

UNVEILING THE FEMALE 'I':
Autobiographies by Australian Women Born in the
1920s

by

Valarie Holzer, B.A. (Hons), Dip. Ed.

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text or in the footnotes.

Talane Hober

ABSTRACT

This study fulfills the need for research into autobiographies of writers who have a number of common traits which will provide specific conclusions about the art of autobiography. Unveiling the Female 'I': Autobiographies by Australian Women Born in the 1920s looks at works by fourteen writers who share the same nationality, gender and decade of birth.

The Introduction documents the elusiveness of women's autobiographies and briefly surveys the critical situation to date, noting the lack of consensus in just what an autobiography is. Criteria have been established for extracting women's autobiographies from the large range of female autobiographical writings and the validity of the linguistic devices used to examine these works is justified.

Working from the proposition by Chodorow that women are defined through process and by "other", Chapter 1 looks at character and style in four autobiographies of childhood to establish how this forms the identity of Australian women born in the 1920s.

Chapter 2 discusses two autobiographies of childhood which focus on other aspects of personal development: Spence's Another October Child presents a portrait of the development of a writer and Lindsay's

Portrait of Pa is argued to be an autobiography of Jane rather than a biography of Norman Lindsay.

The life stories of adults treated in Chapter 3 demonstrate the fallacy of the "quest" metaphor for female writers and offer other life metaphors as more appropriate for conveying their truths of identity.

The position of women in Australian society has received close attention in recent years, and the autobiographies by migrant and Aboriginal women which are the topic of Chapter 4 illustrate their alienation through their lack of cultural experience. Place becomes cultural as well as physical for these women.

Dorothy Hewett's recently published Wild Card both confirms and confounds the pattern of Australian women's autobiography depicting the same period in a highly and elaborately patterned way. Chapter 5 examines its statement about the role of truth in autobiography.

Chapter 6 continues this direction and breaks new ground by looking at the implications of "naming" and photographs in both the structural and metaphoric strands of the re-creation of identity.

The Conclusion considers how Australian women born in the 1920s see their world and their values in comparison with the male view of history. The study draws together the threads of identity, world and truth as represented in these self-life-writings.

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I

INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades works for, about and by women have proliferated, and yet editors and writers still feel the need to justify their focus, albeit grudgingly. The editors of The Penguin Book of Women Poets note that the Preface of an anthology of women's poetry published in 1755 was "an elaborate apologia for producing such a book ... and yet in 1977 it still seems necessary to offer explanation and justification for an anthology of work by women."¹ The absence of women's voices and serious investigation of their works by the academic establishment is well documented. Dale Spender's Man Made Language demonstrates convincingly the silence of women in the male-dominated society,² while her sister Lynne in Intruders on the Rights of Men vindicates the premise that words equal power and reveals how publishers, who are generally male, have ensured the maintenance of this silence.³

¹Carol Cosman, Joan Keefe & Kathleen Weaver, ed., The Penguin Book of Women Poets (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 29.

²Dale Spender, Man Made Language (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

³Lynne Spender, Intruders on the Rights of Men: Women's Unpublished Heritage (London: Pandora Press, 1983).

Classics of feminist analysis in English published in the seventies, Moers's Literary Women, Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, and Spacks's The Female Imagination have provided the fulcrums for subsequent literary criticisms of women's writing and as such have received microscopic attention;⁴ hence there is little need to repeat the process. Still sound if now somewhat outdated, all accept the validity of considering women's writing in a category of its own, in order to redress some of the inequities of the past.

The reclamation of the place of women in literary tradition and the public recognition of their considerable contribution are being rapidly consolidated. In Mothers of the Novel Dale Spender convincingly argues that "the history of English letters is primarily the history of the writing of men."⁵ Moreover, she establishes that, at all periods of time, comparable numbers of women and men were writing and being published, notwithstanding the lack of education for females and the expectations that they would perform, or be responsible for, all domestic tasks. The research she provides demonstrates that if Defoe, Richardson and Fielding can be called the

⁴Ellen Moers, Literary Women (London: The Women's Press, 1986). Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977). Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women's Writing (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976).

⁵Dale Spender, Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen (London: Pandora Press, 1986), p. 45.

fathers (or inventors) of the novel, then Behn, Manley and Haywood have equal (or better) claim to parent status. Her purpose for rewriting the accepted (male) literary tradition is not only to ensure literary and literal truth, but to establish a female literary tradition. No longer can what Spender (drawing on Showalter) calls "the myth of isolated achievement" be maintained; writers like Austen and Bronte are not the brilliant exceptions in a starless void, but are a part of "a collective of women writers ..." interconnected in the fabric of a strong but ignored female literary tradition.

The need to uncover the female tradition in autobiography is equally as urgent although even more fraught with problems. On the whole, the critics (mostly male) are not too sure just what an autobiography is, and what criteria are required to evaluate the good or the bad. Fiction is fiction, a poem is recognizable to most readers, and there is very little argument about what a novel is - but just what is an autobiography?

The terminology within the genre seems to imply specific sub-genres - autobiography, memoir, reminiscence, recollections, autobiographical sketches and novels and yet they are used interchangeably. The subject "I" is no guarantee, for some novels have a first person persona while some autobiographies have been written in the third person.

Roy Pascal recognizes that "no clear line can be

drawn" between memoir and autobiography as each contains the other, but suggests that the difference lies in the focus. He further comments that the difference between memoir and reminiscence is one of content - that the former covers public events whilst the latter concentrates on private relationships.⁴ Avrom Fleishman refines this definition by positing what he calls a double focus, since "in memoirs the focus is almost always on the I-past whereas autobiography derives much of its interest from the complications generated by the interplay of I-past and I-present."⁵ Paul John Eakin on one hand argues that the self portrayed is "necessarily a fictive structure,"⁶ while Paul Jay suggests that "the ostensibly 'factual' referentiality of an autobiographical work" is the perfect vehicle for the concerns and procedures of post-structuralism.⁷ He surveys a wide range of major critics commencing with Pascal, and discusses the manner in which they attempt to categorize or "anatomize" the forms of autobiography. Indeed he concludes that autobiography is the perfect vehicle for all literary analysts, whatever their viewpoint - structuralist or

⁴Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 5.

⁵Avrom Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self Writing in Victorian and Modern England (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), p. 192.

⁶Paul John Eakin, Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self Invention (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985), p. 3.

⁷Paul Jay, "What's the Use? Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography," Biography, 10 (1987), 44.

deconstructionist, Marxist, psychoanalytical or feminist. According to Jay personal reactions to autobiography and the perceptions of it hint that a theory of autobiography may be unwanted but that this in itself may well indicate its *need*. James Olney, on the basis that autobiography always contains something else, offers a taxonomy dividing it into six sub-genres incorporating sociology, psychology, soteriology, autography, phylogeny, and obituaries.¹⁰ Whilst accepting his view that "the first duty" of a genre critic is to define or establish limits, taxonomies are inherently suspicious when defining *self-life-writing*. One cannot help being aware that, of its nature, autobiography will include all those aspects and more, to a greater or lesser degree, without necessarily being limited to or categorized as one. It is noticeable that even the mainly male autobiographical texts he discusses seem to be tortured into fitting the pleasing theoretical schema he has developed.

But if autobiography is elusive critically it is equally so physically. It is not really coincidental that this aspect has also been noted by another female critic,¹¹ and one could suggest that perhaps the most basic (and practical) explanation for the lack of critical cohesion is that one must not only ask what is

¹⁰James Olney, "Autobiography: An Anatomy and a Taxonomy," Neohelicon, 13, No. 1 (1986), 57-82.

¹¹Joy Hooten, Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women (South Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press Australia, 1990).

an autobiography but where are they? Just to find autobiographies in libraries is an interesting and time-consuming investigation. Of the fourteen works to be discussed the Library of Congress classifies five (Robin Eakin, Patsy Adam-Smith, Oriel Gray, Nancy Keesing and Dorothy Hewett¹²) as Australian Literature, two as Biography (Barbara Corbett and Hilde Knörr, although in another series Knörr has been allocated to Sculpture, her husband's profession). The two works by migrant writers are variously classified as History of Jews outside Palestine (Amirah Inglis) and Australian History (Magda Bozic), as is a published poet (Roslyn Taylor) and one of the aboriginal writers (Elsie Roughsey), whilst the other becomes Ethnic Groups and Races (Shirley Smith). The remaining works are allocated to English Fiction (Eleanor Spence) and to Australian Art (Jane Lindsay). The male preoccupation with success and achievement noted in judgements of literary worth seems reflected even in library classification making those autobiographies which are not as concerned with public fame, i.e those by women, difficult to access.

The confusion about autobiography is compounded for the female writer and her critics. Collections of critical essays on the genre have included their token female critic; one need only consider Mary G. Mason's tentative exposition of the differences of "pattern"

¹²The works are en bloc in the Bibliography and individually referenced in the chapter where each is treated.

evident in early women's autobiographies which is one of the collection of essays edited by Olney,"¹³ but overall the emphasis has been on works by males. There have been a number of works published recently devoted solely to women's autobiography, but collections of essays, however valuable and useful, have their own inherent problems and frequently seem to raise more questions than they solve.

Shari Benstock in The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings agrees in principle with Jay's suggestion that there is a need for a theoretical base for the analysis of women's writing, but she argues that to advocate a division between theory and practice is a male-oriented view, as indeed is the existing theory.¹⁴ However, the number of contributors and the variety of their personal viewpoints convey a sense of disunity to the total work which undermines the conviction of each individual argument. As Laura Marcus has commented:

Both essays [by Benstock and Friedman] show their authors cleaving to accounts in which female identity lies outside culture and history, and in so doing, they exemplify the moment in feminist criticism against which the historicist critics in the collection explicitly make their case.¹⁵

¹³Mary G. Mason, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 207-235.

¹⁴Shari Benstock, ed., The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹⁵Laura Marcus, "Condition and Camouflage," rev. of The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings, ed. Shari Benstock, The Times Literary Supplement, 14-20th July, 1989, p. 768.

In Domna C. Stanton's collection of essays Philippe Lejeune's thesis that the female differences are social and cultural opposes the views posited by other contributors. Stanton draws this to the reader's attention by describing it as being in "counterpoint."¹⁶ However it still diminishes the coherence of the work in totality. Obviously differences in opinions are basic to academic study and allow for greater access to an objective truth, but one must still recognize that this difference diffuses the strength of consistent argument which is the hallmark of an extended one-author work.

This difference has also contributed to blurring the parameters of the genre. Autobiographical writings and autobiography have become synonymous, particularly in the area of women's writings. Many critics argue that women's autobiographical writings should include all forms of personal self-writings - diaries, journals, even letters. Benstock suggests that diary, letter and memoir writing are specifically women's writing which both causes and reflects their illegitimacy within the academy," while Linda Anderson, describing women's autobiography as "both a reaching towards the possibility of saying 'I' and

¹⁶Domna C. Stanton, ed., The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century (Chicago & London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. x.

¹⁷Benstock, p. 2.

towards a form in which to say it,"¹⁰ justifies her inclusion of autobiographical sketches, journals and diaries as legitimate forms of the genre.

It is true that these forms have not received the recognition and validation that they deserve, but surely an alternative is to legitimize each specific genre through critical attention rather than bastardizing the term autobiography. Or again, if it is important to include all female self-writings in the one group there is the option of inventing a new classification as has Stanton. Her word *Autogynography* covers this wider category," by reducing the emphasis on the *bios* and is both all-embracing and philosophically satisfying.

Nevertheless I would argue that the volume and quality of women's writings not only make a positive contribution to existing academic genres but that the traditional tools of literary analysis are appropriate for its critique. The use of these techniques will not only highlight the differences but emphasize the skills and suggest new, but not inferior, categories of writing. It will equally ensure that literature embodies and signifies the total human experience rather than just the male view. If, as Elizabeth W. Bruss puts it, "to become a genre a literary act must

¹⁰Linda Anderson, "At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography," in Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory, ed. Moira Monteith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 65.

¹¹Stanton, p. 5.

also be recognizable,"²⁰ then each of these categories of autobiographical writings must be considered a separate and legitimate genre.

Although Stanton perceived a need to "create a more generous and dynamic space for the exploration of women's texts that *graph* the *auto*"²¹ and so removed the *bios*, Australian women born in the 1920s have written texts which can be studied within the most rigorous, theoretical classifications of autobiography. For them, as for autobiographers generally, there is recognition that the *bios* being written about is retrospective and hence can have some form of structure or pattern imposed upon it. The epithet "with hindsight" shows that this concept has been incorporated into language and life: so to write an autobiography implies the recognition of this pattern. Diaries, letters and journals are immediate and serialistic and do not allow for this hindsight or the interplay of author/narrator/subject. Autobiographers must, and will, use all personal resources to write a life, but when journals, diaries or letters are published, they are part of an already legitimized genre and it becomes incorrect as well as unnecessary to classify them as autobiography.

Moreover just as critics use the terms memoir and autobiography interchangeably so too do the authors

²⁰Elizabeth W. Bruss. Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 5.

²¹Stanton, p. viii.

themselves. Oriel Gray's work is subtitled *Memoirs*, Hilde Knörr's is called a love story, while Keesing is so aware of the difficulty that she records her response to questions on the nature of her book. She starts off by saying it is "a kind of memoir to my life and good times in Aust. Lit.," and ends with a statement reflecting even greater confusion; "The kind of autobiography I write when I am not writing an autobiography."²¹

Perhaps it could be argued that the female autobiographer suffers either a lack of knowledge or has been wrongly influenced by her editors; but an alternative explanation concerns her public use of the patriarchal discourse. As Jane Marcus drawing on Woolf puts it, "the very *mediocrity* of the genre [of memoir] in the traditions of patriarchal canons assisted in the survival of the form for use by women and other 'obscure' people."²²

I would suggest that it is more than this. Whether language reflects reality or constructs it, its use to oppress and control has been well documented so that terms such as memoir, recollections, reminiscences, are all less threatening words with which to refer to the act of self-life-writing. They imply the involvement of others but in practice provide each author with the

²¹Nancy Keesing, *Riding the Elephant*, p. 3.

²²Jane Marcus, "The Private Selves of Public Women," in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill & London: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 120.

opportunity to fulfil the singular expectations of autobiography from a less confronting position. Each of these writers has achieved extensive literary experience, if not the accolades which would be lavished on male authors of the same productivity, and the works selected are full-length works in which, regardless of classification, the focus is on the truth of the self, although many of the actions and thoughts eventuate as a result of the actions or interference of others.

Although recognizing that women's writing may not follow the linear, chronological order posited of males,²⁴ there are many alternative structural methods used for portraying the life of the 1920s woman which have been omitted from this study, but which in themselves offer future exciting investigation. These are all autobiographical writings according to the terminology already discussed, but not all are autobiographies and the reasons for their omission will assist in establishing just what an autobiography is and the female contribution to the much wider area of self-writing.

