until culture actually transcends the long tradition in which women mother, representations always function in relation to that tradition. That tradition is in transition as part of the paradigm shift I am examining: but the transition precisely involves constructing images in relation to the past: culture cannot suddenly produce new images, not tied to prior cinematic conventions or cultural codes and discourses. This perhaps explains why, at about the same time as Hollywood narratives dealt with the nurturing father, there was a series of films reviving the old "monstrous" mother-image (cf. for example, *Mommie Dearest* [1981] or *Frances* [1983]). Again, we see Hollywood dealing indirectly with fears aroused by the 70s women's movements: unconscious fear of women's new demands and strengths is displaced into a very old convention of the all-powerful, controlling and possessive mother.

The filmic images of new nurturing fathers in the early and mid 80s have, then, to be set alongside extreme concern in a wide variety of popular magazines and newspapers with the phenomenon of a huge increase in working mothers with small children. The increase, coming largely from middle-class women, meant that conflicts and problems arising from combining work and career got an attention that was never given to poor women's conflicts. The phenomenon of middle-class women working provoked much research and discussion on the effect of Day Care on the child; much was written about the "Executive Mom", and then about the "Super-Mom", but, by the end of the decade, both images were ready for playful satire, Charles Shyer's 1988 *Baby Boom* perhaps being the best example.

Interesting in both *Three Men* and *Baby Boom* is new discourse involving desire for the baby on the part of the yuppie generation. American culture seems ready to critique its drive for more money, more markets, for aggressive, ambitious pursuit (*viz*, in particular, *Wall Street*, elements of which re-emerge in *Baby Boom*). But it seems unable to do this without returning (especially in *Baby Boom*) to earlier American myths about nature as better than the city, the family as better than the single life. These films play out unconscious fantasies of abandonment (the bad mothers who drop off their babies), of unrestrained libidinal desire (parenting is a responsibility for another, and is good for you), and end with the old values (more or less; at least, *Three Men* ends with a slightly unconventional "family"). Other films like *Heartburn* image satisfaction in mothering, and the choice of mothering over career, while a comedy like *Raising Arizona*[3] details the extreme lengths (in this case kidnapping) that parents will go to in order to have a baby.

What seems like contradictory discourses (women pitted against men, fathers against mothers) in this period may actually all be part of a larger economic need to reposition the nuclear family, whose centrality was challenged by various 60s liberation movements: different economic entities have realized that fulfilling 60s demands for freedom of sexual choice, and for living arrangements alternate to the modern nuclear family, puts enormous financial strain on the State. The discourse repositioning the family, however, has to contend with a series of other (largely 60s) discourses which have problematized the old nuclear family: the 60s discourses, then, although hierarchically lower than the economic one, push themselves to the surface of popular culture as other forces insist on reinstating the family as the only viable institution.

In many ways all the films mentioned are about not *whether* to reconstitute the family, but *how* to do it in the wake of 60s feminist and other challenges to the family. So that while analyses of individual, gender-related struggles (about whether or not to mother, and *how to* mother, how to combine nurturing and other work) in the films discussed above reveal a lot about gender-contestation in culture, they need in turn to be situated within the broader, economic discourse that contains (and *requires*) them.

Three recent films, in quite different ways, exemplify contested discourses about sexuality, motherhood and the family, and the alterations in these discourses from the mid 70s to the mid 80s. *The Good Mother* (1988) represents discursive struggles in a 70s, "high modernist" framework.[3] In the film, discourses of divorce, single-motherhood, female sexuality and child custody within a 70s "liberatory" context, vie with those of conservative legal institutions. In addition, a sentimentalizing motherhood discourse (in which motherhood is viewed as in itself all that a woman needs) operates across these other discourses, producing further contradictions.

Both the novel and film may be seen as exposing the degree to which traditional mother images and myths remain deeply embedded within the United States' laws, legal institutions and representatives. We see how these codes in turn constrain what the heroine is able to become — how they force her into traditional maternal positions

that she has, in some ways, moved beyond. Both texts could also be seen to take up the important problem of motherhood and sexuality as exposed *via* the situation of single-motherhood. In this case, Anna's (the mother's) sexuality becomes highlighted, emphasized, in a way that, within the traditional family, it need not. Certainly, within the legal nuclear family (aside from the specificity of sexual abuse or of homosexual parents, so much a part of recent discourses), sexuality is considered a private matter. But the novel shows that this is not the case for the single-mother: her right to be fully sexual comes under criticism from the State (in this case, the divorced father, Brian, brings the State into the matter) when the child is involved.

Liberatory discourses about single-motherhood, female sexuality, child custody, and the State are evident here. But they exist in complex relation to what I am here calling a renewed sentimentalizing motherhood discourse. Even the novel assumes that mothering is woman's only satisfying activity. Anna is destroyed when she loses primary custody for the child, Molly; she leaves her lover, Leo (who has stayed by her through the excruciating court case), and she does not take up any new professional interest.

The film exacerbates the subdued tendencies in the novel, placing even more emphasis on the idyllic mother-child relationship. The visual representation of the New England grandparents' home (not unlike that in *Baby Boom*) is almost embarrassingly nostalgic and stereotypical, as are also the grandparents themselves. This pre-modern, Thoreauvian world still haunts the American imagination, despite its being an archaic discourse.

The film also slants things in favour of the husband in the construction of the ambivalent image of the lover and his relationship to the child. It supplies a scene, not in the novel, in which Anna flares up at Leo when he complains that her life is too narrow in being totally absorbed in the little girl. Anna, interestingly, points out that men previously wanted a home-body, and got it; they now want a woman with broader interests. She demands to know why nurturing is not enough, what is wrong with this focus? The scene prepares for the ending of the film, when Anna, having lost primary custody of the child, acts almost as if the child had died: her life is now seen to be empty, pointless; she is left to yearn for the girl, with nothing important at the centre of her life any more.

Meanwhile, like the novel, the film lets us see how legal institutions construct mothers according to old codes. The lawyer suggests that the only hope of victory is to blame Leo, and when Anna argues for saying the "truth", she is persuaded that the jury is not yet ready for a "truth" that involves openness about sexuality, particularly outside of marriage. But the heroine's over-reaction to the outcome of the case, and her passive renunciation, do not provide helpful models. There is no analysis in the film as to why the heroine is caught in her dilemma on the level of the dominant ideologies that govern institutions like the law-courts. Further, why was the heroine not a fully-fledged career woman, who cared about her work as well as about her role as mother? Why have we still not seen Hollywood address the conflict between work and parenting from the *mother's* point of view in a serious drama such as was done for fathers in *Kramer Versus Kramer*?

This film, then, betrays contradictory discourses: Anna at once stands for impassioned, extra-marital female desire (a desire only released outside of marriage); and for a sentimental self-fulfilment in mothering alone. If the terms have changed since the 19th century, the maternal sacrifice paradigm may be glimpsed returning beneath the narrative of a film like *The Good Mother*. The underlying definition of woman as "mother" and nothing else slyly returns. The film supports both this and the discourse of liberated female desire in a high modernist manner, critiquing the old-fashioned nuclear family discourse and the legal institutions still embedded

in it. It is a modernist film because it assumes that Anna's "truth" is achievable theoretically, if only legal institutions were rational. It lacks the sort of "resisting" elements one finds in other work, such as Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, to be discussed shortly.

Evil Angels (1988) is interesting in this context, since it also contains contradictory discourses. On the one hand, it too supports the notion of a woman's centrality being mothering, and does not disarticulate the old idea of the "good mother" as far as the cinema spectator is involved. That is, the film makes sure to let us see the mother's love for, and joy in, the child before the accident; it insists on the couple's innocence in letting us see the dingo exit the tent; and, finally, it takes us into the privacy of the couple's home, to catch Meryl Streep's tears.

On the other hand, the film exposes the ways in which the public and the court still can be made to evaluate a mother in terms of her outward, mythically "motherly" sign. The mother in the film refuses to adopt the mannerisms, dress and submissive style that might turn the court and jury in her direction, or support her case in the public's eye. The mother refuses to display her grief publicly, or trade on her loss in any way, even with her husband. The film demonstrates that her relative strength and independence are read negatively against prevailing motherhood codes: the court and the public construct the mother's behaviour as indicating her complicity in the baby's disappearance. The fact that her demeanour, style and manner do not fit culture's notion of motherliness is read as a capacity to murder.

Fatal Attraction, meanwhile, embodies in a postmodern way violent opposition between 60s feminist liberatory sexual discourses and the new discourses supporting the nuclear family as the desired institution. Glen Close is shown at the start of the film as an independent career woman, who objects to being made a sex object, but who, in turn, has intense sexual desire and drive. The female spectator is invited to identify with the figure at the start of the film, only to have this identification sickeningly wrenched away as we watch Glenn Close turn into a monster of horror film proportions before our eyes: we are forced now to identify with both the besieged husband and abused wife, and finally, with the wretchedly tortured child. Glen Close, the repressed underside of the nuclear family, now becomes intolerable; like the ghastly mutations of science fiction and horror genres, she must be eliminated at all costs, as the representative of all that threatens the biological nuclear family. Like those mutations, she keeps returning in ever more vile forms, with ever more monstrous purposes until finally, together, husband and wife manage to eradicate her. The sanctity of the nuclear family returns, as the battered trio regroup, and reconstitute their little community.

The violence of the opposition between the discourses in this film suggests that, as the decade ends, culture's need to reformulate the family in the wake of earlier change has increased. Now even the wife has to resort to violence — she is, as it were, *contaminated* by the "liberated" woman to the extent of having to descend to violence, suggesting that the nuclear family is, indeed, in terrible danger.

A complex phenomenon, the renewed valuing of the family surely has to do partly with (and is partly constructed by), specific anxiety about AIDS, and with the virulent anti-abortion crusade (itself one of the causes for focus on the foetus) that puts so much sentimental emphasis on having the child, and on constructing the biological family. The discourse of reproductive technologies that involves focus on the foetus and a renewed marginalizing of the mother-as-subject is related to both the above discourses (AIDS, anti-abortion) in complex ways that will emerge in the following discussion. All of these discourses, in turn, link up with the broader economic one noted earlier.

The apparently contradictory discourse opened up by new reproductive technologies in which the mother *per se* is absent, marginalized, denied, the foetus

taking her place at the centre of things, in fact turns out to collude neatly with discourses discussed earlier. Instead of an intense mother-child relationship being idealized and hypostasized, we have obsession with conception and gestation — with foetal life within the mother. But the two discourses are ultimately linked in a series of different ways, i.e. they both indicate, at least in dominant forms, a return to obsession with the biological child. The sentimental mother discourse speaks from the position of the mother's pleasures in nurturing, however, while the reproductive discourse is only interested in the mother as the being that initiates the foetal discourse — by desiring to create a foetus. After that, she becomes marginalized.

Male fears, and envy, of women's ability to reproduce have long been acknowledged as an unconscious discourse interacting with other mother discourses: in the body of my book on *Motherhood and Representation*,[4] I show that such unconscious psychic processes, in league with broader social forces, have partly produced dominant patriarchal mother-images of the polarized "angel" and "witch" stereotypes. The orientation towards the child which began with Rousseau (marking the start of the modern motherhood discourse) was further developed in psychoanalytic theory. This orientation largely entailed the marginalizing of the mother, on the one hand, and, on the other, over-valuing her for her sacrifices or denigrating her for her failures.

The new push that science is making in relation to the foetus marks, as Evelyn Fox Keller has pointed out,[5] man's age-long desire to control and understand woman's mysterious reproductive processes so long the envy of men. At the same time, the interest in the foetus carries to a wild extreme earlier patriarchal concern for the child over the mother. The mother is now asked to be responsible for (and subject to) her own unborn child; the foetus, thus, takes on a life of its own, with its own needs, demands, satisfactions.

The proliferation of foetal imagery in contemporary fiction is currently being studied as a phenomenon that needs situating in the context of both reproductive and nuclear technologies.[6] But discourses involving reproductive technologies have dominated the popular media in America in the past few years and images of the foetus itself are now common. Science's new interest in the foetus coincides with a discourse reviving distaste for women's bodies and biological processes. Patriarchy's age-long distaste has been well-documented, but the renewed representations, in such films as *Aliens* (for example) are significant as they dovetail with medical reproductive technologies. The monster-mother creature's endlessly proliferating, ghastly body, consisting of sticky, sucking tubes which smother all in its path, emblematizes a host of traditional male fears. Medical science's control of women's reproductive processes aims at producing the "clean machine" that will replace messy, female biology.

The foetal discourse also coincides with representations of the cyborg — the artificially created human being — that is prevalent in male-centred 80s science fiction film (cf. *Blade Runner, The Man Who Fell to Earth, Brother From Another Planet, Brazil*). The cyborg represents another way in which males desire to control reproduction: in this case, women are no longer needed at all, since human look-alikes can be created independently of ovums and sperm. Biological reproduction becomes anachronistic, and with it, biological women.

Ironically, medical science's new interest in controlling female reproduction (and even in replacing normal biological modes) was foreshadowed as early as 1972 by Shulamith Firestone. *The Dialectic of Sex* rests on the fantasy of an artificial womb which would relieve women of the necessity of going through child-birth processes they then saw as burdensome — as taking away from women's freedom to leave the home and fulfil themselves. Male scientists now engage in this fantasy with a

view to *replacing* women as the creators of life, marking the paradoxical and dramatic alteration in mother-discourses since 1972.

As is clear from a brief look at feminist science fiction from the late 60s to the present, it was women who first initiated a discourse around control of their bodies. This originally meant freeing themselves of a culturally imposed — and not necessarily desired — reproductive role that still prevailed at the time. It also meant freeing themselves, at the same time, for sexual choice, including lesbian relations. Utopian fantasies about reproductive alternatives appear in women's sci-fi novels, such as Naomi Michison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, Marge Piercey's *Woman On the Edge of Time*, or Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*. All three novels, in different ways, seek (as did Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Herland* [1915]) to replace usual reproductive modes with alternatives that would make possible a utopian, egalitarian world, in which women are no longer oppressed by their biological and nurturing functions. Unlike Perkins Gilman, who simply avoided the issue of female sexual desire altogether, some of this fiction stresses freedom of sexual choice and multiple and varied sexual partners, as an important part of the utopian worlds.

In the 60s, then, before abortion became readily available legally, women's discourse centred on removing themselves from being inscribed within bodies not within their control. In the 80s, however, such unconflicted fantasies about the liberating possibilities of open sexuality and of reproductive technologies are no longer possible. The AIDS crisis has drastically altered feminists' 60s conception of a liberated sexuality; and while feminists continue to debate pornography and its effects, as we near the end of the 80s the centrality of the pornography debate begins to wane. Perhaps at its most intense in the early 80s, the pornography debate is being replaced by feminist debate on the effects on women of new reproductive technologies. Already under way in the late 60s, these technologies only captured feminists' attention when their psychological and physical impacts on women became clear, and when patriarchal investment in women's reproductive bodies began to be equated with that already explored in pornography.

As Robyn Rowland has pointed out,[7] it is the remaining maternal (pro-natalism) discourse that has supported new reproductive technologies in an era when more and more women are apparently finding (although figures may be misleading)[8] that they are infertile. According to Rowland, infertile women describe the intense feeling of being outside their community because they cannot get pregnant. The discourse of pregnancy, then, is individualized and leads to women giving it precedence over all else.[9] In this way, women collude with medical scientists' new interest in proliferating, and experimenting with, the reproductive technologies that represent the cutting edge of medicine.

Significantly, women's science-fiction depicts the contradictory positions women hold in relation to new technologies. Dystopias sometimes replace 60s utopias, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986). The enunciative position in this novel could be described as "resisting postmodernism" (or a postmodernism like that which governs my own text, representing a modernist look within a postmodern universe); sometimes, as in Octavia Butler's *Dawn*, fiction radically shifts the issues at stake, writing from another position altogether, one that I would call "postmodernist" in the sense of an acceptance of new cultural tendencies, an attempt to work with new technological possibilities. A brief look at each of these novels will make the differences clear and prepare the way for some theoretical conclusions.

The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopic fantasy of a totalitarian North America, now called the Republic of Gilead, in which a group of right wing religious fundamentalists are in control. Most women are infertile, due to excessive use of chemicals and radiation released from an earthquake on the San Andreas fault. Those women, like the heroine Offred, who remain fertile, are made property of

the State for the purposes of reproducing the Commander's line. Many of the babies born are "unbabies", and there are also "unwomen", i.e. all the infertile women. Since the military take-over, women have been denied access to their money and property, which was given over to their husbands. Reduced once again to mere bodies (more thoroughly than in prior decades), women are refused literacy and education; their value is limited to reproduction.

Atwood's novel is, however, complex: running throughout the novel is a maternal discourse not dissimilar from that glimpsed in many recent films: Offred constantly remembers the period prior to the take-over, when she, Luke and their daughter lived happily together. Offred was then an intellectual, combining mothering and career successfully; the child was well-adjusted and smart. Aunt Lydia, the right-wing moral majority instructor, whose task it is to re-educate Offred and other women, constantly refers negatively to the same period, blaming the women who chose not to have children, or who participated in reproductive medical practices now outlawed (such as looking into the womb with machines to see the state and gender of the foetus). In this novel, right-wing thinking abhors new reproductive technologies, while it seems that from Offred's point of view, women were on the verge of having what they wanted when the take-over happened. Perhaps Atwood wants to indicate that, if only we take care of the environment, refuse the right-wing positions of power, and use new technologies with due respect and care, a world like the one in her novel can be avoided.

Octavia Butler's *Dawn* provides an example of fiction speaking from an altogether other position *vis a vis* new technologies — a position perhaps first articulated by Donna Haraway in 1985.[10] The novel is concerned with the problem of xenogenesis between an earth woman, Lilith, and a species, the Oankali, from another planet. A post-apocalyptic tale, *Dawn* traces the events after a nuclear destruction of earth. The Oankali land on earth and take several earth beings up to their planet to mate with, so as to produce a new species, neither human nor Oankali, which will be returned to reproduce on earth. The Oankali need such gene renewal to survive, but they also want to remove the genetic flaw that led humans into nuclear war in the first place. The new species will be more peaceful than the old. The novel ends with Lilith pregnant, but the product remains unknown.

In a sequel to *Dawn*, Butler again demonstrates how reproductive technologies will, when carried to a science-fiction extreme, not only save humankind from destruction but free women and men from the stifling notions of difference recent feminisms have exposed. As Susan Squier has noted, the novel imagines a situation where genetic, birth and social parents may be the same people or they may be different people. In this sense, Butler opens up the creative possibilities of new reproductive technologies, and challenges our species-hierarchical, nineteenth-century concept of the human body as the only valorized one.

The 60s feminist utopia, in which women control and use reproductive technologies to free themselves of an oppressive patriarchy, now gives way to new narratives preoccupied (either negatively or positively) with post-holocaust worlds. Writing in the context of extreme proliferation of nuclear weapons and of projected life-threatening (and infertility producing) chemicals, women writers imagine different kinds of postmodern worlds where the issue of the nuclear family is no longer central. Scenarios like these are partly produced by the paradoxical situation of the 80s in which several different things are happening at the same time. Let me briefly summarize:

First, male scientists began in the 60s to develop reproductive technologies not far removed from Firestone's 1972 fantasies, causing women concern about patriarchal domination of processes they had hoped to control for their own ends. Second, a new series of options began to be available to women, such as entering

professions previously open only to men, while social discourses increasingly valorized combining a career and mothering. Accepting (again within an individualist discourse) these new values, women no longer needed to see the two roles as antagonistic. Rather, they re-discovered pleasure in giving birth and in nurturing once mothering was no longer an irrevocable male mandate; finally, in line with the new social codes and with the return of the maternal as a desired function, women themselves were drawn to the new reproductive technologies as helping them to get pregnant.

It is these new technologies, together with the growing anti-abortion movement and the general reaction against 60s liberatory values, that have brought about entirely new mother discourses, in turn eliciting different feminist responses. Within feminist and academic spheres, the change has been from more or less ignoring or wanting to separate the self from (then still traditional) mothering in the 60s; to the pioneering focus on the mother from a series of different perspectives (psychoanalytic, sociological, ideological) by the first wave of scholars in the 70s and early 80s (i.e. Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jane Lazarre, Adrienne Rich, and Nancy Chodorow); to, recently, the complex feminist responses to new reproductive technologies. Whereas the first wave of feminist scholars focussed, broadly, on giving due (and for feminists *new*) attention to the mother as a subject, the second wave of feminist scholars (cf. new books by Sara Ruddick, Barbara K. Rothman, Robyn Rowland, E. Ann Kaplan) find themselves needing to address the implications of popular and scientific interest in new reproductive technologies.

In the 80s, then, the female body is a site of contestation between women seeking to retain hard-won control of their bodies, and male-scientists newly fascinated with gaining control over women's bodies through new reproductive technologies.

In the culture beyond feminist and academic spheres, the most dramatic effect of these technologies on the discursive level has been the shift from a late 70s focus on the mother's experiences, needs, conflicts and constraints in nurturing and helping children to grow (since Freud, the child's parallel needs and desires have consistently been a central concern) to a contemporary focus on the period of gestation and birth. This shift positions the *foetus* at the centre of things in place of the mother. New reproductive and other technologies (such as those for dealing with premature births) have produced a situation where the mother is seen as merely the vessel for the foetus, now conceived as a being not only in its own right, but with its own rights: these are frequently represented as in conflict with the mother's desire and, sometimes, rights.[11] The sudden proliferation of foetal representation, and the attentions to issues arising from reproductive technologies (from surrogacy to in vitro fertilization to artificial insemination) in recent popular materials, need addressing. For the upshot of much of the discussion is on the one hand a new reason to blame, deny or marginalize mothering work, and, on the other, a new sentimentalizing of the mothering relation that feels uncomfortably like its nineteenth-century oppressive idealization. Neither of these alternatives is desirable, as I hope I have shown. And yet any other position seems difficult to posit.

The difficulty arises from the collapse, yet again, into binary mother positions, albeit of a different kind than those in prior centuries. Arguably, the contemporary anxiety about the mother/mothering is only the historically appropriate manifestation of the ways in which culture has always (or at least in modern times) blocked the mother-as-subject (i.e. the mother-as-sexual, independent, autonomous). Cultural forces always work to keep the mother mythically and in representation marginalized/absent/excoriated, other than as patriarchal *function*, as something *for* the patriarchy. The exact cultural forces at work insisting on marginalizing the mother, relegating her to the periphery unless patriarchally located, remain to be analyzed: but one can hypothesize that the bar under which the mother labours

has several determinants that have been variously located in three of the great modernist narratives. These range from the discourse of survival (Darwin's narrative), which focuses on the need of the species in the earliest human communities, and on the mother required, for their protection, to be devoted to the young (included here also would be possible hormonal programming in women for nurturing); to the discourse of psychoanalysis (Freud's narrative), which makes unconscious fears of the mother manifest as the modern nuclear family gets under way, with its closed mother-child relationship; to the discourse of Marxism, with its economic, social and political reasons for marginalizing the mother.

The very existence of all these narratives exposes a constant play of forces at work in any culture such that the mother is a pawn at their mercy. External eruptions into the Real (such as war, revolution, economic or other social disasters); or patriotic concerns (in complex societies with multi-ethnic groupings) become reasons for either pushing the mother back into the home or for bringing her out into the work force. For motherhood is the one modern female role around which arguments can always be made for requiring woman to be in one place rather than another. The moral, emotional and psychic force of society's obligation to care for its young and to enable them to grow provides arguments difficult for women to take issue with. And, in recent years, social science research into the impact on children of different kinds of mothering can always be used to bolster arguments needed by society at large to re-direct the mother at times of eruption.

Here we see how the pre-modern idea of the mother prior to the first Industrial Revolution gave way to an early modern-mother construct, emblematised by Rousseau at the time of Industrialism and then to the "high" modern mother shaped through the male narratives just outlined. In our own period, in the wake of the second, electronic revolution, as I have shown, we find ourselves in the midst of transition to a new postmodern mother-paradigm. This is typified by the simultaneity of nostalgic, sentimentalizing motherhood discourses (that look back to earlier periods), and various kinds of discourses arising out of the new reproductive technologies that are revolutionizing the very concept of, not only the *human* body, but the body in general. Central here is the postmodernism that celebrates the end of history/subjectivity/the unconscious, the end of the hierarchical position of the human body as we know it, the end of logo-centric, totalizing narratives with a monolithic Subject, and the coming of a post-holocaust (positive or negative) world.

Negative dystopic postmodern fantasies serve an important warning function. Significant, too, is work that focuses on women's victimization by new institutions controlling reproductive technologies. But work exploring the benefits to women of new technologies is also important, as a correction to a one-sided rejection of all technologies because of harmful institutional control. Above all, crucial work is needed to analyze the ideological frameworks, representations, and discourses that construct the new reproductive technologies and the new social and political institutions that position the postmodern mother.

* * *

This paper is part of the last chapter of a book on Motherhood and Representation that self-consciously sets out to locate merely one dominant, white, middle-class mother-discourse in North America in the period from 1830 to the present. The deliberate limitation to this discourse was partly (simply) practical: such a complex, multi-faceted task forced me already within these limits, that it was impossible to address even other mother-discourses within North America itself (such as working class, slave, black, native-American mother discourse), let alone thinking about other national mother-discourses.

My hope is first, that the book will inspire others to develop such work; and second, that some knowledge of how a dominant North American, white, bourgeois mother-discourse developed over the hundred and fifty years considered in the book will benefit scholars researching other terrains. The complexities and contradictions within the discourse, as well as the resistance to it, and the subtle ways in which it does, and does not, change, may be useful to those researching other mother-discourses which have, often unfortunately, had to contend with the North American and Anglo-Celt discourses manifested in the agents of imperialism and colonialism.

I want to thank Brett Kaplan and Paul Willemen for their discussions relating to this essay. I remain responsible for the ideas as expressed here, however.

NOTES

1. Cf. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", in *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August 1984), p.67.
2. Cf. Tania Modleski, "Three Men and Baby M", in *Camera Obscura*, no. 7 (Fall 1988).
3. The film was made from Sue Miller's 1981 novel of the same name, and was only recently released in Australia, significantly under a new title, *The Price of Passion*. The novel clearly looks back to 70s experiences and struggles. The use of the term "high modernist" will be clarified later on.
4. Cf. E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Maternal North American Melodrama, 1830 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, Inc.). Forthcoming 1990.
5. Cf. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
6. Cf. Zoë Sofia, "Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-semiotics of Extraterrestrialism", in *Diacritics* (Summer 1984), pp. 47-60. Cf. also Susan Squier, *Reproductive Figures and Cultural Critique in Nuclear Age Fiction*. Forthcoming.
7. Cf. Robyn Rowland, *Living Laboratories: Women and Reproductive Technology* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press). Forthcoming 1990. Cf. also her articles "Of Woman Born: But for How Long?", in Pat Spallone and Debbie Steinberg, eds., *Made to Order: The Myth of Reproductive and Genetic Progress* (London and Boston: Pergamon Press, 1987); and "Women as Living Laboratories", in J. Figueira-McDonough and R. Sarri, eds., *The Trapped Woman: Catch 22 In Deviance and Control* (Sage Press, 1987).
8. Deborah Gerson, "Infertility and the Construction of Desperation", in *Socialist Review*, vol. 18, no. 3 (July-September, 1990), pp. 46-64.
9. Cf. Catherine Mohler Reissman, "Women and Medicalization: A New Perspective", *Social Policy* (Summer, 1983).
10. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs", in *Socialist Review*, no. 80 (1985), pp. 65-108.
11. Cf. Jennifer Terry, "The Body Invaded: Medical Surveillance of Women as Reproducers", in *Socialist Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Summer 1989), especially pp. 26-32.

ELIZABETH JOLLEY

My Mother's Visit

'I should never have given you the book about Elizabeth Ney.'

'Why ever . . . She was a sculptor and an artist . . . She . . .'

'She had a baby in that book without being married.'

'Oh! Really!'

'It must have given you ideas . . .'

'Don't be so utterly stupid! How can you be so stupid!'

'Keep your voice down. You don't want the others to hear you speaking to your mother like that.'

It is a cold day with the wind howling outside. I can see the dull green leaves of the trees shake as the branches toss wildly. Occasionally there are bright patches of sunshine and the jug of red tulips on the window sill suddenly seems alive. The light shines through the red waxy petals. The day seems to be one of warmth and sunshine changing suddenly to the greyness of rain lashing in the wind. Smoke is whirled from the chimney pots opposite. It whirls into space and blossom flies from some trees in a nearby garden. My mother has come to visit me. She has brought some lilies of the valley, her favourite flowers, in a small green vase shaped like a stork.

Helena is in a little wicker cradle half hidden by a screen at the foot of my bed. I almost make a cruel remark that I suppose my mother is trying to pretend that the stork brought Helena. Perhaps the hardest thing is not having any visitors, I mean not having a husband or the baby's father to come. The other women have husbands who are also the fathers of their babies.

'My baby's father is dead,' I tell one of the women when she asks me. After that she does not say anything else. I lie far down under the blanket during the time when visitors are allowed. I try to read. I hope Helena will not go on crying. She has been drawing attention to us both and to the empty chair beside my bed. I have been reading where Virginia Woolf writes of "the clock which marks the approach of a particular person" knowing that I have no such clock.

Helena cries the whole day, the first day of her life, a heart broken crying as if she knows straight away some secret awful thing about the world into which she has come.

'Why does she cry so,' my mother's eyes fill with tears. She holds Helena trying to quieten her. I see something about my mother then, something which must have belonged to her life and which I have never seen before. She tells me she has brought a present. I unwrap small pink knitted things. They look like dolls' clothes.

'The clothes are very sweet,' I try to thank my mother. I did not expect her to come. Her journey will have been quite long and complicated. Two buses and a train as well as the walk to and from the buses. I try to thank her for coming.

Suddenly it is quite dark outside and snowflakes are whirling about against the panes of the tall window. I watch the snow. It settles on the green leaves and, melting, slides off the shiny surfaces. It is late for a snow storm. The crocuses and daffodils are in flower in the gardens, my mother says, the front lawn is pretty with them. I feel a fear about the snow instead of the half remembered childhood delight when someone would cry, 'it's snowing!' A journey is made so difficult when it is snowing. I think how will it be when I have to leave the nursing home with Helena. My mother is saying she is glad I have called my baby Helena. It will be easier for her to spell when she goes to school. She sees that I am looking at the darkened sky and the whirling snowflakes. She looks towards the window too. 'It's not settling,' she says and she says she is sure it will be sunshine again in a few minutes. Before my baby is born I call her Beatrice, *the bestower of Blessings*. I feel her little round head in my side and I keep reading about Dante's love for Beatrice and how, in his poem, he sees Beatrice as being a guide through Paradise.

'No one calls anyone Beatrice nowadays,' my mother says. She explains that Helena means light and that the name is considered to be the symbol of beauty. 'And, in any case,' she says, 'the child must have a Saint name.' She says do I realise that over a hundred churches in England are called after St. Helena because of a certain Helena who was made into a saint because, while she was on a pilgrimage, she dug up the True Cross in the Holy Land. 'Imagine,' my mother says, 'her having the good sense to take a spade in her luggage.' My mother says she has always liked the idea of a pilgrimage.

'You certainly made one to come here today,' I say. Helena is actually quiet for a few moments and my mother looks at me again, the tears welling up in her blue eyes.

'No,' I say as if she has spoken. 'I can't come home to you. I don't want you to sell your house and move because of me. I shan't come so don't do anything silly.'

Before she leaves my mother stuffs some pound notes into my purse.

I hold my baby. She is new-born and small and wrinkled with grief. I hold her close to my face and feel her soft skin. She smells clean, of Vinolia soap.

MARGARET PACKHAM HARGRAVE

Small Fame

Mother was in the front parlour. She was not practising her violin or her singing, but was looking at the sweep of the lace curtains. She looked for dust along the window-sill, and did not speak for a moment. When she spoke, her voice sounded soft and sad.

"We are moving to another house and we will not be having a maid," Mother said. I looked at her puffed eyes and lips.

"Are you still waiting to be famous?" I asked Mother. She looked out the window. She often did that when Father was late coming home. He never arrived sooner because she waited for him. I looked at the piano. Father's violin case was not there.

We moved to a house on the waterfront because Mother's Aunt Catherine had rooms to spare since marriages and the war. Father did not come.

"The She-Oaks" was not at all like our fine house at Leichhardt. There were no canals at this waterfront, just a wide, still river, and there were no houses on the other side. It was very silent, even when the breeze wrinkled the water. I stood on the verandah and looked down, across the flower beds to the water. My boat, the boat I had been promised, was tied up at the jetty.

Aunt Catherine was married to Uncle Will, who was Mother's uncle, Mr William Watt.

"What will Will Watt will?" Father used to joke.
own wit. Sometimes he would add, "Watt-what? The eternal question, never satisfactorily answered. Whoever can satisfactorily explain Will Watt?"

Mother's cheeks had grown spots of pink.

"He has a dream," she had said, while Father tuned his violin.

On most days Uncle Will went to his job in the city. His painting kept him busy at the weekend. He was copying a painting in the Art Gallery. He walked in the bush while he waited for his own ideas to spring upon him. When I was scrubbing the potatoes for Aunt Catherine, Uncle Will stamped across the wooden verandah. He was carrying a thick piece of log which, he said, spoke of the naturalness of nature. The quintessence of nature's grandeur was in the log, he said, and he would paint it.

Aunt Catherine chopped the onions and I sat on the table.

"You'll be an old maid if you sit on the table," Aunt Catherine said.

"I want you to excel. You are to be the bee's knees," Mother told me as we stood on the verandah after Sunday lunch. There was a glass of champagne in Mother's hand and she had a little bunch of violets pinned to the lapel of her grey suit.

"Why must I be the bee's knees?" I asked. "I will be the heart of the working bee."

"I will be its guts, too," I thought, even though Mother does not like that word.

"I will bring home the bacon, I will work and get my just desserts," I said to myself as I sat on the stone wall and looked down into the river.

Soon the exams were coming and the bee's knees I would be, but I did not know my Geography well enough to excel. I consulted the Junior Atlas and tried hard to remember with the book closed. The towns and the rivers in inland New South Wales were hard for me to remember. I took a fine nib and some Indian ink and I wrote some tiny letters along the side of my rubber. I had to squint to see them. "FOD", I wrote, for Forbes, Orange and Dubbo, and "TAG", I wrote, for Tamworth, Armidale and Grafton and "NSW" for the big cities down the coast, for Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. I put my rubber carefully into my wooden pencil case.

Annie and Georgie and I walked along the red road to the school. In the shade of the pepper tree the teacher waited in her brown shoes. The galvanised iron roof waved and shuddered in the heat. I drank from the tap near the school verandah. The geraniums were pink and green along the sunny side of the classroom.

We took out our pencils and rubbers and the teacher wrote the questions on the board. "What is the longest river in Australia?" the scratched blackboard demanded of us. "Name three towns in central western New South Wales," it ordered us to tell it. I wished I had picked a pink geranium and placed it carefully on Miss's desk. "What is the vital industry of Newcastle?" the blackboard insisted to know in taller and taller letters.

I played with my rubber while the teacher strutted between the desks. She had a tiny hole in her brown lisle stocking. I squinted at the side of my rubber and tried to focus on the small letters that had become a little blurred. I giggled. I was the bee's knees now, the excellent Geography student. I looked harder at my rubber. "FOP" and "TOG" and "NEW" it now said.

"What have you there, Daphne?"

The teacher was standing next to me and I saw how her lipstick ran into little lines around her tight mouth.

"My rubber, Miss," I replied happily. "My helpful, interesting rubber," I thought.

"Give!" the teacher demanded. The words on the blackboard instantly shrank.

"What is this FOPTOCNEW?" the teacher's tone was harsh. Her watery eyes watered more and her lipstick glistened.

"Umpf," I said. I giggled. "Stumff- hhfumpfss?"

"Get up!" shrieked the teacher.

All the other children stared at me in awe. I was the bee's knees now. But perhaps I would not be known for excellence in Geography.

I followed the teacher and my rubber onto the verandah and down the four steps to the tap near the pink geraniums.

"You are a cheat, a low cheat, Daphne Stevens," the teacher shouted. "A despicable cheat. You will eat your sin."

The teacher turned on the tap. She grabbed me by my long hair and forced my head under the tap. I struggled, but she had an iron hand. To get me away from the tap again, she pulled on my blue ribbon and it undid and it flopped in the red mud around the tap. She ground the ribbon into the mud and she handed me the rubber.

"Eat!" she demanded. I was surprised.

She stuffed the rubber into my open mouth and she stood with her pale hair straggling across her forehead and her watery eyes full of a strange shining. I chewed the rubber. I chewed and chewed.

"Swallow!" the teacher cried.

"You'll never cheat in my school, Daphne Stevens."

I spat. I spat the chewed and blubbery rubber into the sweaty face of the teacher.

It blobbed onto her glasses and it trickled down her cheek and it stuck like paste to the pale, damp hair.

"Ha!" I yelled. "I am the bee's knees."

I kicked the teacher in her skinny shins and I ran out of the school yard.

Mother was crying when I sneaked in through the back door. I could hear the soft sobs from the front bedroom.

"Oh, Bill!" I heard her saying over and over again.

I went into my room and hid under the bed.

* * *

Annie and I walked on either side of Georgina down the red road, past the school and to the little wooden church. We held on to our black Bibles and were given worn blue hymn books at the door. We sat in the third row and I could look up to see the Reverend Jasper Pengilly turn the pages as he read the lesson. His fair face glowed and his blue eyes shone with enthusiasm for his good work. He could work with me, and did. He shook my hand after the service.

One Sunday afternoon he came to tea on the big front verandah at "The She-Oak" and Aunt Catherine laughed as she helped mother put out the bone china. I sat and looked at the Reverend Jasper Pengilly, who had a boat from which he could not catch fish. Mother was wearing her cream silk dress and the pearl and amber combs were in her hair.