It was disappointing not to include Zelda D'Aprano's (b.1928) Zelda: the Becoming of a Woman, the story of a working-class unionist published as part of the International Women's Year activities in 1975.²⁵

²⁴Estelle C. Jelinek, ed., Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), p. 17.

²⁵Zelda D'Aprano, Zelda: the Becoming of a Woman (n.p.: Z. D'Aprano, 1977).

Jean Hamilton's (b.1926) Just Lovely equally would have contributed as a companion volume to MumShirl since both these women have received a number of civic awards and yet lived lives of great difficulty.²⁶ However it seemed important to concentrate on only those works which were published by commercial publishing houses as they have already surmounted a major obstacle to entering the public arena, since the force of these female stories have triumphed over the power of the publishing "gatekeepers" (to use Lynne Spender's terminology). Hence these stories and these messages are doubly prized.

Reluctantly I have had to put aside the great number of short life-writings, such as those published in collections where the twenties woman is well represented regardless of thematic thrust. In Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids, recollections of Catholic girlhoods, Veronica Brady (b.1922) describes how her life experiences made her "the kind of Christian and kind of woman" she is,²⁷ while Norma Grieve's (b.1925) memories as a university graduate are included in the accounts of Melbourne women's lives in The Half-Open Door,²⁸ as is Heather Radi's (b.1929) record of unequal

²⁶Jean Hamilton, Just Lovely (Coonamble, N.S.W.: Joan McKenzie, 1989).

²⁷Veronica Brady, "We Are Such Stuff ...," in Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids: Journeys from Catholic Childhoods, ed. Kate Nelson and Dominica Nelson (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), pp. 23-31.

²⁸Norma Grieve, "A Relatively Simple Affair," in The Half-Open Door: Sixteen Modern Australian Women Look at Professional Life and Achievement, ed. Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982), pp. 246-59.

opportunity in its Sydney-based companion volume Against the Odds.² The brevity and imposed limits of these writings, frequently compounded by editorial focus, predisposes the writer to concentrate on the main, or thematically appropriate events of a life and do not allow for any extensive development of the 'I'.

For similar reasons I have also had to reject those vignettes which have appeared in literary magazines as did Gwen Harwood's (b.1920) account of how music and poetry were in her world waiting to be listened to and which were felicitously combined when she became a librettist for an opera,³ or her past and present memories of place delightfully detailed in "The Seventh House."⁴

Also hindering the development of a continuous 'I' are those stories which deal with only a limited period within a life. Charmian Clift's (b.1923) engaging tale of her extended stay on Kalymnos in Mermaid Singing⁵ or Ruth Park's (b.1923) The Drums Go Bang written in partnership with her husband,⁶ which describes their lives from the time they met until Park won the Sydney Morning Herald prize for The Harp in the

²Heather Radi, "Thanks Mum," in Against the Odds: Fifteen Professional Women Reflect on their Lives and Careers, ed. Madge Dawson and Heather Radi (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984), pp. 170-185.

³Gwen Harwood, "Words and Music," Southerly, 46 (1986), 367-376.

⁴Gwen Harwood, "The Seventh House," Overland, 101 (1985), 13-14.

⁵Charmian Clift, Mermaid Singing (North Sydney: Horwitz, 1970).

⁶Ruth Park and Darcy Niland, The Drums Go Bang (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956).

South have been judged as outside this range. So too, by virtue of their specific focus, has the "topical popular" genre of which June Bronhill's (b.1929) artless but amusing work is one."

Life cycles, while evocative and stimulating, are of their very nature episodic and do not provide a consistent and continuous portrait of a self and hence require different analysis. It could be argued that Thelma Forshaw's (b.1923) An Affair of Clowns, Jean Holkner's (b.1926) Taking the Chook and other Traumas, Jessica Anderson's (b.1925) Stories from the Warm Zone, and Kath Walker's (b.1920) Stradbroke Dreamtime all portray reality as experienced by a child." It may be argued that this structure is a better representation of the past since memory seems to contain the past as separate events rather than unreeling an ongoing life but it prevents the portrayal of the development of the self as a continuous process.

Anderson's prologue to the above-mentioned life cycle deserves careful consideration since it is an author's comment on the vexatious question of autobiography vis à vis autobiographical fiction:

The first section of this collection is autobiographical fiction. Though I have been true to the characters of my immediate family, and to our circumstances and surroundings, few

³⁴June Bronhill, The Merry Bronhill (North Ryde, N.S.W.: Methuen Haynes, 1987).

³⁵Thelma Forshaw, An Affair of Clowns (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967). Jean Holkner, Taking the Chook and Other Traumas of Growing Up (Ringwood: Puffin/Penguin, 1987). Jessica Anderson, Stories from the Warm Zone (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987). Kath Walker, Stradbroke Dreamtime (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1982).

of the events described occurred as written, but are memories fed by imagination and shaped by the demands of the narrative forms. As a reflection of this fictional content, and to put myself at a necessary distance while writing, I changed the names of the characters and of various streets and places.

It is obvious for this author that, although her own life was the source of invention, she did not believe she was writing an autobiography nor did she expect this work to be read as one. For Anderson the fictional content required changes to ensure there was no attempt by the reader to establish complete factuality. Whilst not adopting a totally reader-response-oriented position, it is obvious that the role of the reader in any text cannot fail to influence contemporary critical analysis and that authorial intention is crucial.

Nevertheless many respected critics make no distinction between the disparate styles of autobiography and autobiographical fiction, offering a range of explanations for their position. One suggests that a "fictive metaphor" is used to reveal the self¹⁶ and thus is able to include autobiographical fiction and poems. Others like John Colmer, who (taking as his precedents Olney & de Man) argues with conviction that it is "ultimately pointless to attempt a rigid definition of autobiography and to try to decide which works do and do not fit it,"¹⁷ as both use the same

¹⁶William C. Spengemann, The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), p. 121.

¹⁷John Colmer, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 2.

"traditional resources of the writer of fiction."¹⁰

These comments require some clarification and further discussion. Firstly the terminology, "traditional resources" could include a wide range of elements, an examination of poetic truth or an investigation of any one of the various sub-categories of realism in fiction.¹¹ If however, as he goes on to explain, they are:

expressive dialogue, analysis of other characters as well as the self, creation of dramatic scenes to illustrate conflicts, studied contrasts, deliberate changes in pace, and the resolution of major conflicts in the conclusion,

these elements would consequently seem better redefined as linguistic or literary devices. Then one can ask, why shouldn't these devices be used to analyse even the most rigidly classified autobiographies? Their purpose is to enable the fiction writer to make the imaginative realistic; they permit invented characters in imaginary worlds to convey basic and important life truths with conviction since the verisimilitude of fiction is a basis for its success. So it is only to be expected that an autobiographer who wishes to convey the truth of a life would also use these conventions by which truth is portrayed. Or as Barrett J. Mandel has noted:

¹⁰Colmer, p. 17.

¹¹Realism in fiction is a separate and complex issue and any discussion would necessarily be superficial and distract from the focus of my argument. Realism in Australian literature is comprehensively covered in Laurie Hergenhan, ed., The Penguin New Literary History of Australia (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988).

Of course it is true that autobiographers use techniques of fiction, but such usage does not turn autobiography into fiction any more than Dvorak's use of folk motifs turns the *New World Symphony* into a folk song.⁴⁰

He too wonders why critics ignore the converse, bearing in mind the many fiction writers who use autobiographical devices.

So I have had to exclude autobiographical novels published by women of the 1920s, although their number is legion and their range enormous. These women have converted or thinly disguised their life experiences and called the results novels - Maria Lewitt's (b. 1924) No Snow in December, Janka Abrami's (b. 1921) "Zat izz Apples, Sir", or Monica Clare's (b. 1924) heartrending story of an aboriginal childhood.⁴¹ In response to the acknowledged fictional component of autobiographical fiction there has been a surge of analyses examining them in light of the conventions of Bildungsroman, and its subtype the Künstlerroman;⁴² but while this approach may contribute to the elucidation of an author's literary skills, it does not assist greatly in the more complex analysis of autobiography.

⁴⁰Barrett J. Mandel, "Full of Life Now," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 53.

⁴¹Maria Lewitt, No Snow in December (Richmond: Heinemann, 1987). Janka Abrami, "Zat iss Apples, Sir" (Brunswick, Vic.: Globe, 1986). Monica Clare, Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl (Chippendale, N.S.W.: Alternative Publishing, 1978).

⁴²See for example Carol Franklin, "The Female Künstlerroman: Richardson versus Björnson," Southerly, 43 (1983), 422-436; or Sue Thomas, "Writing the Self: Barbara Hanrahan's The Scent of Eucalyptus," Kunapipi, 11, 3 (1989), 53-66.

It becomes clear that those works to be regarded as autobiography and studied as such are written in extended prose, deal with a major part of a life and are regarded by the authors themselves as a truthful representation of the life they have lived and the person they have become. As will become evident, the focus does not necessarily redefine the genre but more often signifies gender.

The study of autobiography allows the reader to "know" the author and to participate in a different world. In each autobiography the author sets the limits which the reader must identify and often, in response to the tacit invitation of the author, the reader will be led into other works which elaborate on, and further explain, the development of self.

Most extended critical works offer a résumé of the major critical analyses that have preceded them, elaborating and highlighting those aspects which are of particular personal relevance. Saunders in her examination of autobiographies by established German writers posits that their heightened literary sensibilities and recognition of the power of language to portray experience is unique and requires special attention.⁴³ On this supposition she analyses a number

⁴³Barbara Saunders, Contemporary German Autobiography: Literary Approaches to the Problem of Identity (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, Univ. of London, 1985).

of critical works by scholars such as Shumaker, Spender and Pascal, drawing on their views of autobiography as an art form whose authors are artists. Olney's theory of the metaphor of self and Fleishman's assessment of the figurative language in autobiography have also received close attention for their considerable and varying contributions to the study of the genre. Pioneering feminist critics have uncovered and drawn the outlines of the female tradition, making the relevant connections between the theories offered by these and other exponents of critical analysis. Hence, while referring at times to the latter, it is the feminist critiques which will form the background to this study of women's autobiographies.

Estelle C. Jelinek takes as her prototype Shumaker's English Autobiography and attempts to "document the literary history of the characteristics in women's self writings which contemporary women continue" without necessarily claiming it to be a definitive history." She argues that women's autobiographies have a discrete literary tradition of their own and that the criteria for what is "good" formed by establishment scholars are based on the reading of male autobiographies. She concludes that the traditions and practice of women's self writings have been at best undervalued, but mostly ignored. From her study of autobiographies up to the end of the

"Estelle C. Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p. xii.

nineteenth century she concludes that the female contribution was "the analysis of self through subjective, personal treatment" such as female "heart and hearth" compared with male historical chronicles, or female disjunction compared with male progression."⁵ She further suggests that the traditional political and military chronology is largely irrelevant to women and therefore is not reflected in their writings. Using an extensive range of autobiographies she suggests that the major change between women's self writings from antiquity is in the subjects they are prepared to discuss.⁶ However, her exploration of twentieth-century writers is telescoped into a study of four main works; this is disappointing when you recall the rush of autobiographies published this century. Although an important contribution to the study of women's autobiographies, the book does not fulfil the generic claims of its title, for, as can be seen from the texts she covers, it is only the American tradition on which she focusses.

It is interesting to note the development of a national approach to literature which increases in an inverse ratio to the diminution of geographic isolation. Just as the world becomes more the global village, so greater emphasis is placed on national differences. This is particularly evident in

⁵Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography, pp. 52-3.

⁶Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography, p. 186.

autobiography where the life and the social milieu are integral. Albert E. Stone comments that autobiography is "firmly rooted in our [American] culture" and proceeds to examine twentieth-century American autobiographies, taking into account not only the literary creation but also "the equally complex processes of historical re-creation, ideological argument, and psychological expression."¹ Sidonie Smith, highlighting the manner in which female autobiographers force the boundaries of the prevailing customs and ideologies, selects Chinese-American Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior as the single twentieth-century work "which captures so powerfully the relationship of gender to genre."² Helen Buss argues that Canadian women's autobiographies:

... stand apart as exceptional achievements, as unique documents when viewed against the background of the literature of their time and place, the availability of the autobiographical tradition in their lives and the isolated cultural position, ..."

and ironically uses the patriarchal metaphor of colonisation (journey, exploration and the acquisition of wealth) to chart their tradition.

¹Albert E. Stone, Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 19.

²Sidonie Smith, A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), p.150.

³Helen M. Buss, "Canadian Women's Autobiography: Some Critical Directions," in A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing, ed. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: Longspoon/NeWest Press, 1986), p. 156.

If, as Richard White suggests, the Australian cultural identity is an invention which is continually being reinvented,⁵⁰ our literature is both the product and the cause of this invention. There has been a considerable number of articles on Australian autobiographies,⁵¹ but only two full-length critical works have been published which concentrate on this particular genre. The formative work by Colmer "charts the personal quest of a number of writers to discover the truth about themselves and society."⁵² Through the study of each individual quest he is able to distinguish six different purposes of Australian autobiographers - 1) the transmission of humane values to benefit the reader and society as a whole, 2) personal therapy, 3) personal confession, 4) refracted social history, 5) intellectual and cultural history, 6) the neglected or misunderstood outsider. He succeeds in effectively analysing the manner in which the male authors portray their personal quest, but by combining the female autobiographers in the one chapter (apart from Sally Morgan) he subjugates them to gender, even though recognizing in the introduction that the

⁵⁰Richard White, Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980 (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

⁵¹One need only consider articles by Brian Matthews, "Australian Colonial Women and Their Autobiographies," Kunapipi, 7, Nos. 2&3 (1985), 36-46, or Fay Zwicky, "The Mother of Narcissus: Autobiographical Reflections in the Australian Waterhole," Island Magazine, 18/19 (1984), 66-72; and also the issue of Meanjin, 46, No.1 (March, 1987), which was devoted entirely to "Autobiography and Childhood".

⁵²Colmer, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, p. 2.

purposes of each of these female writers is different."³³ His attempt to evaluate works by such disparate authors as Oriel Gray, Barbara Hanrahan and Kylie Tennant only reinforces the view that there is a difference in women's writing and that the personal quest, so well espoused and exposed by the male writer and explained by the male critic, is either more subtle in these autobiographies by females or more likely is not present at all.

Colmer does accord thematic importance to Sally Morgan's search for her past and her roots, comparing her account with Vincent Buckley's search for his Irish ancestors. It would seem therefore that The Missing Heir,³⁴ which shows Tennant searching for her integrated self, would have benefitted from comparison with Patrick White's quest for identity. As Joy Hooten puts it: "It is, I suggest, Tennant herself who is the 'Missing Heir' consciously separated from her real people and astray in a crazy world."³⁵ Colmer's use of gender as a classifying device becomes problematic in his study, particularly as he suggests that a "distinctly feminine mode of perception and writing" is questionable.³⁶ Indeed his change of classification between male and female autobiographies and hence his analysis only serves to highlight their inherent

³³Colmer, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, pp. 3-4.