"Do you enjoy Sunday School?"

The Reverend Pengilly was looking for my soul.

"Sometimes," I said.

"Only sometimes, Daphne?"

The Reverend Pengilly drew in his brows and pulled one eyebrow up at the same time. It was an amazing trick which even I could not accomplish after long minutes at the mirror.

"I like the songs," I said.

Mother rescued me with her smile.

"Daphne is very fond of music, having such a home as she had."

Mother's voice broke and the Reverend Pengilly extended his long hand in comfort so that I realised my suspicions were correct.

I walked with him up the steep stairs to the road, pretending that I was his friend.

Mother bought me a Box Brownie for my birthday. She smiled at me her soft smile and gave a little sigh.

"Perhaps, Daphne, if small things can be the begetters of the large, then this will make you famous."

I had the solutions and the trays and my dark little bedroom and I snapped and recorded all that I saw. One of my first subjects was the Reverend Jasper Pengilly.

I sat on the stone wall and I looked out across the river. It was low tide and the oyster beds were grids of black, and I could see how the shore sent its secret grey fingers out. The Reverend Jasper Pengilly was rowing past in his little boat. My boat was about the same size, but it had a little motor, put there by Uncle Will.

"*Will* it go?" I asked him, but he only laughed and charged into the bush to look for more of nature's wonders that he might paint.

As the Reverend Jasper Pengilly rowed past, I had my camera at the ready. My instincts were not wrong. I watched as the Reverend Jasper Pengilly lifted up his oars and rested them. He stood up very carefully, and when he had steadied the boat again I saw him looking round and about. As I was not wearing my blue ribbon, he did not see me on the low wall. My camera recorded the amazing thing that he did next. As he was pulling down his sweater again, I quickly got off the wall

and crouched down behind it. When I heard the sound of oars again I popped up and waved, as if I had just arrived on the scene.

"Ahoy!" called the Reverend Jasper Pengilly.

I waved again and took another picture.

I snapped Uncle Will in his painting shirt.

"Why have you made the log golden?" I asked.

"Nature is man's treasure trove!" shouted Uncle Will and waved his brush. I looked at the log where he had placed it on a wooden stool. It was black and twisted.

I snapped Aunt Catherine as she was digging around the mint bush.

"What are you doing, Daphne?" Aunt Catherine turned round when she heard the shutter click and knew that her back and beam were on my film. When she was hitching up her stockings to her knee garters, I appeared suddenly to record the moment. I snapped Annie and Georgina when they were hiding high in a she-oak tree and Mother posed for me beside the herb garden.

In my little bedroom I put red paper round the light and I bathed my film and I floated and fixed my records of our daily lives. I examined the results. The pictures were a little too dark, but clear enough.

"Look what I have!" I demanded.

The Reverend Jasper Pengilly put down his cup and smiled at Mother. Today she was wearing pale blue silk and there was a silver buckle at her waist.

"Let us look at Daphne's work," he said. Mother gave a little sigh and reached for a cucumber sandwich.

I put the bundle of photographs on the table between Mother and the Reverend Jasper Pengilly, who at once moved his chair a little closer to her. He looked at the photographs one by one.

"You look gracious here, Clarissa," he said to Mother and I saw how his blue eyes softened. I waited.

"Ha!" he laughed when he saw Aunt Catherine's enormous digging squat, and "Ha!" again when he saw how her garter pinched the puffy flesh above her knees.

"You have a sense of humour, Daph — " he started to say.

Then — "Oh!" Mother said as if someone had struck her hard and suddenly in the chest. "Oh! Oh!" she cried again and her face turned suddenly pink, then pale. She jumped up and did not care that there was a smudge of butter turning to grease-stain on her blue silk dress.

"Get out!" the Reverend Jasper Pengilly yelled at me and Aunt Catherine came in from the kitchen, her whiskery chins wobbling.

The Reverend Jasper Pengilly picked up the photographs. I acted quickly against the destructive fire in his eyes. I dived across the table and the teapot flew into the air and spewed onto a reverend hand. I snatched my photographs up and stuffed them all into my knickers, into which the Reverend Jasper Pengilly would not look even though he was running round the table. I stood behind Aunt Catherine, who was wondering what would happen next.

Mother remembered that she was a lady.

"Get . . . out!" She ordered the Reverend Jasper Pengilly, and she did not raise her voice at all.

"There will be trouble!" his voice was loud, as if he were in the pulpit and forty brazen sinners were before him.

"There is trouble already," Mother replied. "Please will you leave at once."

He did.

Aunt Catherine went to Mother, who was crying quietly.

I went back to my room and unloaded my knickers. Mother had been right. Small things can be the begetters of the large and, in a limited sense, I was famous.

DELYS BIRD

"Mother, I won't never go drovin' ": Motherhood in Australian Narrative*

Near the end of Patrick White's *The Eye of the Storm*, Dorothy, Princess de Lascabanes, flies back to her French home. Her visit to her native Australia was initiated by her mother's impending death, and has been terminated by that death. Preoccupied with consoling thoughts of her inheritance, Dorothy plans to keep her mother's bizarre jewels as "sentimental tokens", a reminder that "the worst mothers in the flesh do not necessarily destroy the touching concept of motherhood."[1] This thought functions more significantly as a general narrative statement about the nature of mothers and the politics of motherhood than as an oblique reference to a fictional mother. As narrative statement, it suggests a broad analytical framework through which mothers in fiction and the construction of motherhood in narrative might be read,[2] recalling as it does the structural argument of Adrienne Rich's influential work, *Of Woman Born*.[3] In it, Rich investigates contemporary and historical western motherhood by way of two interrelated aspects; motherhood as experience ("mothers in the flesh"), and motherhood as institution ("the touching concept of motherhood"). Mother as flesh and motherhood as concept suggest too the contradictory meanings inherent in the figure of the mother in western cultural history, incorporating the typologies of the bad, destructive mother and the good, nurturing mother.[4]

These types of motherhood — irreproachable or negligent — continue to dominate the representation of the mother in our society, and the limiting either/or dichotomy itself operates to repress motherhood in a way that is analogous to the repression of the feminine within a patriarchal social structure that labels it an unchanging mystery. While the difference Dorothy perceives between flesh and concept establishes a familiar dialectic, expressing the real and the ideal; the psycho-social experience of mothering and the cultural institutionalisation of that experience; these dialectical structures are non-productive. They merely refer to and reproduce the ambivalence with which motherhood is regarded as well as the ambiguity of the position of the mother in patriarchy. Now re-interpreted and analysed in numerous studies on mothering and in the work of feminist theorists like Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Julia Kristeva, Adrienne Rich and others,[5] motherhood has been variously described as a political battleground, a site of social meanings or a maternal space. Recognising both the social and the psychological significance, hence power and threat of the mother, Patricia Waugh says: "Women [thus] carry not only the affiliative and domestic human ties because of their economic position within the family; they also carry the deep human ambivalence about the flesh and mortality (about that which cannot be ultimately controlled)."[6]. Motherhood is thus positioned at the interface between nature and culture, between real and ideal, between self and other, and its fixedness in ideology and myth as good/bad, the eternal nature of woman, refers to a cultural ambivalence towards the mother and a patriarchal need to displace her potential power.

Little critical attention has yet been paid to the representation of motherhood in Australian texts. Using Rich's framework, which opens up questions of the relationship between the ideological and the real, and incorporating some of the issues I've raised, I want to explore the narrative meaning and function of a number of mothers in fiction. This might among other things identify both those attitudes and values that create and continually reproduce a contemporary ideology of the family, in which domesticity and femininity are conflated in the figure of the mother at its centre, as well as the processes by which that ideology is perpetuated. For example, Henry Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife',[7] a story with a central place in Australian narrative, integrates the values attached to motherhood in late nineteenth-century Australia into the story of a day in the life of a bush woman. It valorises both the ideal of stable family life and the figure of the good mother who is the perpetrator and guardian of that stability, providing a special kind of social commentary as it exemplifies the dissemination of those ideals as well as their power to shape and influence the experience of motherhood. While that experience is influenced in turn, of course, by questions of class, historical time, and cultural background as well as by individual differences, and should be understood not as monolithic but as diverse, the institutionalisation of motherhood and the inscription of motherhood within an ideology of the family denies differences.

The representation of the drover's wife is an example of this tendency to produce the pattern that elides differences. As a bush mother, the drover's wife is resourceful, undemonstratively nurturant, and fiercely protective of her home and family. This type of the bush mother is presented as a new woman for a new society. She is made representative through her status as an Australian pioneer, her depersonalisation, her lack of voice in the story, and so on, while her lonely enactment of the rituals of polite suburban life, her domestication of the bush, above all her uncomplaining acceptance of her role and function as a mother create a fictional paradigm redolent of the ways Lawson's contemporary society constructed women as mothers through its institutions and its nationalist ideologies. Her situation dramatises the immobilising effects for women of a restrictive ideal of family life, while the narrative insists she is "contented with her lot". Paradoxically, however, although this is the story of the drover's wife, the mother is repressed in the narrative. Not she but Tommy, the eldest son, is "a little hero". Her reward for the deprivation of her life comes with his final words: "Mother, I won't never go drovin', blast me if I do!" Effectively closing off the gap between this woman's life experience and the narrative celebration of maternal power and influence which seeks to deny the ambiguities of that life experience, Tommy's words also reinforce the way masculine decisions shape women's lives. Controlled in the present by Tommy's emotional dependence, the bush mother is similarly trapped and deprived by her husband's droving life, which Tommy is certain to emulate.

While a complex of socio-historical and psycho-sexual factors have operated throughout the period of white settlement of Australia to imbue domestic life with enhanced value and persuade Australian women that their fulfilment lay in that life and was to be gained through mothering, family ideologies actually devalue motherhood, naturalising the woman's function as mother. Ironically, too, although women's biology is no longer her destiny, motherhood in the twentieth century seems to have acquired ideological and psychological significance in inverse proportion to the diminishment of that previously inescapable function for most women of bearing and caring for a number of children. That is, as the choices for women's lives have widened, family ideology has tightened.[8] And while feminist scholarship and theory has rewritten the traditional myths of the mother, analysed the implications of the ideology of motherhood and its construction of women, and most recently offered a recuperation of motherhood as an active, positive process for

women, the limiting definition of women as "reproductive beings, housewives and mothers"[9] is still being produced through a masculine hegemony and internalised by the women who are its objects. Those social values and attitudes as well as the myths and ideologies that contribute to the construction of motherhood reverberate in its textualisation in a range of Australian narratives. Because my space is limited, I've chosen to read and speculate on that textualisation in works that are well known, that are 'representative' of Australian fiction, and that seem both relevant and offer different constructions of motherhood. I've used two of Patrick White's novels where mother figures are central, one of Thomas Keneally's in which motherhood is grotesquely distorted, and one of Jessica Anderson's where the role of the mother and the politics of motherhood are subjected to narrational critique.

In White's fiction, middle-class, suburban women are typically objects of the satire. Their capacity to mother is often made part of an attack on middle-class Australian family values and attitudes; women are seen as carriers of this despised value system. Among the numerous mothers of *Riders in the Chariot*,[10] Mrs Jolley and Mrs Godbold stand in oppositional textual relation to one another. Together, Jolley and Godbold become the composite mother of classical myth and contemporary ideology, with her capacity for both regenerative goodness and devouring evil. Mrs Godbold (who is the fictional type of Caroline Chisholm's "good and virtuous women")[11] and Mrs Jolley evoke the textual device of splitting into the pure examples of the Good Mother and the Evil Mother common to the representation of mothers in narrative forms like myth, fairy tale, fantasy and family romance.[12] In *Riders in the Chariot*, the device clarifies cultural ambivalence towards motherhood, as well as serving the satiric function of the dual figuration of the ideal and its corrupt reality. However, the narrative problematises this classic duality, rendering the ideal an unwitting self-parody.

Mrs Jolley, who comes to Xanadu to be Mary Hare's housekeeper is a false or terrible mother. Mary's biological mother, disappointed in her ugly, difficult daughter, has begun the process of maternal abuse Mrs Jolley continues. Mrs Jolley claims motherhood as sole justification for her existence; everything she is and does is related to and can be understood by her identity as a mother. On her arrival at Xanadu she tells Mary " 'I am a mother, and am always glad to hear of anybody in like circumstances,' " (p.43). Believing that mothers form a natural, exclusive group, Mrs Jolley empathises with Mary's dead mother: " 'Only one who has been a wife and mother can ever fully sympathise.' " (p.58). With her impossibly white teeth and her corsets, her baking of pink cakes and her sentimentally superficial Christianity, above all in her wincingly ladylike manner, Mrs Jolley parodies middle-class Australian motherhood. Her misfortune, having to live with and work for Mary Hare, is for her a result of the unnatural separation of a mother from her original family: " 'This is what happens to a mother forced by circumstances to live separated from her family.' " (p.196). Performing a grotesque dance to torment Mary Hare, Mrs Jolley foreshadows a bleak maternal future; she has "the blue eyes of future mothers." (p.68) Cruelly malicious, utterly shallow and appallingly genteel, Mrs Jolley is a type of the wicked, rejecting mother, and she functions in the novel as a continual satiric comment on the nature and function of mothers in suburban Australian society.

The good mother, Mrs Godbold, is one of the four riders of the novel's title. She exemplifies the sanctity and sanctification of motherhood. Although Mrs Godbold lacks social status — she is poor, her husband is a drunk, and she takes in washing to keep her family together — she lives out the stereotypical capacity of motherhood for endless, patient nurturing. Ruth Godbold gains narrative status not through statements of self-interest, as Mrs Jolley does, but through her actions. As well as her own children, she nurtures each of the other chariot riders of the novel. A large,

generous figure, Mrs Godbold is endlessly fecund: "Strangled by the arms of a weaned child, she was seldom it seemed without a second baby greedy at her breast and third impatient in her body." (p.66) She constantly performs her domestic tasks, her aim always to create harmony and peace in her home: "She would scrub, wash, bake, mend, and drag her husband from floor to bed when, of an evening, he had fallen down." (p.66) This succouring, long-suffering, perfect mother typifies the socially and morally regenerative qualities central to a mid-twentieth century ideology of the mother, with no acknowledgement of the actual physical, economic and emotional hardships that exist within this idealised domestic economy. As the portrayal of Mrs Godbold lapses into sentimentality, its overblown sanctity and ludicrous exaggeration — caught in the image of the mother with a child in her arms, one at her breast and one in her body — encourages the intervention of a reading suspicious of the clichéd use of the ideal of motherhood. Placed outside society, outside history, she is represented at the end of the novel as the timeless figure of the earth mother: "Mrs Godbold's feet were still planted firmly on the earth." (p.552)

Thomas Keneally's *A Dutiful Daughter*[13] is like *Riders in the Chariot* in that it depends on reduction and gross simplification for its construction of motherhood. This aberrant text produces Mrs Glover, the most extraordinary mother of Australian fiction. An awful transformation turns this mother into an anti-type of a mother goddess. The mutation (of both parents) into half-cattle, half-human creatures occurs after the Glover's daughter, Barbara, begins to menstruate, and Mrs Glover has explained to her that her body's hidden change is a natural sign of her capacity for motherhood. Thus it is part of God's plan for women. An allegorical narrative, *A Dutiful Daughter* establishes its meanings for motherhood through narrative structures which relate the human to the animal, virgin to whore, beauty to beast, and so on. Women are represented through a pagan/Christian belief system that understands them as bodies — loathsomely inscribed, tainted and fearsomely sexual, and known by the witchery of the womb. Obsessed by the story of Joan of Arc, Barbara feels she too has been assigned "the mark of the beast" (p.75). But she discovers that this mark is only her potential female fertility: that "womanhood is the mark of the beast." (p.86) Here, the familiar device of universalising women, transcending history and difference by their representation through a set of images that defines them as dangerous and disgusting bodies is particularly crude.

Women, mothers or potential mothers, are treated in this text with distaste. Bleeding and uddered in preparation for motherhood, women are doomed. Their bodies are their fate, and nature and culture combine to ensure this fate. While this treatment arguably operates to criticise the values of an unenlightened and sexist society, or question the inheritance of a chauvinist and poverty-stricken Catholicism, or describe the contradictions of an ideology of the suburban family, its impact is so strong, and its thematic and imaginative realisation so powerful that the textual mythology is inescapable: women are despicable creatures. A small but tellingly unnecessary and dismissive addendum to Damian Glover's meeting with this mother on his return home from university reinforces such a reading. His mother kisses him "with the robust suction noise that hearty mums made in old films." (p.63) In *A Dutiful Daughter*, the power of the father is dominant. Although both parents are caught by the same "accident" of nature, Mr Glover is a roguish old bull, full of animal potency as he lusts after the neighbour's heifers and complains with pride to his son of the uncontrollable demands of his twelve-inch member. He's enhanced, freed even by his animality, while Mrs Glover is tied down and plagued by hers.

Like the goddesses of classical mythology, Barbara the virgin daughter is beautiful, strong and protective, performing her ritual duties in the narrative. But she will become her mother, fulfilling the alternative myth of the woman as beast, tied to

a suffering body that is deemed useless after its breeding is done. This is the condition of being a woman that Barbara recognises at the end of the narrative when she tells a common female destiny: " 'Your condition will not be cured,' she stated to the mother . . . 'Nor will mine.' " (p.178) The ancient myth that the nature of women is their fate is linked with a more contemporary myth that women's biology is their destiny. Both are depressingly realised and continually reinforced in this offensive exploration of the myths of motherhood in which the mother is the object of narrative ridicule.

Elizabeth Hunter is the central figure of *The Eye of the Storm*. Old and rich, she's bedridden and the story of her life spins out in her memory and her dreams from the room to which she's confined and where she will die. Elizabeth Hunter's understanding of herself as a mother, as well as her children's reactions to her and their memories of their childhood, are important factors in a narrative realisation of her character and the meanings of the narrative as a whole. Here, the concept of motherhood as a socially sanctioned ideal is placed against an exploration of the lived experiences of a mother and her children. These children, Dorothy and Basil, return to Australia after many years in Europe to visit their dying mother. Their motives, however, owe less to filial love than to self-interest. More concerned to acquire their mother's wealth than her blessing, Dorothy and Basil's renewal of their relationship with their mother is nevertheless complicated by ambivalent emotion; they arrive at once yearning to love as well as ready to hate her. And Elizabeth Hunter represents both the powerless mother — since she is immobilised and made childlike by her age and her illness, thus vulnerable to her adult children — and the powerful mother — aware that her "mind is a match for the lot of them on its better days" (p.85), while she can still conjure up "the goddess hidden inside" (p.121) of her former legendary beauty.

The children, however, are paltry, second-rate replicas of this mother. Equally weak, they envy their mother her beauty, charm and wit, those gifts they have been incapable of expanding in their own lives as she has in hers, and they blame her for their tawdry empty lives. Dorothy's return becomes an attempt to recover through her mother her own childhood. This regressive longing generates an initial feeling of fulfilment when she greets her mother; a feeling which is quickly replaced by antipathy and self-admonition: "She must never forget *Mother is an evil heartless old woman.*" (p.79) Contemplating the venal purpose of her trip: "to coax a respectable sum of money out of an aged woman who also happens to be my mother", Dorothy admits the irreconcilable poles of her feeling for that mother: "whom I do sincerely love at times, but have also hated (God yes!)". (p.214) Only the death of the mother will dissolve this destructive symbiosis, and Dorothy speculates on the possibility of killing the old woman. Later, this theme is picked up in a complicit conversation between Dorothy and her old school friend, Cherry Cheesman, who effectively killed her mother when she moved her to Thorogood Village, the old people's home where the awkward presence of unwanted mothers can be forgotten.

Basil Hunter is an ageing, alcoholic, desperately lecherous actor. There is nothing sincere about Basil, who exploits his return — which is so eagerly anticipated by his mother — as a mini-drama, calling it his response to "the theatre of reunion." (p.124) Incapable of feeling, Basil seeks to lay the blame for his spurious life in what he calls "the original grudge", his mother's self-confessed inadequacy. She "*was never a natural mother* — I couldn't feed." (p.320) Like Dorothy, Basil dreams of matricide, or of being murdered by his mother, as he flounders between his social needs — money from his mother — and his unconscious desires — to kill or be killed by her. A tedious, ineffectual man, as incapable of action as he is of feeling, Basil's memory of his mother bribing him with kisses, lollies, and money as she wheedles

a declaration of love from him as a child establishes the mutually dependent, emotionally manipulative relationship between the son and his mother.

Planning to take control of their mother's life by removing her to a nursing home, thereby preserving their inheritance which is being eaten away by expensive private nursing, Dorothy and Basil still fear her influence and long for her approval. Intensely narcissistic, Elizabeth Hunter uses her children as extensions of her ego. She defines herself in relation to her mothering role, manipulating its possibilities, and her power and position are established for her in her wealth, her secure sexuality and through the continued dependence of her children. An object of fear and desire to those children, she exerts this maternal power over everyone around her. Female sexuality and motherhood coincide in the figure of Elizabeth Hunter. Her sexual body, "her breasts, her navel, the Mount of Venus" has been "contorted . . . as though her children were jostling, elbowing, fighting each other to be first out of the womb." (p.431) Voraciously possessive by nature, she has made the "hateful" children hers. Taking them from her husband, she says she "made them into mine". (p.529) Actively aggressive in her mothering, Elizabeth Hunter is nevertheless ambivalent about it. She understands that families "can eat you" (p.22) and remembers her unborn children as invaders, "barbs in her womb". (p.35) In her middle age, during a period of introspection, her self-recognition depends on her assumption that she has failed as a mother. She thinks of herself as "Above all . . . a mother whose children had rejected her." (p.415) reproducing the ideology that demands that children must love their mother.

The mother and her children move between acceptance and rejection, love and hate, greedy devouring and the freely given autonomy of individual identity. In this text, the ambiguities that hold together the mother/child dyad are made explicit. A patriarchal society "bludgeons" women "into childbirth and endless domestic slavery." (p.86) Elizabeth Hunter, by virtue of her beauty and her wealthy marriage, has avoided the realities of this situation. Yet she cannot escape the influence of the institutionalisation of mothering; she remains unfulfilled by motherhood. Her children disappoint her greatest need; they "wouldn't allow me to love them." (p.162) Two of Mrs Hunter's nurses, Flora Manhood and Mary de Santis, represent simplified alternatives of motherhood. de Santis is the saintly, chaste mother figure, whose next patient after Mrs Hunter's death will be a crippled adolescent girl where she will replace the girl's bad mother. The curiously named Manhood is the potential earth mother, who accepts after Mrs Hunter's death her seemingly individualised but actually universal procreative fate. In her final monologue, she thinks: "but your flesh is different my children are human." (p.573)

In *The Eye of the Storm* the relationship between mother and children is realised in patterns of metaphor that recreate the psychoanalytic language of the unconscious as they produce the contradictions constitutive of motherhood. The myth of mother love; generous, all-encompassing and selfless is unattainable, qualified as it is by ordinary human emotions, and always accompanied by its libidinal opposite, hatred. Blamed by her children for not loving enough, nurturing enough, giving enough, the mother is perceived by them as a lack. Yet she has dominated their lives and their weaknesses are contrasted with her strengths. A pattern of mutual dependence and rejection is complicated by sadomasochistic images of devouring — families can eat mothers, mother can swallow children — and the accompanying childhood fantasy, revived by Dorothy and Basil, two ageing children, of destroying the mother, childlike in her age. The narrative construction and exploration of motherhood in *The Eye of the Storm* depends on a continually realised tension between the ideological institutionalisation of the mother, that "touching concept of motherhood" and its lived experience, "mothers in the flesh".

Nora Porteous, in *Tirra Lirra by the River*;[14] is obsessed throughout her life by the memory of "the step of a horse, the nod of a plume" (p.140), a memory associated always with a sense of inexplicable grief. She recovers the meaning of the memory at the end of her narrative and near the end of her life as an image of the horses at her father's funeral. He died when Nora was six, and *Tirra Lirra* can be read as a quest for the lost father. Despite the ostensible narrative power of this deeply buried loss, however, Nora's story is dominated by mothers and by a narrative exploration of how mothering is constructed and mediated in social structures. The relationship between Nora and her mother confronts the powerful belief that mothers must love their children. As she begins school, Nora recognises by observing other mothers with their children that "My mother didn't like me much." Far from feeling deprived, Nora is retrospectively pragmatic about this mutual antipathy: "To tell the truth, I didn't like her much either. Our natures were antipathetic. It happens more often than is admitted." (p.14) Nora's mother, however, is uncomfortable with differences that may challenge or disrupt her belief in the rightness of her domestic world and its values. Thus she denies the possibility that mother love is more cultural platitude than natural occurrence.

It is only when she marries that Nora gains her mother's approval, which corresponds to the social status she gains as a wife. But it is soon clear that Nora is an incomplete woman; she does not become a mother. After two years of unexpectedly childless marriage, Nora weeps for what she — and her society — represents as her failure as a woman. Her husband, Colin Porteous, who is patronisingly pleased at Nora's lack of sexual response which gives him power over her, labels her frigid and blames this for what he calls her "problem", her inability to conceive. When Nora's "frigidity" suddenly disappears, the possibility of a baby seems to her a certainty, and she feels fulfilled: "proudly conscious of my status of housewife." (p.32) But she has no child and she is pitied and despised by her mother-in-law who seeks this lack as a "tragedy for Col." (p.45) Nora's childlessness within a marriage that is hateful to and oppressive of her is a narrative device, a metaphor for the emptiness of the traditionally constructed role of wife and mother for women. Nevertheless, Nora chooses not to mother when she is able to. Travelling to London after she leaves her husband, Nora has a love affair and becomes pregnant. She decides to have an abortion. This choice, however, is complicated by the masculine brutality of the abortionist who reproduces exactly Col Porteous' attitudes and hollow authoritarianism, and by the fact that this event desexualises her - it signals the end of her interactive sexual life.

In this novel, two related aspects of the ideology of women as mothers form an interlocking narrative grid. Firstly, women are socially acceptable only if they marry and mother, and the conventions of their society insist that their life is one of domestic mindlessness; one in which women are dependent on men, and one whose narrow limits deny them any capacity for female growth or achievement. Women can escape this life only if they're exceptionally determined to do so and the costs of escape are high. Secondly, accepting the position of wife and mother their society offers them may be damaging or even destructive to women. Nora wastes years of her young womanhood suffering in that restrictive domestic sphere. Dorothy Rainbow, a girlhood friend of Nora's sister Grace, is representative of its capacity to destroy. Marriage and motherhood change her from an exotic beauty with flowing hair and romantic clothes into a stereotypically suburban mother with bobbed hair and tight unyielding clothes. Dorothy's attempt to accommodate that image leads to a violent act of rebellion and outrage which is inexplicable to those who think they know her as gently submissive and conforming. She kills her husband and all but one of her children with an axe, then gases herself. Trying to understand the "incredible

pattern" that led to Dorothy's death, Nora remembers only, and ironically, that "She was anxious to please." (p.126)

When Nora finally achieves the memory of her father that has haunted her all her life it is significant that she first remembers her mother dropping a black dress over her head, and her child's eyes, filled with tears, on a level with the mother-of-pearl buckle of the belt on her mother's dress. Thus her emotion, with its potential both for creativity and for disruption of the social order is organised and effaced through the conventional trappings of grief, a black dress, and it is mothers who educate their daughters into the conventions by which they are themselves constrained.

Each of these narratives is very different in its formal and thematic preoccupations. And each allows for a reading of its representation of motherhood as a textual site, or an area of women's experience; in both cases these representations are differently constructed and produce conflicting meanings. The contradictions inherent in the ideology and the social practice of motherhood and reproduced in Elizabeth Hunter's life story in *The Eye of the Storm* are excised in *Riders in The Chariot* by the division of all the mothers of the text into two camps, the good and the bad. This splitting is part of the satiric structure of the novel, but is not only that. Bad mothers like Mrs Hare, Mrs Jolley, her friend Mrs Flack, Mrs Rosetree and all the others are expressive of the suburban, family values that the satire ridicules. Devoid of true emotion, or a moral or intellectual sensibility, these women are stupidly neglectful at best and deliberately sadistic at worst towards those in their care. Their claim to social recognition and status is achieved through their actual or putative motherhood; but their kind of motherhood is made malevolent in the text, and they are mocked for their social pretension and their poor mothering. Good mothers like Mrs Godbold or Himmelfarb's mother have all the qualities traditionally associated with the maternal role. Nurturing, self-denying, unswerving in their devotion towards those they care for, these women acquire textual status rather than claiming recognition for themselves. The divisive stereotyping has the capacity to expose the limitations of the ideological expectation that mothers will be either perfect or dangerously flawed, yet I want to argue, it is incapable of fulfilling that capacity.

The good/bad stereotype of the mother in *Riders in the Chariot* is suggestive. As is usual with satire's oversimplification of character, the destructive vitality of the wicked mothers generates a kind of textual energy that is lacking in their approved opposites. This allows for the possibility that the existence of demonic mothers textualises an explicit criticism of the attitudes that type women as good mothers so as to ensure social order through the creation of a desire for stable families with mothers at home. However, those bad mothers are themselves complacently sure they are perfect; they're caught in the ideological web that unites motherhood and goodness. Through them, then, a constant attack takes place on the devalued and corrupt family structures and attitudes they preserve and perpetuate. This does not allow, however, for a critique of the construction of motherhood, since the mothers and their constituent features are subjected to the satire. Thus the potential for subverting the social contradictions and repressive ideological practices involved in the constitution of women as mothers that exists in the device of the split mother, since it makes those contradictions so clear, is not taken up in the text. The splitting remains at the level of damning bad mothers as products and representatives of a middle class Australian family ideology and upholding stereotypically good mothers. There is no examination of how the stereotypes are produced or of what their social consequences are. Through reification, this text reinforces the status quo those stereotypes of motherhood exemplify.

The Eye of the Storm, on the other hand, establishes a psychology of motherhood through Elizabeth Hunter's memories and through her interactions with her two

middle-aged children. Privileged by wealth and beauty, Elizabeth Hunter is able to defy social conventions; as she does so she tests her own resources, and discovers her selfhood. She is not, however, immune to the persuasive power of the ideal of the good mother. Despising her adult children as much as she denied them when they were small, she nevertheless remains greedy for their love. Guilt because the children don't let her love them and her desire to be adored, worshipped even as the mother, are indications of Elizabeth Hunter's internalisation of the prescribed attributes of motherhood. Clearly not a good mother according to those prescriptions, Elizabeth Hunter also displays the ambivalence as well as the manipulative possibilities inherent in the "touching concept" of motherhood.

A number of shifting perspectives illuminate the figure of Elizabeth Hunter in her position as mother. These perspectives are controlled and themselves manipulated by a dominant, yet hidden narrator. The image of the daughter thinking of he newly dead mother that I began with exemplifies the effect of this ambiguously authoritative narrating. Dorothy will keep her mother's jewels as a substitute for sentiment, as "sentimental tokens"; she is sentimentally attached to the ideal of motherhood, that "touching concept"; and her preservation of the ideal indicates its lack of meaningful reference as it is placed against the reality of the "worst mother in the flesh". This composite image is packed with ironies. Typically, the narrator's position is deliberately unfixed, but the displacement that occurs between sentimentality and sentiment, between tokenism and felt regard opens up to question mystification of motherhood as an ideal and the strength and persistence of that concept, as well as its exploitative nature for women.

Mrs Glover, the allegorical cow-woman, stupid, bovine, diseased, and unquestioning of the model for women's lives given her by her religion and her upbringing, bears (but not as uncomplainingly as the drover's wife does) the burden of being a woman and a mother. In *A Dutiful Daughter*, St Joan is emblematic of women's lives. Her body marks her difference, and she endures repeated, unsuccessful searching of that body for the sign that will condemn her as a beast. Barbara Glover chooses death rather than the inescapable fate, which is that of all women, of becoming her mother. This vicious morality tale reinforces the mythic construction of woman as a degraded, reproductive body. Its allegorical structure asserts the relationship between beast and goddess, woman and saint, and ensures the fulfillment of that relationship in guilt, suffering and death. As an allegory, one whose effect is often blackly comic, it seeks to avoid implication with ideology as it moves between the levels of social and psycho-sexual life and their mythic counterpart. But the inevitable relationship of these levels of meaning reinforces the function of the ideology of motherhood that presents an ideal to ensure women's acquiescence to and complicity with it and to keep women safely compartmentalised as mothers.

Tirra Lirra by the River represents motherhood as problematical for women. Independence and creativity are stifled by suburban life, and that is the arena to which women are restricted if they mother, or aspire to motherhood. The attraction of that aspiration is clear, for Nora rejects the stultification embodied in that suburban life, yet longs for a child to ensure her position in that urban world. In *Tirra Lirra*, a simple denial of motherhood is not seen as possible, but adherence to the role of wife and mother is undertaken at great risk — a risk exemplified in the bizarre deaths of Dorothy Rainbow and her family. And although there is very clear criticism in the novel of the values and attitudes of the suburban world within which the mother is situated, and which is represented as a wasteland of female hypocrisy and mean-spirited matriarchy, some insight is allowed of its colluding inhabitants. One of these, Lyn Wilmot, nurses Nora during the illness that initiates her memory narrative. Lyn seems to Nora a reincarnation of her hated mother-in-law, Una Porteous. Although Una was a truly terrible mother, as Nora watches Lyn

"looking up and down the street with the same aimless longing with which Una Porteous used to look up and down the street from her front door" (p.50) the pitiful vacuity of the life to which these women are condemned and in which, ironically, they revel, is revealed. Their desolation comments on the inadequacy of the institutionalised meanings of motherhood.

The nexus between women, motherhood and the family in Australia is complex. Each of these novels reproduces in different ways and through different narrative means those cultural assumptions and expectations that hold out motherhood as the goal of women's lives and conceal its construction according to a restrictive paradigm of possibilities. None of these texts is overtly subversive, of either the narrative or the social structures through which women are represented as mothers. Only *Tirra Lirra By the River* produces a potential critique of the patriarchal positioning of women which is located in the social script of motherhood, while to varying degrees the representation of motherhood in the other text is open to question and critique.

NOTES

1. Patrick White, *The Eye of the Storm* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973). All page references are to this edition.
2. An interesting example of the collapse of fiction into the real occurs in relation to this novel when Sumner Lock Elliot refers in an interview to Elizabeth Hunter: "Oh! that hideous woman. His mother, you know, really." *Yakker 2*, ed Candice Baker (Sydney and London: Pan Books, 1987), p.69.
3. In her Foreword, Rich states her aim: "Throughout this book I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children; and the *institution* which aims at ensuring that that potential — and all women — shall remain under male control." Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (London: Virago, 1976), p.13. And in *From Here to Maternity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), Ann Oakley notices the way the "ambivalence of motherhood as it is lived clashes with the dominant ideology that says proper women become mothers." p.6.
4. The types of perfect motherhood are the Greek goddess, Demeter, who controlled the seasons and the earth's fruitfulness, hence 'earth mother', and the Virgin Mary, Christian symbol of the purity and spirituality of motherhood. In classical myth, Medea is the wicked mother (although of course her story is susceptible to feminist re-reading), and rotten mothers abound in fairy tales and folk lore as well as in more contemporary narrative forms. The Queen in *Snow White* is a perfect example, as are the Duchess and the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*. There are many orphaned fictional daughters too, and the lack of a mother (good because she's dead?) can be a severe affliction (see Adrienne Rich's article "The Temptations of a Motherless Woman", *Ms*, Vol 2, 1973, pp. 65-107, which, although it deals with *Jane Eyre*, is rich with possibilities for other texts). An alternative view of the absence of a mother claims that the success of a startling number of fictional orphans undercuts and enables questioning of the assumption that a mother is necessary for a child's successful growth and development. Writing of terrible mothers in Victorian fiction ("Murderous Mothers: the Problem of Parenting in the Victorian Novel", *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3, 1979), Joan Manheimer uses her analysis as an indictment of the socio-historical period that promulgated the ideal and the ideology of the Good Mother to support male interests.
5. An article by Heather Jon Maroney in a recent collection of feminist essays summarises the major feminist positions and theories of motherhood. "Embracing Motherhood: New Feminist Theory", in *The Politics of Diversity*, eds Roberta Hamilton and Michele Barrett (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 398-423. For a thoughtful exposition of the French feminist theorists' use of the mother and motherhood as metaphors able to "articulate the unrepresented, the female unknown", using a notion of maternal difference that "centres exclusively on the symbolic and the imaginary" see Domna Stanton, "Difference on Trial" in *The Politics of Gender*, ed Nancy K. Miller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). See, too E. Ann Kaplan (*Women & Film*, New York and London: Methuen, 1983) and Patricia Waugh (*Feminine Fictions*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989) who develop psychoanalytic theory to interpret the positioning and representation of the feminine, and its relation to the mother, in the different narrative forms of film and fiction.
6. Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions*, p.75.
7. Henry Lawson, "The Drover's Wife" in *The Prose Works of Henry Lawson*, Vol 1 (Australia: Angus & Robertson Limited, 1937).
8. According to Nancy Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), "mothering . . . has ceased to be embedded in a range of other activities and human relations. It stands out in its emotional intensity and meaning and in its centrality for women's lives and definition." (p.6) The splitting of public and private spheres of activity has been accompanied by a splitting of the woman-as-mother; her emotional power is immense, her political power negligible.
9. Joan Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory", *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1, 1979, p.217. This definition, says Kelly, shapes "women's self image and sense of worth, sexual preference and expression, women's relations with other women and with children and men."
10. Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974). (First published, 1961.) All page references are to this edition.
11. In her polemical text *Emigration and Transportation Relatively Considered*, 1814, Caroline Chisolm calls on "Her Majesty's Government", if it "be really desirous of seeing a well-conducted community spring up in these Colonies", to send them "good and virtuous women".
12. This duality — or splitting — organises and clarifies the range of attitudes and beliefs that surround motherhood. For instance, Cinderella has both Ugly Sister and Fairy Godmother; Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* Red Witch and White Witch; all function as surrogate mothers.
13. Thomas Keneally, *A Dutiful Daughter* (Melbourne: Fontana, 1979). All page references are to this edition. (First published, 1971).
14. Jessica Anderson, *Tirra Lirra by the River* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980). All page references are to this edition. (First published, 1978).
15. Sara Ruddick begins her recuperation of the value of maternity through an exploration of what mothers *do* (mothering as a social category) by a stark statement of these restrictions: "Throughout history most women have mothered in conditions of military and social violence, as well as economic deprivation, governed by men whose policies they could neither shape nor control." "Maternal Thinking", *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 2, 1980, p.343.