³⁴Kylie Tennant, The Missing Heir (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986).

³⁵Hooten, p. 109.

³⁶Colmer, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, p. 14.

difference.

According to Colmer the difference between male and female autobiography is that females "assign greater importance to emotions, fantasies and the secrets of inner life" and that they "recreate the intimate rhythms of family life with greater intensity."⁵⁷ Nevertheless it is equally apparent that they do portray historical facts, pragmatic decisions and professional actions albeit, I will argue, with a different focus and from a perspective in which the world-shattering is juxtaposed with the incidental - and all are assimilated and transformed into the female development of self.

A most valuable study which celebrates and itself reflects the calibre of Australian women's life writings is Stories of Herself When Young by Joy Hooten. The wide range of resources and the extensive bibliography of works published since settlement, provide a solid and comprehensive foundation for any further study of this area. Her conclusion that "there is no name for female autobiography" and that it is "halfway" between the traditional definitions of autobiography and memoir is both formed and undermined by her inclusion of all autobiographical writings."⁵⁸ As I have already demonstrated, a more incisive categorization allows women's autobiographies to be "counted" within the traditional genre and thus they

⁵⁷Colmer, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, pp. 13-4.

⁵⁸Hooten, p. 102.

require no renaming. "Autobiography is" (to quote Mary Sue Carlock's conclusion)" and women have written it.

Focussing on the way Australian women have depicted their childhood and adolescence, Hooten's analysis ranges from the conventions to themes and topics in support of her argument that the major difference between male and female autobiographies lies in "relatedness", that is "the definition of the self in a context of relationship and judgement of the self in terms of ability to care."¹⁰ However, the major topics of all autobiographies of childhood are universal - mothers, fathers, schools and places, and Hooten's open-ended approach commented on by one critic is only to be expected, given the variety of humankind.¹¹ In attempting to establish a pattern which could apply to such a wide range of autobiographies, she refines and reworks the comprehensive and overarching concept of relatedness to encompass the spectrum of interactions and developments presented in the portraits of Australian women's selves over the past two hundred years.

The extended time span of these sources allows another critic to cavil at what he calls her "little regard for ... historical differences in the idea of self," and he suggests that her conflation of time and

¹⁰Mary Sue Carlock, "Humpty Dumpty and the Autobiography," Genre, 3 (1970), p. 349.

¹¹Hooten, p. 91.

¹²George Watt, "Female Explorations Extend our Maps of Australia," rev. of Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women, by Joy Hooten, The Australian, 21 - 22 July, 1990, p. 8

authors produces "ahistoricism" resulting in "a difference of form rather than content."¹² It is disappointing that the adage "the more things change, the more they stay the same" is particularly true of the position of women. The rapid and diverse changes in Australian society experienced by males have made it important that the position of women remained constant, or at least appeared to do so. One of the scholars reclaiming Australian women's history has found that "our women are still deeply, if unconsciously, impoverished by this dominant cultural characteristic [misogyny],"¹³ so that Hooten's assessment of the similarity of Australian female experience in the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth which David McCooley suggests is "ahistoricism" may unfortunately be just the reflection of the little change evident in women's access to power and general perceptions of their lack of personal autonomy. For these fourteen women of the 1920s the theme of relatedness is central. Although for them the concept is redefined to give less emphasis to the ability to care and more to gaining personal autonomy in reaching their judgement of self, it is still an important element in their stories.

These two studies of Australian autobiographies,

¹²David McCooley, "A Different Sense of Self," rev. of Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women, by Joy Hooten, Australian Book Review, 123 (1990), p. 18.

¹³Miriam Dixon, The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984), p. 12.

because of their scope, provide excellent introductions to, and overviews of Australian autobiography but there is now the need to research writers who are more closely connected, the results of which may substantiate more specific conclusions. Therefore to examine works by writers of the same gender and born in the same decade should provide valuable information.

The more specific focus of this study will prevent any criticism of "ahistoricism" since the contemporaneity of its subjects will support the validity of the historical findings discussed in the Conclusion, while to concentrate on the developmental phases of the native-born and the participation of the ethnic women in the social spectrum combined with the elucidation of self through photographs and "naming" will make a useful contribution to portrayal of female identity.

The similarity in publication dates with all except three (and interestingly, those three are stories of childhood - arguably the least confronting genre) being published in the last decade suggests two feasible explanations. Firstly, publishers' awareness of the marked growth in reader-interest for autobiography generally, and women's stories in particular, while the second concerns authorial intention. That each author saw the need to write her life from approximately the same vantage point in that life allows for well-grounded critical comparisons since the similarities between the lives revealed or

the philosophical comments become inter-supported.

But why women born in the 1920s? Working independently, others have noted the uniqueness of the period. Hooten uses 1920 as a cut-off point "since there is a marked change in national consciousness after the First World War"⁴⁴ - an initially disappointing approach in that it reflects the ubiquity of the male sense of history. And yet on reflection the "national consciousness" is the sum of the minds of individuals, and for these women the impact on their parents of "The War to End All Wars" plays an important and invidious role in their development, particularly with the advent of another, even greater conflagration within two decades. Carolyn Heilbrun explains that, for American women born in this period (as she was), "World War Two was a source of profound metaphor,"⁴⁵ and she draws the conclusion that women of this generation, for her "those born between 1923 and 1932 - can now be seen to have transformed the autobiographies of women's lives."⁴⁶ And so it is for Australian women.

It may be that autobiographies of special interest are written in periods of massive changes in society. If so, the great number of autobiographies from these women is self-explanatory. Born in the flapper 20s, adolescents in the Depression 30s, in their late teens

⁴⁴Hooten, p. 23.

⁴⁵Carolyn Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 72.

⁴⁶Heilbrun, p. 60.

and early twenties during WW2 40s, living through the puritanical 50s, the freewheeling 60s, and the feminist 70s, it is no accident that so many had such marvellous stories to write.

II

THE GOLDEN AGE - with tinges of lead

Childhood with its timelessness and mystery is simultaneously the truly original and yet universally perceived experience. For the autobiographer it is a chance to convey this experience and for the reader it is by these vicarious means that she can make sense of her own experience, and become aware that she is both similar to others and unique in herself. The popularity of life stories has been attributed to the "hope of recognizing and having our experience explained,"¹ and yet their very number suggests it is more than just the need for the elucidation of the personal. Surely it is also a desire to understand and know the human condition in general, to find out how others see the world and resolve their unique experience.

But the question remains, why write an account of childhood? Just as the stories of childhood and their readers abound, so too do the critical works which have lent the status of sub-genre to this area of study and they have offered a multitude of reasons. Richard N. Coe in his important study When the Grass Was Taller

¹Hooten, p. x.

offers a wide range of motivational possibilities ranging from the confessional mode in which the author accounts for the loss or acquisition of faith, to the need to detail or explain the problem of identity. He suggests that other authors attempt to "recapture something of a paradise which has been lost, or partially lost forever,"² or alternately to complain about the impact of so-called civilisation on this paradise. However he concludes that for most "it is the primitive urge toward personal immortality."³ Each of these, while valid and of course non-exclusive, may well be used to schematize the plethora of male autobiographies, thus reflecting the tenets of male-oriented critical theory; but they do not greatly assist in the classification of the equal number of female life stories. Coe bases his assessment on a flawed premise when he suggests that "childhood is a quest, a search for understanding;"⁴ that it is a "quest for a sense of true identity,"⁵ since the quest plot is recognized as being a male story.⁶

So what is the female story? Superficially each of these *Childhoods*,⁷ particularly Corbett's evocative

²Richard N. Coe, When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), p. 62.

³Coe, p. 42.

⁴Coe, p. 41.

⁵Coe, p. 51.

⁶Heilbrun, Writing A Woman's Life, p. 48.

⁷Following Coe's precedent I will be using "Childhood" to designate the autobiography and "childhood" to refer to the chronological period of a person's life.

recreation of Dora Creek," might be seen to fit into Coe's *paradis perdu* category, since it is not just accidental that the example Coe uses to support his theory is a woman's autobiography. Adam-Smith's narrative could be seen to celebrate the mythical "bush ethic," while Taylor's autobiography is somewhat ironically subtitled "An Australian Childhood," and even Eakin's witty and pungent story of a King's Cross childhood has some hint of nostalgia," despite a review on publication where it was judged as "cruel" (which seems to reflect the reviewer's personal knowledge rather than the book). But the explanation for women's Childhoods is far more complex.

Although female difference has been explained from biological, linguistic, cultural, or psychoanalytical viewpoints, it is the cultural explanation which has been more popularly and persuasively argued." Elaine

⁸Barbara Corbett, A Fistful of Buttercups (Kenthurst, N.S.W.: Kangaroo Press, 1983), p. 61.

⁹Patsy Adam-Smith, Hear the Train Blow (1964; rpt. Melbourne: Nelson, 1987).

¹⁰Roslyn Taylor, Your Hills Are Too High (Broadway: Redress Press, 1986).

¹¹Robin Eakin, Aunts Up the Cross (London, 1965; rpt. South Melbourne: McMillan, 1980).

¹²Nancy Keesing, "Sydneyiders," rev. of Aunts Up the Cross, by Robin Eakin, Bulletin, 23 Oct. 1965, pp. 53-4.

¹³Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Critical Inquiry, 8 (1981), 179-205. Showalter's article surveys the major theoretical positions in each of these fields at the time. Among the more recent publications, Cora Kaplan's Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism (London: Verso, 1986), comments on language and culture, as do Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality," New Literary History, 16 (1985), 515-543. R.W. Connell, Gender and Power (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), provides an assessment of sexual politics; Robyn Rowland, Woman Herself: A

Showalter has concluded "class, race, nationality and history are literary determinants as significant as gender,"¹¹ but I would argue that the literary re-creation of childhood demonstrates that gender and its accompanying socialisation is paramount.

Another critic claims that there have been very few true female autobiographies prior to 1973 since only now are women beginning to write autobiographies that reveal and explore the hidden depths of their lives.¹² To some extent the 1920s women with their accounts of the golden years of childhood fit into this tradition as anger and bitterness are not overtly indicative of these life stories. Adam-Smith allows a rare note of bitterness into the first part of her story when, in the chapter entitled "We Were 'Pats'", she writes of the lack of friends for her sister and herself:

I feel that the reason neither my sister nor I could have friends has no place in this book or on my tongue. She and I talk about it sometimes now ... (p. 34).

Corbett affirms the religious bigotry of the times (p. 8), and although Hooten's conclusion that "it is clear that the mother's Irish-Catholic prejudices erect

Transdisciplinary Perspective on Women's Identity (South Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), looks at the construction of female difference; and Maggie Humm, Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), provides a useful overview of feminist literary theory.

¹¹Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," p. 197.

¹²Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Women's Autobiographical Writings: New Forms," Prose Studies, 8, No. 2 (1985), 14-28.

barriers around the girls" is justified by the structural placement of the comment,¹⁴ the structural importance given to the secret she does reveal suggests that that too could have been a contributing factor. While understandable, this silence becomes a warning signal that an author who knowingly refuses to give language to such an important aspect of childhood might also colour other memories or prevaricate with the truth.

Nostalgia is seen as both an insufficient motivation¹⁵ and a debilitating factor to the writing of a worthwhile autobiography as Heilbrun explains: "nostalgia imprisoned women ... ; [because] Nostalgia, particularly for childhood is likely to be a mask for unrecognized anger".¹⁶ Yet if, as she has stated elsewhere, "for girls childhood is often the happiest and freest time,"¹⁷ the anger perceived by Heilbrun seems more likely to intimate the author's awareness of her relative powerlessness as an adult rather than that of the child. Hence to recreate the world of the child, to have the chance to become the manipulator rather than the manipulated, shows the manner in which women use nostalgia and orchestrated silence to gain a voice.

Nostalgia is a valid emotion which informs a number of autobiographies of childhood but this sweeping generalization implies that nostalgia is all

¹⁴Hooten, p. 310.

¹⁵Coe, When the Grass, p. 62.

¹⁶Heilbrun, Writing A Woman's Life, p. 15.

¹⁷Heilbrun, "Women's Autobiographical Writings: New Forms," p. 18.

there is to many women's Childhoods. This, I suggest, is a simplistic misreading of their stories. Women's portraits of childhood do indeed convey a nostalgic view of *paradis perdu* but this is only the sugar coating for these 1920s autobiographies which hide an acutely observant, recording, female 'I' who incisively and often dispassionately portrays the good and the bad in her world and who expresses her anger, dismay and disapproval always subtly and as much by omission as by inclusion.

Thus as an autobiography of childhood depicts the formative period of life I would argue that it must reflect the developmental pattern of the subject both in content and style. Nancy Chodorow and others have convincingly argued the separate developmental patterns of male and female personalities.²⁰ Elsewhere Chodorow has proposed that "in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than the masculine personality does,"²¹ and that contrary to male development which is formed outside, separately, and in stages, "female identity is a process."²² Hence male stories can indeed be quests depicting heroic (or anti-heroic) adventures but women's autobiographies will be

²⁰Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).

²¹Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in Woman, Culture and Society, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 44.

²²Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," Critical Inquiry, 8 (1981), p. 349.

different. Hooten defines this difference as "relatedness" showing how various writers value and become aware of their places in the social structures of family and friends.²³ If female is defined by other rather than self it would follow that the impact of characters which impinge upon or enter the personal world of the child would have great influence on the definition of self. In addition, for the 1920s female autobiographer, place becomes part of this "relatedness" not only because of the smallness of her world and the resultant intensity of her experiences within these narrow parameters but also, I suggest, because the female parent, the role model who generally becomes the embodiment of ambivalence, is defined within this same space.

Equally women's habit of frequently recording the trivial juxtaposed with the world-shattering, giving all equal weighting, is evidence not of literary fault but of developmental difference. Women are socially conditioned to be the reactors rather than the proactors in social relationships, which in turn leads to their tendency to record, rather than to interpret, the patterns of society and society itself.

It is for these reasons that, although commenting on other important elements of each work, a detailed examination of characterization and settings in these *Childhoods* will demonstrate the manner in which a female author recreates the process of the formation of

²³Hooten, p. 91.

her identity and comes to terms with the contributing factors.

The role played by the mother has been recognized as crucial to the development of the female identity, and her characterization and presentation in autobiography demonstrates as much about the daughter as the mother. Nancy Friday in My Mother/My Self discusses the ambivalence present in mother-daughter relationships, suggesting that an understanding of the restraints and beliefs established in this relationship is essential to the understanding of self.²⁴ Lynn Z. Bloom while considering the heritages of mother-daughter relationships concludes that the female autobiographer "not only ... becomes her own mother, she also becomes the recreator of her maternal parent and the controlling adult in their literary relationship."²⁵ Although she looks at both the legacies of the mothers - the transmission of human values and group identity; the nurturing and conveyance of a sense of self - and how the daughters responded to them, she does not home in on the author-daughter's role in characterization of the mothers and the final working out of the bond with its implications for autobiography.