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KIERAN DOLIN

Mater Dolorosa: War and Motherhood in *Lucinda Brayford*

Few Australian novelists have drawn so heavily on family history as Martin Boyd. His major novels explore the fortunes of aristocratic families in the modern world. In *Lucinda Brayford* and the Langton sequence the survival of the fictional family is dependent on young women of beauty and wealth. Lucinda Brayford and Alice Langton ensure the extension of the lineage by bearing children and the continuity of the traditional lifestyle and values through their money and education. They are the 'natural aristocrats' on whom devolves the role of consciously seeking the enjoyment of all that is good and an understanding of the defeat of the good. While this pattern of pre-eminent motherhood derives from Boyd's own background — Brenda Niall has described the à Beckett family of his childhood as 'a matriarchal order'[1] — the plot in which the character of the mother is developed suggests an imaginative reworking of historical material. In *Lucinda Brayford* the relationship of mother and child is the means of representing the struggle between creativity and destructiveness in society and between aspiration and sorrow in the individual, a struggle finally expressed in the image of the *Mater Dolorosa.*

Annette Stewart has argued that the heroes and heroines of Boyd's fiction exhibit his 'search for the perfect human type'.[2] Stewart notes Boyd's shift from female to male embodiments of this ideal with the emergence of Dominic Langton in the tetralogy. In *Lucinda Brayford* this transition is both foreshadowed and shown to be a consequence of the family chronicle form. For what all Boyd's family novels reveal is not the 'hungry generations' treading their predecessors down, but the survival of various genetic traits, moral values and modes of social organization, which are traceable not only in Lucinda and Alice, but in their offspring, Stephen Brayford and Stephen and Dominic Langton. Stewart therefore proposes the 'complementary' and possibly even 'composite' functions of Lucinda and her son in the creation of the perfect human type.[3] The study of Lucinda as mother reveals that Boyd's presentation of her consciousness is more extensive than has been allowed in some accounts of the novel.[4] Specifically, the significance of Stephen's death and of the ideals he embodies is registered through Lucinda's thoughts. Dorothy Green has argued that this experience confers an archetypal dimension on the novel's representation of motherhood, that Lucinda becomes, 'like the humblest of her kind, the figure of the Eternal Mother with the Slain Son'.[5]

If these characters are types of Boyd's ideal human being, what is the basis of the typology? This question receives a precise answer in Boyd's non-fiction and especially in *Much Else in Italy*, his 'subjective travel book.' There he argues that the Greek and Christian myths express 'the accumulated experience of our race,' not just of material but of spiritual reality.[6] Boyd regards these stories, collectively designated 'the Myth', as works of art which express the spiritual in material terms, by means of plot, character, symbol and, supremely, parable. The Myth gives meaning to human life: it 'corresponds to man's experience on earth' and is 'a poetic

if not always historical explanation' of the human condition.[7] Boyd lives in the Myth, finding in it the prototype of and explanation for his own experiences. For example, of World War One, in which he fought, Boyd wrote 'Good Friday became one of the facts of daily life.'[8] From the same tradition Boyd invoked the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* as 'the poem which for seven centuries has been the supreme expression of the sorrows of womanhood', with its image of the 'grief-stricken mother who stood at the foot of the Cross and has stood there ever since.'[9] This allusion is the Christian equivalent of Green's reference to the Eternal Mother. Niall shows that Boyd viewed his own mother in light of this typology, and comments: 'That Martin thought of her only in terms of grieving motherhood reveals more about him than about her.'[10] What the biographer's conclusion demonstrates, besides the imaginative power of the *Mater Dolorosa* image for Boyd, is the possibility that such typology can be reductive as a means of characterization, not only in biography but in realist fiction. This danger applies especially to idealized figures: in *Lucinda Brayford* to Stephen more than Lucinda. More generally, the life of Christ offers a paradigm of human life: he is 'the Perfect Drawing' of humanity sought in the travel through Italy and finally revealed in Michelangelo's *Pieta*. While this is a sculpture of the mythic figures of Christ and his mother, Boyd's later novels present characters historically located in nineteenth- and twentieth-century society, but whose attributes and careers are also made significant through patterns of allusion to such mythic figures. The effect of this combination is to bring the values of Boyd's religious world-view to his representation of social and political life, to shape and evaluate history in accordance with the Myth. *Lucinda Brayford* was on this basis described by its author as a 'parable of my life and times.'[11] It re-employs both ancient and modern narratives, to present through recognizably real lives an illumination of an alternative, yet traditional, way of seeing and of acting in the world.

The family chronicle is an appropriate form in which to embody such a parable of our civilization,[12] because its structure of inheritance, applied usually to genetic and economic transmissions, can be extended to anatomize the cultural life of a society over successive generations. Though the Myth is an instrument of critique, Boyd does not simply lament the passing of a traditional order. His very invocation of the cultural heritage is a reassertion of its continuing significance and a recognition of the need for renewal. Simultaneously, his presentation of its historical decline reveals flaws in the old order itself. Boyd's central characters, especially Julie and Lucinda, the two who are mothers, express a complex awareness of the claims of past and future. In the relationship of mother and child, particularly that of Lucinda and Stephen Brayford, a contest between continuity and discontinuity is presented in historical and mythic terms, ending in the image of the mother who weeps for her son killed for refusing to bear arms like his forefathers.

The discrepancy between the dominant social reality and the mythic interpretation of human life is clearly signalled in the episode of the Christmas Hills picnic. As W.S. Ramson and others have noted, the lovemaking of Lucinda and Hugo is rendered in terms which allude to the Phoenix myth: 'She felt that she was consumed by the sun itself, by some first principle of life that immolated her body in an act of new creation.'[13] Boyd proceeds to juxtapose this apprehension with a socially-based repression of the memory of the event: 'They were both too conventional to care to think that they might be the passive instruments of forces outside themselves.' Yet the episode has a permanent influence in their lives in the consequent birth of Stephen, whose life becomes the novel's site of conflict between the 'conventional' and the mythic. While Lucinda regards her pregnancy as a 'sacred fact,' Hugo's interest is merely dynastic: Stephen is the future 'fifteenth viscount' (p.152). Commenting on the disappointment of Lucinda's youthful promise, Ramsom suggests that the birth of Stephen is her 'one positive contribution' to the world,

a central contribution given the novel's valuation of 'creative passion.' He supports this argument by connecting Lucinda's name with that of Lucina, the Roman goddess of childbirth.[14] Boyd's belief in the mythic context of modern life gives this suggestion great weight. Etymologically, both names originate with *lux*, light. Lucina was so called because she brought children into the light.[15] Lucinda is presented as performing this role both physically and figuratively. Her quest is both to lead Stephen to the truth and to protect him from evil. Her role as mother is therefore implicated in his refusal of military service and in his eventual death:

> "why did you bring him up to be so soft?"
> "I did not know the world was going to be so bloody" (p.528).

From the beginning, Lucinda's idealism operates as a criticism of the norms of aristocratic life. Stephen's conscientious objection is a denial of his role as presumptive heir, even as conceived by Paul: " 'the titles you'll inherit, the arms you bear, this place, everything comes to you from the services to their king of your fighting acestors.' " (p.514) Stephen's independent approach is foreshadowed in Lucinda's ambivalent attitude to the Brayford patrimony. From her arrival in England, she feels herself taking on 'the colour' of her new English society, but she also judges it by reference to her Australian experience. In one of the moments of introspection that are to be a significant part of her motherhood and of her own growth to wisdom, Lucinda wonders if her variable responses to people and situations arise from instability of character. She concludes that her 'readiness to accept anything that appeared to be true' is her best quality (p.188). As a truth-seeker, she influences Stephen's education and later attitudes by questioning the value of the conventional expectations of his class. She comes to feel 'the oppressiveness of the past' at Crittenden and experiences 'an urgent need to save herself and Stephen from things that had died.' Accordingly, she walks onto the common, looks down on Crittenden with its portraits of 'dead viscounts' and 'reject[s] the inheritance for her son' (p.275).

This rejection is qualified or potential, for they continue to live at Crittenden, and Lucinda acquires, for the most part, the manners and outlook of a woman of her new class. This pattern is equally true of her motherhood: Stephen is left primarily in the care of his nurses and nannies; the most frequent presentation of mother and baby is Lucinda's watching him splashing happily in the bath. This conventional, externalized picture may be as much a function of the nature of Boyd's interest in childhood as an indication of Lucinda's character. The child Stephen is an embodiment of innocent goodness, both for his author and for his mother when she walks him in the park and is reminded by his delight of the 'Immortality Ode.' (This passage is further discussed below.) Not only is childhood idealized, but the baby becomes a touchstone for adult moral consciousness in Lucinda's decision whether to leave Hugo for Pat. This question is ultimately resolved by Lucinda's eventual realization that Pat is another Hugo, one of the men 'less interested in her than in themselves and their own preoccupations' whom Lucinda feels fated to sit apart from and watch (p.446). If the question of choosing between Stephen and Pat is not posed for Lucinda's decision, a similar issue seems to arise retrospectively for Julie with Bill falling in love with his unknown half-sister. The repercussions of Julie's affair with Maitland suggest that her action is the basis for a parable of interpersonal responsibility, a vehicle for the illustration of the principle that mothers do not abandon their children, as Dorothy Green has put it.[16] The focus of Boyd's representation of family is not the facts themselves but a criticism of 'the way we live now.'

It is important to note, then, that Lucinda does not always or uncritically conform to the conventions or traditional expectations of her class. For example, Stephen

does not go to Eton and therefore does not receive the usual ruling-class education. Secondly, Lucinda's decision to holiday with Paul Brayford at St Saturnin-sur-Mer represents an important departure from the 'county' and an experience in an apparently idyllic community. This resort offers Paul a sense of cultural rejuvenation, imaged in his utterance, " 'I'm not a leaf on an oak, fallen in an English park, but a leaf on the eternal olive, the sacred tree of Athena, the ever-green tree of humanity and civilization' "(p.302). This mythic outlook is again in conflict with another world-view, the scientific and modernist approach represented by Stephen's best man, Roland Roberts. For Lucinda the sea and sunshine of St Saturnin represent a reprise of the Australian beach holidays of her youth. She recaptures that experience, 'not so much as if she had travelled backwards but as if the past had moved to the present' (p.303-4). Similarly, she thinks that at St Saturnin, Paul 'used the past to reflect a deeper light on the present' (p.307). This reflection is a personal instance of the novel's general belief in the application of ancient myths to modern lives, a brief glimmer of 'an elusive formula which could explain the pattern of her life' (p.303). The memory of innocent sensuality in the shadow of the 'Tarpeian Rock' points to the temporary, holiday quality of the St Saturnin experience. The mythic overtones of its name, both classical and Christian, are strong but apart from referring to 'its links with the golden age and its significant name' (p.307), Paul's explication is not quoted, as if readers are to pursue the significance of the allusions themselves.

The relevant associations are manifold. In Greek mythology Saturn was the last of the Titans, despite swallowing his offspring in an attempt, thwarted by their mother, to prolong his rule. In Italy the golden age of Saturn was one of agricultural prosperity, of the creation of wine and of the institution of laws, all aspects traceable in the French village life. Another classical association is with Saturnalia, the feast of excess and of Misrule, with its inversion of the social order. Saturn is finally said to have been father of Junó, the Roman goddess who eventually took over the myths and powers of Lucina. As a daughter of Australia, associated both with station and beach, it is no wonder that Lucinda feels at home in St Saturnin. Just as Lucina became Christianized as St Lucy, so there was a St Saturninus, bishop of Toulouse. His preaching infuriated the congregation, who subjected him to a violent death. His story is analogous to Stephen's, brutally attacked for his beliefs, treated as a criminal and, metaphorically, hurled from the Tarpeian Rock. St Saturnin-sur-Mer is therefore a place made meaningful through myth: it offers a revelation of the 'eternal' good in modern setting, of a society built on freedom, equality, love and respect for others, but it also incorporates an awareness of cruelty and rejection of truth, forces inimical to the development of a good society.[17]

The experience of St Saturnin gives Lucinda a perspective on both Australia and England. While England seems a dying culture of 'leaves on the fallen tree,' Australia burgeons. This organic conception of society, a staple of conservative thought from Edmund Burke onwards,[18] is expressed in the contrast between the fertility of the Vanes and the dying-out of the Brayfords. The invocation of natural processes of growth and decay is combined with a sense of destruction in the human realm, of the experience of the death of the young 'in adolescentis flore.' Lydia's innocent fecundity,

> 'there's something gone wrong with this country. You don't know where you are. You all want a few kids to occupy your time. . . . You must come out to Australia soon and we'll buck you up" (p.328),

is inadequate for Lucinda after her experiences with Hugo, with Bill and with the death of Stephen. The function of this contrast is not to oppose nature and culture through distinct representations of Australia and England, but to show distinctive cultures which are both informed by creative and destructive, good and evil forces.

The most extreme instance of intra-cultural conflict in Europe is the British bombing of the French fleet at Oran. With the death of Pierre, the son of Harry and Assomption, England kills one of its own children and destroys the St Saturnin experiment.

Boyd's integrated representation of family and society, of history and myth, of innocence and experience, is most fully traceable in the death of Stephen and in Lucinda's response to it. Stephen is drawn as an 'ordinary' young man, but one in whom certain qualities, such as ingenuous goodness and forgiveness are visible. This mixture of the normal and the ideal is later reformulated as the 'Perfect Drawing' of humanity, but here it enables Lucinda to construct from her son's life and death the possibility of the triumph of the good in both the individual and European society. Stephen's achievement and limitations are focalized through Lucinda in an extension of her role as truth-seeker. As focalizer, Lucinda lives up to her name by bringing his goodness to narrative light and thus enlarging the novel's rhetoric of value. For example, Lucinda's perception of a childhood incident and her consequent meditation on the 'Immortality Ode' enables Stephen's character to be viewed as a vehicle of the 'visionary gleam' of another, spiritual realm:

> She wondered whether it was a positive thing, brought 'not in entire forgetfulness' from some other world, or whether it was merely an absence of knowledge of the sordid griefs and doubts of this world (p.208).

Lucinda's musing introduces the question which will be dramatized in Stephen's life. Moreover the scene itself is predictive: the leaf which delights the infant Stephen becomes the instrument of his adult illumination of the natural law of growth, on the basis of which he decides to refuse military service:

> As he stood there, examining the tree, it came upon him with rapidly increasing conviction that there was another law of being from that which men obeyed. . . . It was as if he had renounced the world, but had accepted it again on a different level, so that his renunciation was not a denial but a deeper affirmation of life (p.513).

As Dorothy Green has pointed out, this representation places the moral law and the positive law of the State in conflict, the outcome of which is Stephen's imprisonment and death.[19] The mythic pattern of Christian martyrdom is imposed on this section of the novel by allusions to the Crucifixion and Resurrection, but the pattern itself is prefigured in Stephen's name, that of the first martyr on whose feast-day he is born. Imprisoned and beaten for his belief, Stephen's intimations of good and evil are assailed so much that images and memories of each dissolve into each other in a nightmare until it seems that 'his body was torn apart by them, as if he were nailed to a cross made of love and hatred' (p.524). As noted above, the imagery of Good Friday was Boyd's favoured means of comprehending the slaughter of youth in modern war. Dream is the occasion for a symbolization of spiritual experience here, a personal 'war in heaven' with the victory of love represented by the return of light and music to Stephen's consciousness. This love, emblematically expressed in the light which shines from his eyes, inspires an irrational hatred in his guard who seeks through violence to destroy it. In an externalization of the Crucifixion typology Stephen becomes the victim of the dishonest and aggressive powers which have caused the war. Straker is the novel's embodiment of these powers, a domestic counterpart of Hitler, as Susan McKernan has shown.[20] His vilification of Stephen matches the attacks of the guard. However, while the body 'became steadily weaker under the kicks and punches,' the spirit proves inviolable.

As Ramson notes, both Lucinda and Stephen seem passive during his last months of life.[21] Shocked and helpless at the haggard and wasting appearance of her son,

Lucinda can only watch and grieve, especially as Stephen does not respond to medical treatment. In this respect Lucinda assumes the role of the mother in the Good Friday story, the *Mater Dolorosa* standing beside her dying son. While Boyd generalized the significance of this image, as we have seen, his conviction that modern war was a reenactment of Good Friday made the *Mater Dolorosa* particularly referable to those bereaved through war. In this treatment the victims of war are shown to be not merely the soldiers but their mothers, spouses and children. The Myth can only comfort them through the *Mater Dolorosa*, whose tears 'mingle with their own, and her Son on the Cross, whose blood mingles with that of the brothers they have left behind.'[22] Lucinda's passivity functions therefore to intensify and dignify her grief. As *Mater Dolorosa*, she witnesses Stephen's martyrdom, suffering yet seeking some understanding and hope. In King's College Chapel after the deposition of Stephen's ashes she recalls his combination of ordinariness and 'love of the good' and concludes that 'tomorrow the good must return to mankind for it was as urgent in him as the evil, which at length it must redeem' (p.545). The hymn with which the novel ends, *Eya, Resurrexit!*, expresses this faith in terms of the Myth. With hindsight Boyd commented later, 'I doubt if I could write with such simple faith today.'[23] Nevertheless, the Resurrection image does more than simply pursue Stephen's Crucifixion allusion to its Mythic conclusion. It proceeds out of Lucinda's own feelings and consciousness. In the Chapel she recalls her previous visit there with Stephen, after which she sought to explain her cynicism through her experience of loss: *'Partir, c'est mourir un peu* and I have parted from so many things.' (p.545) On this experience and on the continuities found in Cambridge is the survival of Stephen's truth built. She becomes the embodiment of the novel's wisdom, attaining the goal of her lifelong search and keeping alive the light of the good.

Through the image of the mother inheriting from her son the truths of a devalued tradition, Boyd concludes his exploration of continuity and decay in individuals, families and cultures. Such an inversion of the 'natural' pattern of succession constitutes a criticism of the modern ethos and of those who control it. That this criticism is expressed in writing as classical in its elegance as in its allusions indicates that Boyd would purify and renew the tradition. However, the world in which Stephen dies is presented less as the modern product of the traditional order than as a distortion or dismantling of it. This complex attitude to the past, a combination of critique and desire, is reflected in the structure of the novel, which is both linear and circular: noting changes, it seeks the unchanging; filled with an apocalyptic sense of ending, it tries to find its own beginning. Little wonder, then, that the 'mother of sorrows' presides over *Lucinda Brayford*, grieving and hoping, waiting uncertainly for the new to be born, Phoenix-like, out of the ashes of the old.

NOTES

1. *Martin Boyd: A Life* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), p.15.
2. 'The Search for the Perfect Human Type: Women in Martin Boyd's Fiction,' in *Who Is She? Images of Woman in Australian Fiction*, ed. Shirley Walker (St Lucia: UQP, 1983) pp.118-35.
3. Stewart, p.126.
4. See e.g. A.D. Hope, 'On Knowing Where To Stop: Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford,*' in *Native Companions* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974) 204-15 at p.209: 'Boyd manages to give a powerful impression of her state of mind without ever taking us inside that mind.'
5. 'Martin Boyd' in *The Literature of Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Dutton (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1976) 509-27 at p.523.
6. *Much Else In Italy* (London: Macmillan, 1958) p.5.
7. *Much Else*, p.15.
8. Boyd, 'Preoccupations and Intentions,' *Southerly*, 28 (1968), 83-90 at p.83.
9. *Much Else*, p.136.
10. *Martin Boyd: A Life*, p.119.
11. 'Preoccupations and Intentions,' p.86.
12. In 'Dubious Cartography' Boyd writes that the English sections of *Lucinda Brayford* depict 'the collapse of a social order.' *Meanjin*, 23 (1964) 5-12 at p.11.
13. *Lucinda Brayford* (1946; Sydney: Lansdowne, 1969) p.141. All subsequent references, to this edition, are given parenthetically in the text.
14. '*Lucinda Brayford*: a form of music,' in *The Australian Experience: Critical Essays on Australian Novels*, ed. W.S. Ramson (Canberra: ANU Press, 1974) 209-228 at p.224.
15. Patricia Monaghan, *Women in Myth and Legend* (London: Junction Books, 1981) p.162; see also p.182.
16. 'From Yarra Glen to Rome: Martin Boyd 1893-1972,' in Green, *The Music of Love* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984) 23-41 at p.25-26.

17. The sources for the foregoing discussion are: Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Monaghan, *Women in Myth*; and Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (1877-87; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1974).
18. See, e.g., Sir Geoffrey Butler, 'The Tory Tradition' in P.W. Buck, *How Conservatives Think* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) p.147.
19. 'Martin Boyd,' p.523.
20. 'Much Else in Boyd: The Relationship between Martin Boyd's Non-fiction and his Later Novels,' *Southerly*, 38 (1978) 309-30 at pp.313-4.
21. Ramson, p.227.
22. *Much Else*, p.138.
23. Boyd, *Day of My Delight* (Sydney: Lansdowne, 1965) p.211.

JENNIFER STRAUSS

Son and Moon: Scenes from Maternal Life

While Armstrong walks the moon her youngest son
Lurches unsteadily round the TV set.
She cries; it seems a moment innocent,
Absurd, weightless of cause or consequence.
Curious, his fingers ask: "Be these tears wet?"

In Canada, he paints a schoolboy sign:
"No More Cruising". Although not sure it's funny
She laughs, is proud to march beside him,
Shoulder to shoulder down a foreign street.
The sun shines; it's high summer; people hope.

Home again, his mood grows darker, darker;
He is night without stars. She is afraid
But doesn't see him beaten by the police,
The TV news being tired of demonstrations;
After the telephone call, she turns it off

But the blank screen unfurls his angry banners:
"Fill Bellies, Forget Space. Stuff NASA. Build
Homes, Not Rockets. Close Pine Gap." It shows her
Riot gear, slashing hooves, his clumsy steps
Walking a landscape stranger than the moon.

JENNIFER STRAUSS

Elegies for Mothers: Reflections on Gwen Harwood's "Mother Who Gave Me Life" and Les Murray's "Three Poems in Memory of My Mother"

The death of the mother realizes one of our most profound infantile fears of loss: it leaves us to face the final frustration of the unassuageable and not-to-be-expressed desire to re-possess the maternal space and knowingly to assume its *vertu*, its power, even while we reclaim it as the locus of undifferentiated oceanic being in which power was not an issue and there was perfect security because there was no consciousness of otherness; it leaves us betrayed; it leaves us as nobody's child, thrust out once more into the world to grow up, but this time on our own, and unprotected in the generational front line for the next round of visits from the grim reaper.

The death of the mother, too, realizes one of the most profound of our wishes, to be independent, to be free of the powerlessness of childhood and its inscription in the debt of the flesh that we feel so much more vividly towards the maternal body than towards the paternal. This wish *is* socially permissible, indeed it is seen as socially necessary — but in ways that are encompassed with ambiguous (and to some extent) gender-differentiated sanctions. To have expressed it in open conflicts may have left residual guilts and anxieties which are re-activated in grief at guilt's now irreparable status; to have suppressed it may have left residual resentments which if finally acknowledged may precipitate us into the guilt situation, or, if still suppressed as the price of retaining a hold on the mother's love, must provoke an intense version of the "death as betrayal and desertion" syndrome.

I found it painful to write those two paragraphs; but at least they have solved my rather lazy-minded notions that poets avoided writing elegies for mothers merely because they thought the risks of being (or at least of being judged to be) sentimental were too high, or were unwilling or unable to move into the mode of mythological celebration of the Great Mother than enabled George Barker to write of his mother as

> . . . huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
> Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,
> Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for
> The lame dogs and hurt birds that surrounded her,[1]

But that was in another country — and although the Australian generic mother flickers, if dimly, as a value symbol (the bush woman) in a poem like Geoff Page's "Grit: A Doxology," it is not easy to think of elegies for individual mothers which will challenge those that we find for fathers in Vincent Buckley's splendid "Stroke"

sequence or James McAuley's "Father, Mother, Son". The latter indeed demonstrates a tendency that appears positively flaunted in Germaine Greer's *Daddy, I Hardly Knew You*: that is, to recoup the father at the expense of rubbishing the mother.

I do not at all wish to suggest an embargo on elegies for fathers (having written one myself); nor do I want to speculate on possible reasons for a preference which I offer as a subjective impression unsustained by any systematic statistical survey. Rather I want to launch into the equally troubled speculative waters of questioning whether there is a gender bias to the experience of the death of the mother which is likely to be reflected in the poetic coming to terms with that death that constitutes the category of elegy, with its unstable components of grief and celebration.

The source of this speculation is my reading of Gwen Harwood's "Mother Who Gave Me Life" and Les Murray's "Three Poems in Memory of My Mother" ("Weights," "Midsummer Ice" and "The Steel").[2] In discussing these poems and their possible provision of definitively feminine and masculine responses to the death of the mother, I am trying to base myself firmly on material contained in the texts, without recourse to biographical knowledge or speculation. Above all, when I come, as I know I am coming, to that perilous ground of psychological and moral analysis, I want what I say to be taken as a reading of the poems — not of the poets. It is a reading that comes nervously from an avowed opponent of gender essentialism. I cannot help but note that the dominant image of Harwood's poem is fabric, while that of the longest and final of Murray's poems is steel: but it is less important that this should be taken as some expressive gender predisposition towards imaging experience than that it should be recognized as central to the different ways in which the death of the mother is experienced in the two poems.

Grief is a common term, but in the world of Harwood's poem it is part of a paradoxical process of completion and continuity that binds the individual human life to the mysteries of the universe. If it were not for what had gone before, there might seem to be an almost reckless disparity of scale (of sentimentality) in

> The Sister said, When she died
> she was folding a little towel.
>
> You left the world so, having lived
> nearly thirty thousand days:
> a fabric of marvels folded
> down to a small space.

But what has gone before is definition of the mother's existence both historically and generically within "a fabric of marvels": recognition of the live-giving bond between her mother and herself has sent the poet-daughter through a kind of reverse evolutionary history:

> backward in time to those other
> bodies, your mother, and hers
> and beyond, speech growing stranger
>
> on thresholds of ice, rock, fire,
> bones changing, heads inclining
> to monkey bosom, lemur breast,
> guileless milk of the word.
>
> I prayed you would live to see
> Halley's Comet a second time.

In Murray's three poems, but especially in "The Steel," the experience remains overwhelmingly one of loss and severance:

> I am older than my mother.
> Cold steel hurried me from her womb.
> I haven't got a star
>
> What hour I followed
> the waters into this world
> no one living can now say.
> My zodiac got washed away.
> The steel of my induction
> killed my brothers and sisters;
>
> * * *
>
> it was the steel proposed
> reasonably, professionally,
> that became your sentence
>
> * * *
>
> Thirty five years on earth:
> That's short, Mother,
> as the lives cut off by war
>
> and the lives of split children are short.

But this quotation reminds us that there are major differences in the circumstances of maternal death, differences that may be felt to be of themselves enough to account for some of the tonal differences between the two poems. Murray's mother's death is a premature one; she has died one month short of her 36th birthday, leaving as a schoolboy the son who now writes "I am older than my mother." She has died moreover of complications of a later pregnancy which are explained in "The Steel" as brought about by "the steel of my induction." Harwood's mother's death is in the course of nature, the wearing-out of "fine threadbare linen/ worn, still good to the last"; it occurs when the daughter is adult; and there is no suggestion that she should feel any causal responsibility for the death, although she bears the different, perhaps more typical, guilt of resisting "the wisdom/ I would not learn from you."

And yet I am unconvinced that these differences are in fact enough to account for the striking difference in the nature of grief in the two poems. Both the consolation and the tension of Harwood's poem come from the thought "of women bearing/ women." If she has herself assumed the maternal function, this has led her not so much to supplant the mother as to recognize her fully for the first time and to renew daughterhood, so that the continuity of mothers and daughters becomes a source of a celebration which can co-exist with "anguish: remembered hours" and the sense of the darkness that "falls on my father's house."

In Murray's poems, the son, unable to subsume loss into continuity in the same way, remains trapped in a grief which must be argued into transcendent religious abstractions if there is to be any escape from the search for the location of responsibility among the entanglements of loss, grief and resentful blame. As the sequence progresses, the mother becomes increasingly an empty space in poems which are filled with the pain of husband and child, a pain assuaged in the case of the father by going back into an all male world:

> to the age of lonely men
> of only men, and men's company
> that is called the Pioneer age.

The adult child, who has gone forward, can make the mother present only in memory and it is memories of her maternal function that are crucial. In "Weights" her appearance and qualities are named as they have been transmitted or denied to her son. And yet they strike one as curiously unimaginatively enumerated ("her factual tone," her facial bones, her will/not her beautiful voice/but her straightness and clarity"); there is little of the evocation of presence that marks the opening image of the father:

> Not owning a cart, my father
> in the drought years was a bowing
> green hut of cattle feed, moving,
> or gasping under cream cans. No weight
> would he let my mother carry.

In "Midsummer Ice" (the most tightly achieved and densely symbolic of the three poems) the evocation of her solicitude and comfort in the past cannot bring her back now to answer the "Remember" with which the poem begins, only to conclude with the repeated "but you don't remember" which both acknowledges and defines the mother's absence.

That absence is insoluble. It is only stressed by stressing the historicity of the mother — the giving of maiden name, of the dates of her life, of the facts of the cause of her death in a double failure of medicine. And as this emerges in "The Steel," interest shifts to subsequent historical reactions and to the local hostility which drives out the doctor who refused an ambulance to bring the haemorrhaging woman to the town hospital for treatment. In the doctor's casting out, the poet reclaims for the Murray clan ("an antique concept. But not wholly romantic") the power of the steel that has robbed them of wife and mother, and having reclaimed power, he can say:

> I can forgive you now
> and not to seem magnanimous.
> It's enough that you blundered
> on our family steel.

The overall argument of "The Steel" is driven, however, not by a search for revenge, but by the son's search for justice in the circumstances of his mother's death, a search which involves the rejection of each successive candidate for blame. It is, I think, courageous to attempt to write about the struggle to rise above that "last protective device of the desperate", the solace of blaming unhappiness on others.[3] And it is probably unworthy to allow the voice of cynical experience to suggest that some ways of saying that someone is not to blame manage quite successfully to have their cake and eat it.

Nonetheless I find this a poem which is profoundly disturbing in a way aesthetically counter-productive, a poem which provokes in me the constant psychic discomfort of a wish to cry "bad faith." In the end I know that this obliges me to consider whether my problem is not simply to do with the *difference* of faith (and politics) that sometimes obstructs my full response to Murray's poems. In this case, resigning its misery to (Christian) mystery, the poem ends with the authoritatively moving final line "justice is the people's otherworld": but before that it has made me cantankerously unreceptive by insisting on my unceremonious eviction from any kind of intellectual respectability:

> There is justice, there is death,
> humanist: you can't have both.

Humanists don't actually need to be hectored into an understanding that justice and death are separate questions. Perhaps exactly because they do understand it, they may be less driven to try to balance the books of justice by a distribution of the assets of blame. And it is this process, which forms a running motif, presented usually only to be explicitly countered in argument, that I find myself disturbed by in "The Steel." It is not the idea of the process in itself — indeed in terms of the poem's argument, it is appropriate that logic rather than magnaminity should baffle all attempts to find relief in scapegoats. It is the quality and nature of the logic that worries me.

In the first two poems, blame is not an issue, although responsibility (which must be borne even in our innocence) is hauntingly present at the end of "Weights":

> I did not know back then
> not for many years what it was,
> after me, she could not carry.

It is with "The Steel" that problems begin to arise. No-one is going to argue with the son's "I didn't mean to harm you/I was a baby" but his opening plaint that his induced birth has left him with no zodiac seems merely self-pityingly fanciful when it is re-iterated in his questioning of his mother's acquiescence

> when I was brought on to make way
> for a difficult birth in that cottage hospital
> and the Cheers child stole my birthday?

Nor would one want to disagree with his absolving of the unborn "little bloodbrother, bloodsister." How indeed "can you blame a baby?" But the following question, "or the longing for a baby?" seems more complicated than its almost throw-away status suggests. I am not going to enter a sectarian argument (of whatever sect) on birth control nor debate whether the longing for a baby is culturally induced or inherent; what matters to me is that at this point an issue is touched on (and ignored) which is at the heart of the difference between "Mother Who Gave Me Life" and "The Steel". The great mystery that we face in facing the death of our mother is not the co-existence of justice and death: it is the co-existence of life and death, and what that means for love in the way of anguish.

Blame, even the labouring to refuse blame, is a distraction from facing that mystery. And at one level of causation in "The Steel," that of medicine, blame can hardly be said to have been laid to rest. There is actually a double pattern of medical causation. In the final death sequence, the role of the town doctor who refuses the ambulance has already been discussed, although one might note there that the possibility of "the stain of class" in his decision really does seem to be raised in order not to be dismissed. But what about the first episode, the induction? Who was responsible then? Something rather strange seems to be going on. The medical procedure is embodied in "the steel" itself. No doctor is mentioned, rather it seems as if it is the mother herself who is humanly implicated in the surgical blame. And one does wonder whether anyone who had not seen the note of the mother's maiden name at the beginning of the sequence would realize initially that it is the mother who is being addressed — almost with hostility — in:

> Sister Arnall, city girl
> with your curt good sense
> where you being the nurse
> when you let them hurry me?

If he asserts later that he is proud of her unselfishness, it is an assertion followed by the desolating aphorism "Any virtue can be fatal." And desolating absence is what the mother's unselfishness bequeaths. She cannot be absorbed into the son's male life as function. There is, for instance, no androgyny in his nurturing of his bereaved father; indeed he stresses the irony of, and the resistance to, being required to father the father who went back to being a baby, "being perhaps wiser than me/ less modern, less military."[4]

As part of the father's return to childishness he is permitted access to a kind of metaphoric maternity because he is unashamed of grief,

> of its looking like a birth
> out through the face
>
> bloated, whiskery, bringing no relief.
> It was mainly through fear
> that I was at times his father.

I cannot decide whether my resistance to this strikingly grotesque image is due to simple squeamishness, resentment at the way it links giving birth to infantilism, or evasion of the unrelieved pain that it certainly does realize. I only know I turn with relief to the world of Harwood's poem where there is no need for such metaphors, word-plays, paradoxical role reversals; when she thinks "of women bearing/ women" it is a chain process in which she takes her place among "the wild daughters becoming women" who, grieving for their lost mother, can nonetheless carry them with them to "walk/ on earth in the light of the living."

NOTES

1. George Barker, "To My Mother" from *Eros in Dogma* (1944), rpt. in *Modern Poetry*, ed. Maynard Mack, Leonard Dean and William Frost, 2nd. ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961) p.344.
2. Gwen Harwood, *Selected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1988) p.157 and Les A. Murray, *The Vernacular Republic: Poems; 1961-1983* (Sydney, Angus & Robertson, rev. ed. 1988) p.52-8.
3. I owe this formulation of the idea to Archibald Colquhoun's translation of Guiseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*. (London: Collins and Harvill, 1960), p.250.
4. "Evening at Bunyah" provides a more extended treatment of this theme from the point of view of the completely adult son.

LORRAINE BENNETT

Victa

The podgy suction of the fridge door opening, wakes Therese from her afternoon's unusual surrender to lethargy. Her husband Des enters the bedroom, with his beer, ever ready to grasp an opportunity. "What, stackin' a few zeds honey?" Caught.

The closeness has given her an irreversible urge to vomit. That's all right, he's been satisfied, and finishes his beer, still cold, and heads to the kitchen for another; the cathartic cough in the toilet vividly evoking his buck's night. The bursting sense of freedom, mind expansion involved in leaning over a fence, incited by the urgency of red, and purging repulsively on some stranger's bed of roses.

Therese emerges, and banging at the stuck window for some air, sees her fringe of weeds ageing on the lawn. This afternoon she's left the job only half done. A first. These are the earliest days of her marriage, dreams made busy by the novelty of self assigned chores and new appliances. She can listen for hours to the swirling murmurs and epileptic seizures of her new Simpson washer, the occasional click of buttons tapping their codes through the porthole of the dryer, lulled like a baby to the warm turning motion of the humdrum, as with her new shot of steam, she stands ironing; underpants, sheets, shoelaces.

It's an old house. She's painted the fence, the letterbox, the steps, the front door and polished its old brass knocker. She's picked the lavender from the front hedge to dry and scent her underwear, and added new seedlings of Sweet Pea. The garden is her consolation and is stunning, fragrant with the efforts of its previous owners. At first she'd imagined she'd wanted one of the new homes, brick veneer, low ceilings and shining fixtures like her sister's, but having settled for this, is contemptuous of Elizabeth's streets, with their spindly staked saplings of feeble gestures in a light wind, the yards on wet days a running turbulence of rawness, that walked in, bleeds across the berber. Her garden has such a comforting freshness, even in this afternoon's heat, and Therese, still nauseous, looks out at her chirpy shrubs and her beds of marigolds, and flinches at their violent brightness.

At last she meets her husband's eyes. Quick as finches they both look away. She doesn't want to say it, neither will he question it. But they both know it, at this moment. This is what everyone has been waiting for. She squints back at the hydrangeas, nodding like the rinses and bad perms of old ladies in the sun, her face in the clutches of a queasily reluctant expectation.