Even Corbett in A Fistful of Buttercups, who

²⁴Nancy Friday, My Mother/My Self (London: Fontana, 1988).

²⁵Lynn Z. Bloom, "Heritages: Dimensions of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Autobiographies," in The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980), p. 292.

maintains the most consistent view of the paradise of childhood, portrays her mother as less than perfect. There is no doubt her mother is "valued, nurturing and stimulating,"²⁶ but she is not portrayed with the same non-questioning adoration which Corbett accords her father. In subtle ways but with sharp contrast the faultless father is juxtaposed with the all-too-human mother. She is no disciplinarian and relies upon her sister to control the children as required while Corbett's father just enthralls (p. 61). Her mother does not quite approve of her first "lover's" house and, in what can be seen as a retrospective reaction, the voice of the adult author in this chapter is jarring, intruding with ironic comments and sardonic humour, denigrating, in tone, the love affair which the past self believed was so marvellous. It would seem that the continued transmission of the mother's values and identity through later childhood and adolescence has superimposed a tension in memory which is reflected in linguistic ambivalence. As can be found frequently in A Fistful of Buttercups, father and daughter form a conspiracy from which mother is omitted, not as Hooten suggests, in a dismissive manner,²⁷ but in a more beneficent way suggesting that the conspirators have a superior and exclusive knowledge of the world. After all no harm came to her when crossing a paddock even though they knew the inhabitant was a bull not a cow

²⁶Hooten, p. 151.

²⁷Hooten, p. 150.

(pp. 158-9), and for mother's good the daughter ate raw liver at her rather's request with a semblance of enjoyment (p. 133). In both these cases there is double role-reversal, where the mother is portrayed as the child, not dismissively, but most lovingly while the daughter has access to an unchildlike, and almost unfeminine power.

According to Judith Kegan Gardiner the female identity is dependent on successfully working through the mother-daughter bond which requires firstly identification and then separation. Drawing on Chodorow, Gardiner states that:

This maternal stage of female identity bears special relevance to women's empathic literary identifications particularly the author's relationship to her character ...²⁸

Although commenting on the female fiction writer, this statement is particularly applicable to Taylor's characterization. In Your Hills Are Too High the bond is never really broken, so that Taylor's confusion is reflected not in the portrayal of her mother but in the consistency of the character of self. Taylor's mother is theatrical, volatile, conservative and conventional. She dominates the narrative and is the only three-dimensional character. She is the cause of unbelievable despair, which still rankles, by not realizing that keeping the young Roslyn down in class was psychologically unsound; she supplied laughter, love and a sense of being part of history with the trip

²⁸Gardiner, p. 356.

to England; she even contributed to success as in the "Great Castor Oil Victory" (p. 83). But overall, this life story exemplifies ambivalence between mother and daughter. Conformity to the social, educational and cultural systems, upheld so strongly by the mother, was questioned constantly by the daughter. It has been suggested that this demand for conformity, which is also reflected in the title, has prevented the author from revealing herself," but of greater import, I would argue, is the unsatisfactory resolution of the bond between mother and daughter. It is no accident that the last pages are a recitation of the areas of disagreements (rather than similarities) between them which culminates in Taylor's pedestrian commonplace - "we couldn't live together and we couldn't live entirely apart" (p. 96). Taylor's own reluctant conformity shows the manner in which she too is her mother's daughter - and qualifies Friday's conclusion by showing that an awareness of restrictions does not necessarily mean they can be overcome.

Often, however, it appears that reality of characterization has been sacrificed to the over-riding claims of artistic style. Eakin comments early in her story that "perhaps our family relationships were not usual" (p. 18), and later on - "It is the laughter I remember and miss most poignantly ... frequently the laughter arose out of the rows, or out of the tears

²Maria Simms, "Growing up in Newcastle and Vietnam," rev. of Your Hills Are Too High, by Roslyn Taylor, Southerly, 48 (1988), 343-347.

which followed them" (p. 66). It is these two motifs which give structure and dictate content and characterization. Her mother is shown to be volatile - "warm-hearted, impulsive and emotional" (p. 19), a marvellous cook with house guests who stayed for years, an inveterate gambler who even has a wager with the X-ray technician on the fate of the coin swallowed by her daughter. But overall the character of mother becomes an extended metaphor for conflict both as instigator and recipient, with Eakin portraying a domestic battleground. Mother "batters" on the wall (p.60); "marches" to the window, (p. 58) and even the unbalanced household accounts become "explosive potential"(p. 62). The accusation of madness becomes "an unexpected bonus in weapons" in one particular battle (p. 60), and as the author is the battlefield for the conflict between her father and grandmother, so her mother is "the buffer between these two constantly warring factions" (p. 19). Eakin's imaginative, figurative language used to describe her mother's role in their domestic world, "explosive highlights in a situation continually smouldering with tension" (p.58), hints at personal knowledge of Armageddon and would go unnoticed in reports of international hostilities.

Just as the mother says, in tears "I couldn't live with the bastard if he didn't make me laugh so much" (p. 66), so too is Eakin her mother's daughter. The tone of her narrative is humorous and bittersweet;

her memories have had the rancour removed; her characters have no fatal flaw while each sting of sadness has a joke in its tail.

But it is in the characterization of Brigid Smith in Hear the Train Blow and the anecdotes presented about her that we become most aware of the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship. Brigid Smith is shown as totally competent; she is an accurate shot with a gun and a marvellous cook, she holds down a responsible job as station-mistress in a time when it was not usual for women to work. She is fleet of foot, a strong disciplinarian and the one for whom people send in moments of need. Overall she appears to be the perfect mother, but there is still a dark side to their relationship and an awareness of her failings on the part of the daughter.

Many of the anecdotes show Brigid Smith placing great emphasis on the truth and respectability and yet her concern with keeping up appearances and constant worry about how her family would appear to the outside world, suggest a fine distinction between putting one's best foot forward or a false one. After all a truism quoted by the author in another respect is "that it is invariably the one with the most skeletons in the cupboard who shouts loudest about the mishaps of others and is the most unforgiving" (p. 148). The motif of the power of appearances is prefigured joyfully when the author and her friend Sylvia dressed up as tramps and believed they had fooled the world. But just as this

lighthearted escapade ended in disillusionment and pain, so does the greatest fantasy of all, that she is her mother's daughter.

That Patsy Adam-Smith was adopted is hinted at throughout the book but not revealed until the last thirty pages. The social stigma and personal trauma of adoption colours her life and her story. The metaphor of belonging is used as a haunting threnody and structural stay to the narrative commencing with the news of the baby's arrival being celebrated by Albert Smith's workmates and their jocular fighting over which branch of the railways would have the future worker. Even the Preface which shows the grown-up Adam-Smith embarking on a troop train and a new life juxtaposes the sadness of leaving with the certainty of belonging as a member of a group of enlisted VADs. Her allusions to her sister Mick's adoption and other comments on the question of identity restate her adult awareness of the insecurity of her childhood confidence. Hence, although chronologically the author was only about thirteen when she overheard the truth of her beginnings⁹⁰ and the book covers her life until she went to war, its structural placement bestows climactic and artistic importance. That Adam-Smith's despair indicates the cultural values of the time is corroborated by Taylor:

⁹⁰Kathleen is noted as being 19 in 1939 and three months pregnant and Adam-Smith overheard the conversation between her mother and grandmother shortly after the wedding.

Children were not told if they were adopted, and only close relatives and friends of the family were informed of the circumstances. But sometimes even the best kept secrets leaked out and it would be whispered at school that so-and-so was adopted. We looked upon the unfortunate child as somehow different, although asked for an explanation of this view, we could not have said what the difference was.³¹

Naming for females is of such significance that it will be discussed at length in Chapter 7. However its indication of belonging makes it an important aspect of this particular mother-daughter relationship and should be briefly considered now. If surnames and the changes women affect in them represent "self definition in its most symbolically meaningful form,"³² how much more significance will lie in the assumption of a Christian name? That the author took her mother's name for confirmation is explained as being done on the spur of the moment with the justification proffered that her father, who was being confirmed with her, took the name of his father. But just as belonging is not only Adam-Smith's metaphor for writing a life, it is also her life metaphor and so she becomes a classic example of the female autobiographer who takes on the role of mother and becomes creator and recreator in the act of writing.³³ By including the renaming of herself "Brigid" at confirmation, Adam-Smith signals her need for identification with her mother, as well as

³¹Taylor, p. 44.

³²Joyce Penfield, ed., Women and Language in Transition (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 1987), p. 117.

³³Bloom, p. 292.

underlining a correlation between the domestic and the spiritual care that should be implicit in this name. Thus when her adoption is finally confirmed the reader is able to experience vicariously the terrible, unwanted freedom that accompanies it. Instead of the daughter gaining the competencies of the mother, like Corbett albeit more seriously, the mother takes on the qualities of the daughter and although there is still a reidentification, it is heart-rending as the mother and daughter display the same doubts and uncertainties. Even in 1981 on publication of this autobiography it is her mother's approval that Adam-Smith needs and awaits to validate and justify her version of their life.

The diversity in the portraits of mothers by these daughters and the complexity of their relationships makes it difficult to see them as archetypal characters, despite the best efforts of a number of critics. Coe suggests that many of the figures in *Childhoods* are archetypal and offers variations and permutations for his pattern of the archetypal mother. She ranges from being cruel, inadequate, or pious to vulgar, frivolous or subservient.³ Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos finds that there are as many archetypal patterns for the mother as there are views of the matriarch, and although agreeing with her that there is an emphasis on mothers in women's autobiographies, the usefulness of her conclusion that it is due to "innate and archetypal aspects of the woman's psyche"

³Coe, When the Grass, p. 140.

must be questioned."³

Annis Pratt finds the archetypal theory helpful to schematize characterization in literature generally, although her argument is undermined by comparing archetypes with the etymologically similar, albeit rigid, stereotypes. She comments that a single archetype can be subject to a variety of perceptions not only from culture to culture but from mind to mind and that the archetypal patterns must be induced from the literature, not imposed upon it.⁴ From this point of view the range of variations appears almost limitless and thus the archetypal theory loses value as a consistent critical tool for the analysis of autobiography.

This lack of clear definition has been apparent since its inception. The term as used by Jung at the height of his career refers to the instinctive, recognizable patterns in the "collective unconscious" which, through the strength and vividness of their energy can be personified and impinge on the conscious imagination.⁵ The implied specificity of this

³Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, "The Metaphysics of Matrilinearism in Women's Autobiography: Studies of Mead's Blackberry Winter, Hellman's Pentimento, Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and Kingston's The Woman Warrior," in Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), p. 183.

⁴Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fictions (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981), p. 4.

⁵Laurens Van Der Post, Jung and the Story of Our Time (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 209. This author also points out that the term was rediscovered from St Augustine, recognized by many as the first "modern" autobiographer.

patterning (which has its derivation in *typos* the Greek for stamp) was later weakened by Jung at the end of his life when he postulated that "all the archetypes blend into one another like the colour spectrum and the *feminine archetypes* [my italics] do often seem to lead almost imperceptibly into one another."³⁰ Although this blurring of outline may be useful to argue that in literature all personified images are archetypal in some sense and have a previous pattern, I would suggest that this lack of acuity reduces the viability of the archetypal model in achieving a deeper understanding of the female autobiographer's portrait of self.

Mothers in women's autobiographies seem rather to be an extension and reflection of the narrating self. The narrating 'I' of the daughter knows her mother's humanity only too well and has no hesitation in revealing the adult female from the two vantage points of adult and child. Corbett, Eakin and Taylor all make reference to their own children and their role as mother, not detrimentally but rather with an air of familiarity. Mothering itself becomes shared, in literature and physically. Of course there are some similarities apparent in the characters of the mothers and their relationships with the daughters but the greater range of differences prevents any easy application of the archetypal theory and undermines its usefulness. These 1920s women exemplify Hooten's comment that "Australian women have produced an

³⁰Demetrakopoulos, p. 204.

immensely varied gallery of mother images in their autobiographies."⁹

Contradictorily the fathers portrayed in these works do not fit the previous critical findings. They are not problematic or equivocal,¹⁰ nor are they tyrannical or a failure.¹¹ Instead each father is portrayed as not only loved, but personable and loving. It is the fathers who are the teachers, providing factual information and emotional assurance. In Your Hills Are Too High although Taylor's father is described as absent-minded and being a "terrible tease" (p. 62), it is he who, using such activities as ping-pong games, taught her some of life's more salutary lessons, whilst purposefully ensuring that there were also some ego-bolstering triumphs. This type of anecdote is echoed in each of the autobiographies.

In an earlier article Coe noted, almost parenthetically and most disparagingly, an apparent gender difference in the portrait of fathers:

Of the eighteen "Portraits of the Artist as a Young Australian" ... fifteen offer father-figures who were either dead, absent, unreliable, weak, failed, or at best, wholly forgettable nonentities. Only three of our children (Robin Eakin, Miles Franklin, David Malouf) would appear to have had reasonably satisfactory fathers - and two of these were women.¹²

In his later definitive work he elaborates on his

⁹Hooten, p. 193.

¹⁰Hooten, p. 135.

¹¹Coe, When the Grass, p. 140.

¹²Richard N. Coe, "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian: Childhood, Literature and Myth," Southerly, 41 (1981), 160.

preconceived image of the father and ignores the possible thesis concerning women. By combining the writings of males and females he produces a curious and unjustified hybrid of an asexual childhood and then proceeds to generalize that "women no less than men seem to relive in their reminiscences this quest for an ideal [father]." However just as he has been found wanting in awareness "of the capacity for psychoanalysis," so he has undervalued the difference of a female childhood. Predictably, but incorrectly, he sees the female writer as having the same life experience in this area as the male, since not only are the father-figures in these 1920s Childhoods almost invincible, but equally none of them are missing.

Obviously there are father-figures who embody every theoretical position - Shirley Ball (b. 1926) in Muma's Boarding House could be seen to support Coe's view with her portrait of the archetypal weak father, but paradoxically she uses his negativity as a counterpoint for her own developing strengths." Spacks has found that father-daughter bonds portrayed in eighteenth-century self-writing helped to define the author through "weakness and subordination," but our autobiographers depict fathers as loving protectors:

¹³Coe, When the Grass, p. 141.

¹⁴Alan Davies, "How to Write a Childhood," Meanjin, 46 (1987), 54-57.

¹⁵Shirley Ball, Muma's Boarding House (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978).

¹⁶Patricia Meyer Spacks, Imagining A Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), p. 74.

men of integrity, who encouraged the development of emotional and mental strength in their daughters. Indeed the similarity in the portraits of the father-figures suggests more about the cultural conditioning of the daughters than the men themselves.

Of the parents it is the father who is portrayed as having the greater perception of each daughter's inner emotional needs. Albert Smith made up snail bicycle races for his non-sporting daughter and when finding out she was coming third out of three academically saw this as merely having only two to beat to become dux of the class. Although Adam-Smith interprets this as meaning that there is such small competition for country children as never to know failure, it can surely be seen as an example of the father's concern for the emotional well-being of his daughter as well as his optimistic outlook. It is interesting to note that the isolation and despair experienced by Adam-Smith over the knowledge of her adoption only affects the mother-daughter relationship. Albert Smith is able to remain the consistently loving teacher-parent, which enhances the theory that it is the mother-daughter relationship that is problematic in the portrayal of the female identity.

Corbett's father "was a quiet scholarly man, who kept us enchanted, amused and totally enthralled with things of the mind and skills of the hand"(p. 61). He taught her practical and relevant mathematics through play and is always referred to in extravagant

terms of endearment - "my beautiful father" (p. 36 & p. 61), "the only man ... [she] really loved and trusted" (p. 129), and "What a fantastic man to have for a father"(p. 50).

He is part of every scene and is first introduced ploughing - he is the intrinsic link with nature, the fount of all knowledge. In this view of paradise her characters have no human and therefore realistic weakness. Even at the end when the floods and storms bankrupted them and forced them to the hateful city, Corbett blames nature not him, and the only negative expression she allows is his quietness and "an unfamiliar slump of the shoulders" (p. 174). She has unsuccessfully attempted to blend childish language "tummy" and "Muvver" into her generally adult style and approach, and this combined with the time span of the book, which covers only her first decade, seems purposely to prevent any introspection into the disillusionment of the teenage years and the subsequent acceptance of the humanity of erstwhile gods.

In Corbett's childhood the gods walk unharmed and even the serpents have no reality - she portrays snakes as "outside", they are not part of her Garden of Eden but are in the world of her invincible father who is able to subdue them and use them for his own ends, usually to achieve a greater good (p. 35). Inside they become trivialised and domesticated as the milk jug beads are used to make a toy snake, or become metaphorically the "snake-beads of memory" again at

the command of the author (p. 39). Corbett's father is an all pervading presence in her private world of childhood, both in the text and as the author of the photographs which liberally illustrate the book." Worthy of comment too, is the fact that Corbett does not give any details of how her father met her mother. It is as if the father-daughter partnership takes precedence. In this autobiography Corbett is the creator, but a sharing creator, returning power to the beloved father in reciprocation for that received from him in her childhood.

The first word Eakin applies to her father is "gleefully" (p. 16) and this sets the pattern for most of the anecdotes she relates. Their close relationship shows him as fun and less than perfect - he snores stentoriously; his practical jokes are great for the watcher, but not, one suspects, for the victim; and she is able to expose the hurtful effect of his shouting on her mother (p. 56), without detracting from the sympathy and love with which he is portrayed. He too is ever-present but as a participant not a god.

Eakin enjoys similar yet somewhat different circumstances. She realizes that she is the focal point for two separate and loving households, but she emphasizes her particularly close companionship with her father. As a small child she accompanied him on his medical rounds and was told of the more amusing of

"Malcolm Macdonald is accredited as co-author by the National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication Data.

his cases. Most of her anecdotes have father and daughter participation as their central motif, as in "My father and I and the hard resident core went to the beach every Sunday morning, while my mother prepared her enormous meals" (p. 89). There was no generation gap in her family; friends of either parents or child were friends of all (p. 90). It is obvious that these Australian fathers are the antithesis of Coe's pattern for the archetypal father and equally seem, superficially at least, to confound Hooten's assessment that "the daughter/father bond is more often than not a problematic one."⁴

Yet bearing in mind the silences which shout and a suspicious uniformity of character, maybe the perfection of the fathers in these portraits is not quite true to life, as there is sometimes a tone which hints that all is not as wonderful as it could be in the paradise of childhood. Taylor explains that she is not the favourite of either parent but protests that "it didn't worry her one bit" (p. 90), as there was a responsibility involved and one had to live up to expectations. She details with delight the manner in which she bested her father when he used to tease her about opening gates (p. 62). Adam-Smith says that she was aware that her sister was her father's favourite and takes great pains to point out that she didn't mind coming second best and indeed she loved her father more for loving the things she loved about Kathleen (p.

⁴Hooten, p. 135.

7). In both cases, although the authors include anecdotes which seem to compensate for this view and show the extent to which they see themselves as being loved best or all, the overall impression is one of genuine warmth and caring as they write of their relationships with their fathers.

The characterization of the fathers reflects this strength of feeling. Some accounts work better than others, not because the intention or meaning was greater but because of the superior literary ability of the daughter. The less skilled Taylor and Corbett are cases in point. Taylor writes about her father, "What he lacked in good looks he made up in personality" (p. 8); she describes him as a laconic, whimsical Yorkshireman who plays jokes and whose philosophy of life was to look forward, not back. Yet Stephen Downes, like all Taylor's characters (with the notable exception of her mother) lacks conviction as she does not allow any of her characters a life of their own. Apart from introducing him by name on the first page, he becomes "my" or "our" father for the rest of the book. He is credited with an occasional phrase or sentence, and then always in dialect, but it is as if he is viewed through glass - the character becoming refracted and distorted through the possessive eye of the daughter. It seems as if the repressed pain of being no-one's favourite has been transformed in this representation of a life where the events and characters are hers to control and manipulate as she

wishes.

One reviewer seriously comments that Adam-Smith's "dismal literary training" of 300 feature articles and children's serials for the ABC are crippling disadvantages for what she might have written.¹ Nevertheless the four editions of this book suggest that the buying public did not agree with the critic, but rather found that such "dismal literary training" has produced "a minor classic" with particularly fine characterization.² Albert Smith is introduced by name as part of a conversation with workmates (p. 2), but after that he is "Dad". He is not described physically, except in connection with his trade, having "the scarred hands and leathered neck" of the navvy (p. 1) but his character is conveyed through Adam-Smith's awareness of his presence at all times and her brief but telling allusions to his personality:

Dad never spoke much but seemed a bit like a receptacle for other people's thoughts. I heard more telling, interesting, pungent comments made to Dad than to anyone else. (p. 91)

As a result when she devotes two chapters to the near-death accident he sustained and uses language that might in other circumstances be described as sentimental, the character she has established as the universal "Dad" reflectively empowers her language and imagery. To add even more weight to the importance of

¹Rev. of Hear The Train Blow, by Patsy Adam-Smith, Australian Book Review, 4 (1964-65), p. 44.

²A remark attributed to the poet Kenneth Slessor p. x.

this event Adam-Smith twists and entwines the hitherto separate metaphors with which she has been conveying her life.

The inherent conflict posed by religion in the mind of the child culminates in her prayer, "If You kill him I'll kill You" (p. 131); the overwhelming desire for love and acceptance based on fantasy is recognized more clearly "like the lovers in the enchanted cottage who could not see one another's defects we were so happy to be together again that we didn't notice any change in his looks" (p. 134); and her life metaphors of a journey and the steam whistle are all evident and shared in "Dad's" trip to Melbourne to be finally healed. Adam-Smith's re-creation of the world of her childhood is a cathartic experience for the author and her autobiography is, as Hooten suggests, "a complex response to a deep personal wound,"⁵¹ which is reflected linguistically in the sharing of her major life-metaphors.

In fact it is the looming presence of death or near death in these Childhoods on which the criticism of nostalgia and sentiment founders. Death is portrayed bitterly, seriously, humorously, prosaically, but never sentimentally. The importance of and emphasis on death not only within the domestic sphere but within the community, suggests both "a deep fascination with death itself, the ultimate timeless state,"⁵² and reinforces

⁵¹Hooten, p. 311.

⁵²Burton Pike, "Time in Autobiography" Comparative Literature, 28 (1976), pp. 334, 335.

the view that the female is defined by other. If in autobiography past selves and the process of development are recreated and thereby immortalized in print, then this act invests others, even the dead, with a reflected immortality. One critic notes but has been unable to explain the differing reactions to death in his study of *Childhoods*.¹ He offers a number of possibilities but he does not take into account that it is the work by a female author which displays the marked contrast in feeling. Equally in life and literature the good memories of childhood would become sickly sweet without stark and stringent events to reflect their glow.

Death and time are not finite in Corbett's life. Her belief in life-after-death and reincarnation commences as a child with the very real presence of her dead sister Joan (p. 52). She includes her mother's account of "life beyond" when she was near-death (p. 125) and her son's psychic knowledge of events twelve years before (p. 56) as further evidence of her views. Death is found in her father's stories, "The Day They Buried Paddy O'Flaherty"; in local legend, "Molly's Legend"; and in community characters, "Livingstone's Corner". In fact death in all its aspects is part of Corbett's life.

Eakin's narrative begins and ends with death and her statement that it was "cosily accepted" refers not

¹A.O.J. Cockshut, The Art of Autobiography in 19th and 20th Century England (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), p. 42.

only to her father being a doctor, but also the many stories of dead relatives by her grandmother and aunt which kept them present in her life as well as her use of their possessions (p. 30). However the significance of other deaths is hidden by one-line throwaways - "Then in another year she [her mother] was dead" (p. 103) - and the bald statement is left unexplored but its starkness seems indicative of a deeper and not-so-cosy emotion.

Adam-Smith includes the tragic circumstances of two local families, the Marvels and the Morans, and whilst agreeing that it intimates "that family love may be an uncertain quality,"⁵ perhaps it can also be seen to demonstrate the contribution of the local community as "other" to the development of the female.

Taylor is the only writer whom death of another does not appear to touch, despite, like Corbett, recording the loss of an unknown sister Dorothy. There is however constant recognition of the essence of death which could be described as the state of non-existence. Her awareness of the fact that if one of her sisters had been a boy she would not have existed, coupled with the constant underlying insecurity of her value as a female rather than a male, colour her life. Being locked out of the house one lunchtime becomes evidence of "the magnitude of my unforgivable sin in being a girl" (p. 16) and her father's reaction to an extremely good report "observ[ing] for the hundredth time that it

⁵Hooten, p. 310.

was a pity I wasn't a boy" (p. 87), shows the process of defining the self by other in a fundamental, if detrimental, way.

The presence of the adult voice in these stories of childhood rejects the death of childhood and thereby the death of self, so that process of writing echoes the process of development that is both finished yet still continuing. Although some critics have argued for death of the author and indeed the death of autobiography, one concluding that "concepts of subject, self and author collapse into the act of producing a text,"⁵³ and others such as Mandel who notes that the consistent presence of death in autobiography can be explained ontologically as it can be seen "surrounding or threatening the writer as a *person* at each moment" or psychologically,⁵⁴ the nature of the female definition by other has not been taken fully into account. In representing her childhood and those who peopled it, far from "collapsing" into the text the subject is reinvigorated, the self recreated, and, as narrator, the author becomes visible.

Each author has a different family structure - Adam-Smith a much loved also-adopted sister; Taylor is one of three surviving girls; Corbett the only living child and Eakin with no siblings - yet in all their

⁵³Michael Sprinker, "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 342.

⁵⁴Barrett John Mandel, "'Basting the Image With a Certain Liquor': Death in Autobiography," Soundings, 57 (1974), 177.

stories the focus on characters remains firmly fixed on the adults especially those who are seen as providers of information. Although formal education is valued, the (often later perceived) informal wisdom of family members and other adults is celebrated. This explains in part the fascination of childhood autobiographers with grandparents noted by Coe,⁵⁷ as the grandmother particularly acts as the reservoir and conveyor of history. The stories they tell not only bring the past into context but assist in giving a personal, familiar history. Corbett in particular acknowledges this contribution to her identity when concluding that her grandmother's stories gave "a nice feeling of 'belonging' in some giant and mighty plan" (p. 145). But more particularly she points to another relevant factor of the role played by grandparents in the life of the child in that "when you are little, the most wonderful thing is to discover the oldest person you know was once a child, too ... (p. 141)

Eakin's grandmother talks constantly, imparting maxims which are only appreciated with hindsight. Adam-Smith's grandmothers are the antithesis of each other - one acerbic and the source of the unwanted knowledge of her adoption, the other loving with no concern for appearances and coincidentally her father's mother, but both important to the formation of identity. Taylor has to go to England to become aware of the love and warmth of an extended family. The

⁵⁷Coe, When the Grass, pp. 158-9.

"aunts up the Cross" gain their significance for Eakin because they are the only part of her domestic world which is denied her. The gangers and old Bill Leaf who taught Adam-Smith to dance, as well as the pilot who flew over the two young girls pretending to be waifs are all components in the domestic world where the girls were acting out their fantasies and "trying on" images with which to face the adult world.

However just as I have argued against the appropriateness of the archetypal theory for the analysis of the major characters in female autobiographies, I would claim the same applies for the minor characters. The value given to the characters that enter their worlds reflects the view that women define self through social relationships,⁵⁰ and that these characters are indeed elements in the process of development. To write an autobiography is to believe in the uniqueness of the self but to grow up female in 1920s and 1930s Australia is to fit into a social pattern of women as inferior. Daughters who portray fathers as promoting autonomy and independence must depict a matriarchy composed of strong, vital and individual women who ensure the continuation of the social restrictions and cultural mores so that the daughters' social conditioning and often reluctant acceptance of these traditions does not suggest a weakness or uniformity of self.

As Heilbrun suggests, women do gain their sense of

⁵⁰Gardiner, p. 352.

self from the domestic world as is evidenced by Adam-Smith's imaginative description "This year summer came in with a blast like an open oven door" (p. 129), and Corbett's jam melon world (p. 50), but the extent to which it is safe is questionable due to the language of life as a battlefield shared by both Adam-Smith and Eakin.⁵⁹

The world faced by each autobiographer differs, and what makes their world Australian - and hence their stories - is not the economic or political factors but the social and cultural ones. The adult games and the education system; country and city life which includes the family dances, race meetings and gambling; the closeness of communities and the patterns of relationships - all these are delineated in close detail. Adam-Smith's story most fits the Australian stereotype both in content and language. She runs the gamut of Australiana from gum-leaf playing to drought, she reports conversations in the vernacular and uses local sayings and imagery as in "the Murray has run many a banker" to describe the passing of time (p. 85). Her story too, finishes with the War, not so much as a catastrophic world disaster, but gaining a final insight into identity and love. The War is not just, as for Taylor, a convenient end point, almost a banal cliché, or according to Eakin a time of excitement.

⁵⁹Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Reinventing Womanhood (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1979), p. 182.