"Yellow's always a good choice, I think Therese. So neutral, no danger of making a mistake." Her mother has dropped in again, this time rustling with a plastic K Mart bag of yellow three ply wool. They lean together in their new found discourse, embroidering fantasies, of bootees, fluffy pilchers, three in ones, a matinee jacket — now that conjures up some bloody imagery, straight from the red centre. Des listens with one ear to his wife's voice, weaving in and out of the knitting and crochet magazines with a new decisive composure. Just because she's growing bigger she thinks she's getting smarter. She twirls the soft wool around her little finger and

hugs her smugness to herself. She doesn't need him any more. She's in love with her own body. He has a mate at work, all he talks about is getting fit, weights, he's into it, anabolic and all that. It makes him sick; he feels like another beer, ticks his fingernails against the can so she can hear it's empty. But she can't now honey, she's in the middle of casting on, counting. And his mother-in-law sits like a magpie, glaring. He turns up the television, and it isn't long before he starts snoring. Like a lawnmower, with an occasional catch, like he's on the lowest notch, and searching for stones to grind.

And that's just the beginning. Her mother starts to ring her daughter, every afternoon. Therese is often still on the phone when Des arrives home. It's the third afternoon in a row that he's grabbed a beer and gone straight out to mow the lawn. He sweats, leaning into the dust storm of his own creation. Therese notices for the first time how his hair is already getting thin, and tiny wet beads glint in the sun.

Therese discovers pregnancy not only works its wonders on the body but also on the memory, a humming circuitry of scent and reminiscence. The smell of wood and paint takes her back to her childhood, in her father's workshed, sitting astride the paint streaked sawhorse, wearing a fragrant necklace of wood shavings, curled and delicate; and that smell has the same effect as a flower: a heightened sense of growth, life. The sawdust kitty litter is enough to set her off. She plants a lot more bulbs, lilies, freesias, narcissus, tulips, digging her fingers into the earth, strongly aware of her own scent, a feeling of pungent sponginess, yet full, a pulpy root vegetable.

When Des arrives home one afternoon, to find Therese not on the phone surrounded by what has lately become the usual clutter — of dishes, knitting needles, infestations of threads, cascades of printed pastel materials, everything stained with teacup rings — he is most pleasantly surprised. He helps himself at the fridge and goes in search of his beautiful elusive wife.

He finds her, and stands quietly watching from the hall as she undresses in front of the full length mirror. She's gotten heavy, his girl is lost in this other shape, of marriage and motherhood. The floral upholstered variety found down at the supermarket behind trolleys piled with sausages and bread. Still, it's her, her body white and smooth in its cool demand to be stroked. And then right in front of him she starts to stroke it, runs her hands over and around her abdominous pride, up to cup her breasts, engorged and streaked with blue veins. She fastens on a new maternity bra, a forbidding addition of skin toned armour. Its sales tag Target pokes up above her breast as she hitches the inch wide straps, almost up to her neck, turns side on and hitches higher. She turns back to face the mirror as mesmerised he watches two petals of stain appear in the centre of her left breast. Suddenly her body has become packed with provocation, hideously misshapen by her own sheer wilfulness. Her hand darts to a point on the swell to what Des hopefully imagines is a more than usually strong kick. He turns silently and goes out to the toolshed, to sit on the bottom rung of a streaky wooden ladder, and to smoke, with the smell of petrol and dry leaves curling round his feet.

Next time Des arrives home from work, walking in dust from what has been the lawn, Therese is standing in the spare room, hands on hips, arching back for balance "Well honey, what do you think?" she can't stop herself from asking. She's been busy, obviously. His eyes slide over the painted walls of Sunlight Lemon and the curtains she's sewn and hung. Ginger kittens with plump bellies tumble in beds of marigolds and Therese can't stop smiling at them, her precious crop.

He comes back, his pickup in the quiet evening air braking desolate with the sigh of an expelled spirit. He lifts a long box from the back and hurries to the toolshed, to reappear with his new toy, a kikuyu green Whipper Snipper. He starts it up and with the concentration of a floor polisher in a hospital ward, guides it over to the

brightest bed. Heads fly. Scattered, the severed flowers fan across the dusty grave of the lawn.

Therese's mother is happy with him. He is fulfilling all her expectations, every word she has said about him. With a tight smile she watches with Therese while he methodically pours petrol in every cicada hole. A few cicadas, some spiders and other assorted tiny creatures emerge wetly from their dark cosy homes, blind in the fumes and sunshine. He follows them their short staggering route, and at the last minute, stops their misery with the mattock.

All day she has worked on the daintily flowered bassinet skirt. This afternoon her sister has finally put in an appearance, and squeakily admires the tiny bed, tucked a present of a teddy under the soft mauve quilt. Therese resents her visit, now, at this time, she's like a stranger pushing forward at the scene of an accident, almost quivering with pleasure as she looks out at the yard. Therese wishes Liz would leave, go stick her boastful head in her new microwave. Therese is not feeling the best today. She could easily become like her leaky tap but tries her best to turn off the lukewarm theatrics. Her back hurts and she feels a real clown, incompetent and colossal in polka dots. Far too big, and swollen, like her front door that has decided suddenly not to open. She takes her sister round to the back door off the kitchen; Des has arrived home.

He is doing something to the wattle. They lean against the door frame, watching the long golden flossed branches, in a nasty harvest of malice, spear to the ground. Next he works on the trunk, sawing, swearing with the urgency in each stroke. Half severed, he plants both arms on it, leaning, pushing with all his might, working it up and down, groaning, sweating. Unstoppable. Locks his heavy boot across it, swinging his hip and his weight into it. Under this momentum, the wood simply collapses, angles to the ground, jarring him, hitting with the hollow whang of the anticlimactic. A rank vermillion in triumph, he sits astride, carefully positioning the teeth of the saw like a bow on a fiddle. Liz looks at Therese, amazed at her quiescence. Still, she hasn't found her own voice, trying so hard not to laugh. She's never known Therese to have so much patience, doesn't realise that where everything else in her married life may have proved only to be disappointing, these months are bringing their own weighty compensation. He looks up and pitches spite towards his wife and with the final sickening, splintering crack, Therese stiffens with victory: she goes into labour, and gets into the car with her sister.

2 a.m. and the baby slurps and snuffles at the flow, excited as a pup biting at a hose's stream. A noise from the passage at the side of the house — Des trickling alcoholic piss into the soft dark faces of the pansies and violets. A stain spreads warm on the sheet next to her, just as she reaches for the new elasticised disposable. Light from a neighbour's car sweeps across the room, cursory as a bored voyeur.

Now she's a mother she has no time for conflicts and attempted sabotage. Instead, she's taken to simply kicking her husband, with the same well aimed purpose she uses when her Simpson washer's on the blink. She puts the baby out in its bassinet when he's at work, over near the fence, in the shade of the neighbour's trees, the only one left, and together they steal this small oasis for twenty minutes each afternoon.

She's always careful to have her daughter inside and asleep when he arrives home. She looks out around a romping ginger kitten: everything looks so flat and lifeless as he approaches, which is how he likes it — he made it, nothing to fight his way through, to swallow him up, clutching him to its bosom. He stands silent in a snapshot of dust. A miracle, she thinks, is that anything at all remains, and waits to see what will happen, not too long now, in the spring.

MARGO DALY

The Carnival of Animals

Always I eat too quickly. And I'm not hungry. Under my thick clothes my winter body, my rounded belly, is hidden. I wear this jumper all the time, I hug myself and rock to the music. My mother knitted it for me, it's big and soft.

I sit solid, I rock, listening to Saint-Saens — "The Carnival of Animals".

Remembering.

Dancing, dancing, dancing. My lovely sister. Am I crying?

"Le Carnival des Animaux," and I know no French. But she prances and whispers in my ear: pas de deux, oui oui oui, mais non mais non, mais bien sûr. I don't understand, I never understand.

My mother is nodding and smiling at Louisa. Auntie Jean and Auntie Mary follow her light steps around the living room, her coral satin slippers are all I see as she dances in front of me and then whirls away. Everything is a blur without my glasses, but my mother says they make me look uglier and she takes them off when we have visitors. She tells me to sit quietly on the carpet and not to stir, but everything is hazy and I reach for my glass of milk and then it's too late and I've spilt it.

And I'm crying, I'm already crying before my mother races over to slap me. And then I'm crying I'm sorry I'm sorry, but it's too late, it's always too late, with the aunties tut-tutting in the background and Louisa calling me a dummie. Nobody tells her to shush, because I've ruined everything, again I've ruined everything. And I'm crying and crying.

I wish I could say that she never hit me, that she loved me. Did she say so once, did she?

When I pulled at her hand. She sat above me with her embroidery. The clock ticked in the silence of the flashing needle. She let me play with her jewellery box, with her rings and her bracelets. My sister was at her ballet class. The carpet was red and warm in the square of sun-light.

— Mother, do you love me?

I eat too quickly. My stomach aches. I still don't understand, and there is so much emptiness, like the pauses between a clock ticking. In between the beating of my heart there is that memory, like a silence, when my soul wants to shrivel up, but only part of me curls up and dies.

I'm still asking now. Or am I pleading?

It is sunny in the living room. It's cold outside. I press my face against the window then hold my hand to my cool cheek. My mother puts the needle on the record. My sister, my lovely sister, spins around and around the room. I turn to watch as

my mother consumes Louisa with her eyes. I want my mother to look at me, to notice me as I stand by the window, bathed in the warm square of sunlight. Then I will be happy, I can feel this happiness in the red glow of the carpet where the sun falls. In the smell of beeswax and flowers and my mother's perfume.

I am smiling as I begin to dance. The music swells up to meet me.

I have known these creatures all my life. The lion marches proudly. My lovely sister dances forever to the king. Until now I have sat cross-legged on the floor. I have pressed my face against the window. I have closed my eyes and dreamt.

I am dancing now. Gracefully, I think, but I am the elephant, ponderous and heavy, and my eyes are shut tight and I am grimacing as the music drowns out their laughter. I am the elephant, I am the cuckoo, I am the kangaroo. Louisa is the swan, Louisa is the fish, she is the antelope. She laughs, she says mais oui mais oui, she says c'est bon c'est bon.

My dance does not transform my ugly face, and even as I spin I am sniffling, I am fat, there is no doubt about that. I am naked, stripped bare as I offer myself to be loved, as I spin and spin faster, like a top.

— Mother, do you love me? I scream it now. I am clumsy, I am ugly.

— Mother, do you love me? I whisper it under Saint-Saens. I can't help it if I'm fat. I eat too quickly.

— Mother, do you love me? I scream it over "Le Carnival des Animaux". I can't stop.

Already it is too late. My mother is yelling at me to stop, but I can't. I can only spin faster and then I am so dizzy and there is a crash. Already I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I only wanted to dance. The polished floor-boards were slippery near the record player. I span and span. I only wanted to dance. Out of control. Just to dance.

It is much too late and I'm crying before my mother even raises her hand and I'm so sorry I scratched it and I am so sorry I fell and I didn't mean it, and I'm calling and I'm calling.

I take the record off. I trace the deep etch with my finger, where I fell. I am tracing the line to the part of me that hides, trembling with fear, that will not offer itself again. It's too late for her to listen. I look up and she is calling me a stupid stupid girl.

BRENDA WALKER

"Sweetest and Best in Womanhood"? Equivocal Representations of Maternity in Australian Women's Fiction

The process of becoming a mother: pregnancy, birth and bonding; stimulates the most extravagantly sentimental rhetoric and the most acute philosophical debate in today's society. The apparent simplicity of the greeting-card view of motherhood is still influential. This view flosses over everything except the tactile satisfaction of holding a compliant baby: "a bundle of sweetness, just so full of charms, to coo at, to cradle and rock in your arms."[1] Politicians with conservative electorates invoke a broader but comparably sentimental view of motherhood and the family. Women's magazines run anecdotal pieces which project the multiple laparoscopies and frequent disappointments of IVF programmes into a fantasyland where doctor knows best and women only feel complete with a baby. The ideology which informs all of this has not changed a great deal since it was stated in The *Ladies Handbook of Home Treatment:*

> Deep down in the heart of the true woman is the desire that she may one day be a mother; and this is right, for it is only in following out God's original purpose that she may attain unto what is sweetest and best in womanhood.[2]

However this ideology of motherhood is rarely, nowadays, seen in such a frank and imperative form. Society is now required to rethink the basic premises of maternity, as bioethical committees attempt to define degrees of intervention in the process of conception and the admissibility of surrogacy arrangements. Platitudes about motherhood are now contradicted by the acknowledgement, in self-help books, on talk-back radio and elsewhere, of the difficulties and complexities of the experience. This is at least partly in response to the feminist movement of the 1970s which emphasised that womanhood and motherhood are not synonymous and that motherhood is hard and unusually demanding work. This emergent ideology has led the writer of *The Baby Book*, an Australian Women's Weekly Publication, to argue somewhat defensively that "society overstresses the negatives of parenthood."[3] Wherever the emphasis fall, it is clearly easier to represent an equivocal view of motherhood now than it was at the turn of the century. We can find evidence of this in newspapers and popular magazines, but it is also apparent in that recent women's fiction which constitutes a direct response to the enabling influence of the feminist movement, or which was written amid a climate of ideas which was made possible by a movement which encouraged women to be expressive, assertive and creative.

Any discussion of changes in the representation of maternity must take into account the fact that the traditional associations of motherhood in religious

observance and in popular wisdom are mystical and ambiguous. The maternal figure exists in a uniquely numinous relationship to mainstream culture and this is unlikely to substantially change. Economic and other social pressures which influence maternity are to some extent identifiable, but it is much more difficult to speculate about the way in which the physical, the natural and the spiritual converge on maternity. The Belgian/French theorist Julia Kristeva describes pregnancy as "a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture.' "[4] Presumably the threshold is part of the cultural edifice but it allows movement between the zones of nature and culture. Of course the very division between nature and culture is questionable, as Kristeva's use of inverted commas suggests. Yet even a qualified identification between the mother's body and nature is highly problematic. The mother's body cannot be directly apprehended, it can only be spoken for. Obviously, this raises questions about who speaks and from what position, questions which have considerable significance for the current argument about women's fiction expressing an equivocal view of maternity. The reproductive process cannot guarantee access to culture and nature, nor does it create a neutral space between culture and nature, as the threshold metaphor suggests. Nature is, as Kristeva herself recognises, beyond realisation, beyond conventional knowledge and language. The threshold is a false demarcation, because is stands between culture and nature according to culture.

Kristeva also suggests that maternity loosens a woman's affiliation with culture because it brings her "closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and consequently, more nugatory of the social, symbolic bond." The argument about instincts refers us to the body, not as an instance of nature, to be opposed to culture, but rather in Freudian terms, where the instincts arise from bodily needs which demand that the psyche provide satisfaction. The mechanism whereby the body interacts with the mind is of course left unresolved in Freud and in Kristeva. The problem of maternal psychosis is one of the issues which is addressed by the writers whose fiction I will examine in a later discussion of maternal rejection of the infant. The maternal experience, because of its various connections with the libido, is indefinably but intensely enmeshed in the instinctual and is therefore likely to conflict with cultural strictures in a way which could indeed make a mother "more open to her own psychosis." Kristeva's emphasis here, and in her theory which associates the maternal body with disruptive artistic creation, acknowledges and contributes to the mysterious aspects of maternity, those aspects which derive their resonance from the unconscious or even the spiritual. According to Kristeva, "a political explanation of human phenomena . . . will be overwhelmed by the so-called mystical crisis, or spiritual crisis."[5] This anti-materialism is, necessarily, puzzling. Elsewhere Kristeva recommends that women adopt "an ostensibly masculine, paternal identification, because it supports symbol and time . . . [and enables women] to have a voice in the chapter of politics and history."[6] Such an identification is impossible to sustain during the process of maternity. Kristeva, then, identifies the maternal experience as a distancing from familiar forms of language and reason, a distancing from the symbolic order itself. However writing about motherhood must, in some sense, restore the maternal to the symbolic order.

Kristeva claims that literary creation has replaced motherhood on women's scale of aspirations. There is no evidence of comparative childlessness among contemporary Australian women writers, but it is apparent that writing is important to a great many women of a certain age and class and that today's women fiction writers are remarkably prolific and popular. Kristeva flippantly inverts Flaubert's "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" by remarking that "today, many women imagine 'Flaubert, c'est moi.' "[7] The identification with writing is perhaps not surprising, if we accept her description of how much women's literature has to offer:

> [It] bears witness to women's desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders, to nourish our societies with a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex.[8]

Kristeva recognises the importance of women naming somatic and unconscious experiences. This work of naming is prominent in contemporary Australian women's fiction.

Kristeva's idea of women's writing as a witness to sacrifice is of particular interest here, because maternity in contemporary Australian women's fiction is often represented in terms of the physical, emotional and social distress of women characters. Partuition, in particular, is not commonly represented in ways which conform to Shiela Kitzinger's description of childbirth as "powerfully erotic."[9] The ability of contemporary women writers to present an equivocal view of maternity to sympathetic readers indicates a shift in ideologies of maternity which can be illustrated by contrasting Henry Handel Richardson's treatment of the subject in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* with more recent depictions. Richardson's account is a useful indicator of the social and literary priorities of her time — although of course it is impossible to generalise extensively about such priorities on the basis of her example.

Childbirth and its aftermath is usually reported from the perspective of male characters in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony.* Mahony is, after all, the central character and his medical training allows Richardson to introduce debates which were current in obstetrics at the time — such as whether or not the use of anaesthetics contravened religious or moral sanctions. Mahony also (at one point) reproduces the most exalted view of motherhood when he considers his brother-in-law's wife and children:

> The beautiful young woman and her children might have served as model for a holy Family — some old painter's dream of a sweet benign Madonna; the trampling babe as the infant Christ . . . were they not in the presence of one of life's sublimest mysteries — that of motherhood? . . . every woman who endured the rigours of childbirth, to bring forth an immortal soul, was a holy figure.[10]

Here, the emphasis is on spiritual and artistic transcendence rather than the "rigours" of birth. Two minor female characters who help when Polly (Mary) Mahony is giving birth in primitive circumstances have a contrasting perspective. Mrs Beamish instructs Ellen to clean the room where labour has taken place and Ellen refuses, claiming that "its jus' like Andy Soakes's shop . . . when they've been quarterin' a sheep. . . . D'yer mean to say that's 'ow . . . 'ow the children always come?' " Mrs Beamish recommends that " 'now you know it, you'll 'ave a little more love and gratitoode for your own mother than ever you 'ad before.' "[11] Ellen reacts by collapsing in tears. Polly's own response to her ordeal, which includes great physical suffering and her baby's death, is comparatively unconvincing. Polly "bore the thwarting of her hopes bravely."[12] Her second experience of pregnancy and childbirth is described in some detail, but plausible emotional ambiguity is reserved for Mahony and Mary is simply "radiant."[13] Mary has a difficult labour which endangers her life. However

> in the end Mary's sound constitution triumphed, and she was gradually won back to life; but over a week passed before she even asked to see her child. Then, in a sudden impatience, she tried to raise herself on her elbow.[14]

Richardson is clearly reluctant to include anything which might cloud Mary's maternal jubilation. But this week, during which Mary does not even ask to see

her baby, is a significant gap in the creation of a competent, sensible and cheerful character who otherwise conforms to bourgeois ideologies of motherhood. Her name, which changes from Polly to Mary, reinforces her claim to maternal perfection. Emotional turmoil and gruesome facts are voiced by her husband or by women of a different social class, such as Mrs Beamish and Ellen. Class distinctions are obviously significant in the characterisation of Mary, who is warmer and kinder than English middle-class women (and suffers their rejection as a consequence) and not vulgar and grasping, like Mrs Beamish. But class distinctions reveal a textual ideology which affiliates middle-class mothers with a Christian holiness (like Mary and her sister-in-law Emma, the "sweet benign Madonna"). On the other hand, characters like Mrs Beamish consider that childbirth provides a connection with previous generations of mothers, who are owed a debt of reverence because of the extremity of their physical sacrifice in labour. the narrator's sympathies however clearly lie with Mary as a middle-class individual (as opposed to a link in a maternal chain) and her physical indignities or lapses from maternal competence are revealed indirectly or simply referred to in passing. An emphasis on maternal confusion and dismay is by no means impossible within the social and narrative conventions of Richardson's time. But to a large extent *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* presents, rather than interrogates, conventional ideologies of maternity. This is not a narrative which, in Kristeva's terms, reveals "the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex." Although maternal sacrifice figures strongly, suffering, in this novel, occasions demonstrations of resourcefulness and courage.

The depiction of maternity in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* has multiple significance. The text exemplifies Pierre Macherey's contention that a "book is not the extension of a meaning; it is generated from the incompatibility of several meanings."[15] The incompatibility between Richard Mahony's view of motherhood and Ellen's horror of the aftermath of labour creates a contradiction which exposes the ideology of motherhood and simultaneously questions each view of maternity.[18] Mary Mahony's inability to look at her child for more than seven days after the birth establishes an equally significant contradiction. The hiatus is explained in terms of physical debilitation, but since she does seem to be conscious and to have the use of her eyes the explanation is not entirely convincing. The text creates a gap in Mary's otherwise conventionally perfect motherhood, a gap in which the reader is free to imagine a range of possibilities: outright rejection of the child, post-partum depression like the maternal psychosis of which Kristeva writes, or weakness so extreme that it eclipses the desire to see the baby. The text provides a silence which is equivalent of repression.

Some recent Australian women's fiction specifically articulates equivocal or even less positive attitudes to maternity. In Jean Bedford's *Sister Kate* we also find a mother who does not ask for her infant:

> They brought the baby to her again in the morning and every hour or so during the day, but she would not hold it, and they had to stand close to the bed, for she would really let it roll off, it seemed.
>
> 'If we could only get it to suck,' the midwife muttered to the doctor when he made his visit. 'But I put it to her and she won't close her arms around it, lets it lie as it may, she doesn't seem to care.'
>
> Finally the old woman sat close to the bed, pressing the baby to Kate's breasts as she slept. But it was languid and would not drink heartily. Kate woke, or half woke and let her gaze slide down to the infant's head buried in her bosom, breathed in the sickly smell of blood and milk, and closed her eyes again and slept.[16]

This is close to the experience of maternal exhaustion and indifference which Richardson denies us, although traces of it are discernible in Mary's story. Of course the ambiguity of Richardson's text at this point makes comparison extremely

speculative but Bedford is explicit about a situation which is, at basis, part of the range of possibilities for Mary Mahony. Bedford's description has a good deal in common with the opening of Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story*, in which inertia and dismay follow childbirth:

> It was a wild night in the year of Federation that the birth took place. Horses kicked down their stables. Pigs flew, figs grew thorns. The infant mewled and stared and the doctor assured the mother that a caul was a lucky sign. *A girl?* the father exclaimed, outside in the waiting room, tiled as if for horrible emergencies. This was a contingency he was not prepared for, but he rallied within a day and announced, *Lilian. She will be called Lilian Una.*.
>
> Later, the mother lay on her white bed at home, her palms turned up, staring at the moulding of the ceiling with the expression of surprise she wore for the next twenty years. *You didn't tell me it would hurt*, she whispered to her friends as they patted the crocheted bed jacket, and she was already beginning to suffer her long overlapping series of indispositions. The friends picked up the baby from its crib beside the bed and placed it in the mother's arms.
>
> *A lovely picture*, they agreed, and left.
>
> Sunlight slanted between the curtains so a band lay across the bed like something alive. The carpet flamed where the sun fell over it, and on the ceiling the reflection of the waves of the bay outside flickered on and on like a conversation. Eucalypt leaves rubbed against each other and a kookaburra pealed in hysteria somewhere. The baby slipped further and further down off the breast but the mother lay smiling and staring at the ceiling, listening to the bird, until the baby fell to the floor. When Alma came in, reddened from dusting the banister, she saw Lilian's tiny fingernails scraping weakly over the patterns of the carpet, and her wet mouth opening and closing on air.[17]

In the first paragraphs of *Lilian's Story* nature is fantastically appropriated. The opening sentences echo G.K. Chesterton's poem "The Donkey", in which the perversity of a beast so grotesque that it must have been born "when fishes flew and forests walked / And figs grew upon thorn" is transmuted to grace when the donkey carries Christ on Palm Sunday.[18] This is appropriate, given that Lilian will become a social anomaly with her own remarkable qualities of resourcefulness and grandeur.

Grenville also parodies the literary convention which signals upheaval in the social order by projecting it onto nature. The extravagant description is ironic, since the birth, though domestically momentous, is insignificant in the wider scheme of things. When the kookaburra utters the displaced hysteria of the silent mother the view of nature as social simalucrum is emphasised. There is fantasy in this description of nature, not the mysticism which associates maternity with special natural wisdom. Indeed the references to the natural are ironically overstated and Lilian's mother is pitiably bereft of "natural" nurturing impulses, due to inadequate social preparation for the endurance of pain and exhaustion. Before she lapses into a kind of paralysis she reproaches her friends for failing to tell her what the experience entails. Maternity must be named from within "the social, symbolic bond" (to use Kristeva's terms) if the dangers of the mother's tendency to be "open to her own psychosis" are to be avoided. Women need verbal initiation into natural mysteries, even if the knowledge is appalling — as it is for Henry Handel Richardson's character, Ellen. Another kind of naming is at work within the opening paragraph, as the father, disappointed about the sex of the baby, authoritatively inducts her into the social order. However maternity is more palatable for the social order when it has been transformed by art into a study of the Madonna, or simply the "lovely picture" which is created when Lilian is placed within her mother's unresponsive arms. As Lilian's position on the floor suggests, such an arrangement can have unfortunate consequences.

Grenville's depiction of the mother's disabling shock and rejection of the infant draws attention to the importance of naming maternal experience, but it also constitutes a significant articulation of a maternal experience which contradicts the sentimental and mystical views of the process of becoming a mother.

Descriptions of pregnancy and childbirth which contradict the popular view that motherhood confers fulfillment upon women are not difficult to find. Barbara Hanrahan's work often provides examples. *The Albatross Muff* is an historical novel, set in a sinister version of Victorian London, where female children are vulnerable to sexual coercion and shadowed by malignant supernatural forces. As the heroine dies in childbirth her consciousness flicks between remembered and anticipated anxieties and her childhood journey from Australia to England becomes a metaphor for the loss of consciousness:

> . . . there was nothing wrong with Baby . . . apart from it being a girl.
> *Come*, the voice said, and there was nothing to do but go to meet it.
> . . . she drifted, she floated. The water was all about her. How had it happened? One minute so hot — the hot sun boring into her, almost as bad as a pain. Then blackness, then the tropics left quite behind, and the faces — was it Mama and Baby, was it Mr Backhouse? — bending over her, then gone. And so much wetness . . . water-wetness: the sea, the rain. And she was adrift — not hot any more, but cold. And she felt herself slipping away; felt the water lapping, very salty. And she started to cry. She heard it crying, too: it was like a seagull, it cried with a sort of mew. She said 'Let me have him,' but they didn't hear. She scratched at the sheets. "Oh please," she said, but still they didn't hear. She didn't like the nurse. What was it — a boy, a girl? It must be a boy; that was important, or else William wouldn't love her.[18]

This anxiety to propitiate a husband is an extreme reconstruction of Victorian domestic priorities. Hanrahan does mingle these concerns with the mystical or spiritual, but she does so in order to depict death, not in order to exalt maternity.

In *Sea-Green* Hanrahan's central character, an artist, refuses to sacrifice herself to maternity and has an abortion, but not before the mysteries of involuntary bodily processes are contemplated with horror:

> She was afraid of her body, afraid to look too hard, afraid to probe. She just ringed the days in a pocket diary and started a new plate, litho combined with etching: a red screaming lady with a swollen black baby leering from her womb. Both hard sharp pointed teeth; the baby was wrong way up, sliding down the tube. Ugly, ugly baby.[20]

The print is a nightmarishly unconventional visualisation of motherhood, the opposite of Richard Mahony's "sweet benign Madonna" and remote from the composition of the falsely "lovely picture" in *Lilian's Story*. This expressionism is an absolute denial of maternal felicity. Similarly, the narrator of *Annie Magdalene* rejects the pressure to fulfill her maternal potential and ignores her own mother's attempts to place her within a social niche:

> Mum was dying for me to get married and have a baby (she said if I ever got into trouble, she'd bring the baby up as if it was her own), but I'd made up my mind when I was sixteen that I wasn't going to do either and I stuck to it. I was very independent and always had my say and did what I wanted.[21]

The conflicting approval and condemnation of extra-marital pregnancy — getting "into trouble" — testifies to the mother's collusion in her daughter's inappropriate socialisation. It is not surprising that Annie Magdelene rejects marriage and motherhood.

Within a social context which rhetorically venerates mothers but which offers them negligible practical assistance circumspection about the joys of maternity is understandable. However the passages from *The Albatross Muff* and *Sea-Green* go further than this. They associate birth with psychic incoherence and death; and pregnancy with a radical estrangement from the body. They name an alternative to mainstream ideologies of maternity.

Julia Kristeva points out that there is a "cult" of motherhood, which appropriates "tenderness, love . . . and social conservation."[22] This cult influences the way that

women read and write themselves into the symbolic order of language: the verbal language of law, literature, journalism conversation and the visual language of film, photography, painting and so forth. Some Australian women writers have inserted a challenge to the cult of maternity in the symbolic order. They have done this by acknowledging that the process of becoming a mother may dislocate women from the symbolic order altogether, or may cause them to take an antagonistic position in relation to its dominant ideologies.

NOTES

1. Greeting card, Royle Publications Ltd, 1986.
2. F.C. Richards, Eulalia S. Richards, *Ladies Handbook of Home Treatment* (Signs Publishing Co., Melbourne 1912) p.84.
3. Sue Wendt (ed) *The Baby Book, The Australian Women's Weekly* Special Projects Division, Sydney, p.2.
4. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1980) p.238.
5. Julia Kristeva, in Toril Moi (ed) *The Kristeva Reader* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986) p.8.
6. Julia Kristeva, ibid, p.156.
7. Julia Kristeva, ibid, p.207.
8. Julia Kristeva, ibid, p.207.
9. Shiela Kitzinger, *Womens Experience of Sex* (Collins, Sydney, Auckland) p.209.
10. Henry Handel Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1983) p.73. For a discussion of idealised maternity and feminine identity in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* see " 'A Rather Prosaic Australian Wife', or the Fortunes of Mary Mahony" Elizabeth Lawson, *Westerly*, no. 2 (June, 1985) pp.71.80.
11. Ibid. p.139, 140.
12. Ibid. p.93.
13. Ibid. p.4 & 6.
15. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978) p.80.
16. Jean Bedford, *Sister Kate* (Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1982) p.122.
17. Kate Grenville, *Lilian's Story* (George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985) p.3.
18. G.K. Chesterton, *The Collected Poems of G.K. Chesterton* (Methuen, London, 1948) p.325.
19. Barbara Hanrahan, *The Albatross Muff* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1977) p.194.
20. Barbara Hanrahan, *Sea-Green* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1979) p.160.
21. Barbara Hanrahan, *Annie Magdelene* (Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press, London, 1985) p.66.
22. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.237.

SUE ROWLEY

Inside the Deserted Hut: The Representation of Motherhood in Bush Mythology

In the visual and literary texts that together constitute the nationalist bush mythology of the late nineteenth century, the idea of women doing men's work is troubling. The representation of women as mothers, particularly as young mothers, articulates the division of labour between men and women which was regarded as both natural and proper. The idea of separate spheres is integral to the depiction of motherhood, and spatial metaphors are central to the construction of gender difference. However, this paper argues that the idea of motherhood was itself ambivalent and unresolved.

Women's labour and motherhood

While pioneering women certainly did labour on the land,[1] in the bush mythology the idea of women "doing men's work" is immensely problematic, and fraught with anxiety. The resolution of the problems caused by women's labour outside the domestic sphere is achieved through the mythic transformation of physical labour into child-bearing.[2] Through this transformation, women's labour could be celebrated as their contribution to the nation.

It is with motherhood that the insistence on separate spheres is most unambiguously expressed. Images of women from the 1880s to 1900s predominantly represent women in terms of their relationships to men, and in particular, as sweethearts, wives and mothers. But sweethearts and wives can contribute to the formation of the nation through their labour and through heroic deeds performed out of love for their bushmen sweethearts. As wives and sweethearts, bushwomen can be represented as occupying the same space as men, and moving beyond the confines of domestic space. As mothers, they are almost invariably represented within the home.

Historically this crystallisation of the representation of woman as mother coincided with the greater ability of men to support families, the attempts to restrict women's participation in the paid workforce, and the reorganisation of the domestic sphere.[3] Female employment opportunities, which had expanded in the 1880s, were curtailed in the 1890s.[4] Whilst many of the institutional measures to consolidate the norm of the family consisting of a male breadwinner and an unemployed housekeeping wife and mother occurred in the early years of the twentieth century, the mythical images through which this family was imaginatively formed were shaped in preceding decades and coexisted with other competing and complementary images of women. Women's relationship to the nation shifted over this period from an extension of their relationship to their husbands to their role as mothers of the nation's future sons and, ambiguously, daughters. Increasingly, it became difficult to represent women within nationalist mythologies expect as mothers.

Frederick McCubbin's painting *Home Again*, 1884, depicts a young woman in straitened circumstances. Presuming her husband to be dead, she has donned widow's weeds and, in order to support herself and her infant, she has taken in ironing. If it were not for the child, perhaps she might have found employment outside the home. But since she is a mother, she is bound to the home and consequently must accept the poorer pay and more vulnerable conditions attached to casual domestic labour. The brightly burnished silver and copperware on the mantlepiece, and pot of flowers, teapots and broom in the recessed space between the fireplace and the door all testify to the diligent house-keeping of the woman, and to her respectability sustained in the face of recent poverty. Bourgeois notions of respectability are entwined with the construction of domesticity and motherhood. The visual image constructs the circumstances under which women would be bound to the home. Whilst the incursions of women into the public sphere, and particularly into paid employment seemed problematic, the notion of a young mother, recently widowed and certainly respectable, taking in work, could be seen to be quite heroic.

Nevertheless it is not the baby that is visible, but its cradle. The young woman seems alone. The interior suggests order and solitude. Into this scene, through the open door, bursts the husband, arms outstretched, swag over his shoulder. The woman raises her arm in a gesture that is both protective and introspective: she is on the verge of recognition. Although the baby's presence indicates the seriousness of her plight and the great restrictions on her options for employment, there is no visual sign of a bond between them that might alleviate the young wife's aloneness. It is the man who brings movement and warmth back into the home. If she does not show the exuberant welcome that the dog offers, nevertheless her body is turned towards him.

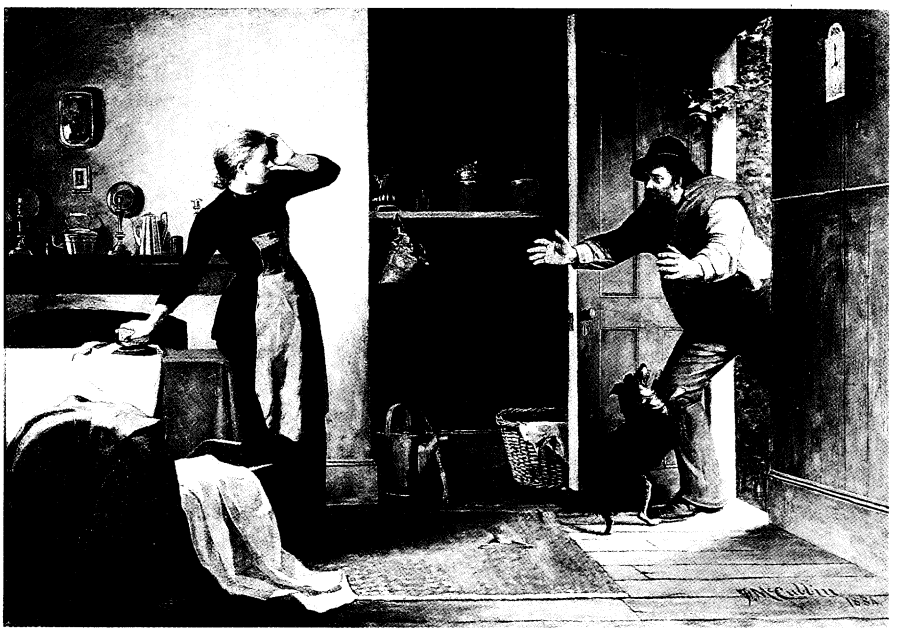
The depiction of the woman's plight in terms of widowhood detracts attention from the issues of destitution resulting from desertion and the economic dependency of women.[5] Widowhood was a common enough experience for both men and women,[6] but the poverty that a widow with young children faced was the consequence of social not natural circumstances.[7] Thus, although impoverished by her husband's absence, the painting suggests that the social order is intact.

The woman who receives news of the death of her miner husband in John Longstaff's painting, *Breaking the News*, 1887, holds her baby at her side. Longstaff has concentrated the moment on the intense and intimate gesture of shared grief and pain of the old miner who brings the news and the woman who has been waiting for her husband's return. The presence of the baby underscores her plight and her continued dependency, as well as the continuity of life itself, without alleviating the pain of her loss.

Motherhood domesticates women, binding them to their proper sphere. A young mother may be immobilised by her baby although its presence may enhance rather than diminish her sense of aloneness and vulnerability. In *The Chosen Vessel*, Barbara Baynton gives us a powerful metaphor for this maternal domestication:

> She laid the stick and her baby on the grass while she untied the rope that tethered the calf. The length of the rope separated them. The cow was near the calf, both were lying down. Feed along the creek was plentiful, and every day she found a fresh place to tether it, since tether it she must, for if she did not, it would stray with the cow out onto the plain.[8]

The cow would stray and the woman could pursue her out onto the plain, if it were not for the calf and her own baby. Baynton's story explores the consequences of the binding of the woman in motherhood to the baby, and her inability to save herself from the intruder swagman who rapes and murders her is integrally tied to her motherhood.



Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917 Australian
Home Again, 1884
Oil on canvas, 85 x 123cm
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with funds
provided by G.J. Coles Pty. Ltd. 1981.
Reproduced by permission of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

John Longstaff
Breaking the News, 1887
Oil, 109.7 x 152.8cm
Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia

The Proper Sphere: spatial differentiation and the construction of gender difference.

In the bush mythology, spatial differentiation is central to the construction of gender difference. The notion of separate spheres is deeply etched into the bush stories and images. The domestic sphere is represented as feminine space, and the outside, the bush and the world at large as masculine spaces. The house-paddock, as far as the slip-rails, is ambiguously feminine. The implicit masculinity of the narrator positions the reader too, as an observer on the outside looking in. Domestic space constitutes a "known unknown location", to use Lennard Davis' term.[9] Domestic space is known, in the sense that it is taken for granted, and assumed to be constant, a still point in a dynamic world. It is unknown in the sense that it was defined as women's place and the ways in which women constructed their lives in that space were opaque to the masculine observer.

The visual representation of domestic space in the narrative paintings in which a central figure is that of the young mother, positions the viewer outside the frame which encloses the space of the painting. Frederick McCubbin's *Home Again* (1884), John Longstaff's *Breaking the News* (1887) and Aby Alston's *Flood Sufferings* (1890) employ similar devices for rendering the domestic space.[10] Shallow depth, coupled with a wide view of the room, gives it the appearance of a stage, and renders it strangely one-dimensional. The walls, with their panels of dark and light suggest a backdrop rather than adding depth to the space of the painting. There are signs of feminine occupancy. In *Breaking the News*, the table is set and the plates are warming on the stove. *The Australasian Sketcher*, 12 July 1887, inferred the story of domestic well-being:

> The table is laid for the evening meal. The young wife takes pride in the neatness of her modest home, as shown by the little surroundings. We imagine her, with her infant in her arms, sitting by the fire as she prepares the husband's dinner.[11]

The woman's actions described here are familiar and yet give the impression of being slightly out of focus. The suggestion that she was simultaneously preparing her husband's dinner, holding her infant, and sitting by the fire, table laid, waiting for her husband's return, has a tranquil quality that throws the emphasis on the waiting, rather than the labour. It implies a masculine observer who is not familiar with the complicated and active process of juggling saucepans and babies, but who perceives the home as a stage tableaux waiting for the central character to bring it all to life with his arrival. Further, the implication that the miner will come in and straight away sit down to the evening meal suggests a lack of familiarity with the lives of mining families. The use of realism in the treatment of the narrative connotes a universality of, what is in fact, a bourgeois expectation of female domestic labour. The work of women in mining communities was certainly more arduous, but also more central to the support of the income-earner than is explicit in the painting. Winifred Mitchell tells us that the miner arrived home "expecting to find the stove well alight, and before it the great tub of hot water in which, with his wife's help, he would remove the coal dust grimed into his skin; it was impossible to clean the back without aid."[12] Miners came home to a bath and women spent a good part of the day getting the water hot.

The setting for each of these works is not, in fact, the space in which women construct their lives, but space in which men are *at home*. The table set for dinner, the fireplace, the space just inside the door: these are the spaces of leisure and comfort. The spaces of cooking, cleaning, washing are off-stage, except in the case of *Home Again*. Here the ironing in front of the fire displaces the husband, confirming his absence. The viewer's realisation that the sheet will be scorched if she does not lift the iron, coupled with the frozen quality of the tableaux, and in conjunction with

the woman's introspective, protective and vulnerable pose, makes this an ambiguous and ambivalent image. The orderliness of the arrangements of objects suggests housework as her only activity. The husband's dramatic entrance suggests that his presence will bring the home alive. The reversal of this is suggested in the cluttered cupboard top in *Breaking the News*. Wine bottles, cup, newspaper, book — these signs of masculine leisure make the place look "lived in". With his death, this slight sense of disorder will be erased and with it, the sense of activity that it imparts. In each of the three paintings, the space is represented as familiarly feminine and yet, there is little sense of the way in which these immobilised women move through that space.

If the domestic space is shallow and sombre in tone, depth and light are the features of the glimpse through the open door. The open door ruptures the otherwise enclosed interior, giving it a womb-like quality. The view from the inside of the world beyond the home is a framed and partial one; the door, a reminder of the sense of confinement and separation from the world at large that is implicit in these representations of domestic space. The narrative focuses on the implications for the young mother of events that occur outside her domain. In each of these works the defences of the home have been breached: by flood, by death as a result of a mining accident represented as a "natural disaster", and, in the case of *Home Again*, firstly by the assumed death and then by the ambiguously depicted return of the intruder-husband. The differences in scale, depth and lighting of the scene outside, glimpsed through the doorway focus attention on what is happening outside. The outside world is glimpsed partially through the doorway, as though we too saw the world from the inside looking out. The relationship between interior and exterior space constructed in these paintings focuses attention on interface which the doorway creates.

Very different treatment of space is found in other late nineteenth century works. The paintings of shearing sheds depict interior views of masculine space, and make an interesting comparison with the domestic interiors. In Tom Roberts' *Shearing the Rams* (1890), and *The Golden Fleece* (1894) and R. Godfrey Rivers' *A Woolshed* (1890), the viewer is positioned within the picture space, which is characterised by depth. The outside, still framed by windows and doors, is more expansive, and throws light into the shed. The landscape is not the scene of action. It is the men's labour in the shed that is the focus of narrative attention. As the interest of the Heidelberg painters shifted from the depiction of interior space to *plein air* landscape painting, the sense of vision was expanded. Bush huts became a sign of the fruits of "strong masculine labour",[13] of the domestication of the land. The hut could then be represented from outside, and is frequently placed in the background.[14] A smudge of smoke is sufficient indication of the life within and the comfort awaiting the home-comer. The interface between the domestic interior and the world beyond is no longer a central device in these works. The lives of men could be represented as autonomous of women but the lives of women are seen from the point of view of men, and as dependent on the events of the world beyond the home.

Although in literary works, the devices for the representation of space are different from those used in painting, the relationship between the inside and the outside remains central to the construction of gendered space in the bush stories. In the literature of the bush mythology the reader is generally positioned with the implicitly or explicitly masculine narrator. The reader follows the narrator as he observes the house from outside and crosses the threshold to come inside. The huts in the bush literature are frequently rough-built as writers like Lawson situate bushwomen in much greater poverty, isolation and hardship than the painters envisage. The cracks between the timber slabs of the walls convey a powerful impression of restricted vision, inadequate protection and entrapment. In *The Drover's Wife*, the snake which goes under the house, "may at any moment come up through the cracks in the rough

slab floor." Through the night, the woman waits for the snake, watching for it, and listening for its movements.

> From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and whenever she hears a noise she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle . . . . At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver.[15]

The snake, when it is caught, is literally half in and half out. Having emerged two feet into the kitchen, the snake realises the danger and "sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him" (p.243).

The huts in Baynton's stories, *Scrammy 'And, The Chosen Vessel* and *Squeaker's Mate*, all enclose a feminine or feminised character who looks out, through cracks in the wall and through the door at her assailant. This activity of looking and listening for the threatening intruder outside, who is, in turn, looking and listening for movement inside, is the basis of the suspense that builds up in Baynton's stories. As in the paintings, the ability to make sense of what is happening on the other side of the wall is frustrated by obscured vision and a straining to hear the faintest of sounds. The woman in *The Chosen Vessel* who wakes with the knowledge that the intruder is outside the hut "saw one of the open cracks, quite close to where she lay, darken with a shadow."

> Still watching, she saw the shadow darken every crack along the wall. She knew by the sounds that the man was trying every standpoint that might help him to see in (p.83).

In *Scrammy 'And*, the dog and the old man listen for the telltale sounds of the thief outside. But it is not only those confined within who must piece together the outside world from incomplete fragments of vision and hearing. The man outside strains to see and hear what is happening behind the walls.

> Warder growling savagely went along the back wall of the hut, and despite the semi-darkness his eyes scintillating with menace through the cracks, drove from them a crouching figure who turned hastily to grip the axe near the myall logs (p.37).

Those outside must rely on obscured vision and impaired hearing to make sense of domestic activities. Only some of the sounds and sights of the interior can be rendered meaningful. Meaning must be constructed within discursive frameworks which allow only partial and fragmented access to the interior. Yet, this process of constructing meaning represses the recognition of its partiality and incompleteness. In the paintings described earlier, the living space of the hut is a metonym for the domestic space. Nevertheless this metonym obscures the way in which women's labour within the home cannot be inferred from the representation.

This construction of gender through spatiality is crucial to an understanding of the representation of mothers in the bush mythology. The positioning of the reader or viewer is implicitly a masculine one, and consequently the representation of the mother is shaped in response to a male, and bourgeois, point of view. In *The Drover's Wife*, Lawson tells us:

> She loves her children, but has no time to show it. She seems harsh to them. Her surroundings are not favourable to the development of the "womanly" or sentimental side of nature (p.242).

In another sense the whole story is a demonstration of her construction of her own motherhood. Lawson is commenting ironically on the absence of expected

articulations of motherhood in time-consuming displays of the sentiments of love. But the concept of motherhood in Lawson's story is not a coherent and resolved ideal against which the Drover's Wife's practices are measured. On one hand the Drover's Wife is an image of an heroic mother[16] whose mothering is shaped by the immense hardship that the protection and survival of her children entails. On the other hand, the poignant sense of the woman's "spiritual exhaustion"[17] is implicit in the dissolution of her "womanly" mothering. The text shifts between an expression of a middle class ideology of motherhood and an alternative and resistant construction of what it means to be a mother.

In the late nineteenth century, bourgeois observers sought to comprehend the apparently disordered lives of working class families by forming an imaginative grid through which working class practices were interpreted and judged. Categories such as respectability, domesticity, hygiene, dependency and sexual morality were fixed points in the evaluation of mothering practices. In her Sunday ritual bush walks and her unsuccessful prohibition of swearing, the Drover's Wife also adheres to the ideal of the "good mother". But the quality of mechanical repetition to these behaviours suggests her alienation from the social context in which these actions would have been meaningful. It is Lawson's acknowledgement of this imaginative grid that allows his characterisation of the woman as undergoing a loss of those sentiments by which femininity was defined. But, at the same time, the fierce protective mothering that ensures the survival of the family against great odds resists the imposition of the bourgeois grid through which working class mothering practices were evaluated. This resistant alternative feels like bedrock partly because it is the articulation of a more archaic practice. It is subversive because it continues to undermine the efforts of reformers to modernise the relations between child, mother and the institutions of the public order.

In her study of London working-class mothers, Ellen Ross comments that the " 'relational and sentimental features' of mothering have come to dominate the 'service aspects'."[18] She argues that the assumption of a greater emotional investment in modern mothering has emerged because of the failure to understand the meanings "service" carried for working class and poor women in the past. The mothers' domestic work of sewing, cleaning, nursing and especially supplying and preparing food, frequently provided not only their families' only source of comfort but also their sheer physical survival. As a result, these caring services carried much greater emotional resonance with both mothers and families than is assumed (p.74). She suggests that "the deep appreciation of food in a hungry people" helps explain the detailed accounts of domestic activities, such a shopping and cooking to which this emotional investment is attached.

We learn simply that the Drover's Wife gives the children some supper, and that she has her sewing basket by her side. But the focus of the night's vigil and of her memories is on her actions to protect the family against dangers that threaten their lives and livelihood. To think of these, she puts down her sewing:

> Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks (p.241).

The dangers against which she struggles are associated with the world beyond the hut. Like the paintings, *Breaking the News* and *Flood Sufferings*, the disasters are not seen to be consequences of the social order: bushfire, flood, pleuro-pneumonia, crows. The hut is besieged by intruders: swagman, mad bull, and the snake itself. The differentiation of gendered space is integral to the heroism of the woman. She does not extend her domain into the bush beyond the yard, and nor is she successful in her struggle against fire, flood or pleuro-pneumonia. But she repels intruders, protects her family and maintains the integrity of her own sphere.

Once again, the domestic space is constructed as a "known unknown location" and her actions within it are eclipsed. The focus is on the interface between her world and the world at large. Though "she thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think of", her reminiscences give little sense of ways in which she might ascribe meaning to the domestic activities on which the family's comfort and sheer physical survival depend.

Nevertheless, the unresolved tension in *The Drover's Wife* between incompatible constructions of the meaning of mothering registers a critical moment of uncertainty, and of transition in the relationship between the public and private spheres, and men, women and children within them. This is the reason for the recurring motifs of thresholds, doors and cracks in the walls, through which men gain access to the interior, unaware of the limitations which render this access partial and constructed by the imaginative grids they use to make sense of domestic space and activity.

In images of childbirth, however, the threshold becomes the only part of domestic space that is comprehensible and accessible to men. The site of dramatic action is not within, where a baby is born, but at the threshold, the boundary between inside and outside. At the moment when women are in labour, and give birth, men's access to the domestic sphere is closed off. What has been assumed to be "known" is held in abeyance as all routine domestic labour is assumed to have ceased. Domestic space becomes an "unknown location" which cannot be represented from within. The house becomes a black box, alluring and threatening, but inaccessible and illegible. Men neither observe nor participate in the childbrearing, and nor do those inside respond to their home-comings. The babies are born inside, and the exclusion of men from domestic space seems virtually absolute during childbirth.

Readers of the stories are positioned outside, waiting with the presumptively masculine narrator. At the doorstep, the new father crosses, but is then lost to view, or the new baby is brought out, by the mid-wife, to be presented to the father. Consequently, although men appear acutely aware of their exclusion from childbearing, the stories create an inversion, in which it is the mothers who are excluded from representation.

This uneasy sense of male exclusion from childbirth, and its inversion in the exclusion of the mother from the narration of the events, is found in Rudd's *The Night We Watched For Wallabies.* The enormous fire that Dad has built inside contrasts with the bitter cold of the night outside, but the boys' protests are in vain when Dad insists that they go out to keep the wallabies off the barren paddocks.

> Slowly and reluctantly we left that roaring fireside to accompany Dad that bitter night. It *was* a night! — dark as pitch, silent, forlorn and forbidding, and colder than the busiest morgue.[18]

It is not until the end of the night when the baby is born that the boys realise the meaning of their expulsion from the hut. It is only at this point that the story itself acknowledges the birth which constitutes the absence at the centre of the story. The experience for the boys is one of pain, resentment, futility and anxiety. The land is barren, and their useless vigil "was a lonely, wretched occupation".

In Steele Rudd's *Two Cases For A Doctor*, the reader is positioned with Uncle, who is left alone outside the hut when Sandy has responded to Kate's message — "a flag in the shape of a white shirt flying at the humpy" — by dropping the plough, harnessing the horse, and recklessly driving away to collect the mid-wife.

> Uncle stared after Sandy till he became restless, then walked about, now and again pausing to glance at the deserted humpy, where the white shirt was still flying (p.259).

Inside the *deserted* hut, Kate gives birth to a child.

Rudd is unable to account for the childbirth directly but in *Two Cases for the Doctor*, he creates an analogy to the childbirth. The story tells of two apparently different episodes when a doctor is needed on Sandy's Selection. In the first case, the male doctor cuts a "cancer" from Uncle's lip. Before the operation, Sandy shaves Uncle's top lip with a razor used for shaving greenhide. The doctor arrives and at Uncle's request, he operates without chloroform, snipping a V-shaped piece from his lip. Though Uncle "submitted himself bravely" to the painful operation, when the doctor tells him that Sandy must shave the area for a second time, tears come to his eyes and he demands chloroform for the shave. Lionel Lindsay's illustration of the operation shows it being performed outside the hut (p.257).

This episode is loosely analogous to the one which follows: childbirth is an operation equated with the removal of a painful, though not necessarily malignant, cancer. Since Sandy's solicitous participation in the first episode has exacerbated the pain associated with the operation, it is implied that he would also intensify Kate's pain if he were present at the birth.

Rudd's handling of the analogy suggests his uncertainty and ambivalence about childbirth. On one hand the analogy suggests that giving birth is a comparatively minor operation like the incision in Uncle's lip. On the other hand, the story suggests that men, like Uncle, make a great deal of fuss about very little pain but women undergo a moment of great pain and danger, almost in silence. The crudely comic treatment of Uncle's operation contrasts with the aura of secrecy and mystery which attaches to the image of the deserted hut. The Uncle's operation can be cast in the form of a men's yarn, or tall story, but implicitly, childbirth cannot find expression in this form.

If Steele Rudd eclipses the drama of childbirth by focussing on the actions of men, nevertheless the babies are born alive, well and apparently after trouble-free labour. It is Henry Lawson who paints the nightmare picture of a husband who cannot act to save his wife and baby, both of whom die in childbirth. Ratty Howlett, desperately ill, tells of his wife's death many years ago in *No Place For A Woman*. He had made arrangements for a doctor and a woman in town to attend Mary's labour, but she "was wrong in her time."

> She was took bad suddenly one night, but it passed off. False alarm. I was going to ride somewhere, but she said to wait until daylight. Someone was sure to pass. She was a brave and sensible girl, but she had a terror of being left alone. It was no place for a woman!"[20]

Howlett's descriptions of his actions reveal his panic, indecision and fear. Unable to actually leave the vicinity of the hut, Howlett watches the road for someone coming. At dusk, when the light fails, he "went down in the hollow and stopped down to get the gap agen the sky." This image of confinement heightens the sense of his inability to act decisively, and through the use of motifs generally associated with female confinement to the domestic sphere, the panic-stricken Howlett is emasculated.

> "I'd get on the horse and gallop along towards the town for five miles, but something would drag me back, and then I'd race for fear she'd die before I got to the hut."

Howlett sends a "black boy" into town for help. For a night and a day and another night he watches desperately for someone to come, paralysed by anxiety, running this way and that, but never inside to Mary.

> "It come on about daylight next morning. I ran back'ards and for'ards between the hut and the road like a madman. And no one came. I was running amongst the logs and stumps, and fallin' over them, when I saw a cloud of dust agen sunrise."

Mary's mother and sister arrive at the same time as the doctor and the woman who was to stay.

> "They said she was dead. And the child was dead, too.
> "They blamed me, but I didn't want her to come; it was no place for a woman."

In Lawson's story the isolation is overwhelming, and unable to get help, Howlett is beside himself with grief and despair. Nevertheless the motifs are those identified in Rudd's more optimistic stories: exclusion of the male from the domestic space, the positioning of the narrator and reader outside the house, and the consequence absence of the mother from the story. This baby, however, is never to be carried across the doorstep by midwife, or doctor. Ratty Howlett spends the rest of his years compulsively "running down and bailing up travellers." But they can never bring the help that Mary needed in childbirth. It is Howlett himself who, at least in fantasy, brings Mary and the baby daughter back, by maintaining the simulacrum of the domestic life he might have led had Mary lived.

This sense of danger and the possibility of death, which men cannot act to forestall underlies these representations of childbirth. Clearly articulated in Lawson's story, the muted sense of danger and dread is implicit in Rudd's stories. The enormous fire in the hut the night they "watched for wallabies" suggests an inferno: Dad "staggered inside with an immense log for the fire", and the family sits "as near to it as we could without burning ourselves." In drawing the parallel between childbirth and the operation on Uncle's lip, Rudd could suggest that both might be "rather painful." This parallel is as close as either author could come to recognizing the pain and fear that the women left alone inside the "deserted humpies" might experience in labour.

The pain and the insistent fear of death which attends childbirth undermines representation of woman as "the bearer of new life." The muted recognition that her life might be forfeit in childbirth is grounded in the actual experience of maternal mortality in the late nineteenth century.[21] In her study of American women's responses to "death and debility fears" in nineteenth century childbirth, Judith Walzer Leavitt comments that most women seemed to know or knew of other women who had died in childbirth, and that one in seventeen men claimed that they had a mother or a sister who had died as a result of childbirth.[22] In Australia, about one in thirty women might be expected to die in childbirth in the 1890s.

Acknowledging that this is a moment of danger, the need for female help in childbirth is emphasised. In spite of the title of the Rudd story, *Two Cases for the Doctor*, it is the mid-wife who attends births in the Rudd families. The mid-wives are somewhat incomprehensible to the boys: they "couldn't make out" why Mrs Brown should stay with them. In the *Sandy's Section* stories, the midwives who attend Kate's labour, Mrs McNevin and Mrs Holstein, both speak with heavy accents which emphasise their foreignness. Their difference underpins the inaccessibility of their knowledge and skill. In *No Place for a Woman*, Ratty Howlett says he "thought Mary was wrong in her time":

> "We should have had a mother-woman to talk to us." (p.584)

He hopes against hope that Mary's mother, sister or the woman from town, or the doctor, will arrive in time. But it is the "black boy" and the drunken doctor whom he blames for the delay. In Lawson's stories the exclusive magic of women's knowledge about childbirth is further emphasised by the motif of the "black gin". In *The Drover's Wife*, the woman is alone, "very weak", and "ill with fever", praying for help.

God sent Black Mary — the "whitest gin" in all the land. (p.241)

In *No Place For A Woman*, "the old black gin was dead the week before, or Mary would a' bin alright" (p.584).

Childbirth remains the deepest secret of the woman's domain. Babies are born inside the house, and men must wait outside. Other women attend the births, and present the babies to the men. The mid-wife is the mediator, going between the dark, unknowable recess inside and the doorstep: it is she, not the mother, who brings the infant to the world inhabited by men. The babies are a sign of the future, but the representation of childbirth is unsettled by the recognition of the danger and closeness to death which is the shadow in which the image of new life is formed. Men's response to childbirth is to get help and then to wait with a sense of anxiety and exclusion. At the moment when they become mothers, women are rendered invisible and absent from the narrative. Only through indirect means can their experience of pain, fear and isolation be acknowledged.

In *Scrammy 'And*, Barbara Baynton's account of the siege of the old shepherd's hut can be read as a substitution for childbirth. The incident is framed by the birth of a child. Where the stories of Rudd and Lawson are told from the point of view of the man who waits anxiously outside, Baynton's story constructs a complex interplay between the terrified figure within, and the terrified adversary without. The old shepherd is left alone with his dog when the man and the woman leave the bush for the distant township to have a baby. In the early evening the man and dog, Waterloo, become aware of the threatening presence of the one-handed tramp called 'Scrammy 'And', lurking outside. The old man tries to allay his fears by carrying on with habitual repartee and routine evening activities, but his fear pervades the story. Without firm knowledge of Scrammy 'And's whereabouts, the old man treats himself and the dog to the counting of the gold coins which he keeps concealed in his belt. As they become more convinced of their danger, the old man lies down on his bunk and dies. From the terror inside the hut, the narrative now moves outside to the intruder, desperately clinging to an axe, trying to get into the hut to steal the coins, but terrified of the dog. He bashes down the door, which falls across the bunk, concealing the old man's body, which the dog guards. Scrammy 'And climbs onto the bark roof, pulls away a sheet of rotten bark, and swings a pole at the dog through the rafters. He manages to injure the dog, but his support snaps and he hangs by one arm above the bunk on which the door-concealed body lies. The dog pulls him down, the door falls aside, and he confronts the "open eyes set in that bald head", just as the dawn brings light into the hut. The intruder flees. The broken-ribbed dog continues to guard the old man without comprehending his death until the following day. When the man and the woman return with the baby late in the afternoon, the husband goes to check the shepherd's hut. Inside he finds the wild-eyed dog still keeping the blowflies away from his master, a sight he "was not willing she should share" (p.45).

The woman, the old shepherd and the dog are associated with each other and with the maternal. We learn that "there was a suggestion of the dog in his movements", and, in the dog, "more than a suggestion of his master" (p.28) The man talks to the dog as though he were talking with himself, and their intimacy is expressed in word and action. Together they care for the sheep, and protect the lambs. Yet each is both mother and child to the other. The old man feeds the dog meat that he has carefully boned. The dog watches with protective concern as his master succumbs to his death. The absent woman is third point of this maternal triangle, and "the tenderness of her womanhood brought the old man closer to her" (p.27). He feels that the woman has supplanted him in the man's affection, and he complains about the "despised woman-worked button" that she has stitched for the

hat he has made for the man. "What does 'e care about me an' you, now 'e's got 'er?, he asks the dog and accuses the dog too of switching allegiance. "An' wot's more yer don't bark at 'er like yer used ter!"

> "An' wot's more," he continued, "I believe ye'll fool aroun' 'er wusser nor ever w'en she comes back with ther babby." (p.30)

Yet, in a sense she is a younger version of himself, and in spite of his dire forecast that she'll have a girl, he has penned the calf so that there will be milk when they return with the baby. He hand-feeds the lamb of the ewe with barren udders, and his fingers are "lamb-bitten" and sore. The images of the milch cow, the ewe with "blanky blind udder" and his hand-feeding of the lamb all suggest a concern that the woman may not be able to feed the new baby, and that he will provide milk.[23]

The description of the old man opening the stitching of his belt to spill out his gold coins is suggestive of childbirth:

> Then together they closed the door, spread a kangaroo skin on the floor, and put the slush lamp where the light fell on it. The man sat down, so did War, took off his belt, turned it carefully, tenderly, and opened his knife to cut the stitching. This was a tedious process, for it was wax thread, and had been crossed and recrossed. Then came the chink of the coins falling (pp.32-3).

Hearing the noise of the intruder outside, he thrust the coins back into the belt.

> But round his waist the belt did not go that night. Only its bulk in his life of solitariness could have conceived its hiding place (p.33).

Presumably, he wore his belt hidden under his trousers round his loins. The notion of "bulk" and of conception imparts a sexual ambiguity to the shepherd and a suggestion that the belt laden with coins is equated with pregnancy. The faltering obscurity and unusual working of these two sentences suggests that Baynton is using a metaphor about which there is uncertainty and discomfort. The gold coins can be read also as a metaphor for the genitals. As he dies, the old man's eyes "rested on the hiding-place of his treasure, then turned to the dog" (p.37). In consequence the image of childbirth is sexualised, and the siege is a substitution for both childbirth and sexual violation. Baynton made a similar connection in *The Chosen Vessel*, when the woman is afraid of the look in the intruder's eyes and the gleam of his teeth as he watches "newly awakened baby beat its impatient fists upon her covered breasts" (p.82).

The threat that Scrammy 'And poses is a multiple one. He has killed a lamb, and has stolen milk from the cow. He wants to steal the coins, and in order to do so, intends to kill the shepherd, and to distract the dog by unpenning the sheep, so that "dingoes would come up from the creek to worry the lambs" (p.38). His stumbling over the lamb's feeding-pan reminds us that the lamb will be at risk if the shepherd does not feed it. Metaphorically, his plan to steal the coins can be read as his intention to steal the child, and this theft is cast as an act of sexual violation. We are told that the night "seemed pregnant with eyes", he began to feel "impotently frenzied" in the fear of daylight breaking, his "body stiffened with determination", and "unconsciously he felt this stiffened beard". His handling of the axe, and the breach of the defences of the hut by breaking its door and roof, is again an image of rape and of his intrusion into domestic space.

Baynton's treatment of the maternal not only affirms its fierce power, but also demonstrates constraints on the actions, even to save life, of the mother that are the consequence of maternity. The dog cannot leave the master and is vulnerable

to attack because he seeks to protect the old man. The old man is trapped inside the hut and dies of fear on his bunk. The "natural" mothers, in *The Chosen Vessel* and in *Scrammy 'And*, here represented by the old man and the dog, are rendered passive, vulnerable, and trapped within the domestic sphere as a consequence of their motherhood. It is the unnatural mother, the ewe with the blind udder, who finally teaches her lamb to drink water from the creek, and "they crossed to tender grass in the billabong, then joined the flock for the first time" (p.44). With this image of the "unashamed, silent mother", Baynton contests the conventional notions of motherhood, for though the "undemonstrative" ewe is unable to feed the lamb herself, she has ensured its survival by breaking the confines of domesticity.

Like the other bush writers, Baynton does not deal directly with childbirth from the point of view of the mother. But it is possible to read *Scrammy 'And*, in the context of the other bush stories, particularly those of Lawson and Rudd, for a vivid metaphoric treatment of childbirth, which explores both the experience of the woman giving birth in the hut, and the man excluded from the event.

Responsibility for the Child

Concurrently with this transition of the representation of women as mothers, around the turn of the century a shift in the idea of the child was occurring. In nationalist and imperialist discourse, the child was seen as a "national resource". As "an asset of the State, related to the State, a child of the State, a member of the community",[24] the child was no longer the offspring and responsibility only of parents. Public alarm was expressed at the consequences for the nation of the decline in the white birth rate and the high infant mortality. Women were to bear the brunt of the blame for their unwillingness to raise large families and for mothering practices which were seen to jeopardise the lives of their infants. Consequently, the representation of motherhood is inscribed with anxiety about the welfare of the infant and the undermining of the "national strength" inferred from the drop in the birth rate.

The actions of women to control their experience of reproduction and maternity were profoundly disturbing and controversial in the public sphere.[25] That the decline in the white birth rate was a matter of considerable public debate is evident from a number of public enquiries, and most notably the NSW Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate (1903). The Royal Commission reported four reasons for limiting family size:

> i. An unwillingness to submit to the strain and worry of children;
> ii. A dislike of the interference with pleasure and comfort involved in child-bearing and child-rearing;
> iii. A desire to avoid the actual discomfort of gestation, parturition, and lactation; and
> iv. A love of luxury and of social pleasures, which is increasing.[26]

In short, the Commission concluded, the reasons given for family limitation amounted to "selfishness", and specifically the selfishness of women. In the name of the nation and the race, they demanded that "people of today should consider what these facts mean for the future". This intersection of the discourses of pro-natalism and nationalism has significant implications for the representation of motherhood in nationalist mythology.

In his poetry, Lawson explicitly intervened in the debates about the birthrate. He supported the pro-natalist position, and his demands for high white fertility are articulated in terms of national and race survival. He too attributes the decline in the birth rate to selfishness, particularly on the part of women.

> We must suffer, husband and father, we must suffer, daughter and son,
> For the wrong we have taken part in and the wrong that we have seen done.
> Let the bride of frivolous fashion, and of ease, be ashamed and dumb,
> For I tell you the nations shall rule us who have let their children come![27]

But Lawson also coupled the short-sightedness of birth control with his critique of government policy with respect to immigration, irrigation and employment. In *And the Bairns Will Come*, birth control is associated with the selfishness of the "rich and well-to-do".[28] But, he suggests, young men, out of work, and their employed sweethearts are in no position to marry and bear children. Poverty has created an inversion of the social order, with men out of work and women working in factories and shops. It is in the interests of the nation that Lawson advances a pro-natalist position. In his articulation of nationalism, Lawson combines a critique of the political, economic and social order with pro-natalism. The representation of Australia as the mother of her children eclipses the participation of women as mothers. Women are castigated for their reluctance to bear Australia's children:

> Don't you hear Australia calling for her children unconceived?
> Don't you hear them calling to her while her heart is very grieved?[29]

Those who did not support the pro-natalist position were, in Lawson's view, disqualified from expressing concern about the welfare of children generally. Yet, in his early writing, Lawson could support the suffrage campaign in terms of the protection of children, arguing for the need for women to extend their domestic and nurturing role into the public sphere through the exercise of political power. In 1891 Henry Lawson published *The Helpless Mothers* in the *Dawn*. Lawson decried the powerlessness of mothers to protect sons from "Halls of Vice", and prevent "the sacrifice of the daughter's soul to lust". He talked of the destitution of families dependent on drunkard husbands and sees the solution as the women's vote:

> We'll know the worth of a purer youth
> When women rule with men,
> For love of virtue and peace and truth
> Shall save the world again.[30]

Over the decade Lawson changed his treatment of women's political activism, to express a view that results not only from his personal career and relationships with women, but also from a broader cultural hardening towards women's role within the nation. Lawson characterises feminists through a number of recurring motifs. Amongst these motifs are the accusations that the women were childless, and that this was incompatible with their professed concern for the well-being of children and girls. Because the poems appear to express very extreme sentiments, it is worth noting that they were published, and that these views were not too far removed from the conclusions of the Mackellar Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate in NSW:

> There are some who never have had a child or a girl about the place,
> Who'd rush into print, with a letter wild, for a lane-brat's dirty face.
> Neglected children and Brutal Men and Young Unprotected Girls!
> Are the cries of the Awful Neglected Hen — and that is the way it whirls.[31]

Lawson is contributing to the shaping of a nationalist discourse in which feminists have "never a thought for their country's sake".[32] Up till the late 1880s and early 1890s, child-bearing and rearing were seen to be "women's work", and Lawson supported the argument for granting to women resources and power they needed to discharge their responsibility for the care of children. Over the decade of the 1890s, women's practices of birth control and family limitation became *public* knowledge, and men began to formulate a role for themselves in controlling reproduction.

Responsibility for pregnancy and birth was assumed by the state, and by the men who dominated the police force, the judiciary and the medical profession.[33] This masculinist intervention in reproduction was legitimated in terms of the national interest and the shift in Lawson's position reflects this intersection of pro-natalism and nationalism. Thus, Lawson calls on "the men who made Australia", the bushmen, to "see that your daughters have children, and see that Australia is home."[34]

Public alarm was not focussed only on the decline in the white birth rate. Concern with infant mortality escalated as it became clear that the trend towards smaller families was irreversible. Infant death was a common experience, with 14% of babies born in the 1890s dying before the age of one.[35] A slight rise in infant mortality from the 1880s to the 1890s was viewed with considerable public concern. In nationalist discourse, the image of the child and of childbirth as signifying the continuity of life and the young nation is unsettled by the muted acknowledgement of the insistent possibility of child mortality.

The fear of infant mortality finds expression in the bush stories. In Steele Rudd's *Kate's Babies*, Dad's response to the birth of triplets is, "I s'pose it's better than *losin'* one" (p.371). In a later story, Lily mentions the death of a baby in her letter to her mother:

> The day before it took sick there was nothing whatever the matter with it, but it took convulshuns, and before Mr Pills could get enough hot water to put it in the poor little thing was dead. It was Mrs Pill's first baby too, and everyone about is so sorry over it (p.473).

In *The Drover's Wife* the woman recalls that "one of her children died while she was here alone" and that "she rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child" (p.241). These accounts are one step removed — remembered or retold — but the experience of the death of infants was both common and painful so that it casts its shadow in the bush mythology.

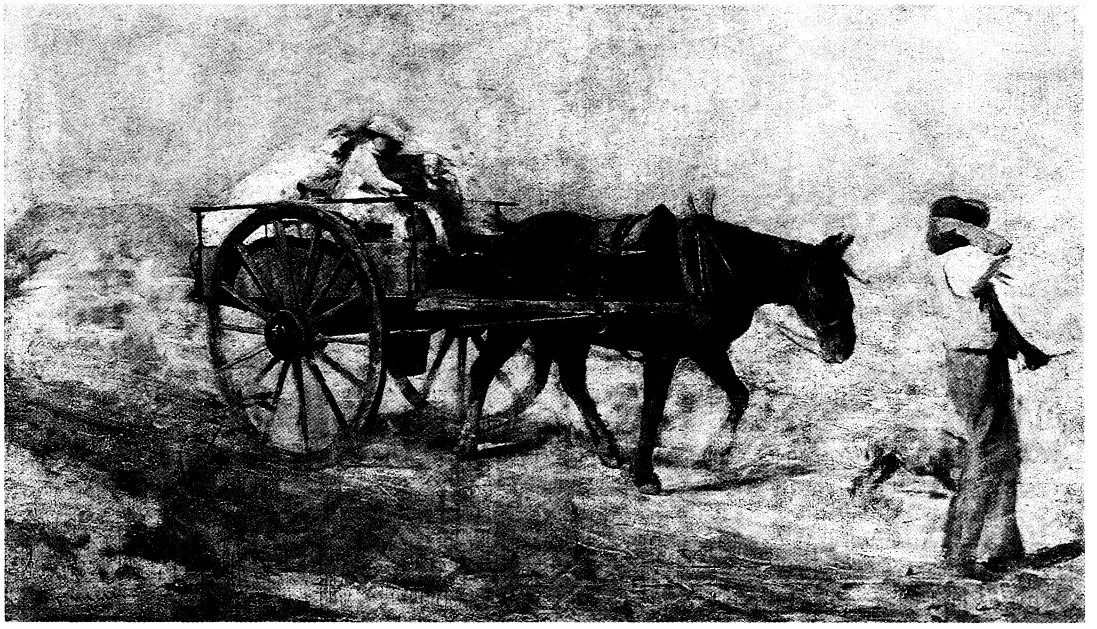
Whilst the death of some infants had in the past been seen as inevitable, now there was a growing concern to prevent these deaths. The population debate shifted ground, away from concern about the declining birth rate to focus on the means of preserving infant life.[36] Infant life and child health became matters of public concern. Once again, mothers were held accountable for infant death and failure to "thrive". Wide-ranging public interventions, legislation and reforms were introduced to promote infant welfare, and to transform women's traditional childcare practices.[37] Whether the result of neglect or ignorance, deficiencies in mothering cried out for redress.

The representation of motherhood, then, was deeply problematic. On one hand, women were insistently represented as mothers in the bush mythology. On the other hand, this representation was inscribed with a certain lack of confidence in their mothering practices. In the world of action, medical and welfare networks combined support with surveillance, instruction and control to effectively supervise mothering, "rescuing" children whose mothers were lacking the moral qualifications for rearing Australia's children.[38] In the world of imagination, the notion of "separate spheres" worked against the construction of an image of "supervised motherhood".

Finding visual and literary images for representation of the child as the responsibility of men was difficult to achieve without undermining the representation of motherhood or the spatial differentiation central to the construction of gender difference. That men might share the domestic interior with women and children appears to have been unimaginable. If the child was to be imagined in the care of fathers, then the child would have to be placed outside the home.