Although each of the writers is aware of the Depression, both Taylor and Adam-Smith comment on how little it altered the tenor of their lives. Both interestingly contribute to the national mythology by selecting the romantic "swaggie" as a symbol of the times and then further romanticize their conception of him. Eakin and Taylor point out the contrast between their families and the Australian way of life in almost identical phrasing:

... it was not until many years of contact with other humans had taught me that I learnt perhaps our family relationships were not usual. (Eakin, p. 18)

Until we girls grew up and mixed more with people outside the home we didn't realise the habits and sayings that were so much a part of our daily life were typically Yorkshire and not Australian. (Taylor, pp. 9-10)

and yet while all authors accept their racial and religious differences - Taylor's Yorkshire parents; Eakin's Jewish-Irish ancestry; Corbett with an English mother - all accept, without question, that they are Australian.

Only Adam-Smith records her participation in the War, but as patriotism could also be described as belonging it is not surprising that this is the end point of her Childhood. Patriotism yes, but a chance to belong finally to an unfailing and legitimate Mother (Australia), and a chance to find a more certain identity. She admits that she enlisted to escape the "turmoil" of mind and the "nameless, faceless

fears" (p. 175) - again the emphasis on identity as names and faces in her story have been essential in establishing and maintaining identity. Coe's thesis that "the quest for personal identity is inextricably linked with questions relating to national identity" has been established in Colmer's view as "beyond question."⁴⁰ However, I would suggest that this is not so in the case of women. Adam-Smith's patriotism was a personal response but, as I have established, her circumstances and rationale were exceptional for the time. I would argue that Australian women accept their nationality with ease as the battles which loom large on their horizons are for social, sexual and professional rights. Being Australian is the one aspect of life that is commented on and accepted but not questioned. It is the one certainty on which they can rely even (or particularly) when their personal, female identity is threatened.

⁴⁰Colmer, "Australian Autobiography: a Hole in the Literary Landscape," Southerly, 46 (1986), p. 166.

III

CHILDHOODS WITH A DIFFERENCE

The authorial focus of each of the books discussed in the last chapter was the child in her domestic world, her interactions with the characters who inhabited that world and the manner in which the adult depicts these memories. While still keeping the authorial eye firmly fixed on the process of female development through a portrait of the author's life in the 1920s and early 1930s, there are other accounts of childhood in which singleness of purpose and explicit authorial intention lead to a double focus. This variation is evidenced by, and reflected through, literary technique - the structure and content of the work combined with an idiosyncratic use and exposition of metaphor and language. Another October Child is Eleanor Spence's description of her childhood in country New South Wales from her birth in Sydney until she marries, but it is equally an explanation of how she became a writer and the elements of that life which became food for the imagination and contributed to the

development of her inner self.¹ Jane Lindsay's Portrait of Pa, on the other hand, purports to be a portrait of the famous artist Norman Lindsay, who happened to be her father, but it also becomes a portrait of the author.²

a) Another October Child - the unveiling of an author.

"I envisaged my life largely in terms of story, with me as both protagonist and commentator ..." (p. 97) but in Another October Child "story" takes second place as Spence concentrates on portraying the development of imagination and attitudes which have shaped the writer and which help to explain the adult she has become. She attempts to detail the myriad sources and elements that contributed to and nourished that imagination and her dreams and personality. All the tangibles of life, the surroundings, the relatives, friends and family, the daily events, which are related so precisely and imaginatively by the previous authors are, in this work, veiled and subsumed in the overwhelming portrait of the subject where the eye of the 'I' is firmly focused on the inner self. The subtitle "The Recollections of Eleanor Spence" reflects the stylistic move away from an emphasis on narrative and plot (elements which she recognizes as so important in the writing of children's books for which she is renowned), and into the mode of the oral tradition. The

¹Eleanor Spence, Another October Child: Recollections of Eleanor Spence (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1988).

²Jane Lindsay, Portrait of Pa: Norman Lindsay at Springwood (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973).

"folksy", seemingly desultory, recall of memories is achieved through a very patterned use of language and through interweaving time, truth and memory.

For Spence time is not only part of the landscape of the imagination: it is also something which can be delighted in and shaped in the same way as novels can be enjoyed and shaped. For the child time was made manageable and controlled by the various "celebrations and commemorations" of a year (p. 44) and for the adult these become part of the shape of her autobiography. Time becomes tangible when she combines it with nature as in "the floods of April and the fires of October" (p. 5), and her past becomes a continuum on which she moves freely, dipping in and out of it, like playing word associations with a dictionary. Her complex management of time enlarges the ostensible story of childhood to encompass much more of the whole life. Spence gives notice of her proposed combination of the universal and the particular blended into the continuum of time - present, immediate past and childhood - in the first chapter where she discusses October and all its connections, associations and ramifications. Her first sentence "October is more than a month." (p. 1) sets up an exploration of its possibilities. It demonstrates the differences between our British heritage and Australian actuality - seasonally, culturally and metaphorically; it is the birth month of her brother, daughter and herself, and it is the title of her best selling novel. In this way Spence has

effectively set up multiple levels of experience and has established, that for her, time and identity have shifting perspectives and a fluctuating stability.

A particularly effective result is that in these recollections of childhood Spence is simultaneously child, mother, daughter, author and mature woman. She frequently uses present events as "triggers" to memories of her childhood. At the beginning of Chapter 2, the adult hears the "eternal" cry of the little girl next door which then enables her to draw the correlation with herself at that age, and Chapter 5 commences with the anticipation of University, although chronologically the major content of the chapter concerns primary school. She compares the contribution made by her book-loving parents to the achievement of her life with that made by musically skilled adults to her son Alistair's pleasing progress in this field (p. 124). A concise and graphic example of her ability to present layers of time simultaneously occurs in Chapter 6 where she discusses the changing relationship between reality and the visual between her childhood and now. She introduces the topic and chapter by "This morning I was listening on radio to a broadcast from A.B.C Archives of the U.S. space travellers landing on the moon in 1969" (p. 57). This sentence encapsulates her ability to layer time as she presents the now (1984-7), the awareness of time past (with the archival tapes of 1969), and then applies these times and realities to validate and lead into the recreated realities of the

1920s and 30s. For Spence time is not fixed and all pasts become part of the present.

The wealth of critical material concerning the use of time in autobiography and the complex manipulations of it by writers show the extent to which it is an area of real concern for the human imagination, both male and female. One of the first influential articles on the use of time in autobiography suggests that most literary autobiographers have an "obsessive preoccupation with time"³ and that, further, many of these writers concentrate on childhood and do so most credibly, perhaps because of the child's undifferentiated sense of time and the special ability of the writer to move easily back into this period of life. John Sturrock and Stephen Shapiro both question the emphasis given to chronology⁴ and the "dreary recitation of where *his* [my italics] ancestors were born."⁵ One might suggest that the generic terminology must apply to the specific gender for, although Spence details the pasts of her Scottish-born mother (Ch.2) and the Northern Irish ancestry of her father (Ch.3), it is far from being a "dreary recitation" as the facts become stories and stories for her are the explanation of life.

In fact emphasis on past generations has been

³Pike, p. 326.

⁴John Sturrock, "The New Model Autobiographer," New Literary History, 9 (1977), 51-63. Stephen A. Shapiro, "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography," Comparative Literature Studies, 5 (1968), 421-454.

⁵Shapiro, p. 436.

imaginatively integrated into the female autobiographies studied so far. For Adam-Smith the stories of the past give the child a place within, and unity with, the total universe as she "become[s] melded into the people, the land and the movement of the stars; time wavered and it was as though she took part in events and ages that were in reality her grandmothers', her parents' time."¹ On the other hand Spence, like Corbett, marvels and delights in the way the story of the past becomes an integral part of identity - if events hadn't happened as they did then "I would never have existed" (p. 20). For Spence as writer, the retelling of her mother's past, sad and romantic as it was, only reinforced her view that life was indeed like the plot of a novel.

Anecdotes are recounted not for the chronological progression of the events in a life or even the social patterns, but to describe her awakening to the life truths contained within the occasion and for the contribution each of these made in the total development of the persona. Frequently too, each occasion is both a specific event and a symbolic representation of a number of similar events as can be seen in her description of end-of-year events.

Spence recounts back-to-back the details of two prize-givings, one for Sunday school and the other a school break-up. These two scenes simultaneously explore experience on different levels. Firstly the

¹Adam-Smith, p. 1.

nature of competition and its personal application as well as the importance of social behaviour are described and evaluated, while her use of language reveals not dogmatic truth, but a deeper certainty based on a combination of familial customs and time-honoured expectations. "My sister and I were *probably* [my italics] wearing the liberty-print frocks (one green, one pink) given to us the summer before by our aunts" (p. 51), and "our mother *must have* [my italics] kept a rather anxious eye upon the picnic feasting knowing all too well the limitations of our digestions" (p. 54), or again that she ... "*probably* [my italics] spent the rest of the day ... telling me that coming last didn't *matter*" (p. 53). Words like *probably* and *must have* generally express uncertainty but in these sentences, and indeed autobiography generally, they become invested with an intensity of grammatical meaning which could well lead to a new classification of "personal imperative". Events which occurred before her birth, as when talking of her father at twenty-nine who "*surely* [my italics] ... must have had a few lady friends" (p. 24), as well as those which occurred during her lifetime where she describes if not the exact truth, then the essential truth, gain greater validity by being expressed in this manner. This style of writing imparts a sense of Spence's personal security and allows her to convey evocative and seemingly precise detail without compromising truth or memory.

The revelation of universal and personal truths and the conviction of her beliefs combined with her use of poetic detail permeate and enhance all levels of truth for the reader. This "subjective truth" which has been more specifically defined as being "not a special type of truth but truth about a special dimension of experience,"⁷ gives power to the statements of universality which might in other circumstances be weakened by the personal approach.

She is an author for whom characterization is an essential component in all literature. This is evident as she recalls her first story and her "pleasure in lining up my characters ... endowing them with names ages and physical attributes" (p. 68), and she states "my overwhelming interest, in both reading and writing, was in people, real and imagined" (p. 65). Hence it is somewhat ironic to find that, unlike her established style of fictional writing, there is no dialogue at all and a dearth of three dimensional characters of any note in her autobiography. In fact the only real character is the author herself who becomes both the lens and the focus through which all others are detailed and disseminated. The 'I' is part of every event as when talking of her mother's ability as a pianist: "by the time I was old enough to listen, she was a good pianist still" (p. 14). It seems that the unveiling of the author has resulted in achieving the

⁷Lynd Forguason "Autobiography as History," University of Toronto Quarterly, 49 (1979-80), p. 153.

opposite for those who surround her. The self is never out of focus - the description of her sister Dorothy's perfectionism brings to light the author's tendency to be "slap-dash" (p. 78), and her pride in her brother Robert becoming dux of the school - "I was very proud of being sister to the dux and had dreams of emulating him. 'Dux' was such a fine-sounding Latin word and, like him, I loved Latin" (p. 121), again shows how the persona becomes a barrier between the reader and other characters. This prevents any real empathy developing with the other players in her life for as she states earlier, she definitely is one who does not like being ignored (p. 60). However, if this is a portrait of the growth of the inner self it is quite reasonable to expect that there will be a concentration on protagonist/narrator/self and that this be reinforced by egocentric linguistics, grammar and content.

From the previous *Childhoods* it was established that, to a lesser or greater extent, each author gained identification from the characters who surrounded her. Spence's autobiography reveals a difference. Certainly she is gratefully aware of being a "truly wanted child" (p. 30), but in contrast with the previous authors, she finds her father ill-at-ease with the child-self and it is her mother who encouraged individual development and fostered positively the talents of each child. This mother has the empathy and performs the tasks attributed to the fathers in other life stories; it is she who sends off her daughter's story for appraisal by

the editor of The Bulletin (pp. 175-6); it is she who argues for her daughter's rights against the Professor of the French Faculty (p. 201); and it is she with whom Spence was able to discuss whatever feelings and concepts she could articulate (p. 146). Although she suggests that "I didn't consciously seek to model myself upon my mother" (p. 159), she is aware that her mother was "set squarely and constantly in the centre of my life all my childhood and beyond" (p. 11). In Another October Child it is not the mother-daughter relationship which is ambivalent but the actual thought of growing up which she recognizes throughout her story. As she states, her "Peter Pan collar is peculiarly appropriate" and it becomes a metaphor for the self being portrayed (p. 118).

But if seasons and celebrations shape time, then books and writing shape and symbolize the development of the writer. She describes at length the books she has read and her reactions to them; she details the process of her writing and the honing of her skills. Delighting in establishing "small and delicate webs of connection" between aspects of life (p. 2), Spence explicitly traces connecting strands between her personal life and the books she has written. The effect of this is twofold. Firstly, finding and incorporating these analogous connections into the reading of both her fiction and autobiography (without of course imputing total meaning and truth to the fictional works) gives a reciprocal and interdependent resonance

to both works. Secondly, there is an implicit invitation to the reader to make other connections between her writings and the life depicted in Another October Child particularly through works such as The Seventh Pebble (set in the 1930s)⁸ which bestow a greater depth and texture on the people and the social times depicted in her autobiography.

The most accessible connections are those she draws with place and event. The Seal Rocks of her holidays at the end of University become Chapel Rocks in The October Child; and the description of Chapel Rocks "the innocuous seaside village" leads into a landscape that becomes "lonely and primitive,"⁹ while the horror of the ravine known as the Devil's Hole gives increased vividness to the holiday she describes in her autobiography.

But more important although less explicit are the connections that can be made between her life and both theme and attitude as depicted in her fiction. Although agreeing with Brenda Niall that Spence's earlier works with perfect families and understanding teachers leave little for children to be angry about,¹⁰ one could argue that the omission of such inherent conflict from a novel suggests greater ingenuity and skill in narrative on the part of the author. However, as she

⁸Eleanor Spence, The Seventh Pebble (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982).

⁹Eleanor Spence, The October Child (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰Brenda Niall, assisted by Frances O'Neill, Australia through the Looking-Glass: Children's Fiction 1830-1980 (Melbourne: Melbourne Univ. Press, 1984), p. 257.

points out, many of her novels draw on her personal experience. The reality of childhood as Spence knew it involved little conflict and was peopled with perfect families and understanding teachers. As she explains, it wasn't until she left University that she discovered violence could take place in a marriage (p. 218). She believes she really was "let down quite gently during a crucial growing-up period" (p. 211).

There are a number of her leading characters who have some similarities in personality and attitude with the author. Karen in Patterson's Track is, unlike the author, timid, but the shared aspects of her personality are described in some detail." She too is a dreamer (p. 13), inclined to live in a world of make-believe, and enjoys stories (p. 28) and these common personality traits enhance Spence's "mythical inner landscape where I - naturally - stood in the centre" (p. 58).