One alternative was to bring both mother and child out into the world of men. This could be readily represented in the context of natural disaster and hardship,

Aby Altson c.1867-c.1949 Australian
Flood Sufferings, 1890
Oil on canvas, 110 x 153.5cm
Accessioned 1967
Reproduced by permission of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917 Australian
The North Wind, 1891
Oil on canvas, 91 x 152.7cm
Felton Bequest 1941
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against which men battled to protect their families. In paintings like McCubbin's *The North Wind*, 1891, and Longstaff's *Gippsland Sunday Night, February 20 1898*, 1898, the image of women clasping babies to their breasts in the face of searing heat, drought, bushfire and flood underscores the heroic struggle of men to protect their families and their property.

Aby Alston's *Flood Sufferings*, 1890, associates protection and safety of mother and child with their evacuation from the home. As flood waters swirl through the humble room, a young mother cradling her tiny infant is carried on a makeshift stretcher by two stalwart men, out of the house, into the rain towards the waiting vehicle. The baby is tiny enough, and the woman invalid enough to warrant the conclusion that the mother has given birth to the child in the midst of the flood. Outside the door, waiting anxiously is another woman, perhaps the mid-wife. One of the stretcher bearers, perhaps the father, looks solicitously down. Behind the carriage, the misty grey sky has cleared to pale gold. The mid-wife stands on the other side of the threshold, ushering the infant into the world. The domestic sphere is no longer seen to be a safe haven. The men seek to secure and protect the child and the mother, and, metaphorically, this shift is represented in the image of bringing the child out into the public sphere.

The images of women and children protected by men rob the women of their capacity to act. They are carried in vehicles and on stretchers, their arms entangled in baby clothes. Though they are not confined within domestic space, their capacity for action is even more circumscribed. They are represented as more dependent and more passive than bushwomen isolated in huts. Their vulnerability is heightened by the sense of homelessness. In *The North Wind*, for example, the cart piled high with the family's possessions represents the contraction of domestic space. But their movement across the drought-stricken land suggests a destination. When, and if, they arrive, they will re-establish the gendered spatial segregation of home and the bush beyond the slip-rails.

Homelessness is an image which connotes disorder and disaster. Whilst men cannot imagine themselves within the home, nor can they associate well-being with the obliteration of the home. Their own spheres, their "proper place", is defined by its dichotomous opposition to the "proper place" of women. Consequently the restoration of order rests on the re-establishment of the home. Thus, the representation of men protecting women and children out of doors is compatible with the representation of women as mothers, but the absence of spatial differentiation suggests a transient moment of social disorder.

An alternative representation of the child as the responsibility of men, one which leaves the domestic world of women intact, is formed by the separation of mother and child. Mothers remain in the home, but "motherless" children are brought into the public sphere, under the guardianship of fathers.[39]

But images of the child in the bush are fraught with anxiety. It is as if men are unsure of their ability to ensure the welfare of the child. The recurring motif of the lost child in both visual and literary works furnishes poignant examples of the fragility and vulnerability of children in the bush. This motif enjoyed widespread popular and artistic appeal throughout the nineteenth century, and, as Leigh Astbury shows, its topical interest lay in the actual disappearances and miraculous rescues of children lost in the bush.[40] Nevertheless, it is in the 1890s that the metaphoric potency of the image can be tied to the anxiety about the proliferation of healthy white Australian children.

Although much of the account of the lost children in Lawson's story *The Babies in the Bush* is about the distress of the mother over their disappearance, the final twist of the story focuses on the father's sense of guilt. For Maggie Head, the pain and grief could be allayed only by her belief in bush fairies and her ritual recounting

of the story to bushmen from "the back country". Lawson uses the creation of delusive fantasy to enable Maggie, like Ratty Howlett, to maintain a fragile mental and emotional equilibrium which staves off the recognition of the desperate truth under which her heart and mind would surely break.

When he is about to leave, the bushman, Jack, who hears Maggie Head's story expresses his sympathy to the boss, her husband, Walter. He responds by telling of his absence from the search for the children. When the children were lost he was "beastly drunk in a shanty in the Bush"; the shanty-keeper refused to tell of his whereabouts.

> "I could have found those children, Jack. They were mostly new chums and fools about the run, and not one of the three policemen was a Bushman. I knew those scrubs better than any man in the country."[41]

As Andy says later, his belief that he was responsible for the children's death ten years earlier, is "the thing that's been killing him ever since" (p.784). For the father, no comfort can be found in the reconstruction of the event in fantasy: he must face the knowledge that his wife represses.

Although the focus of the story is the unresolved response of the parents, Lawson refers to the conventional theme of nature's enticing beauty and treachery in luring the children to their deaths. The children become lost when gathering wildflowers, and, as Astbury notes, this theme is reiterated in both paintings and literature of the period.[42] McCubbin's 1886 painting, *Lost*, depicts a girl lost in dense scrub, her apron folded up to hold the flowers she has gathered. The child is dwarfed by the height of the surrounding bush, and she stands still, hand to face, in the middle distance. The bush behind suggests no discernible features by which she might orient herself. The tall, slender trees and intricate, wispy foliage that enclose her, obstruct the viewer's access to the child and partially absorb her. Jane Clark suggests that "there is a clear indication . . . that she will not remain lost: at the centre of the viewer's entry into the painting is a conspicuously broken twig, presumably the last of several which will trace the wild-flower gatherer's path for searchers or re-trace it if the child recollects herself."[43] This benign, literal reading is unsettled by the metaphoric interpretation of the broken sapling as a young tree that will not grow. The device of the broken sapling is used again in McCubbin's 1907 painting *Lost*, but this sapling, which bars access to the child and mimics the child's seated pose, is too thick to be an accidental path-marker. The greater narrative impetus of this work, too, suggests a less optimistic interpretation.

Readings of these paintings have stressed the theme of nature's duplicitous beauty. However, they have overlooked the way in which this theme of oscillation between hope and despair has worked in conjunction with representation of men's social relationships. At the literal and narrative level, the lost child theme finds its topical source in the actual disappearances and rescues of lost children. Another area of topical concern, the newly realised value of the child, the fears for its safety and well-being, the controversies, and public interventions to ensure the reproduction of the race, finds metaphoric expression in these works. This concern is most clearly articulated in Furphy's account of the death of Mary O'Halloran in *Such Is Life.*

At five years old, Mary O'Halloran is described by Tom Collins as "perfect Young-Australian", and "a child of the wilderness", in perfect harmony with her natural environment, "undisturbed by other companionship, save that of her father":

> This brings us to the other mark of a personality so freshly minted as to have taken no more than two impressions. Rory was her guide, philosopher, and crony.[44]

The child is inseparable from her father and their mutual love is to the exclusion of the mother. Mrs O'Halloran is described as an embittered woman, who "spends

her time in a sort of a steady fury". As Collins approaches the neat, two-roomed hut, she and the child emerge to meet him. After a brief introduction she goes inside, leaving Collins with the child. He asks her name, and as she replies "Mary", her unseen mother responds:

> "She's got no name," remarked the grim voice from the interior. (p.89)

The child goes inside only when her father does, except once when she goes in to be dressed for bed by her mother. She falls asleep each night cradled in Rory's arms. The child is not seen to inhabit domestic space with her mother. The care and rearing of the child is seen as exclusively Rory's responsibility: he dresses her and teaches her to write. She is showing Collins her writing skill when the entrance of her mother "cut short this nonsense". Rory has forbidden his wife to beat her. When the woman comments that not beating children "when they want it" was unheard of, Rory responds with, "You bate hur, an' A'll bate you!" (p.93). It is the father who determines the manner of child-rearing, though his nurturing and teaching style would, in other contexts, be seen to be maternal, and her harsh withdrawn relationship, paternal.

Later in the book, Thompson tells the story of Mary's death. Rory had gone on a three-day station muster of ewes, leaving home before daylight. Though "she didn't trouble herself the first day", by the second day the child seemed, "not fretful, but dreaming", questioning her mother about a swagman whom Collins and her father had found dead in the earlier episode.

> "Still, the curious thing was that she never took her mother into her confidence, and never seemed to fret." (p.234)

But on the third day, taking some milk and bread, Mary left home to search in the scrub for her father. Her mother walked twelve miles to raise the alarm and was unable to stand when she arrived at the station. The men began to search for the child. She had spent seventy-two hours in the bush and the trackers picked up the sound of her exhausted voice calling "Dad-de-e-e!", without terror, still searching for her father. But they arrived half an hour too late, and found her dead, having fallen face down into a sort of trough and lacking in strength to get out.

Her heart-broken father prepared to take her for burial in Hay.

> "The child's mother wanted to go with them, but Dan refused to allow it, and did so with a harshness that surprised me." (p.241)

It is men who must take responsibility for this child's death. Rory, because he loved her and bound her to him with that love which fulfilled the need of his "love-hungered soul", and because he did not prepare her for his absence, left her fearing for his safety. Tom Collins, too, is responsible for the child's death. He decided not to disturb a swagman whom he believed to be sleeping, and consequently was unwittingly responsible for the death of the exhausted man blinded by sandy blight who was in desperate need of the care and protection from the light that the hut, and the woman within, would have given him. It was the discovery of this man's body that caused the child to be fearful for her father's safety.

The mother's exclusion is virtually complete. She is outside the charmed circle in which her daughter lived with the father, absent in the search and recovery of the child's body, and forbidden to articulate her grief through ritual in the journey to bury the dead child. Yet Furphy allows enough clues to indicate that it is her point of view that must be repressed if the story is to be given the coherence required

by "the correctness of style" which structures the masculine yarn. Thus, we perceive her story through cracks, partially obscured, incoherent and framed by another point of view. Whilst the reader's sympathy for the child and the father is actively engaged in the narration, we learn that this nameless woman loved the child, that she cooked and cleaned and sewed, that she was powerless to construct the relationship with her daughter that she sought, that she was unable to stand when she arrived at the station after her twelve mile trek through the bush to raise the search, and that she wanted to accompany the child to its burial. If her alienation from the child is signified by her inability to give it a name, there is a suggestion that this alienation was not of her choosing, but the corollary of the intimacy between father and daughter who fulfilled each others' emotional needs to the exclusion of all others.

One of the most moving motifs in bush stories is that of bushwomen riding alone through the bush carrying a dead, or dying child. It is an image of displacement as grief and desperate need urge them away from the hut into the world of men. This is one of the few journeys that bushwomen make, and its image is filled with pain. Furphy captures this pain in a profoundly disturbing metaphor. The stranger who meets the disfigured woman, who passes as a male boundary rider, on an outback track, comments that

> "he was carrying a box that he evidently couldn't trust on his pack-horse, but whether it was a violin-case or a child's coffin, I wasn't rude enough to ask." (p.357)

Using the childbirth metaphor of creativity, Furphy equates the music of Nosey Alf Jones' (Molly Cooper) with the child she never conceived. The case that carries the violin that brings music to life could instead be the coffin of a dead child.

Conclusion

In the bush mythology, settling the land is achieved by men clearing it and women bearing children to inherit it. The division of labour between men and women is articulated in terms of a spatial metaphor. The notion of men and women occupying their "separate spheres" is an expression of the complementary relationship between them. However, the insistence on spatial segregation and differentiation in the construction of gender sets the terms within which the representation of motherhood is shaped. Whilst mothers are placed under virtual "house-arrest", the positioning of the implicitly masculine observer renders the domestic interior only partially legible. In consequence the point of view of the mother is excluded and the meanings she might ascribe to her domestic and mothering practices are negated.

Although in the paintings and literature of the 1890s and early 1900s, women's significant contribution to the nation lies in their childbearing, public concern about birth control and deficient mothering practices undermines the celebration of motherhood. The representation of motherhood is inscribed with a distrust of women as mothers and a desire by men to control child-bearing and rearing. This masculinist intervention in an area previously seen to be women's responsibility is represented in terms of a separation of mother and child. The child is imaginatively shifted into the public sphere, under the protection of the father. With the evacuation of the child, the occupancy of the "deserted" home is suppressed. To speak of the representation of motherhood in the bush mythology is to explore the process of the exclusion of women from the myths by which Australians have sought to construct an identity.

NOTES

1. M. Lake, "Helpmeet, Slave, Housewife: Women in Rural Families 1870-1930", in P. Grimshaw, C. McConville and E. McEwen, editors, *Families in Colonial Australia* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985) pp. 173-185.
2. S. Rowley, "The Representation of Working Women in Nationalist Bush Myths", paper delivered to the *Australian-Canadian Labour History Conference*, Sydney University, December 1988; see also: Desley Deacon, "Political Arithmetic: The Nineteenth Century Australian Census and the Construction of the Dependent Woman", *Signs*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1985) pp. 27-47.
3. S. Magarey, "An Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges: Feminism in Australia in the 1890s", paper delivered to the *Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women*, Wellesly College, Massachusetts, June 1987, pp. 15-26; K. Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1880-1940* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986).
4. Margarey, pp. 18-2; W. Sinclair, "Women and Economic Change in Melbourne 1871-1921", *Historical Studies*, vol. 20, no. 79 (October 1982) pp. 279-280.
5. Family desertion emerged as an issue of public concern in the 1880s. See M. Lake, "The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context", *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 86 (April 1986) p. 125; S. Tiffin, "In Pursuit of Reluctant Parents. Desertion and Non-Support Legislation in Australia and the United States 1890-1920", in Sydney Labour History Group, *What Rough Beast?* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982) pp. 139-40.
6. P. McDonald and P. Quiggin, "Lifecourse Transitions in Victoria in the 1880s", in P. Grimshaw, *et al.*, p. 66.
7. As J.B. Hirst notes, this representation of the pioneers' struggle against the land itself eclipsed considerations of social, legal and economic determination of land settlement, J. Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend", in John Carroll, editor, *Intruders in the Bush* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986) p.15.
8. B. Baynton, "The Chosen Vessel", in Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson, *Barbara Baynton* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1980) p.81.
9. L. Davis, *Resisting Novels* (Methuen, New York, 1987) pp. 52-3.
10. Leigh Astbury discusses the influence of George Folingsby on his students who included Longstaff, McCubbin and Alston in L. Astbury, *City Bushmen, The Heidelberg School and the Rural Mythology* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985) pp. 36.
11. Cited in J. Clark and B. Whitelaw, *Golden Summers, Heidelberg and Beyond* (International Cultural Corporation of Australia Limited, 1985) p.47.
12. W. Mitchell, "Wives of the Radical Labour Movement", in A. Curthoys, S. Eade and P. Spearritt, editors, *Women at Work* (Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, 1975) p.2.
13. Tom Roberts, *Argus*, 4 July 1890.
14. See for example, F. McCubbin, *The Pioneer*, 1904; T. Roberts, *Evening, when the quiet east flushes faintly at the sun's last look*, 1887-8.
15. H. Lawson, "The Drover's Wife", *A Camp-Fire Yarn* (Lansdowne, Sydney, 1988) p.240.
16. See, for example, Manning Clarke's reference to the heroism of "this bush mum" in *In Search of Henry Lawson* (Macmillan, Melbourne, 1978) p.52.
17. B. Matthews, *The Receding Wave; Henry Lawson's Prose* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1972) p.14.
18. E. Ross, "Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's Working-Class Mothers 1870-1918", in J. Lewis, editor, *Labour and Love, Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986) p.73.
19. S. Rudd, "The Night We Watched for Wallabies", *On Our Selection* (University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1987) p.28.
20. H. Lawson, "No Place for a Woman", *A Camp-Fire Yarn*, p.584.
21. Maternal mortality in the 1880s-1890s was around seven deaths in every 1000 confinements, P. McDonald and P. Quiggin, "Lifecourse Transitions in Victoria in the 1880s:, in Grimshaw," *et al*, p.67. Although women had begun to restrict the size of their families from the 1880s, women of reproductive age during the 1880s bore between five and seven children. If one mother died for each 143 confinements, and if women bore, on average, five infants, then one in thirty women might be expected to die in childbirth. The rate of maternal mortality based on confinements clearly underestimates deaths connected with pregnancy, abortion, childbirth and post-partum illness.
22. J. Leavitt, "Under the Shadow of Maternity: American Women's Responses to Death and Debility Fears in Nineteenth-Century Childbirth", *Feminist Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 1986) p.136.
23. Public concern for preserving infant life included advocacy of breast-feeding and the provision of milk: see C. Bacchi, "The Nature-Nurture Debate in Australia, 1990-1914", *Historical Studies*, vol. 19, no. 75 (October 1980) p.201.
24. Debate on Maternity Allowance Bill, 25 September 1912, cited in Reiger, p.110.
25. Whilst middle class women may have been adopting contraceptive practices, working class women were unlikely to have had access to contraception. Other social practices to avoid childbearing and rearing included infanticide, babyfarming and abortion. J. Allen, "Octavius Beale Reconsidered: Infanticide, Babyfarming and Abortion in NSW 1880-1939", in Sydney Labour History Group, editor, *What Rough Beast?*, 1982, pp. 111-129; L. Finch and J. Stratton, "The Australian Working Class and the Practice of Abortion 1880-1939," *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 23 (November 1988) pp. 45-63.
26. Report of the NSW Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate, cited in N. Hicks, *'This Sin and Scandal': Australia's Population Debate 1891-1911* (ANU Press, Canberra, 1978) p.22.
27. H. Lawson, "Australia's Peril", *A Fantasy of Man* (Lansdowne, Sydney, 1988) p.245.
28. H. Lawson, *A Fantasy of Man*, p.220.
29. *Ibid.*
30. H. Lawson, "The Helpless Mothers", *A Camp-Fire Yarn*, p.152.
31. H. Lawson, "The Song of the Doddle Doos", *A Fantasy of Man*, p.339.
32. H. Lawson, "The Cliques of the Who'll-Get'In", *A Fantasy of Man*, p.247.
33. Finch and Stratton, p.51.
34. H. Lawson, "Australia's Peril", *A Fantasy of Man*, p.245.
35. Allen, p.111.
36. Bacchi, p.201-2.
37. Reiger, p.139.
38. Swain, pp. 98-107.
39. See, for example, H. Lawson, "His Father's Mate", *A Camp-Fire Yarn*, pp. 56-65; and "Brighten's Sister-In-Law", pp. 708-718.
40. Astbury, pp. 158-175.
41. H. Lawson, "The Babies in the Bush", *A Camp-Fire Yarn*, p. 784.
42. L. Astbury, *op. cit.*, p.168.
43. J. Clark, "The Scent of the Eucalyptus", in D. Thomas, editor, *Creating Australia, 200 Years of Art, 1788-1988* (International Cultural Corporation of Australia Limited, 1988) p.100.
44. J. Furphy (Tom Collins) *Such Is Life* (Eden, Sydney, 1987) p.91.

SARI HOSIE

Chamber Music

(For Pamela Kleeman and David Reed)*

The woman looks up and sees, through her rear-vision mirror, a girl standing on a bridge above the freeway, watching the cars. She almost crashes her own car trying to keep sight of the girl.

The woman is standing outside the art gallery, waiting to be let in. Outside, it's raining. A hot-concrete smell is everywhere. It's an important exhibition. Everyone has come to see the "Old Masters". All through the summer, people troop into the gallery to look at the famous paintings.

People stand looking at Picasso's blue room.

CAT. No. 31
Pablo Picasso
Spain, France, 1881-1973.

The blue room. 1901.
oil on canvas
50.4 x 61.5 cm.

"the subject: a woman
washing herself."

"And the blue room is blue.
This colour inflects every surface
— the walls, the bathtub, the water jugs,
the furniture, even the shadows."

The woman knows,
having read Anais Nin,
That Picasso delighted
in withholding pleasure from women.

The woman watches Picasso's blue woman. I am my father's daughter and my father's son. The son he never had. I look with his eyes and my own. She is beautiful? Am I more beautiful? I can watch the blue woman or I can be the blue woman.

". . . but Picasso's nude is a
completely different creature,
bony and introverted."

Ah, they say she is *not* beautiful. That is a relief. I can be more beautiful than, or I can *be* the blue woman.

* Pamela Kleeman's "Airing the Dirty Linen in Public" and David Reed's "Well Hung" appeared in "Off the Wall", the fourth annual print-making exhibition (Print Makers' Association of W.A.), May 10-24, 1987 at Prism Art Gallery, Fremantle.

The girl has left the bridge long ago and is in the art gallery. She hadn't come to jump, only to decide. Shall I have this baby or not? My life or yours, baby?

Everyone has come to look at the paintings but they are so close together — the people and the paintings — pressed into several small spaces or chambers. When the gallery closes, some will still be waiting, hoping to get in.

Will she have her baby? Her lover laughs and tells her that women don't create as many objets d'art in the world because they are so involved in the creation of human beings. Leave the painting to me, he says.

— I want a child.
— I don't.
— I wish you danced.
— I wish you drank red wine.
— I don't want a child.

"it . . . reflected a state of
mind . . . perhaps precipitated
by the suicide . . . apparently
the result of an unhappy love
affair."

At parties the artist explains why he and the girl no longer live together.

— I just couldn't be tied down by a domestic life, he says, a little sadly — it brings out the worst in me.

The girl gives birth.
x Born of mother x date: 12/3/73.
Head Circumference:
Sex:
Weight:
Length:

The ex-lover brings no flowers but sends a card. Thinking of you. X (He doesn't bring flowers, he doesn't know what to bring and we have a moment of pity for the man who doesn't know quite what to do or what it is that's wanted.)

The young woman runs up the spiral staircase to the specialist's rooms. His hands are cold, his voice clinical.

— We must find out why.

"Why Picasso chose to paint
entirely in blue is . . . unclear.

His cold hands are on her bare flesh.

— These are the chambers of your heart. These are the valves. Her heart continues to beat, although she holds her breath, watching her heart on a small television screen. Lub-lub. A tide washing in and out. The valves are like velvet flowers, fuzzy underwater flowers. This is too difficult a knowledge, the connection between her life and the ebb and flow of these strange flowers.

— It shouldn't happen again, the specialist says. A young, healthy woman like you. There will be other children.

The music begins. The woman's friend is giving a party in an art gallery. She plans everything, even music. A string quartet. Chamber music, adapted for performance in a room. Music for playing in a chamber, in my lady's chamber.

The hall is divided into two parts. On one side, the party. People laughing, drinking, talking, celebrating the birthday. The second is full of art, mainly soft sculpture, some of it suspended from the ceiling. The second room is still and quiet.

Walking between one room and the other is like covering and uncovering one's ears. An eerie childhood pass-time. Some people walk from room to room. Most prefer the party but one or two spend their time looking at the art.

"The Blue room is a premonition. It reflected a state of mind perhaps precipitated for Picasso by the suicide . . ."

I am strangely affected by the art. My friend, known for her unusual tastes, has never shown me anything like this before. First, a rotary clothes-line, a miniature clothes-line, in fact. On it some clothes are hanging. Pegged to the line. A nursing brassiere, huge, old-fashioned knickers, a washing up rag, all pegged up. It turns like a carousel when I touch it accidentally. For a moment I see it full of women riding in the garments.

The girl didn't see the artist again. He was never heard of.

The woman remembers.
My heart stopped beating.
They don't know why.

"Why Picasso chose to paint entirely in blue is . . . unclear."

At that moment. Why my heart should choose that moment.
Why my child should die.

Between the lines, the painting that recurs, softer than the blue room. Blond, downy hair. Blue eyes.

The music seems to go on and on. Chamber music. There is no end to the forgotten music, once remembered. A certain music, lub-lub, in the subconscious mind, in the body. "You shall not be left comfortless." Lub-lub. "Requiescat in pace." Let him or her rest in peace, and the requiem aeternum dona ies, domine. The mass, if one's child is born in holy wedlock, for the repose of the soul. Requiem. Repose. Rest. Quiet. No rest for the wicked. A woman's work is never done. And the greatest sin of all is the sin of despair. The lord giveth and the lord taketh away.

Was it a failure of the heart? Guilt, that cold shape, disperses itself among my belongings. Was there a moment when I did not want the child?
— I don't want a child.
— I do.
Did not want to deliver my body and my life?

All babies are born with blue eyes. Slate/grey/blue.

"Why Picasso chose to paint entirely in blue is . . . unclear."

On the bridge the young girl stands in a raincoat in the middle of summer. It *was* raining. Looking back, it's possible to see her. My eyes, the woman imagines, were rather dramatic. Two smudges of brown in the summer rain. Perhaps she did lean a little, over the rails? She had a moment of power, there on the bridge.

The woman watches for one more moment. Time, cars, rain. She stops watching the bridge and arrives at her party.

SARI HOSIE

Aquamarine and the Real Sea

> *Hold still. We are going to do your portrait so that you can begin looking like it right away.*
>
> (Helen Cixous, Signs, *Vol 1, No. 4 Summer, 1976)*

Someone somewhere struggles to wake. Just before consciousness she has the impression that her head is being lifted off but when she opens her eyes she sees her son's face inches from her own. He holds her face too firmly in his hands and asks for breakfast. She has been dreaming . . . a long, complicated dream, the essential parts of which are missing. She remembers a giant cricket in the kitchen at midnight, a little girl in plaits and a white veil making her first communion and a studio portrait of a child with a bouffant hairdo, a pale, made-up face and a cupid's bow of cherry red lipstick. (A friend says the people in dreams are part of the self but she isn't ready to own up to these characters).

He and she meet for lunch over daffodils and phrases.

"I should be back at work you know. Don't say I never give you flowers", he says, looking away, smiling blondly like the boy in him she once knew. "The girls in the office say I never do."

Daffodils thrust in her face, the smell of yellow, and she smiles, wondering why she must think of roses. When she was eighteen he gave her a rose, stolen before the sun on a frosty morning, pinned to a note for her to find, waking.

"The daffodils are beautiful, thank you." She has always believed that daffodils look plastic.

He begins to whistle.

She has never been able to whistle. She can sing a little, wonders if she can still speak . . . . There is so much . . . . She begins with a suicides. "Can we have the house sprayed with insecticide or something?"

"Why?" he gasps.

"Well", she laughs, "the Indian crickets keep jumping into the knife and fork drawer. They get rattled to death by the knives and forks and I have to pick them out."

He laughs. "I don't think ordinary insecticides work with those things."

She is glad to have made him laugh. She resists adding, "One day I shall meet the cricket of my dreams."

She shows him a daffodil. He has been glancing at a young woman, heavily made up, pretty, blond, at the next table.

"Did you know?" she asks solemnly, "that plastic things don't have real colours?"

"What have you been reading now?" he smiles.

"I'd like to get a part-time job," she tells him, knowing that his response is critical.

She goes to the library without the children one day. I exist, she tells herself. Moi, j'existe. Paris. London. New York. Rome. I could look them up! she thinks, as her face is brushed by the dangling leaves of a eucalypt. She passes a fat, tattooed young man (a Hell's Angel) leaning against his huge motorcycle. He watches her, flexing his arm so that the tattoo of a curvaceous female figure appears to sway.

She thinks of a speech she gave once, as a student. "It's very good, Love," her Uncle, helping rehearse, had said, "but they won't be listening."
"Why not?"
"They'll be too busy looking at your legs in those black stockings!"

She walks back towards the library but just as she is about to enter, she realizes there won't be time. Her husband, with a child's hand in each of his own, is coming towards her. She runs to meet them.

Her children, less needy, run with the pack now. "Canya?" they learn in April and "She's mean to me" by May. "Am I allowed . . .?" Learning the other mothers' words and fighting until icy pole hearts melt green and orange in the sand. She remembers that after the birth of her second child she was preoccupied with cleanliness. She ran around the house in between tending the babies, in a race never won and never over until at last she dreamed of the cricket.
"Marie," said the cricket, standing upright in the kitchen. "It's really too much. We can't get a living any more. Not a crumb. How about it?"

She takes herself to mass. Say but the word and I shall be healed. She's chosen a bad day. First Holy Communion and the church is hot and crowded. Father is grumpy and cross with those at the edges of rows who haven't make room for others. He retells the story of the Samaritan before the boys and girls come up to the altar.

She knows why the little girls are all in white and the boys are in brown. (If the girls are the brides of Christ, what are the boys?)

She remembers, as a child, wanting the solid brown of the boy's robe and especially, the carved wooden rosary instead of the plastic pearl. She slips out of the church as quietly as possible, imagining as she leaves that the little girls in white grow wings and rise up to follow her.
She decides she has a rare disease that cannot be cured but she abandons the nightmare, contenting herself with the threat of nuclear war.

"What's wrong?" he asks at night in bed. What does she want? He's there for her. She knows that, surely? After all, he tells her, half joking, she has a dishwasher, washing machine, dryer . . . . What can she want?

She says that it's not his fault, it started a long time ago. She thinks of telling him about the dirty dishes and the washing that continues in a magic stream that never ends and the food that must be thought of and bought and cooked, the dust that lies in wait everywhere to take up her time and the crickets chastising her from the kitchen drawers . . . but she decides this is too risky. He goes out to lunch often with people from work. He can now eat with chopsticks while she cannot. He might go out one day and find a made-up, blond daffodil girl at the same table.

She prepares to teach again. She has sewn a shirt, big and modern, with a round

collar to soften it. She has pressed and smoothed it. She dresses and makes up her face with care after the ritual application of Aquamarine perfume. London. Paris. New York. Rome., says the bottle. She fixes nervously on the bottle. Aqua, water. Marine, sea. This "sea water" is brightly blue and its scent overpowers all her own scents.

She squares her shoulders like another person entirely but at the last moment her son overturns the choc milk, some spitting onto her collar. She dabs and licks, soothing the son and cleaning the collar. The coloured, flavoured milk is very difficult to remove but real white milk will take it out.

She hasn't taught for a long time but she finds the right phrases, hears them everywhere, begins to recollect that they were once said to her. "Do you know what happens to people who fool around on the stairs?"

"Please cut out the sound effects. If your animal isn't tame (this said, smiling, to the owner of a bleeping watch) don't bring it to school!"

One day she has trouble with a student. She adjusts the collar at her shoulders, large, white, round. He notices. Looking her coolly in the eye, he says, "What's wrong with your collar?" She goes numb. The collar is large and round and meets at her throat forming two arcs. She's wearing grey trousers, the white shirt and a black vest. There are no pimples on her face. Sometimes she wears a man's tie or a thin red ribbon at the throat but today there is nothing. Maybe the top button has fallen off and the edges are flapping? She looks at the boy. "Why?" she asks, finally.

Her throat is sore from all the talking at school. On the way home from day-care her daughter begins to sing, "There was a princess long ago, long ago . . ." She mixes up the lines. The handsome prince puts the princess under his spell and the wicket fairy wakes her with a kiss.

At home she worries about the children, mends a shirt for her husband while he cleans a few cupboards. He's proud of her . . . the house is a mess but he's proud of her.

In my next life, she jokes to herself, I will let my spirit run free. I might go to school one day wearing the round collar. She the boy and hear the question "What's wrong with your collar?" I would take the collar very carefully by one edge (I know its weak points; I sewed it myself) and with great care and a few sound effects, rip it away from the blouse.

"Here, see for yourself. What *is* wrong with it?"

He stares, horrified at the white thing on the desk. He bolts as if it were alive.

I might go to the library. See the bikie. Look him over with utter disdain, walk proudly to the kerb and drive away in my long red Maserati.

Just over the slope of the hill is the sea, shimmering into the sky. I might go there, forgetting a girl in a bikini and the time when girls and boys alike had long and silky hair. I might go there with the wind blowing against me and stand firm, seeing the salt wind, salt water, salt sky. I might walk into the water with anyone who cares watching, and not stop, although they may think I will drown, and at the last moment, begin to swim out into the current and back, at will.

She struggles to wake. Marie, Marie, hold on tight, she tells herself but it is no comfort. She has lost her voice. She writes a note to her husband, beside her in

bed. She can't teach this week. He will have to call the doctor, take the children to daycare and school, worry about lunches.

Notes are too slow. She begins to type. She writes about suiciding Indian crickets, never-ending dishes, the colour of plastic, the mythology of roses, a letter to her dead mother about turning her into a woman/painting her face at thirteen, the lost parts of dreams, the washing, the washing up, choc milk that isn't real milk, melting icy poles, Paris. Rome. London. New York. Perth. Western Australia, her faith . . . say but the word . . . philosophy . . . I write therefore I think therefore I exist . . . and Aquamarine perfume and the smell of the real sea.

JENNIE FRAINE

Crayon Communications

The Three-Year-Old

Water leaps like spiked hair or fish snouts
that sniff sunstream in the vacuum between
sulphur crests. Another row of waves
red as a rooster's comb. A green splash.
That violet line you call "boat".

Now you order me: "Draw a rainbow.
There!" Pointing to the corner
older children reserve for sun.
Moreover, I must reproduce time-
honoured sun-shape, that quarter-circle
snagged on paper's end and top.
My cosmos turns inside-out,
upside-down; I resist. You shove
the coloured sticks at me; you're
a waist-high seizure of will.

There, sir — at your command! — our
two rainbows confront and blend
your lightwaves / my steady heat.

Three-and-a-half

Here's grass as though jade sculpted flame.
A purple horse, formless to my untrained eye,
floats in a white sky. Now you add
a most important element: "BLOOD",
you say, "BLOOD, Mummy, BLOOD".

(Some days you stop running to tell me,
"I doing blood like you". Powerless
to dispute, I nod and check a nappy
invisibly-inked.)

So, on the block of sky you've captured
with weaker right hand, baby-blue blood
rains large drops. Grass and horse
are linked, anchored to the butcher's paper.

Four Years Old

"Nana, sit still". He's got every chance
to get it right; she'll coo with delight
at the bulbous head/body, slightly larval,
the limbs (all four), the orange streak
he calls "smile". Her eyes are lakes.
Any colour will do. Three fingers on
each arm and he's satisfied.
A bloodless coup.

JOAN BARTLETT

Migrant Women Circa 1857

Like grey geese skeining north
they flocked all day towards the ship.
Hooded against the alien wind, their eyes
looked inward upon another land
where southerlies blew summer.
There were no words.
Caught in secret updraughts of regret
each flew alone.
They were long done with crying in the wind
and had forgotten how to sing.

The Captain, going ashore, wide open to their gratitude
heard instead the muted thrash of wings
beating against bars
and wished he'd thrown the damned bowl overboard
when coasting down the Africas.
He remembered equatorial nights:
The ship, a drowning fly
struggling across the saucer of the sea.
And how the one cool sanity on board
grew gently in a copper dish
imprisoned in his cabin.

And now, at journey's end
no whirling flock of thankfilled people,
come to see the essence of an English spring
but this cloud of sorrowing, grey-gowned women
drifting down upon his ship,
like exhausted birds of passage.
And each one halted, looked, then shuffled past
taking with her the imprint of pale flowers
laid on crinkled leaves
and the honey smell of primroses.

Back to the place she now called home
each bore, like a still-born child, the image.
And nursed it through the heat-bound night, willing it to stay
with lullabies of Dorset lanes or Suffolk downland, blue
with chalk-sprung harebell.
Then as the dawn wind blew, belling out the flour-sack curtains
they waited for the singing.
But when they heard the magpies' dying fall instead of thrush
or robin,
each closed her heart against the pain. Save one
who, on the edge of sleep, thought she heard a cuckoo.

DRUSILLA MODJESKA

Extract from: *Poppy: The Evidence**

I say I had to, it was a sort of obligation.
Marguerite Duras

The first wound comes with the cutting of the umbilical cord. The thread is cut and we're out there alone. Where? I don't know, I didn't recognise a thing, bright and light with rain pebbling the windows.

In my family there have been three generations of daughters, first born, and in each case the mother wept and outside the rain settled in, as if in sympathy. Well, it was England, it's not so surprising.

When China was born to Pauline, Pauline wept and China was taken away. When Poppy was born to China, China wept, and Poppy was taken away and put in a crib covered in fine broderie anglaise threaded with blue ribbon. When I was born to Poppy, Poppy smiled and held me firm against her chest. Then she wept, inexplicably, inconsolably, and I was taken away. Perhaps I was in danger of catching a chill, I don't know, there wasn't an explanation. Only the snip of metal closing. And blood.

It's a common enough story.

Poppy was born to China in 1924, less than a month after Zinoveiv's letter urging revolution was published in the British press, sealing the fate of Ramsay Macdonald's first Labor Government, and sending Jack, her father, to London to celebrate a victory that meant more than the second-best birth of a daughter. China pushed Poppy out behind the dead twin in the guest room of the house in the hills behind Cardiff where China herself had been born the year the old Queen died, and, incidentally, Australia became an independent Federation; not that this was a piece of information anyone thought to mention in the nursery where the tiny China might otherwise have heard something other than eulogies to a dead queen, though her father knew quite well that there would be money to be made from steel in the old colony of New South Wales. He watched, as if a rival.

I was born to Poppy in 1946, the year the Bank of England was nationalised and the press reported from Nuremberg details of crimes that had occurred in the forests and cities of Europe while London was bombed and British soldiers (my father among them) had fought for liberty, democracy and family life. Poppy's father Jack was more concerned that day for the fate of the Bank of England than he was for the men on trial at Nuremberg, or his daughter in a hospital in south London and the arrival of another girl to swell the ranks of an already rankly female family. But Richard, my father, was interested only in events in the labour ward. Although he had a newspaper with him and had perused the headlines, he couldn't read for anticipation and thereby missed the advertisement announcing that *The Doll's House* was opening at a theatre less than two blocks from the tiny flat where he and Poppy

and I would start our life together, courtesy of Jack who at least did that for them. Having made it clear to Poppy that he had expected her *to do better*, he reduced the rent on rooms that had once been servants' quarters at the top of the house that was now the office.

At the hospital Richard carried me wrapped in a woollen shawl to the window, so he could see his first child by the wet light of morning.

"Don't cry," he said to Poppy. "We're a family now."

I remember none of this, only a voice that cradled life, and the future, and was never questioned until it stopped one night and disappeared into air hung with words that no longer belonged to any of us. May, Phoebe and I drank the brandy that came on the tray with a pot of tea, three cups and a plate of digestive biscuits. We sat beside the body that had made us what we were, Poppy's daughters, each of us similar, and different. While we waited, Poppy's skin which was still pink as it had always been, began to change its texture as if to foreshadow the cold grey it would be by morning. Perhaps it had already become vegetable matter, a more pliable substance that would, this time, give life to another order of things. May turned the covers down so we could see her neck and the top of her chest.

One arm was free, resting quietly on the covers. The fingers curled in towards each other. May opened them and removed the ring that Marcus had given her the year Phoebe left school and we had all become accustomed to Richard's move from one family to another. May put the ring in a small porcelain dish with her watch and some scraps of ribbon. She turned the hand and held it up for us to see the lines: work lines, life lines. When Phoebe was thirteen she was given a book on palmistry and she practised on Poppy who had by then returned from the sanitorium and hadn't yet thought of India.

"You're going on a long journey," she announced. "Without a destination."

Such are the jokes families make, told over until no-one knows if the original is true.

"Should we ring Richard," Phoebe asked.

"Wait until morning," May said. "We might wake Cecily."

"There will be papers to sign," the sister said. "In the morning."

Who was she, this woman whose death we would register in the morning? A life completed and signed for, a body handed over.

It is in the nature of families that we know least those who affect us most? So that May, Phoebe and I could stand in a dark car park unable to say who she was. May said I was being fanciful, but all I could say for sure was that she was my mother. That I had known since the day Richard held me to the light and I looked across the room for Poppy holding out her arms to empty air. Who was she hoping for? For me? For Richard? For her own mother? Or for a future that inhabited her like a ghost?

When Poppy married Richard it was her ambition to create an ordinary family. The war was over, and so was a childhood spent with a nanny who was kind enough but powerless against a maudlin and neglectful mother who favoured the children who came after, unable to forgive Poppy for the one who arrived dead. Poppy was saved by war service and the only authority that could keep her from Jack. When she left and tuned her wireless from the serials she'd heard in the nursery to the newscasts she listened to with cheerful, uniformed girls who'd grown up, she could

see, in decent families, she vowed that when the war was over and Britain was free, the future would make up all that had been denied in the past. In her house every child would sing, there would be a clean cloth on the table, and the windows would open onto lupins.

Afterwards, at the end of her life, when she gave me her wedding photos, Poppy said they revealed the vanity she'd spent her life denying she'd inherited from China. She attributed this to the flowers in her hair and the dress made of cream silk bought at Jack's expense on the blackmarket. It was May 1945 when Poppy married Richard, four days before Germany surrendered, and for the rest of that year her friends and the people she admired were married in uniform.

"I say I did it for China," Poppy said. "But I can see it's not true."

When I look at her face in the photos I see embarrassment at the ostentation of the surroundings that served some other purpose. But this is incidental to the photos. When I look at Poppy in her wedding dress what I see is nerve and sinew and tissue. I see the determination of a body that was to produce May and Phoebe and me. This is the vanity of the flowers in her hair.

So when I say I can see her intention, it's not in her expression, not at all, but in the future that is prefigured by her body and by the composition of the photos. At the centre are the bride and groom looking out at me with newly married eyes. On one side stand her family. On the other is his. There they all are, the people who bordered her life. China is wearing a beaded dress. A fox head with open beaded eyes hangs from her stole. Her face is soft and fleshy under the powder. Jack's face is sharp and bony. His hair is slick and still black. Even in formal photos like these, I can see he was a man who would have been disturbing to women. He offers his arm to Poppy without looking at her. His attention is turned towards the girl in a taffeta dress; Poppy's sister Lily holds up a bouquet to her father. The two boys stand to attention.

On the other side is Richard's family. Gertie's hair is pulled into the neat roll that nobody, except perhaps Ted, saw her without. Ted is wearing a bow tie with his suit. His feet are planted firmly on the ground in heavy black shoes. Next to him is Peg, the youngest of Richard's sisters, the one who helped Gertie dust the books on Sunday mornings. Her dress had been retrimmed for the occasion, and if you look carefully you can see that the hem is not quite straight.

"I married Richard because of their decency," Poppy said.

Poppy wanted an ordinary family. She wanted to break the cycle of loss and sorrow she'd been born into, and save her children from wounds she thought were hers alone. If the photos make me sad it's not because what she wanted didn't happen; but because it did which confused the issue more thoroughly than any simple failure could. Poppy did make an ordinary family, a supremely, triumphantly ordinary family. A family to be proud of. Her windows did open onto beds of lupins. The water in the jug on her table was always fresh. Outside children played happily. I know this is so because I was there. And because I was there I find it impossible to see that there must have been cracks then, hairline cracks, injuries none of us could see. The cure she took became the malady, and as she struggled with one, she succumbed to the other. Perhaps like the psychiatrist who advised Richard in 1959 that Poppy should be admitted *just until she's feeling herself again*, we all mistook one thing for another, and not only the poison for the cure. All any of us saw was the family, cure and poison both.

On the wall beside my desk I've drawn a large family tree. They are all there, the names that once marked the limits of the known world. The names are tethered by straight lines drawn in ink. That way the relationships between each person are straightforward and unambiguous. On the other wall I've pinned the photos. There's nothing to join them together. Whichever way I arrange them, a chronology forces itself out, so that faces that were once unblemished seem to move down on the neck, and there is less space around them, less air holding up their heads. This explains nothing. The photos themselves explain nothing. I only have them on the wall because she gave them to me. I look at them and they make no sense. In every one I can name her. There is no doubt, no uncertainty. I can even recognise her in the photo that has a cigarette burn where her face should be. I'd know that dress anywhere, those sandals. I would not make a mistake. But recognising is not the same as knowing. The photos are like islands in a sea of things forgotten, glimpses of uncharted territory. It's for this reason I don't like them.

I have taken two photos from the others and have propped them up on my desk by the window. In these she is not obscure or obscured to me. In the first Poppy is a child, about six years old. Her hair is curled, her dress is clean, her shoes a glossy satin. Although her eyes meet the camera steadily enough, and her mouth is split wide with a smile, the child I see is vulnerable. Maybe it's her feet, formally arranged in third position. Or the monkey perched behind her and tethered to a stand. It is wearing a jacket and a small Fez hat, it's face mimicking hers like a shadow. Or perhaps it's the plaster on her finger, and an arm held out from her dress at a barely perceptible, but self-conscious angle. In this photo there is hope.

The second photo, taken the week after Marcus died, comes towards the end of her life and the grief is clear for all to see. Her hair is straight and loose, streaked with grey. She is reading a book. I can't make out its title, but I can see that though the spine has been patched with sealotape the pages are falling loose. Behind her the garden is in full summer bloom. The emotion in this photo is calm.

The portrait of her as a child is the earliest any of us have of her. It was taken by a photographic studio whose name and address is stamped on the back. The last photo I have was taken by me. It's on the board in the kitchen. She asked me to take it when I stayed with her in the summer of 1983. "Will you take my photo," she said. "So you'll remember me as I am today." She is lying, completely relaxed on a fold-out chair in the garden of the house where she lived without the family. There is honeysuckle on the fence behind her. In each of these photos she is alone. In the others pinned on my wall, she is imbedded, encased in the family. Hedged around, surrounded. Is that how she felt? Weighed down, as I am by the photos themselves, random images of a family past?

During that last summer, when she asked me to take the photo that's now in my kitchen, I had lists of questions for her, although in the only photo of me from that summer I am with Phoebe and we are shelling the peas. That was how we held ourselves still, with small domestic tasks that tied us to life, and the future. But my mind was stuck, going over a past that was about to disappear. I wanted to be certain, and to test my analysis, I practised on the present. I pored over the papers and wanted her view on the coal strike, and on Poland, but she refused to co-operate with the analysis I was already making. There were other things she wanted to tell me. She resisted my questions as if they tired her and distracted me as well as her from some other task. I wanted to know what was in the papers the day she married Richard, and who made the speeches, and what they said. Did she know the Armistice was close? All she would say was that the sky was a filmy grey, the colour of doves, and that when she came out of the church into the square, she watched a soldier walk by on the other side. He was carrying a small girl on his shoulders and she was certain he was singing Papageno's first aria from *The*

Magic Flute. When I asked Richard, he remembered the incident but he said the man was singing 'There'll always be an England.' The little girl, Poppy said, was looking up at the birds, wild and noisy, shitting on the church portico.

"Did you get that exercise book at Smiths?" Poppy asked. I was making notes. She told me that the bookshop in the main street had bound notebooks with hard black covers and thin lines.

"If you're going to write it all down," she said, "you should at least use materials you like."

Right now it is late in 1987. In Sydney where I live the Jacarandas are in bloom. In Canberra the Hawke Government announces the terms of the Royal Commission into black deaths in custody. In England the Royals are packing their bags for the celebration of the founding of a favoured colony. In January, on the day Prince Charles will take the salute on Sydney harbour *in celebration of a nation*, and the Kooris will gather in mourning and in memory of another history, it will be four years since Poppy died. Put like that it seems a matter of little significance, and perhaps it is. Some questions don't know how to take their place, and step aside for other matters. But maybe that is how we live our lives, moving between one thing and another, big things and small, inside and out, so that our days are made up of remembering and forgetting until there are no clear lines. Here in the house I share with Mary, where the newspapers are delivered every morning and friends come to tell stories lived right now, I have the books Poppy read, the diaries she kept and the letters that were in her attic when she died. I have an atlas, books on the history of Britain, and maps that are detailed enough to show the town where she lived after the divorce, the village where we lived when we were a family, and even the house on the hill where we moved after her breakdown, part of a settlement that settled nothing but gave us a good view over that part of southern England. I also have memories, and as I write I find they increase and magnify, repetitive, exaggerated, useless. I have a ring, a string of pearls, a locket and a gold heart. These I wear. The papers are piled around my desk, tied with the thread she made, along with the notebooks I kept of our conversations during that strange last summer. Through this patchy evidence I piece together pieces of the story of Poppy who was born in 1924 and died in 1984, daughter of China and Jack, wife of Richard, lover of Marcus, mother of May and Phoebe and me. That is how we mark a woman, by her kin and progeny. But it doesn't tell me who she was.

Now I think that Poppy's reluctance to give me what I wanted that last summer, talking sporadically, sometimes directly, sometimes elliptically, which I understood at the time as capricious, was, on the contrary, her last gift. That is what I should pay attention to, not the photos. She knew the answers to the questions I had would not be found in newspapers. The clues she was leaving were in the gaps and holes I was busily bricking up. I have been slow to come to this conclusion, as if my life first had to catch up with hers. And now I find I am interested as much in the inner history that intersects with these outer histories, but also has its own life: the struggle for autonomy that is the talk of us all.

Bread for one yen, says the Japanese proverb. *For the other yen, white hyacinths.*

Like Poppy's family, the story I have to tell is ordinary. A common tale. There are no hidden surprises to be uncovered, no secrets, at least none that I know of. Even if I did it wouldn't be my place. There are loyalties and considerations. Besides

this isn't that sort of book which is why it presses on me, as if it could breach the gaps that began the day they took her to the nursery prepared for the dead baby and she accepted her mother's pain as her own. Understanding that wound, handed down from one to another, I might understand the inexplicable pressure to leave, as if there was no air for either of us there in the family with every option laid out. Perhaps it was only me who felt encased, hedged in, and I give my feelings to her. But I know for a fact that Poppy was unable to sleep in a room without the window open, if only a crack, and the curtains drawn back sufficiently to let in the new day. Poppy didn't leave England as I did, or only briefly; but Phoebe was right after all, she was on a journey, crossing lakes and rivers and meridians to some other destination.

There is a map shop on the highway going south out of Sydney. It lists the maps it supplies in large bold letters: nautical, aerial, ordinance survey and so on. And underneath it says *if it's not on one of our maps, it's lost.* If I could afford it I'd buy them all and spend a great deal of money cataloguing them so there would be a grid of known lands and oceans taken from every perspective. But as it is I don't have the money and in any case if I'm honest the only map I'm interested in is the one that's not there, the one of the bits that are lost, or have slipped off, somewhere else. So like everyone else I'll have to make do with the maps there are, or else find my own way through the possibilities and hopes, the stories I've been told, the hints and silences, the events about which I have no opinion, the dreams and fictions, the regrets and fears, and the dry insistence of memory. I think of those early maps of Australia that had the unknown land, the great southern continent stretching away into imprecise margins. Is that where you go if you venture off the maps, as Poppy did, into dream, the imagination and the dark continent of femininity.

* This extract is work-in-progress from a forthcoming biographical novel by Drusilla Modjeska to be published by McPhee Gribble mid-1990. Our thanks to the author and publishers for permission to use it.

JOAN KIRKBY

Barbara Baynton: An Australian Jocasta

The replica of Oedipus-pharmakos on the woman's side is Jocasta; she is herself Janus-like, ambiguity and reversal in a single being, a single part, a single function. Janus-like perhaps as any woman is, to the extent that any woman is at the same time a desiring being, that is, a speaking being, and a reproductive being, that is one that separates itself from its child.[1]

It is difficult to imagine a fiction more haunted with evocations of defiled maternity than that of Barbara Baynton. Indeed, the human toll, in the novel of that name, is death by childbirth. Considering Baynton's own experience of motherhood — her first child born to her in a lonely bush hut without any witness whatsoever, the second aided by a midwife who referred to the child as 'another little bit of flesh' and told her of 'unbelievable horrors, of pregnant women, exhausted from overwork, dying alone in labour and being found with 'wild pigs eatin' her as I come along', the third followed by finding her husband in bed with her niece who in turn was driven mad by childbearing — it is scarcely surprising that ambivalence toward the maternal haunts Baynton's fiction.[2] All around her she saw the toll of motherhood, the sacrifice of women undergoing 'a coded, fundamental perverse behaviour, ultimate guarantee of society.'[3]

In Kristeva's terms, the mother who is both a speaking being and a reproductive being, is inevitably split. She is both a symbolic subject, one who participates in the symbolic order, and one who in the event of motherhood is occupied by a powerful *subjectless* biological program which unsettles the limits of the symbolic order.

> Cells fuse, split and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space to signify what is going on. "It happens but I'm not there."[4]

Mysterious, inexorable process; matter without signification; a body where nobody is. More than anyone else, Kristeva writes, the mother is 'a thoroughfare, a threshold where "nature" confronts "culture" ' (DL238). She is neither the subject of gestation in command of a process nor its object. Indeed the maternal site is a fearful one; on the one hand the mother is under the sway of the symbolic paternal function as symbolizing and speaking subject and on the other she is the site of a process that highlights the fragility of the symbolic order in its attempts to systematize the very process she is host to.

In Kristeva's view, the symbolic order itself is *'a strategy of identity'* which exists by means of *'a series of separations* that are oral, corporeal, or even more generally material and in the last analysis relating to fusion with the mother' — 'the struggle each subject must wage during the entire length of his personal history in order

to be separate, that is to say, to become a speaking subject . . . . (PH 94) Indeed, she argues that the taboo against the mother is the originating my theme of the symbolic order. Because of her partuition and the blood that goes with it, the mother is coded as impure: 'The terms, impurity and defilement, that Leviticus heretofore had tied to food that did not conform to the taxonomy of sacred Law, are now attributed to the mother and to women in general.' (PH 100) Thus the mother is coded as the enemy of the symbolic order.

Although Kristeva argues in 'Stabat Mater' that to love and to write are the same thing for woman — WORD FLESH — the woman writer who chooses WORD AND FLESH intensifies the split in her being. (TL 235) In the quest for symbolic mastery she risks in her psyche a denial of the mother which is also a denial of her self — that is, in the identification with the paternal function and the repression of the maternal which she must undertake to become a carrier of the S/WORD. For the entry into syntax, as Kristeva writes in *Desire in Language*, constitutes a first victory over the mother: 'Language is in a sense the suppression of the mother; it represents the nascent subject's success in separating itself from the mother; his/her victory in the combat to achieve autonomy.' (DL 289) This split is experienced particularly acutely by the woman writer, who possesses the generative power of the maternal but chooses to actualise the WORD FLESH paradigm through writing. If syntax is a first victory over the mother and language in a sense the suppression of the mother, writing is a constant exercise in denying all trace of dependence on the mother's body. However, the woman can never completely exclude this aspect of her psyche which erupts in unexpected ways. For a woman 'the call of the mother' troubles the word; it can generate hallucinations, voices, 'madness'. The ego is 'a fragile envelope, incapable of staving off the irruption of this conflict, of this love which had bound the little girl to her mother and then like black lava had lain in wait for her all along the path of her desperate attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order.'[5] Moreover, Kristeva identifies writing as a second level rite which causes 'the subject who ventures in it to confront the archaic maternal force on the nether side of the proper name' (PH 75); to become a writer is to achieve symbolic mastery under the sway of the paternal function, but it is also to open oneself up to maternal force.

Baynton's only novel, *The Human Toll* is specifically concerned with motherhood; indeed motherhood is 'the human toll.' It is a fate that Ursula, the orphan protagonist of the book, struggles to evade. Troubled by her own sexuality — her attraction to Andrew — she asserts her determination to be a writer and separate herself from corporeal process. However, throughout the novel she is beset by evocations of abjection — of defiled maternity — which operate as emblems of female guilt toward the mother for choosing writing instead of loving, for preferring the s/word of the father to the womb of the mother. Indeed Ursula's desire to escape the body and write leads to a nightmare confrontation with 'the maternal.' She is haunted by images of defiled maternity, in the episodes of the maimed doll, the stirring of the pig's blood, the dissolution of the body of her aunt, the corpse of Boshy, the obsessive recurrence of blood, her love for the pet lamb and Mina's shrivelled baby, the whole 'bushed' section of the novel which culminates in her longing to drink the water and blood of Christ's wound. Ursula's experience bears witness to Kristeva's contention that: 'The symbolic "exclusory prohibition" that . . . constitutes collective existence does not seem to have . . . sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine. The latter, precisely on account of its power, does not succeed in differentiating itself as *other* but threatens one's *own and clean self* . . .' (PH 64-5) Such is the fate of Ursula.

The novel opens with the death of the father and the issue of Ursula's illegitimacy — her very place within the symbolic order. She is 'a poor liddle motherless fatherless

lamb' and 'ther crown ov Englan" can prevent her touching one acre of her father's land. However, standing by her dead father's bed, it is a tale of maternal rejection that she tells 'the shrouded figure stiffly outlined by the sheet': 'Father . . . . I've been waterin' th' ewes an' lambs, an' one ewe won't 'ave she's liddle lamb, an' she's lamb's cryin' like anything — poor liddle lamb!'[6]

Taken to the loveless home of the widow Irvine she is befriended by Andrew Palmer who together with the 'sex-sophisticated Liz' buys the brown-eyed Bush girl a doll. When Ursula breaks the doll in her sleep, 'she gave Rachel's cry which the boy never forgot' and he attempts to assuage 'the tearful child's maternal grief.' (153) The doll is a surrogate child, the child that Andrew would later like to give Ursula and that she would like but fiercely struggles not to have. Widow Irvine, 'the childless woman, who had been a doll-less child,' subsequently takes the doll from Ursula: ' "A nice play-toy that for a respectable girl," said the shocked parson, his lean fingers indicating the naked, maimed doll and its unabashed mother.' (167) With persistency Andrew later attempts to make a doll out of a bottle for her. In this context, the doll is an emblem of the flesh that Andrew and Ursula might create between them and in this incarnation it is also an emblem of death, for as Djuna Barnes writes in *Nightwood*: 'We give death to a child when we give it a doll — it's the effigy and the shroud . . .'[7]

The doll episode is followed by that of the stirring of the pig's blood. Ursula watches Mina Stein make advances to Andrew, putting her 'fat arms' around his neck; an interlude interrupted by Mrs. Stein's cry, 'I want Mina to stdir the pigs bloodt' (180): 'Mr. Stein's foot, pressed into the pig's flank, was levering the last blood and breath through its gashed throat into a dish held under it by Mrs. Stein.' In spite of her revulsion towards blood Ursula follows as if hypnotised and insists herself on stirring the blood:

> Her nostrils, filled with the steaming odour, dilated ominously. Soon her movements became spasmodic, and a few splashes stood like crimson beauty spots on her bleached face. Still round, though slowly, went the spoon. Suddenly it dropped but her hand stirred space, till blindly lurching forward with an inward heave, she plunged both hands into the warm blood. Partially conscious, she knew someone laid her on her back, and she, a willing sacrifice turned, so that, like the pig, the blood might be pumped thoroughly from her side . . . Ah, but someone was raising her, so they were going to lay her on the trestles, and she not dead. She opened her eyes, took a deep breath, then limply and contritely placed both arms round Andrew's neck. (180-1)

Here Ursula, confronted with the explicit sexuality between Mina and Andrew, is drawn hypnotically to the cauldron of blood. She identifies with the wounded pig; she becomes a willing sacrifice, turned like the pig so that the blood might be pumped thoroughly from her side; 'limply and contritely' she surrenders to the male. The passage is redolent with feminine imagery. The pig, like the baby, as Stallybrass and White write, is a creature of the threshold, barely separate from the animal.[8] The pig is also associated with the flesh and with female genitalia; 'pig' in Greek and Latin was also 'cunt.' Blood is inevitably associated with the maternal: 'Menstruation, the first blood mystery in woman; pregnancy, the second blood mystery, the embryo built up from the blood; after childbirth the woman's third blood mystery occurs: the transformation of blood into milk.'[9] Blood is also, in Kristeva's terms, 'a fascinating semantic crossroads, a propitious place for abjection where *death* and *femininity, murder* and *procreation, cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together.' (PH 96) Like the pig, blood is associated with the body and with defilement — the unclean, the impure. Ursula's obsessive loathing of blood is related to her fear of the generative power of the mother. The loathing of defilement represents

'an attempt at separating the speaking being from his body in order that the latter accede to the status of clean and proper body.' It is precisely the 'fear of the uncontrollable generative power of the mother' that repels me from the body. (PH 78-9)

It is shortly after this that Ursula is drawn to the circus and the larger world that it represents: 'henceforth no music for her in the Bush bird's minstrelsy . . .' (186) She has responded to the call of the symbolic order; subsequently she hides even from Andrew and 'A sullen laboured grief against her seized him, and as she stood there he felt without analyzing that not years but the world had rolled between him and her.' (206)

The rest of the novel recounts her futile attempts to break free of the maternal, the destiny that would require her to pay the toll of motherhood. Called home from school by the death of her aunt, Ursula sits by the bloated, swollen corpse:

> Her mouth had fallen apart; round it a white weal threw into high relief the stagnant purple hue of the lips and cheeks . . . Dissolution did not beautify Mrs. Civil. Her great body lay shrouded in stiffly bulging outlines, and in deference to an old custom a plate of salt, to arrest swelling, lay on the stomach . . . . a stifling scented stillness filled the room with an intolerable odorous heaviness. (208)

The corpse, as Kristeva writes, represents fundamental pollution: 'A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming.' The corpse is 'abjection itself, a fecalized, feminized, passivated rot.' (PH 109,185) It is precisely at this juncture — witnessing the dissolution of the body of her aunt and meeting the widower Hugh Palmer — 'his wife Margaret having paid the toll of motherhood' (211) — that Ursula decides to write a book. On her solitary bush wanderings she comes upon 'a forgotten family vault, gaping and mouldering' that had been 'her childhood's Garden of Gethsemane,' and the 'snaggy hole' that had been the death trap of many. She has a vision of the tomb from which Christ had risen, and 'Mary, that picturesque sinner, coming with spices and sweet perfume to the tomb':

> In the ages that had passed there had been no sympathy for Mary — Mary, not His mother, but another Mary, who had waited through the long night, then "very early, while yet it was dark", had come: and He, though knowing, was gone. (214)

This is Mary Magdalen, Kristevan emblem of sexuality without reproduction and it is under the influence this Mary — and not MARY THE MOTHER — that Ursula comes upon Andrew and Mina and announces her determination to WRITE A BOOK, that is to take the other path to WORD FLESH from that of MOTHERHOOD: 'It was a statement that took her by surprise, for till she spoke, her future plans had not been within her mental focus.' (215) When Hugh Palmer asks her to marry him, she reaffirms her determination to write a book.

She denies her mother to her old childhood guardian Boshy. When he tells her that he 'often sees yer mother's eyes a looking et me ther same', she responds: 'Oh, Boshy My mother could not — she could not. You have been both mother and father to me — both, both.' However, when Boshy dies shortly thereafter, his blood falls upon her hands and wrists, suggesting the corporeality she cannot suppress. (Hands suggest the ability to make contact with the world from a self-made place.)[10]

She becomes obsessed with the thought that she must 'go quietly away and never see Andrew or any of them again' — 'this very day she meant to part for ever from Andrew' (250). However, that night, Andrew, tricked into marrying Mina, comes to her:

> The veins in his forehead stood out stagnantly; his blood-red eyes looked mournfully, helplessly at Ursula's, filling swiftly with maternal solicitude . . . Again his virile blood seethed, purpling and distending neck and face and brow . . . His bloodshot eyes looked hopelessly into hers . . . then the tempestuous blood spurted from his mouth and nose. (251-2)

Andrew flees to the bush and Ursula, involuntarily follows after him, as the companion and keeper of his grossly corporeal new wife. When they first meet there, his blood vessels are again close to bursting:

> She groaned and her hands went out to him then dropped; he was Mina's husband. Oh that terrible smell of blood! Yet she must stir it, or it would be ruined. Virtuously her hand went out, circling in a vain endeavour to keep away Mina's husband. (258)

This scene explicitly recalls the scene of stirring the pig's blood, when Ursula, repelled by the smell of blood, finds herself hypnotically plunging her hands into it and feeling herself a sacrifice like the pig, exposing her wounded side. The recurring confrontation with blood and dissolution are emblems of the maternal fate that Ursula struggles so hard to escape: 'Giving birth: the height of bloodshed and life.' (PH 155) Throughout the novel, 'blood' is opposed to 'book.' For Ursula, the writing of the book represents the alternative to becoming a mother. However, she is violently repelled by blood while being drawn irresistibly to it.

She begins to doubt her determination to write a book. Though each day she vows to leave Andrew and Mina, still she lingers — 'It's in my blood? What has come to me? Why have I changed? What am I doing here? Why is it always tomorrow?' (259) Palmer goads her: 'Have you begun your book yet . . . No one ever had a finer chance . . .Ah, you'll have to marry first' (267). Andrew asks her to wait until he returns from Queensland — 'then you can go . . . to London, Ursie, and write your book,' he said, smiling grimly (260).

On the night that Andrew leaves Ursula is drawn into the moonlight and eerily united with him:

> Her hands were outstretched to him, his to her, yet both were motionless, for about them was a stillness, stagnant and omnipotent as death. And it was Death's moment, thought, and desired the girl, when suddenly from a far point in the river, with the solemnity and clarity of Gabriel's trumpet, came that Bush-call, which few, even of its chosen, are privileged or fated to hear. (262)

It is a curious union; surrender is imaged as 'stagnant and omnipotent as death.' After this experience of 'Death's moment', Andrew leaves and Ursula remains, transfixed, unable to flee the sexuality/corporeality/maternity nexus she so dreads. She is like the sheep chosen for killing, limp 'with the foreknowledge of its doom.' Images of maternity intensify. She embraces 'a lamb newly dropped, and deserted, maybe willy-nilly, by the ewe', Palmer 'looking with envious interest at the instinctive maternity of her sheltering arms.' (268-9) In the night her pet lamb bleats in sudden agony and the crushed bloodspattered creature dies in her arms. Washing the lamb's blood from her hands she determines once again to leave, only to discover at daylight the fact of Mina's impending motherhood:

> Ursula, leaning against the wall, pressed down her bursting heart. Into her eyes came the look of one who, spellbound, stands beneath a falling mountain. Her dilating pupils perfectly reflected the pregnant woman, still standing in the same attitude . . . (274)

Mina herself is a gross representation of 'the maternal.' Associated throughout the novel with matter, corporeality, the distasteful flesh, she stirs 'the pig's bloodt' with indifference and after the death of her aunt Ursula with 'disconcerting wonder'

watches the food pass through the lips that had so lately kissed the dead (210). Mina's bed is crawling with filth; when she leaves her parental home her mother drags her bed and bedding outside, examining the mortised crevices of the bedposts — 'id vass crawlin' — 'From the crevices of the last post she withdrew a chocolate speck, squirming on the point of a long pin.' (254) When Mina's child is born, 'it was weirdly shrivelled and small, as the child of a big womb usually is.' (275)

As Mina's murderous corporeality is foregrounded — she tries to kill the child leaving bruises on its swollen nose and discoloured finger-prints on one cheek — the purity of Ursula's maternal instinct is emphasised:

> If the helplessness of the motherless lamb had appealed to Ursula, what was the lamb compared to this tiny creature . . . When Ursula handled this atom, its shrivelled hands, as if for protection, would clutch and hold her with a grim tenacity peculiar to infancy . . . . Kissing the tendril fingers — at first because Mina its mother did not — but later with a rapture begot by its breath on her breast. The beat of its wee heart held against her own, sent her intense maternity surging like the spring sap in a young tree . . . (275)

Ursula in a sense is the 'Virgin Mother' to this child, inevitably recalling Kristeva's discussion of the 'incredible construct of the Maternal that the West elaborated by means of the Virgin.' Kristeva suggests 'that the virginal maternal is a way (not among the less effective ones) of dealing with feminine paranoia.' The Virgin denies the man and conceives without him and without sex; she suppresses her own murderous or devouring impulses by offering her breast to the child; her own pain is valorized and she fulfils a desire for power (Queen of Heaven) and immortality (the Assumption):

> The Virgin especially agrees with the repudiation of other women (which doubtless amounts basically to a repudiation of the woman's mother) by suggesting the image of A woman as Unique: alone among women, alone among mothers, alone among humans since she is without sin . . . (TL 256-8)

Ultimately, fearing for the child's life Ursula flees into 'the trackless scrub' pursued by Mina brandishing an axe. Baynton's description of being bushed has the wild hallucinatory power that Kristeva attributes to 'the call of the mother.' It is one of the most haunting sequences in the Australian literary record — a virgin Mother nursing a dead infant in her arms flees a figure of murderous and defiled maternity, finally brought to her knees before a bush Christ from whose side she longs to suck lifegiving water and blood. In this sequence, being bushed — the threat of both psychic and physical disorganisation — is an externalization of the fear of abjection, the breakdown of boundaries, rules, and borders; a violation of the clean and proper self; the dissolution of subjectivity — all related to fear of fusion with the mother. Being 'bushed' becomes a sign or an objectification of the feared persecuting power of the abjected mother; for what is abjected and coded as abomination becomes 'a persecuting machine':

> The system of abominations sets in motion the persecuting machine in which I assume the place of the victim in order to justify the purification that will separate me from that place . . . Mother and death, both abominated, abjected, slyly build a victimizing and persecuting machine . . . (PH 112)

Inevitably Ursula, who has struggled so hard to separate herself from pollution and defilement, is tormented by the threat of blood and death. The infant dies at the beginning of the journey and throughout the ordeal she carries its stiffening corpse:

> . . . an internal spasm stiffened it, though no moan came from its cruelly indrawn lips . . . paroxysm after paroxysm, each swifter and more violent, seemed to wrestle for the soul

> that the locked lips of this wee one refused to surrender . . . With her own dried tongue, she bent to moisten into relaxation its indrawn blue lips, and breathing on the clenched, congested hands, tried to lessen their tension . . . . Then the mighty King of Terrors wrestled but with one . . . She was thankful for one thing — there was no blood. *For of all the nauseating things on earth, none were so appalling as blood to her.* [my emphasis] (281)

Still unable to accept its death, she vows to kill Mina if it dies: 'Even the Bible said, "Blood for Blood". Shudderingly she thought she could smell blood . . . She turned another way, and by degrees many others, determinedly keeping at bay the distracting consciousness that she was bushed.' (282-3) Distractedly she buries the child in the hot sand but 'oh God! how could she leave it alone? Sobbing tearlessly, she rushed back, disinterred the child, then with it for hours distressfully stumbled onward.' (283) Images of the maternal recur. 'Penalized by the child's dead, unresponsive cold weight', she comes upon an emu hatching eggs; the emu rises and watches from a discrete distance, 'even as Miriam, thought Ursula.' (286) She longs for one of the thirteen eggs to moisten her parched mouth and ease her burning throat; however, tormented by the thought that one day the egg might be 'a beautiful bird, and faithful like its prospective mother', she restores the egg and wanders on.

Next she encounters 'the gummy meshes' of a cobweb, hanging in 'an insidious circle from branch to branch, facing her':

> Early as it was, its first victim struggled in its gummy meshes. Fascinated, she stood shaken ungovernably by its horrible suggestiveness, while above and about her the trees shivered meaningly. (286)

She grows giddy; 'The blood seethed scorchingly in the girl's veins; hot wave-wings quivered before her strained eyes, and buzzed about her ears and temples.' She flees the spider but is repeatedly drawn back to it: 'Should she kill this magnetic spider and so end its baleful influence. Incentively the trees hissed "yes, yes".' (289) Running from the spider, she plunges on:

> Now, too she had made good progress, and the dreaded spider trap was behind her. That was well. Thankfully she moved on. Oh the cruelty of it! She was back — there it was! there it was! Sobbing, she sank down to hide it from her despairing eyes. Was she losing her senses completely . . . This dead child that she carried . . . Ah! now, indeed, she was becoming disorganised . . . At length, repassing the empty grave that she had hollowed for her chilly burden, the cobweb, the leaning tree, and other objects, convinced her that she was walking in a circle . . . . Was ever agony so great as this thirst? Why even Christ on the cross could not endure thirst and loneliness. (290-1)

She thinks of Andrew and 'that night of nights when he left — ah! that was her shame and this her just punishment . . . . She was becoming disorganized . . . She was lost, or Bushed.' (293)

The magnetic spider in its gummy web is a powerful image of the female artist returned to the limits of biological destiny. In her essay 'Arachnologies', Nancy Miller retells the story of Arachne, the woman artist who was turned into a spider for challenging the gods. The motherless and lowborn daughter of a wool dyer, Arachne had gained fame for her spinning and weaving. Pallas Athena came disguised as an old woman to warn Arachne against defiance of the gods. The two engage in a contest in which the goddess becomes enraged and destroys Arachne's tapestry: 'Arachne in indignation tries to hang herself, at which point Athena both pities her and transforms her.' She is returned to the limits of her body in a graphic way: 'her head shrinks, her legs become "slender fingers" and, virtually all body — the antithesis of the goddess — she continues the act of spinning' — from her own bodily substance.

> . . . Arachne is punished for her point of view. For this, she is restricted to spinning outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself. Cut off from the work of art, she spins like a woman. [11]

The spider then is a reminder and a warning to the woman who would rival the gods by inscribing herself in the symbolic order. Ursula for all her desire to wield the s/word of the father, to inscribe herself in the symbolic order as a writer, is spellbound and hypnotically drawn back into the web of the magnetic spider. She cannot escape the snare of the maternal, falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.

It is the classic Gothic experience described by Claire Kahane, which Kahane attributes to 'the fear of femaleness itself, perceived as threatening to one's wholeness, obliterating the very boundaries of the self':

> I am dangerously seduced by the very experience of terror on the dizzying verge of that ubiquitous Gothic precipice on the edge of the maternal blackness to which every Gothic heroine is fatefully drawn. Ultimately what I confront are the mysteries of identity and the temptation to lose it by merging with a mother imago who threatens all boundaries between self and other . . . . What I see repeatedly locked into the forbidden center of the Gothic is the spectral presence of a dead undead mother, archaic and all encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront . . . [12]

'Again and by degrees oftener', Ursula 'fought and conquered her frenzies.' Menaced by visions of burning snakes and the flames of hell itself — she determines to drink the blood of the diseased sheep at the filthy waterhole — 'No! no! never; she would not drink blood.' In agony, clutching the dead baby, she huskily and hoarsely calls out to God:

> But there was neither sign nor sound till the crows cawed, "Cor-pus Chris-ti! Cor-pus Chris-ti!" "Body of Christ!" she invoked. Yes, there, on that tree, begotten of what Bush-mother, hung the crucified Christ — eyeless, with a tangle of wild hair and beard, His white arms extended crosswise, and His bare body glistening bloodlessly, save for the red blood that had trickled and clotted from his wounded side.*
>
> *"Christ on the Cross" [Baynton writes] is frequently to be found on trees in the Australian Bush — a tangle of shredded bark for hair and beard surrounding an eyeless face. The white-armed boughs stretch cross-like, and even the wounded side is represented by the crimson concealed gum. (296)

In this extraordinary culmination of her ordeal, Ursula lays the baby between herself and Christ and wonders if she 'like poor Mary' had come too late. She finds herself at first longing to suckle from the wound of Christ and then transcending this desire aspires to become the Mother of Christ, protecting him from the afflictions, the crows, the ants, the buzzing horrors that torment him.