Spence invites this correlative reading of her books and her life particularly to convey a deeper understanding of the underlying effects of events in her childhood:

That summer before I started high school was to have been, in my expectations, a season of rainbows. In later life I took some memories of it, changed it about, added and subtracted characters and produced a children's novel called *The Summer in Between*. Not surprisingly, it has a dated feel ... (pp. 116-7)

Further on she explains that her own "in-between

"Eleanor Spence, Patterson's Track (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967).

summer" gave her her first experience of being an outsider when her long-awaited friend from the city, now a little older, preferred her sister's company to hers. In The Summer in Between she explores these feelings of being an outsider.¹² Certainly she has altered much in this work of fiction, but there are still a number of aspects which elaborate on the above event of her life, particularly the personal response of the heroine, Faith to the situation of a leader becoming a follower and the consolation available in books and writing. She includes also her love of reading, the happy family whose advice and support are unfailing, and her awareness that this was the "summer of the last doll" (p. 118). Ironically the author kept her doll in life, but in her fiction the heroine, as a symbol of the move to maturity, gives hers away.

The importance of a sense of place is a hallmark of these female autobiographers and Spence observes:

we children grew up with an important feeling of belonging in a particular place, in a neighbourhood where a nucleus of people stayed put. We were known to all of them, and they to us. (pp. 25-6)

This need to belong not only to family but to place and to be recognized as part of the community is reiterated and expanded in the thesis of The Green Laurel, that people and houses need roots.¹³

As suggested, however, The Seventh Pebble is

¹²Eleanor Spence, The Summer in Between (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959).

¹³Eleanor Spence, The Green Laurel (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964).

probably the novel with the more discernible connections to, and reverberations with the social and personal life of the author. It is set in the late 1930s in a small country town, the heroine's name is Rachel (a familial name for the author) and expands on the tap-dancing, silver frost, and the Shirley Temple cult. The theme of outsiders, Spence suggests, could have been caused by echoes from Ruth Park's The Harp in the South, but there are many more echoes noted in her own life as portrayed in Another October Child. The anti-Catholicism of her father's family is echoed in the main reason for the rejection of the Connell family; the 1939 bushfires which she lived through, and noted as "the persistent observer and taker of notes" (p. 105), have been fleshed out and invigorated in The Seventh Pebble. The firefighters have been individualized and named Neville, Jack and Brian while the evocative description of "the hill beyond the mine glowing like a volcano,"¹⁴ and even the heroine's way of sleeping with the bedclothes as protection from night-time menaces,¹⁵ show the extent to which one vivifies the other.

Nevertheless when making these connections one must be aware of the limitations contained therein. Although stating in one place that the Seal Rocks are the Chapel Rocks in The October Child (p.166), in another she states that they were put in this story "in

¹⁴Spence, The Seventh Pebble, pp. 155-7.

¹⁵Spence, The Seventh Pebble, p. 152; and Another October Child, p. 37.

disguise" (p. 207). Obviously she is reminding us of the essential fictionality of her children's novels but inversely her comment restates the authorial commitment to truth in autobiography.

Again there is another area of tension between authorial comment and the work of fiction. In three places in her autobiography Spence comments on her novel A Candle for St Anthony,¹⁴ the theme of which she says is an "intense, idealised friendship between adolescent boys" (p. 122). She elaborates on the presence of strong relationships in life that usually occur with members of the same sex but which have no sexual component. She states:

We live now in a time and place, however, where such loves and longings are regarded with suspicion or derision - as I found to my cost when I used such a theme in A Candle for St Anthony. (p. 172)

And yet, an examination of the novel discloses that this subjective evaluation is not borne out by the work itself. The language and plot of the novel suggest that although the friendship may have been explicitly non-sexual, to other characters (including one of the protagonists) there were either grave or underlying doubts. Initially Rudi is described as having a face "rather like a girl" (p. 23); Austrians (Rudi's nationality) are described as being "more gay" which Justin (his friend) wryly assesses as "an unfortunate choice of adjective" (p. 61). But more convincingly as

¹⁴Eleanor Spence, A Candle for St Anthony (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).

part of the dénouement is that although Rudi expresses his love in its purest form, and is able to say "It was never the way you thought. It never would be" (p. 127), Spence has Justin wondering if he could have said that with the same conviction as Rudi. Hence in the novel itself Spence has set up the conflict. She has created the suspicions and derision that she then criticizes in her autobiography.

b) Portrait of Pa - when the eye of the beholder sees the beholder.

Since one of the basic tenets in the critical analysis of autobiography concerns the extent to which each author portrays herself and the manner in which she blends narrator/subject/author many scholars take delight in extending not only the debate but also the metaphorical language used to convey their theories. The major linguistic trait involves puns and homonyms on "eye" as in view or focus and "I" as the subject. Patricia K. Addis's annotated bibliography is entitled Through a Woman's Eye¹⁷ and Lee Briscoe Thompson does not resist a number of punning metaphors both in the title and body of her article. But Thompson's literary legerdemain includes an important dimension of criticism when she extends it from the expected "identity/view"

¹⁷Patricia K. Addis, Through A Woman's I: An Annotated Bibliography of American Women's Writings, 1946-1976 (Metuchen N.J., & London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1983).

to incorporate language - sight/cite."¹⁸ This conjunction of subject/focus/language whilst not in the same proportions in each work is germane to the study of autobiography generally but, as is evident in these female autobiographies, "site" plays an important and indeed an integral role in the establishment and portrayal of identity. Spence's focus on the role of language and place in the process of the self becoming a writer shows the ways these three components are essential to autobiography.

As a study of the genre must further elucidate and stabilize erstwhile slithery parameters, any contribution to the theory of portraying a self is valuable but must be based on firm foundations. In his appropriately subtitled article "The Limits of Autobiography" Michael G. Cooke attempts to establish what he calls "phenomena of presence."¹⁹ He takes as a basic premise that "the self is confronted or tested, instead of defined, by the other" and that, further, based on this, the reader can establish whether the autobiographer contains "the essayist, polemicist or what-have-you."²⁰ I would agree that "other" *could* be "an historical event, a pressing question of politics, or society or philosophy" if subscribing to the concept

¹⁸Lee Briscoe Thompson, "Woman's Eye Wide Open: Dorothy Livesay's Right Hand Left Hand," in Autobiographical and Biographical Writing in the Commonwealth, ed. Doireann MacDermott (Sabadell, Barcelona: AUSA, 1984), pp. 223-228.

¹⁹Michael G. Cooke, "'Do You Remember Laura?' or, The Limits of Autobiography," The Iowa Review, 9, No. 2 (1978), 58-72.

²⁰Cooke, p. 65.

of confrontation or testing, but as it has been more convincingly argued that the female self is *defined* by other, and that the domestic or local place looms large in this definition there is little to recommend his point of view. Cooke's thesis can be applied to the theory that the male sense of self is "formed outside, where the world is"²¹ but it is completely at variance with modern theories of female development. Just as I have suggested that the characterization of the family members and friends in female autobiography of childhood has a special connotation because of this identification with "other", so too, other critics have used this theory to argue convincingly for literary patterns in female autobiography.²² It follows therefore that female autobiographies can, and indeed should, include the writers view of "other" to assist in conveying the development of the female self. It would follow too, that an account of a female childhood could be multi-focal as long as the development and life of the writer is revealed.

Jane Lindsay's Portrait of Pa is such a work and shows how subject/narrator/author can be combined in less than equal proportions and can even focus on more than one subject and yet still be autobiographically valid. As Hooten comments in her perceptive assessment of this autobiography, "for Jane Lindsay self-

²¹Heilbrun, Reinventing Womanhood, p. 182.

²²See for instance, Jan Zlotnik Schmidt, "The Other: A Study of Persona in Several Contemporary Women's Autobiographies," CEA Critic, 43 (1980), 43-31.

definition cannot evade definition of this exceptionally ambivalent father."²³ The title reflects this viewpoint. "Portrait of" suggests a biography, a view of another person by one who may, or may not, claim an intimate or personal relationship with the subject, while the addition of the word "Pa" brings a whole new dimension. Although the "Pa" in question is Norman Lindsay, artist, author and sculptor, Jane Lindsay has signalled that this will be a portrait of the father, a role that is defined in relation to other members of the domestic unit, the family. It follows that to portray the father the author must include "mother" and "child/ren", as "father" exists only in direct relation and context to both of these. She notes he may have been a genius to outsiders but as she states "genius is hard to recognize at close quarters" (p. 4), and so she portrays the man "Pa." Hence although the focus is diffused the author/daughter produces a record of the search for, and definition of self at the same time.

In Portrait of Pa Lindsay has produced, not a biography of Norman Lindsay, but an autobiography of Jane, which is a view corroborated either approvingly²⁴ or disparagingly²⁵ by reviewers of the time. Although subtitled Norman Lindsay at Springwood the focus of

²³Hooten, p. 152.

²⁴Ross Campbell, "Close-up View of a Demonic Artist," rev. of Portrait of Pa, by Jane Lindsay, The Bulletin, 6 Oct. 1973, p. 54.

²⁵Cyril Pearl, "Attempting the Puzzle of Finding Pa," rev. of Portrait of Pa, by Jane Lindsay, Nation Review, 26 Oct.-1 Nov. 1973, p. 61.

this work is more on the latter part of the sentence rather than the former. Like the other autobiographers studied so far the character of Norman Lindsay is portrayed only in so far as he affected the daughter's life. There are no details of his childhood, first marriage and family, Jack Lindsay is mentioned as his son only in passing (p. 35). Despite the fact that Norman left Springwood before she finished school (p. 73) her life continues to unfold. She explains she didn't "give him any serious attention" from the time he left until she was twenty (p. 4). This is not to denigrate his role in her life since his praise or blame carried great weight; his influence was pervasive whether he was present or not, and he was frequently the motivation for action or a contributor (sometimes positively, but mostly as an example of what not to do) to the development of her personal values.

Norman Lindsay is both a character and a literary device. As a structural feature aspects of his character and of his life itself are used as organizing factors - his death is used neatly as a framing device, both to begin and to end the story of Jane and her knowledge of life with (or without) father. As a literary device it also means that the time span of the narrative is that of the father. So although Jane was an adult when his death occurred, the focus is on the author as daughter rather than wife or mother, which is evident in the particular vibrancy and vitality of the childhood descriptions.

As a character he is father, genius, god. In one respect he is like the other fathers - he was her inspiration to write and patiently offered encouragement because he assumed that she "was alive for the sole purpose of writing" (p. 117), and that she was destined to be a writer (p. 15). But he differs from the other fathers whose encouragement or teaching was aimed at helping the daughter achieve a general, personal potential, whereas Norman thought excellence could occur only in pursuit of the arts. Not only did Jane have little confidence in her artistic abilities, although she wrote constantly, but her dream was to study medicine, and her main love was animals, horses in particular. The reader is conscious of her awareness of isolation and feelings of being an outsider which is demonstrated in the poignant *r sum * of his lack of empathy for her doubts of personal academic success:

He said it was not important anyway. "You don't learn anything at school," he insisted. He quite overlooked the point that training to be an artist and training to be a doctor required somewhat different approaches. (p. 77)

Obviously this cavalier approach did not answer the needs of the daughter although it seems to have been accepted as part of his nature for she comments much later "even when he was behaving like a demon, no one could deny his charm" (p. 179). Her overwhelming desire to fulfil his values and expectations and hence to receive his approbation takes precedence over accepting her own individuality. Rather than believing that this

love of medicine and horses could be part of an unique personal identity, she suggests that it is genetically determined and that there must have been "cells passed on from my grandfather Robert Charles Lindsay" (p. 71). The emphasis on the familial connection shows the author still searching for identity through "other" and the reader is aware that, albeit coincidentally, it is a conjunction with the paternal side of the family.

It is Pa's opinion of her which remains the emotional impetus. She includes anecdotes to illustrate his approval of even the most trivial event such as her skills at coring kidneys (p. 180), or her ability as a driver (p. 189). This desire for his approval does not cease even with his death as in her last sentence she wonders "for a moment if his spirit had been searching me out. I rather hoped so" (p. 190), while the book commences with her supposition that he would have been proud of her organization of his funeral (p. 3). However there is a sneaking suspicion that these anecdotes are included to make up for being a disappointment which he expressed on numerous occasions in that she did not continue writing with any commitment. In fact, Pearl's waspish review that Norman would not have acclaimed this book because it adds little to our understanding of the man and also because "charity, I would have thought, would have dictated a kindlier tone to a daughter's valediction",²⁶ is probably incorrect. To Norman most likely, the fact

²⁶Pearl, p. 61.

that she was writing again would have mitigated any criticism or tone or content," after all his life was dedicated to the precept that artists seek truth not charity.

But unlike the other fathers he is an acknowledged genius, the one-man painting factory; he is also the god among gods, pagan rather than Christian, living in the Olympian hideaway (p. 184) set in a garden peopled with goddesses, satyrs and demons. The extended metaphor of Norman the god, living in a world peopled by other gods, and having "his gods" supplant the normal concept of fate or deity, all contribute to the idea of him as a being apart. Lindsay's language is similar to that of the other autobiographers, but the concept is markedly different. The previous "father/gods" are loving, caring and personal, while Norman is awesome and separate. Although there are delightful examples of the child in Norman responding to his children and participating in games and stories, his essential lack of interest in them and his need for isolation combined with the author being kept at home until the age of eleven without childhood friends, is portrayed as an indictment of parental behaviour. But again, like the other writers, the fault is laid firmly on Ma's shoulders - Pa had little to do with the household, which was Ma's domain (p. 26), so that

²Norman's delight in other people's life stories and his encouragement of autobiography is well chronicled. See for example Meg Stewart, Autobiography of My Mother (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), p. 196.

turning the two sisters into "lonely shy little girls" (p. 43) is her fault. The image of Pa is kept, in that respect, untarnished.

This lack of normality and resultant difficulty in the search for identity is reflected in the prominence given to other characters, particularly those whose presence was constant and who could be seen as offering guidance and being surrogate parents, fathers in particular. The gardeners and handymen who worked around the house became the extended family. The "strong and simple" bush-wise Strattons with their down-to-earth approach are portrayed as a perfect people (p. 97), the examples of a benevolent nature which inhabits the earth, with none of the ambivalence of the gods portrayed at Olympus. As Hooten has also noted there is an obvious contrast between Norman as the destructive builder and Mick Stratton with his delight in constructing a home from natural stone.²⁰ Visiting cousins were few and far between, and mother's erratic "maternal protectiveness" in curtailing innocent relationships with non-related males is portrayed with still-discernible resentment.

Fra Hillsmith took over the role commenced, but not fulfilled by Norman, introducing Jane to the classics and encouraging her to extend her personal horizons. He provided a purpose and direction to the eighteen year old and she felt he helped solve the confusion of an "emotional teenage" (p. 106). Mother's

²⁰Hooten, p. 157.

disruption of this surrogate parental relationship and the removal of a wonderful hideout replicates the isolation of the younger child and echoes the disruption she felt. The evocative description with its elipsis and sharp contrasts conveys both the elements of memory and some of the personal anguish:

There was something unbelievable and unreal about it: Ma in the flickering lamplight in that ramshackle shed, her best silk alongside dusty feed bins, her expensive shoes on the rough stringybark floor ... and the hectoring, noisy vulgarity ... I felt sick with shame for her. (p. 106)

She suggests she has come to terms with the man who was her father although her work betrays her by revealing him as artistically stimulating but parentally unsatisfying.