> Always and always she would stay beside Him. None should touch Him. No soldier dare again thrust a spear in His side. Stay — His side! What flowed? Blood — and — water — flowed — water! Her mouth gaped. Blood — and — water! Water! Violently her heart beat; stealthily she took a step nearer the wounded side, mouthing something. Back a step, then again forward. Maddeningly fierce was the struggle. No, no, dear Christ; fear not, for she would not drink His precious blood. Sobbing, she fell at His feet . . . .
>
> How merciful He was! and mercy ever begot her penitence. But but though He knew her need, He moved no hand to hold a sponge, dipped even in vinegar, to her burnt lips. Ah! how could she forget? He also thirsted for water . . . . Dear crucified Saviour! she would bring water . . . Fumblingly she groped and groped, till the burning blood gushed from her nose and mouth; then, mercifully, her tired senses swooned, and she fell with her head resting on the tree. (297-8)

In the first instance, Baynton's Bush Christ seems an incarnation of the fantasy of the so-called Phallic Mother, all benificent and nourishing. Caroline Walker

Bynum, in 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the later Middle Ages', notes that the body of Christ was often depicted as female in medieval devotional texts, 'partly because the tender, nurturing aspect of God's care for souls was regularly described as motherly': 'Both male and female mystics called Jesus "mother" in his eucharistic feeding of Christians with liquid exuded from his breast and in his bleeding on the Cross . . .'[13] Similarly medieval iconography drew 'visual parallels between his wound and Mary's breast offered to suckle sinners.' 'Christ's bleeding on the Cross — which purges our sin in the Atonement and feeds our souls in the Eucharist — ' was frequently associated with 'female bleeding and feeding': 'Not only was Christ enfleshed with flesh from a woman; his own flesh did womanly things: it bled, it bled food and it gave birth to new life.' (185) Jennifer Ash argues of the female mystics who were obsessed with the crucified body of Christ, that they found in Christ a representation of themselves. Through love of him they were able to express a love of self. They took Christ's wound as an emblem of their wound, his blood as emblem of their blood. Christ's wound became a symbol of 'my gaping space'; there I touch myself most directly.[14] Love of Christ was a way of expressing love and pity for the self. In this context, Ursula's initial desire to suckle from the side of the wounded Christ suggests a reconciliation with the female body, the female flesh, through a love of Him who represents herself.

Kristeva also argues that 'the nutritive opening up to the other, the full acceptance of archaic and gratifying relationship to the mother, pagan as it might be, and undoubtedly conveying paganistic connotations of a prolific and protective motherhood,' may in fact be 'the condition for another opening — the opening up to symbolic relations, true outcome of the Christic journey':

> To eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ means, on the one hand, to transgress symbolically the Levitical prohibitions, to be symbolically satiated (as at the fount of a good mother who would thus expel the devils from her daughter) and to be reconciled with the substance dear to paganism. By the very gesture, however, that corporealizes or incarnates speech, all corporeality is elevated, spiritualized, and sublimated. (PH 119-120)

In that sense Ursula through this 'nutritive opening up' to the other — that is her willingness to drink abhorred blood from the side of the Bush Christ — might be seen as her coming close to a reconciliation with both 'the maternal' and the symbolic.

However, Ursula resists this desire and becomes instead 'exalted with divine mission', to find water for her Christ; that is she aspires once again to Virgin Mother and Madonna. As she returns with her life-giving water, she comes across the great swollen body of Mina — the abject maternal body.

> 'Was it one of the Marys? No; none of the Mary's had red hair . . . . She looked intently at the distorted face. The eyes were gone — but the familiar pointed teeth were showing in the widely gaping mouth . . . . This water she had so carefully carried was for the thirsty, waiting Christ, not for this woman, her enemy whom she had hated . . . Mina — poor Mina . . . Pityingly, into that open mouth trickled every drop she held . . . . Alas! even now she had not done right. She had only wasted the water, for Mina was dead, and the deceived Christ was again calling her name . . . Who were these carrying the dead child coming from Him towards her? Two soldiers? No; one was a centurion. (299)

The man calling her name is, of course, none other than Andrew: ' "Ursie!" A great sob broke from her; then — "Andree! — " THE END.' Here, faced with the body of Mina, the emblem of defiled maternity, Ursula also responds with compassion; only at the last to censor that compassion in favour of her Bush Christ, her fantasy of a phallic mother. At this moment, Baynton relinquishes her narrative of the struggle of Ursula — to love or to write — with the highly ambiguous reunion

of Andrew and Ursula. *The Human Toll* recounts an extraordinary journey undertaken in flight from the maternal — only like some grim nightmare — to be brought back to the fate one has fled. Blood, eggs, cobweb, dead baby, the bleeding wound of the Bush Christ, reconciliation with her earthly lover.

Baynton's stories are similarly mother-haunted. Ambivalence towards the maternal and longing for archaic maternal love exist side by side. In 'A Dreamer' a young woman is driven back to the home of her girlhood; it is a nightmare journey of return impelled by the woman's own pregnancy, a reminder of the girl's pre-oedipal dependence on the maternal body:

> Must she dare! She thought of the grey-haired mother, who was waiting on the other side. This dwarfed every tie that parted them. There was atonement in these difficulties and dangers. "Bless, pardon, protect and guide, strengthen and comfort." Her mother's prayer. (7)

Although 'Squeaker's mate', through masculine identification, has gained the mastery necessary to censor all trace of dependence on the maternal body, she is crushed by a falling tree and brought back to a grim caricature of the female condition: confinement and sexual subordination, the conditions of maternity which 'both create and emblematize the condition of women'.[15] Unable to hold her pipe or the lighted stick Squeaker hands her she lies helpless as 'the lighted stick falling between her bare arm and the dress slowly roasted the flesh and smouldered the clothes': 'Why did she not keep the flies out of her mouth and eyes? She'd have bungy eyes if she didn't.' (13) This broken backed and barren Mary, for that is her name, is forced into a grim confrontation with the suppressed maternal body, her own vulnerable flesh and the body of her mate's new mate, whose 'figure evinced imminent motherhood, though it is doubtful if the barren woman, noting this, knew by calculation that the paternity was not Squeaker's': 'She was not learned in these matters, though she understood all about an ewe and lamb.' (20)

'The Chosen Vessel' is centrally concerned with the negation of the maternal body. Articulated as pure virginal Madonna to make her fit cohabitate for the clean and proper self, woman in her corporeality is brutalised and negated. With only her 'Mother's brooch' for protection — 'it was the only thing of value that she had' — the young mother is violated and murdered, her body returned to fundamental abjection of the corpse.

Kristeva's formulation of social classification rooted in an extreme fear of the generative power of the mother has extraordinary explanatory power in its application to Australian culture, in particular the literature of the abject which it has produced.[15] A society like Australia, formulated under the regulation of a powerful, punitive external law — a penal system based on rigid hierarchical arrangements — has remained particularly resistant to intermixture, to the erasing of differences and to the threat of undifferentiation. There is a fierce belief in the principle of identity without admixture, the exclusion of anything that breaks boundaries, a fierce need to maintain symbolic oneness, and a fierce condemnation of hybrids and migrant beings (PH 103-4); but above all there has been a particular resistance to the feminine — to woman and the maternal. The idea of the self most commonly articulated in Australian literature bears strong resemblance to Kristeva's borderliner, who lives in a fortified but empty castle; unwilling to experience his own vulnerability, he remains a prisoner in the tower of his own identity, projecting his own abjection onto others and violently punishing them for it.

It is the power of writers like Baynton to provide a powerful critique of this virulent form of patriarchy in Australian culture and to chronicle the fate of the maternal in its context. In confronting the abject, she prepares the ground for what Kristeva

refers to as 'the first great demystification of Power (religious, moral, political, verbal) that mankind has ever witnessed . . .' (PH 210)

NOTES

1. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1982) p. 85. (hereafter referred to in the text as PH.)
2. Penne Hackforth-Jones, *Barbara Baynton: Between Two Worlds* (Penguin Australia, 1989) p. 28.
3. Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', *Tales of Love* (Columbia University Press, 1987) p. 260. (hereafter referred to in the text as TL)
4. Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Bellini', in *Desire in Language* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980) p. 237. (hereafter referred to in the text as DL)
5. Julia Kristeva, 'About Chinese Women', *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (Columbia University Press, New York, 1986) p. 156.
6. Barbara Baynton, *Portabale Australian Authors: Barbara Baynton*, edited by Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson (University of Queensland Press, 1980). All page numbers are from this edition.
7. Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New Directions, New York, 1961) p. 142.
8. Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Methuen, London, 1986) p. 59.
9. Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin* (The Women's Press, London, 1980) p. 58.
10. Nor Hall, p. 156.
11. Nancy Miller, 'Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic', *The Poetics of Gender*, edited by Nancy Miller (Columbia University Press, New York, 1986) pp. 273-4.
12. Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror', in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, edited by Shirley Garner, Claire Kahane and Madelon Sprengnether (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1985) pp. 336, 340.
13. Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Part One, edited by Michel Feher (ZONE, New York, 1989) p. 176.
14. Jennifer Ash, 'Medieval Mysticism: An (Un)holy Madness', *Philosophy, Literature, Madness: A Tribute to Nietzche*, my notes from Ash's paper delivered at University of N.S.W., 17 June, 1989.
15. Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman* (Methuen, London, 1986) p. 144.
16. In my book 'The Lure of Abjection/The Call of the Mother', I examine the work of Porter, Hope, White, Humphries, Baynton, Stead, Astley, Harrower.

REVIEWS

***WORDHORD: A Critical Selection of Contemporary Western Australian Poetry,* eds Dennis Haskell and Hilary Fraser.** Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1989, $19.99.

Anthologies of poetry are always problematic. Indeed as a smorgasbord of tasters to inspire the further investigation of individual offerings, more often than not, the average anthology succeeds only in creating a stew that swamps and masks any distinctive flavourings. Dennis Haskell and Hilary Fraser have tried to circumvent this problem in their "Critical Selection of Contemporary Western Australian Poetry" by selecting ten of the contributors (out of a perhaps over-generous sixty) for extended representation and by providing unusually long "critiques" for them. The production of *Wordhord*, the evident research effort on the part of its editors, and its attractive packaging by the Fremantle Arts Centre Press, provides an admirable setting for the display and promotion of these poetic dishes. And there are quite a number of individual poems that measure up to the confidence placed in them. It is unfortunate, however, that some of the longer, more prominent pieces by ostensibly "established" poets, prove to be somewhat disappointing.

Stephen Hall is the most consistently sensitive craftsman among the poets afforded extended representation. We are told of Mr Hall's poetry: "Characteristically in his poems a particular image provides a focus for reflection, allowing the mind and emotions to play about it, like one of his own moths playing about a flame". If we turn to one of Mr Hall's most original poems, the taut and moving "Shelf-Life", we find this description of his technique to be apposite, and also helpful in understanding how the individual poem works:

> Cuttings of Devil's Ivy are taking root
> in their glass of water on the laundry ledge,
> blind shoots circling the transparent cell.
>
> She could be free, but won't drive beyond
> the daylight. Moving about the house, cooking,
> washing, crosswording — she is running
> an easy finger around the rim of her days.
>
> Off in the night some drawing class, some
> discussion group, some hope, and she
> asking 'desire for distinction, eight letters?'
>
> Weeks of living in a glass, and sprouting
> a few intense laves despite me. The water
> begins to cloud and roots mesh into an
> introspective tangle — 'plant them out',
>
> she says she would but the shock of soil
> might kill them after so long — I concede —
> leaving that gentle twining at the window.

Other nicely constructed poems include: "Sending a letter" ("Writing from here, knitting the lines into/ a page of platitudes, the pampered boats/ dip and chatter with shallow ambitions"); "Some Early Morning" and "Oral History". In each case, Mr Hall presents a poem that we are satisfied has been well finished, without any loss in spontaneity or emotion.

From the other major representatives of Western Australian poetry, there are some good poems. Nicholas Hasluck has unearthed a few amusing ideas in "Cri de Coeur" — the mock-heroic history of an unfinished masterpiece — and in "Ode to Apathy", perhaps Western Australia's own "Ode on Indolence", which declares:

> Apathy! My dearest;
> my indolent own.
> If I could be bothered
> to write, I would.
> If I thought it mattered,
> I might even phone.

In the full poem, however, the idea wears a little thin.

Another nice poem is Andrew Lansdown's "Spring Morning With Baby And Birds". Mr Lansdown extracts full value from his bird imagery, evoking a baby's first "soft sounds" as if "there is a dove in her throat. It becomes in my heart/ a bird in a wicker basket." If the poem has a fault, it is a tendency to explain this striking image too fully. Another of his children-poems is also memorable: "In Her Haste". A daughter is described leaving the house:

> From my desk
> I call, "See you later", and hear,
> thinly from the distance of the driveway,
>
> her sweet unsought rejoinder, "See you
> later! Don't forget the toilet paper!"
> These impish pleasures, heightened by im-
> perfections. I smile like an alligator.

In these lines, Mr Lansdown cleverly steers between cliche and sentimentality to pull off a nice contrast between innocence and his own "wicker basket" heart.

Philip Salom's poems, while being full of interesting metaphysical and ontological ideas, tend to evade formal control and concrete impact. "Walking at Night" is the most satisfying. The reader is drawn into its image of a frenetic, romantic life passing somehow, anyhow, which

> is the brilliant villa upon the hill
> where the world ends. I do not know what
> it is.

Mr Salom's "Three Angles On Absorption" is another interesting piece, evoking the unity of separateness, of being absorbed in absolute presence. Like "Walking at Night", the intellectual organisation of this poem is striking, but it feels verbally loose, as if still groping for exactly the right words it would like to use.

Some of the other offerings by "established" poets, however, are woeful. The opening poem of the volume, for example, Alec Choate's "The Ladder in the Orchard", accurately, but too kindly, described by the editors as "portraying the sexual dynamics between two young men and a young woman fruit-picking", reminds one of a combination of Ted Hughes and D.H. Lawrence passionately straining to stuff Keat's "To Autumn" with every vestige of sexual symbolism that has ever been thought of by someone else. Mr Choate tells us:

> Here is the orchard's bedding, the fertile
> valley
> walled by the bushland virginity
> and the apples are ripe
> rashing their trees with crimson
> and breasting their plenty . . .

This piece of chauvinistic eroticism is later rounded off by the evocation of the young woman's "fruit-generously full" breasts. Then there is Hal Colebatch's desire for heroes and heroic acts expressed in "The Earthquake Lands". This poem could perhaps be relegated with profit to one of the never ending appendices of one of the never ending Tolkien disjecta currently appearing. One hopes that his longing for "Elvish realms" and "Mirkwood" will be fulfilled with his "ambitions to become an expatriate Australian". Some of the most embarrassing poems in the book, however, belong to Fay Zwicky, who really should know better. Her elegy, "For Jim: 1947-1986", reveals an emotion that has not, as yet, had time to find that tranquillity that Wordsworth knew to be so important for poetry. Then her long "Miss Short Instructs Her Latin Class on the Foundations of Nepenthe, 1912" wanders pretentiously between Browning and Joyce Grenfell with ham fisted humour and general tedium. The poems of Mary Dilworth, Lee Knowles and Shane McCauley, on the other hand, are not so much awful as ordinary. In the best, good ideas are clouded by loose writing, while others appear to have no spark at all. Extended representation tends to reveal the weaknesses of these poets rather than their strengths. These criticisms, of course, are subjective. But this, perhaps, emphasises the risks involved in making a "critical selection". For the editors do not state the principles they have used in selecting the ten for extended representation and too often one feels the dead hand of reputation.

On the other side of the coin, among the fifty or so "also-rans", there are quite a few margarites that make the journey through them worth the while. One thinks of the wit exhibited in Peter Bibby's "Footnote" and Margaret Hewitt's "Magic Pudding". The latter perhaps deserves quotation in full:

> Doesn't Mum look beautiful in her tin foil
> tray
> she keeps well in the freezer, until Sundays.
> Lucky we've got a microwave, she doesn't
> take long to thaw.
> Mum rises in the oven, arms outstretched and
> yearning
> her face beams us a perfect apple
> and everything's OK 'cause you can smell
> she's in there
> turning over the vegies for the roast again.

Griff Ransom's pithy view of "Life" is another that might be mentioned in this mode.

Two of Paul Hetherington's five representatives are good examples of tidy, moving expression. "A Part In His Hair" is a nice evocation of the remembering of childhood, the extended metaphor of the final verse being particularly striking:

> My memories
> are knocked from their shelf:
> always fragile, beautifully decorated,
> now they're fragments: a part in his hair,
> china-blue eyes, a dying smile,
> lying at random
> on some shut-up storehouse floor.

"Acts Themselves Trivial" is the other Hetherington poem I enjoyed. It manages to

express neatly (if one forgives this word in such a context) the "enormity of love" involved in "folding yet another nappy".

Other poems that caught my eye included the unusual relation Anna Gibbs has discovered with the motor car in her "Going Places", "Traffic" and "Going". In David McCooey's interesting, long, but occasionally facile "Tasmanian Skies"; in the sense of country life expressed in Dorothy Clancy McGowan's "The Sisters" and "Homestead" and in Jim Pip's, "This Is Not Maxwell's House", there are unusual ideas or perspectives that hold the promise of greater things.

But there are annoying poems, too. Caroline Caddy's "Australia — Described For My Canadian Friends" is an example, one feels, of drawn-out, bicentennial national insecurity, that is about as definitively Australian as Chips Rafferty. Fortunately, not many of the poems attempt to capture such an overt sense of "Australianness" or, indeed, and perhaps surprisingly, "Western Australianness". The editors of *Wordhord* correctly emphasise in their introduction that "contemporary Western Australian poems don't come obviously drenched in light and heat, or glittering with iron ore". Indeed, they point out the diversity of poets and poems that comprise this anthology. This is hardly surprising, since only about a third of the poets represented were born in the state, and many more are birds of passage.

What is surprising, however, is the number of contributors who have already had published books of poetry to their credit: again about a third. There is thus clearly a *present* for poetry in Western Australia, and Western Australian poets are fortunate to be afforded the window of opportunity that *Wordhord* (and its precursors, *Soundings* (1976) and *Quarry* (1981) represents. In "All Our Words", Andrew Burke asks a question that perhaps bothers all poets: "Do you think there's a future in poetry?" This most widely practised and least read of all forms of literature can only have a public future if it is promoted and discussed. *Wordhord* is precisely the sort of promotion that ought to be discussed. The subjectivity of many of the poems, and the often opposing subjectivity of a potential reader's response, constitutes a strait-jacket in which modern poetry must labour to create its market share. Unlike other forms of communication — film, music, novels, plays — where the consumer is entrapped by the production's plot or noise or spectacle, the reader of poetry has to make all the effort to *go to* a poem. The critiques provided by Haskell and Fraser are material evidence that the editors of *Wordhord* feel the reader needs every help in this going-to. But the critiques also tend to separate the reader from the poetry. They exist on the presumption that the reader *needs* help. The concept of a "critical selection", however, does have the important function of stimulating the mental digestive juices. One inevitably begins to wonder and is forced into judgements about the editor's perceptions and choices. In the end, anthologies do not merely *display* their courses: they invite comparison between the dishes.

If anthologies are always problematic, it is also, perhaps, their ultimate reason for being.

Alan Urquhart

***Into the Mainstream: How Feminism Has Changed Women's Writing*, Nicci Gerrard,** Allen & Unwin (Pandora), rrp pb $18.95.

"The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room." In such a manner Virginia Woolf described the 'Angel in the House' the self censoring presence that charged her not to write what was upmost on her mind, for fear of giving offence. Woolf wrestled with her angel in a fight to the death: "Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing."

According to Nicci Gerrard, the daughters of second wave feminism are grappling with a far more awesome apparition; the Angel of ideological correctness. It is more formidable because it is so much more beloved. It is the Women's Movement, the mother who has nurtured, cherished, and provided printing presses for a generation of women writers. Daughters, writing within such constraints have developed the 'feminist novel.' It is a genre which Gerrard claims has become associated with angst ridden, self indulgent, semi-autobiographical novels full of female suffering in the patriarchal world. It's recurring themes are repression, depression and oppression: rape, abortion, adverse social conditioning, the stifling of ambition and the trap of marriage and

motherhood. To sum up Gerrard's main contention she believes that the feminist writer has cornered herself into a literary cul-de-sac.

The young Women's Liberationists of the late '60's are now approaching middle age. Gerrard argues that feminist writing has also come of age. Feminist writers have written themselves out of a dead-end tributary and their work has flown on, into the mainstream. This she sees manifested in the surge of science fiction, detective novels, thrillers, adolescent fiction, family sagas, thrillers and even block-buster romances, now being written by women of a feminist persuasion.

While admiring Gerrard's work I feel that her historical premise is unsound. Certainly early feminist writings, through till the mid-seventies were angry and confessional. Gerrard is however too quick to condemn novels that were a necessary stage in the evolution of the feminist novel. As consciousness raising was a tool of feminist groups, so to did the novel play a vital role in reaching out to women and raising the collective feminist consciousness. It is this collective feminist consciousness that women share today instead of individual memberships in feminist groups. To say also that these novels were tributary and not mainstream is to ignore literary history. What was *The Women's Room* if not an immensely popular novel? Whose bookshelf, did not boast the startling yellow cover of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*? Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* sold over a million copies while novels such as Rita Mae Brown's *Ruby Fruit Jungle* and Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks* were runaway bestsellers. Such novelists also used many of the devices of popular fiction. Marilyn French has been described as a feminist Jacqueline Susan, Marge Piercy writing since the early seventies has always managed to infuse popular form with radical content. To say that women's writing has suddenly 'arrived' just doesn't fit these facts. Feminist writing has simply diversified into a variety of forms. As it moves into male domains such as science fiction it takes the female reading public with it.

While Gerrard's historical research on second wave feminist fiction is shaky, her overview of contemporary women's writing is sound. Nicci Gerrard interviewed more than fifty of the best-known women writing today including: Margaret Drabble, Marilyn French, Doris Lessing, Alice Walker, Fay Weldon, A.S. Byatt, Marge Piercy, Angela Carter and Joyce Carol Oates. We learn not only how they grapple with the 'Angel in the House', but the 'Wolf at the Door'; the relative poverty of a writer's life and the 'Child at the Study Door'; the paramount difficulty of devoting time to both writing and children. We learn of their deep seated drives, hopes, dreams and ambitions. Gerrard's work is also based on talks with editors, critics and literary agents. Indeed one of the strengths of Gerrard's works is her expoše of the 'book world' it's literary prizes which do not necessarily reflect a writer's greatness, publicity which makes or breaks a writer, and the encouragement of women writers through feminist presses and activities such as The Feminist Book Fortnight.

Gerrard's is an extremely well written worthwhile and timely study. It should not be missed by anyone who is interested in women's writing. Women novelists are having such an impact on the reading public, the publishing world and the literary establishment, this category should include just about everyone.

Nadine Myatt

Patricia Crawford and Myrna Tonkinson, *The Missing Chapters Women Staff at The University of Western Australia 1963-1987*, Centre for Western Australian History, The University of Western Australia, 1988.

It is now over a century since women were cautiously and reluctantly admitted as students to several universities in the English-speaking world. Anyone familiar with their struggle for admission to the male-dominated world of academia and the continuing rearguard action aimed at keeping these unwanted intruders marginal will not be surprised by *The Missing Chapters*. Although the story is familiar to those involved, it is rarely recalled or acknowledged by those less directly affected. This account of women at the University of Western Australia in the past quarter century focusses on issues related to the University as employer of women, raises a question left unasked in the most recent official institutional history, *Campus in The Community* (1988): 'What difference did it make to be a female employee [of the University] in the last quarter of a century?'

Professor Fred Alexander, when he wrote *Campus at Crawley* (1963), believed in 'the very real freedom which the University had over the years extended to all members of its staff and student body, regardless of their sex.' The authors' initial epigraph from Virginia Woolf suggests otherwise. 'Even when the path is nominally open . . . there are many phantoms and obstacles . . . looming' in the way of the women seeking access to the professions. The authors have taken up her challenge to discuss and define these and to consider also the ends and aims of the 'battle with these formidable obstacles.' They demonstrate that such a 'very real freedom' was a phantom for the invisible women on the campus.Nor could Alexander have added 'regardless of marital status' for, having admitted women, the University maintained until as late as 1973, an effective bar to permanent employment of married women in The University of Western Australia.

Part One, 'A Partial Story', is Associate Professor Patricia Crawford's short history of women on the University staff. First she considers the question asked of any woman involved with women's history, "What do you want to write about women for?" She challenges the assertion that a woman writing about women need be biased and the assumption that, writing from the male perspective, the male historian can claim to be unbiased in ignoring women's historical experiences when these differ from those of men. She suggests that 'few women find refuge in the University from social pressures and many experience the physical space of the campus as male dominated' because 'women's concerns . . . are rarely defined as legitimate for central-campus purposes,' commenting, without further elaboration, that the story of the publication of these missing chapters is 'an example of how male hegemony is maintained.' (p.13)

The fundamental issues of the sixties for women employees were equal pay and tenure. The issue of the seventies was child care, the concern of women because 'that fathers might have responsibilities was unthinkable.' (p.29) Crawford stresses that the University was no different from the general community during that period, which meant that it was not even keeping pace with the slow advances for women in other Australian Universities. As a married woman who returned to academia after an eight year absence and, by 1965, had tenure, I was astonished at the continuation of the marriage bar in Western Australia and wryly amused by the implication that young married male academics, 'required to devote their whole time and attention to teaching and research' (p.21 Doc. 5) acquired, through matrimony, the unpaid services of a competent housekeeper and nurse to whom they apparently needed to give neither time nor attention! Crawford notes that 'since academics take a professional pride in their rationality and objectivity, the admission of prejudice is difficult for them.' (p.40) Document 8 (p.39) in which some FAUSA men reveal both irrationality and a lack of objectivity when discussing sexist terminology illustrates her point that the allegedly 'humourless' minority of feminists on campus may simply have a different sense of humour (p.42).

There is, to my knowledge, no evidence that any university has been in the vanguard of improved conditions for women employed as general staff. Only recently have attempts been made by women themselves to bridge the gap between academic and general staff, the former with that phantom of upward progression before them, the latter with career barriers clearly in place in the wake of equal pay and with sex segregation even more rigid than between academic staff. In Part Two Dr Myrna Tonkinson, Equal Opportunity Officer, looks in more detail at the conditions affecting women on the general staff capturing their own perceptions of their work experience.

Here too, 'until recently women were not perceived as having careers' and University policy 'discouraged women from combining a career and marriage.' (p.56) Despite this, Tonkinson found a 'strong attachment to the University and a variety of forms of praise of it.' (p.58) It was 'no worse than anywhere else' and women tended to blame not the University but either the prevailing norms of society or particular individuals with power for any perceived unfairness. (p.61) Tonkinson considers secretaries as a case study 'symbolic of the position of women in the University' and the incidence of RSI or 'occupational overuse syndrome', the latter an area in which the University has emphasised prevention through education. It should also be indicated that, although 'safety education and the vigilance of keyboard workers themselves' is essential,

preventative education must extend also to the academic generators of the material destined for word processing.

A quick check of the history from which these chapters are missing shows that the topics dealt with here occupy about three of its 434 pages. The Centre for Western Australian History is to be congratulated for producing this brief and attractive book well illustrated with intriguing photographs, clear graphics and reproductions of eleven of the documents in the case. The document glimpsed on the front cover reminds those of us who have known both eras that 'When one thinks back to the 1960s it almost seems a different world, both in the university and in the community at large.' That may give some grounds for optimism to invisible women in Universities.

In a final reflection, Patricia Crawford asks 'And Are Things Better Now?' One senior lecturer, looking back on her own University career, had 'an awful feeling that the gains are mostly superficial tokens.' (p.81) Another believed that 'the real task is to change male perceptions' (p.77) while a cleaner of twenty years experience declared "I'm coming back as a man next time." (p.79) Crawford herself is not unduly optimistic. She suggests that 'there may have been a small quantitative change in the numbers of women employed by the patterns seem much the same.' She concludes that 'for some women, ironically, the University is the only place where they want to be, for it is an institution established for the very things they value, teaching and the search for wisdom' (p.81) something which should be not only the concern of The University of Western Australia but of all Universities everywhere.

Ailsa G. Thomson Zainu'ddin

David Brooks and Brenda Walker, *Poetry and Gender*, University of Queensland Press, 1989, $28.95.

Poetry and Gender, edited by Brooks and Walker, is a valuable contribution to debates around Australian poetry with a particular focus on the involvement by women in both its writing and into a theoretical arena. The book is arranged into an introduction by Brenda Walker, a quotation-collage piece by Susan Hampton, 27 statements by poets about their own work — their poetics, and 13 essays about individual poets or clusters of poets. The essays cover a wide range of positions and theoretical approaches, sometimes even echoing the artists statements with an anecdotal, easy use of language.

At a time when poetry publishing in Australia looks a little shakier than usual, with mergers and rationalising policies being put into place, but still with a strong tradition of small press poetry and a scooping up of much of this into anthology (particularly since the 1970's and the burgeoning of women into print, ready or not), a book like this one is important. The idea of the statements by the poets is a very good one, whether it 'works' or not. It gives an opportunity between academy and writing desk for an articulation of the poetry and the poetic 'sense' to develop into a real poetics, to move beyond either the self-conscious position at the desk that so often practices serious restraint, or within and limited by a prescribed set of rules, the academic canon, doctrines that exclude at least as often as they accept, confining to margins much of the work that women writers do.

It is the generosity of approach and organisation that makes the book important: there is plenty to argue with (and the 'disputatious' reader identified by Walker in her introduction should be kept busy here, too), and there is much to learn in these pages about process, about the actual writing experiences of this group of poets. About history too, about antecedents and influences, about other canons and the shape of poetry in Australia. The collection represents the margins well, as it promises through its title and its basic idea: experimental writing, poetry by Aboriginal women, migrant women, poets of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as established and establishment poets and theorists. Through Walker's introductory discussions of exclusion and the questioning of such exclusion, productive disruptions and the recognition of difference, some of the subtleties of the writing that follows are given good signposts.

In Walker's argument about why contemporary women's involvement in poetry has failed to gain critical recognition in a culture where the arena of fiction writing is dominated by women, she uses a quote by Les Murray about the fundamental differences in prestige between

poetry and prose: with prose as 'butter sculpture" and poetry "gold inlay work". Walker turns Murray's metaphor over to make her cogent point; it "can be used to account for the time it has taken contemporary criticism to value women's poetry as much as women's fiction"; it is where women are situated in the social world that makes these distinctions.

Susan Hampton's "Soundtracks" sets the tone well with its disruptiveness, its fragmented tellings of so many of the agenda items for the Australian women poets and critics corroboree: it is an impressionistic collage of quotation, projection, utopias, quirky information, and detail from surveys and questionnaires about gender-specific issues. One of the (46) quotes is her own diary entry from soon after the collection she co-edited, *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, was published:

> The thing most commented on by reviewers of the women poets anthology was this: "In fifteen well-known collections of Australian poetry published since 1970, the average of female authors selected was 17%. The average number of pages of women's poetry was 13%".

A quote by Rosi Braidotti on the previous page, used by Sneja Gunew in her essay on migrant writing, and repeated by Brenda Walker for her introduction, ties in well:

> Feminism has evolved beyond the recognition and condemnation of a factual reality — the patriarchal oppression of women — towards a more active critique of the theoretical models imposed by their culture: the very status of discursivity, rationality and consciousness has been called into question.

This book actively attempts to get beyond simply the equal-opportunity call of representation; some of its contributors follow this line while others can be comfortably included with a direct experience, and less theoretical, approach. In times when much of the writing that stands outside the establishment of an imagined Australian literary canon is being vilified, accused of incoherence *and* experimentation, as if experimentation shouldn't be encouraged, we as a reading audience need to be diligent and search out publication of work that can often get buried by the authoritative voices of its sophisticated opponents, well versed in theory. For all of the reasons above, the collection is highly recommended: it offers the reader so many voices, and the variable way the book has been organised is a successful experiment in the mergings of theory and practice. I conclude with another quote from Hampton's set of quotes, this time by Luce Irigaray:

> It is therefore useless to trap women into giving an exact definition of what they mean, to make them repeat (themselves) so the meaning will be clear. They are already elsewhere than in this discursive machinery where you claim to take them by surprise.

Terri-ann White

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JOAN BARTLETT — is a migrant pom, who now looks on Australia as home. An account in a local paper about the berthing of a ship at Fremantle during the 19th century prompted this poem.

LORRAINE BENNETT — has a BA in Communication, majoring in Writing and Literary Studies, and a number of her stories have been published in literary magazines around the country.

CARMEL BIRD — has written two collections of short stories, *Births, Deaths and Marriages* and *The Woodpecker Toy Fact*. She has also written a novel, *Cherry Ripe*, and a text book for writers, *Dear Writer*.

DELYS BIRD — runs the MPhil in Australian Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Western Australia.

MARION CAMPBELL's second novel *Not Being Miriam* published last year by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, won the 1989 Western Australia Week Award for prose fiction.

MARGO DALY — is an MA student in Women's Studies at the University of NSW, a freelance writer and reviewer, and co-editor of *My Look's Caress*, a forthcoming anthology of modern romances.

MARY DILWORTH — has received awards for her short fiction, her poetry and children's stories. Her novel *The Mill* was recently published by Millenium Books, and she is a featured poet in *Wordhord*.

KIERAN DOLIN — has tutored in Australian Literature at UWA, and completed an MA thesis on Martin Boyd's novels.

JENNIE FRAINE — works as a freelance poet in schools, cafes, and at markets and art festivals. Her first collection of poetry, *The Cast Changes*, was runner-up in the FAW Anne Elder Awards, 1985.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER — is an Australian poet who lives in London. Her fourth collection, *Fish-Rings on Water* has just been published in England.

SARI HOSIE — lives in Perth with her husband and three children, teaches creative writing part-time at Curtin University and is writing a collection of short fiction.

ELIZABETH JOLLEY — teaches in the School of Communication and Cultural Studies, Curtin University of Technology, WA. Her most recent novel is *My Father's Moon* (Viking Penguin).

E. ANN KAPLAN — is the Director of the Humanities Institute of the State University of New York at Stonybrook. She is at present visiting Research Fellow at the ANU Humanities Research Centre. She has published widely in feminist literary theory and cultural studies and is working on a book to be published in 1990 by Routledge, *Motherhood and Representation: The Maternal North American Melodrama: 1830 to the Present*. Her paper is part of this work in progress.

JAN KEMP — is a New Zealander who teaches English at the National University of Singapore. She writes both poetry and short fiction.

JOAN KIRKBY — teaches Australian and American literatures at Macquarie University. She is currently working on a book on Australian women writers, *The Call of the Mother*.

AGNES LAM — born in Hong Kong, now resides in Singapore and is a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore.

JULIE LEWIS — writes fiction (*The Walls of Jericho,* Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1987) and biography (*Jimmy Woods: Flying Pioneer,* FACP 1989) and teaches creative writing at Curtin University. She is also a mother.

DRUSILLA MODJESKA — is just finishing a biography/biographical novel based on the life of her mother. She is an editor with Angus & Robertson.

NADINE MYATT — is a freelance writer, sessional teacher, mother and post-graduate student living in Melbourne. She is at present preparing a thesis on feminist literature at Monash University.

MARGARET PACKHAM HARGRAVE — teaches secondary English/History. Remembers the clothes-prop-man and the ice-man at Narwee. Would like time to finish the novel of which "Small Fame" is an excerpt — but there's this marking to do . . .

SUE ROWLEY — lectures in Art Theory and History in the School of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong.

JENNIFER STRAUSS — has three now-adult sons. She teaches English at Monash University and her most recent collection of poetry is *Labour Ward* published by Pariah Press in 1988.

AILSA G. THOMSON ZAINU'DDIN — teaches a course on the history of education for women at Murdoch University. She is the author of *"They Dreamt of A School" A Centenary History of Methodist Ladies' College, Kew 1882-1892* (Hyland House, 1982).

GRAEME TURNER — is the author of *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative*. His most recent book, *Australian Television: Programmes, Pleasures and Politics*, co-edited with John Tulloch, was published by Allen and Unwin in September.

ALAN URQUHART — at the moment is in somewhat of a quandary whether to be a teacher at Dover Heights College of TAFE or Randwick College of TAFE.

BRENDA WALKER — teaches at the University of Western Australia and is Reviews Editor of *Westerly*. With David Brooks she co-edited *Poetry and Gender*.

TERRI-ANN WHITE is a Perth writer and bookseller. She is the co-editor of a forthcoming Fremantle Arts Centre Press title: *No Substitute*, an anthology of prose, poems and visual images.

WONG PHIU NAM — is one of Asia's best known poets. He lives in Kuala Lumpur and his most recent collection of poems has just been published by Singapore University Press.

Erratum

Due to a printing error, a sentence in Patrick Hutching's article, "Miriam Stannage: Perception, 1968-1989 perceptive perceptions perceived" published in the September issue of *Westerly* reads incorrectly. The first sentence under the heading "Homage to Sight" on p.46 was incorrectly printed. The sentence and the paragraph which follows should read:

> The cover of the fine catalogue to the Stannage exhibition, shows a detail of *Pages of Braille* 1978 from the "Homage to Sight" series, 1981. The work is made of actual embossed Braille sheets of a dun cardboard colour, unevenly washed with white acrylic to produce tender off whites shot with hints of lilac and lavender. This is a work of poignant irony. The blind could not see the elegant wash; but — then, being acrylic, it would not blunt the message of the Braille for them as it obscures it for us. The back of the catalogue to the exhibition is decorated with the same detail and contains a definition of 'perception' from a thesaurus: this is a definition which, chosen by accident or design, excludes precisely the thing that the work *Pages of Braille* needs for its elucidation, that is the Latin derivation of 'perception'. The word comes from *percipere*, "to lay hold of, grasp", from the root *capere*, "to take". And, as the blind know, unseen the world must be *taken* by touch, grasp, or by very fine tactile explorations or large but delicate findings out through the white stick. To take or capture a printed message the blind must run their fingers over the text whether of Braille or of Moon's relief letters. Stannage makes an elegant polychrome *frottage* out of Moon's letters, as an ironic gesture, at once beautiful and intensely sad.

The printers and the editors apologise for the error.

KEEPING MUM:

Fiction by Margot Daly, Marion Campbell, Julie Lewis, Lorraine Bennett, Carmel Bird, Sari Hosie, Margaret Hargrave.

Poetry from Katherine Gallagher, Jan Kemp, Wong Phui Nam, Agnes Lam, Jennifer Strauss, Mary Dilworth, Marion Campbell, Jennie Fraine, Joan Bartlett.

Delys Bird, who won't go drovin'; Jennifer Strauss on Elegies; Kieran Dolin; Brenda Walker on Maternity; Sue Rowley on Bush Mythology; Drusilla Modjeska; Ann Kaplan; Joan Kirkby discusses Barbara Baynton.

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