The earlier conflict evident in the portrait of Ma does however change and achieves resolution. On the surface the introduction of Rose sets the scene for the desired return to Springwood by Jane and Norman. But the underlying view, including the wry description of Ma as "'The Dominant Feminine'" with secrets and probably a "bad conscience" (p. 8), plus the author's initial description of her as duplicitous, treacherous and intimidatory, sets the tone for her portrait. Lindsay's descriptions of her in the first part illustrate their originally ambivalent relationship:

Ours *must* [my italics] have been a happy growing-up, though it lacked the conventional cosy family circle. Ma was always about, and a great comfort when minor catastrophes happened or when we were sick. Her collection of household slaves saw that all was well cared for

and left Ma free to devote herself to various activities for profit or pleasure. (p.48)

The juxtaposition of the caring mother and the household slaves and the lack of conviction about the happiness of the childhood revealed in the use of *must* reflects an almost subconscious awareness of her lack of emotional security. It is no accident that the first part of the book finishes with complete disillusionment and the break between Jane and her mother which she contrasts immediately with a reiteration of her identification with her father. She wonders whether the rift between mother and daughter is caused by a marked similarity in nature between her father and herself, which she suggests is indicated by her selfish personal absorption and isolation. It is obvious that this negative view and abnegation of the self is just another claim to identity. At this time of disillusionment any form of parental connection and identification was better than none at all.

However the portrait of Ma changes as does the author's relationship with her. The descriptions of her charm, beauty and vitality combined with details of Norman's patently unfair treatment of her in the second part alter the reader's initial impression and show that, as an adult/mother herself with the development of personal values more reflective of conventional, societal mores, Lindsay has come to terms with her adult/mother.

The structure echoes her two lives at Springwood:

as a child until the time mentioned above, and then her return to Springwood while Ma was in America. Although she moved out again many years prior to Norman's death her bond with Olympus was broken only by his consistent obliteration of all that Springwood had signified which was followed closely by his death.

Springwood/Olympus is "home", not just the house but the outbuildings, surrounds and even the animals - in fact anything without the power to hurt that could be loved. This explains the deep feeling evoked in the author at the killing of her horse, since Olympus, horse and life had become inextricably bound up together, "To me, at least, Olympus had been destroyed in the knackery yard" (p. 58). In addition her discovery of the removal of her belongings into another room in the house and the resultant sense of outrage confirms the connection between significant environment and identity. As it has been expressed sociologically "home is the foundation of our identity as individuals and members of a community; an irreplaceable centre of significance."²

Lindsay's story loses immediacy when she and the action move away from Springwood. Her Sydney life is dismissed in a paragraph or two, and Norman's in a sentence. Her time at boarding school receives greater attention but this indicates more the importance of education for Lindsay than its value as place.

²P.R. Hay, "Place and Literature," Island Magazine, 34/35, (1988), p. 31.

Again there is a structural balance which, I would argue, the author uses to emphasize the importance of various aspects of her life. Olympus is destroyed twice in this book. The first occasion almost at the end of Part 1, although chronologically set in Part 2, describes her sorrow at the destruction of the sheds (for Jane the happier part of 'home' than the house) in perhaps the most evocative and lyrical paragraph of the book, where the short sentence structure reflects the disconnectedness of nostalgic thoughts and all with their roots in 'place', rather than 'action' which the suppressed principal verbs might have indicated:

Musty lucerne chaff never swept from under the bins. Charlie smoking his pipe after lunch. Stockholm tar and linseed oil, gall cure and saddle soap. Horses warm with sweat. Warm milk splashing in the bucket. Horses rugged against cold winter wind. Ice on the water trough. A dead magpie floating in the tank. The sweet smell of wet lucerne and warm cow's breath. (p. 94)

One can see Lindsay's endorsement of Spence's view that, of all sensory stimuli, the senses of smell and hearing arouse the strongest power of recollections.³⁰ At the end of Part 2 Norman's changes and alterations are described in detail, again with the evocation of long-gone social warmth and nostalgic memories which finally remove all childhood from the house and thus destroys all that was "home".

The author suggests that Ma identified with Springwood more than any of the family (p. 183), although its role and importance fluctuated and changed

³⁰Spence, Another October Child, p. 165.

depending on the need of the person. For Jane the emphasis on place is diminished partly by Norman's destructiveness and "various onslaughts from his Gods. Bushfires ..." (p. 87), but mostly, I suggest, through an increase in the number of significant "others" in her life. The reduction of the role of Springwood as recorded in the life of the author is in direct apposition to the growth of her own individuality, and indeed makes a striking contrast with Norman's elevation of the place into his monument of immortality.

Although still seeking to define herself by "other" there is no longer only one of great importance. The final bushfire which caused her to move from Springwood shows her worrying first about her baby and, once the inevitable Strattons had secured a fire break, then her husband. Norman's view of Olympus becoming his monument to immortality is criticized by Jane as she favourably compares other men's claims to immortality through descendants. Jane's sense of self now is more in line with society's view that the production of children creates immortality. It is no accident that it is she who organizes the final disastrous family get-together because it seemed the right thing to do. Olympus, the first universe, is no longer paramount for the adult author.

The overt sense of place in this work is given further credibility by the subordination of time. Although events are used as structural devices to frame

the story of a life, time then becomes reasonably flexible, with the author moving in and out of the past at whim, much as does Spence. The major difference is that the past is not a continuum with the present - indeed there is no present, only a past bounded by Springwood. Just as other places had no real relevance, so too other times. Although in one respect time and place are inextricably bound up with Pa it is obvious that this is not his biography. The childhood of a self who is defined fully by "other" and the roles and relationships intertwined within that unit of society - family, show that this book could quite truthfully be called "Portrait of Me".

IV

THE BOOK OF THE ADULT - the metaphor of gender

In the books already discussed, although there was much ambivalence in the portraits of the characters, both the author/subject/narrator herself and those surrounding her, there is no intimation that the span of childhood caused confusion, although there is little agreement over just when that era ends. In Taylor one might discover a facile merging of the start of WW2 with the end of her childhood (which makes her about thirteen); or for Corbett the move to the city and the accompanying disillusionment when she was ten years old destroyed the trust and innocence which signified childhood. Adam-Smith was around seventeen when she joined the adult working world and finally realized that love was not genetic, while Eakin is even older when she leaves home and goes to England. For Spence it is when she marries, while it is only through the death of Pa and Olympus that Lindsay is able to put childhood behind her. In all of these life stories it is apparent that childhood is not a quantitative number of years or even a specific stage of development but is rather the time when each author accepts her separate identity;

when the familial influences on the self are no longer randomly integrated or unquestioned. It is this distance which enables each author to recreate her version of the past as story.

It has been claimed that twentieth-century authors often use a myth of themselves "strongly associated with the special value of adolescence."¹ As Spacks suggests, it is the period in a modern life when the uniqueness or personal identity becomes manifest. Although she separates the experience of the eighteenth-century male and female autobiographer, it is disconcerting to find that her conclusions become general when discussing the philosophical ideals and values of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers. One must agree that by the mid-twentieth century there is a special concentration on the role of the teenager in our society, but it is equally apparent that gender and date of birth affect the way in which the galloping social and cultural changes are exhibited in autobiography. Certainly later female autobiographers, such as those born in the 1940s, appear to subscribe more readily to the personal concept of adolescence and are less inclined to gloss over or objectify the sexual and emotional development of these years. Their writing delineates the momentous changes of puberty as part of the experience of a life,

¹Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Stages of the Self: Notes on Autobiography and the Life Cycle," in The American Autobiography, ed. Albert E. Stone (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 54.

as can be seen in Josie Arnold's (b. 1941) Mother Superior, Woman Interior.² Arnold explicitly (and with humour) details the sexual education she received by living next door to a house described as being "like the training school for a brothel."³ She describes her own stages of sexual development through homosexuality to heterosexuality, extolling and celebrating each as a contribution to her total self in providing proof of her sensuality and ability to love.

Some of the authors in this study reveal their personal uncertainties or their feelings of insecurity. Despite the importance of the domestic role and the inculcation of the female image by the family already examined, only Gray, Inglis and Hewett (to be explored later) comment in any detail on the advent of puberty and menstruation, although Knörr is able to suggest her own lack of sexual experimentation through a discussion of the social mores of sexual behaviour. Although childhoods can extend to, and include the adult worker/thinker, I suggest that there is no real adolescence for the 1920s woman. It is as though the child stays a child until she becomes the adult. Inglis comments that "teenagers did not exist and teenage fashion had not been invented."⁴ This further supports the concept of female development as "process". The division of life into the "stages" of childhood and

²Josie Arnold, Mother Superior, Woman Interior (Blackburn: Dove, 1985).

³Arnold, p. 17.

⁴Inglis, Amirah, p. 119.

adolescence suggests set, objective, recognizable boundaries, while the continuity of life evidenced in these works with their almost accidental, superimposed, subjective endings argues process.

If in female Childhoods the maternal role is prefigured, in these autobiographies of the adult children become virtually a metaphor for female life. Husbands, lovers and boyfriends are undeniably important: when Hepworth falls in love with another woman and informs Gray of his passion by letter she states:

I remember that I felt utterly detached from life, without identity, without any kind of anchor to hold me to the world. (Exit Left, p. 198)

The trauma and hurt appear overwhelming and one might agree that her lover creates the meaning of her life but the paragraph continues:

How long since I had read the letter - minutes or hours? Mechanically I looked at my watch. God, it was past time for me to pick up Steve from kindergarten, and although he enjoyed it, he was always anxious if I was late. I dabbed at my tear-blotched face and went to get Steve. (p. 198)

Identity as lover she may have lost, but as mother these personal hurts and pains are subordinate to the needs of her child. If "others" have been detailed for the effect they have on the developing self, children become integral to the life of the adult female self. For Gray the dissolution of her marriage ended up with the one certainty that "wherever I went, I went with

Stephen [her son]" (p. 153); while Hewett's desolation over leaving her son Clancy for life with her lover is a haunting threnody which culminates in her despair at his death:

Twenty years later, my sister asks me have I ever regretted that choice. 'I'd never leave a child for any man again,' I tell her. (Wild Card, p. 144)

Children bring with them not only delight but formidable demands which undermine adult certainties and female goals particularly. When referring to the differences in outlook between the children and parents, Knörr's view of herself as "only a custodian" is used to suggest a less personal vulnerability (p. 157). Yet her recognition of children's rights "to state our accountability to them" shows the role of parent still precluding personal attainment (p. 156), as she comments baldly and without rancour, "During those years when Hans and the gallery were both very productive and the children were seeking their vocations, my writing went into recession" (p. 163). All the same, Knörr particularly is aware that not only do adults teach children and have dominion over them, but there are important lessons for parents to learn from children.

The minimal role of spouse and children in male autobiographies has been noted.⁵ The male writer depicts the attainment of success and, as will be seen in the discussion that follows on Riding the Elephant,

⁵Jelinek, Women's Autobiography, p. 11.

it is completely in keeping with Keesing's work that her husband and children and her relationships with them are, at best, incidental to the authorial voice.

It is important to establish the extent to which the metaphors of the female life are used to organize and influence both structure and technique in the literary recreation of this life and to colour the world and society in which it is lived. Each of these writers offers a duplicity of life metaphors which contributes to the pattern of multifocus. The titles suggest the use of the "journey" metaphor, obviously as in Hilde Knörr's Journey with a Stranger, and less so, but still formulated in terms of progression and action, as in Oriel Gray's Exit Left and Nancy Keesing's Riding the Elephant.⁴ It has been argued that the use of journey metaphor by women autobiographers has two implications - "journey as action and movement, implying freedom and the will to choose, and journey as direction, implying a goal beyond the self."⁵ Each of these writers physically journeyed from her domestic locale: Keesing to Perth, Knörr to other Australian states and Bavaria, and Gray to New Zealand as well as the countryside of New South Wales and Canberra. None went of her own volition. That the journeys were as a

⁴Hilde Knörr, Journey with a Stranger: The Love Story of an Artist and a Writer (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1986). Oriel Gray, Exit Left: Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985). Nancy Keesing, Riding the Elephant (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

⁵Mary Grimley Mason & Carol Hurd Green, ed., Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), p. vii.

result of life choices made by their partners, substantiates the view that for these Australian women "Life" was imposed rather than chosen. For them the "free choice" was made before the journey with social custom dictating most options:

Sometimes I raged audibly against the sense of responsibility that kept me running from one day to the next, yet I knew I had chosen each step of the way. I fed my soul continually on that drug we all carry within ourselves - an opiate with a self-righteous effect that keeps us from venturing into the uncertain realms of creativity by making us feel that the service of the mundane and visible is essential. (p. 164)

Despite her use of the universal "all" in this paragraph Knörr's "us" seems to refer to, not humanity in general, but females only. The context of this paragraph contrasts the domesticity, imposed and chosen, of the writer with the artistic single-mindedness of her husband. On one hand she sees herself as making the choices and yet equally she recognizes that the social values and customs for the female are a drug; a substance foreign to the self which alters or diverts the mind and values, so that when she demands personal time she terms it a "revolution" and her rejection of the mundane becomes an "amputation". Counterposed to this however is her description of Hans's reaction - his sympathy "tinged with the salt of pity and male condescension" (p. 164), and his actions which were to ignore visitors by returning to work and leaving the wife to look after them. Indeed Knörr wonders after the birth of her first child where "Life"

was taking her (p. 76), while even Keesing writes, "That elephant of mine obstinately takes its own directions but it has given me some marvellous rides and I'm not complaining" (p. 222).

In fact it could be argued that the autobiographies of Gray and Knörr particularly are about achieving the right to make personal choices and that the journey beyond the self begins with the conclusion of the imposed choices, when they become able to participate in life as an individual although they do not cease to be wife, mother, lover. Further, these works suggest that the journey metaphor, while superficially conforming to the patriarchal view of life as a journey, does not adequately provide the language nor the vehicle to portray a female life. Hence each author simultaneously intertwines another more personally appropriate life metaphor: the theatre becomes Gray's world and language; Knörr incorporates the search for a public voice; and to a lesser extent Keesing's life images a circus, for it is in these areas that they feel able to make decisions and take control. Moreover, as evident in Keesing's work, it appears that the greater the access to middle-class values and the patriarchal society the more strongly one is able to control one's life.

Critics accept that male autobiographers generally portray the successful life; the story of events, factors and motivations which culminate in the exposition of the singular personality the writer has

become. Jerome Hamilton Buckley in his analysis examining the truth of the portrayal of self in autobiography (using the generic 'he' which in turn becomes the specific) states that most great autobiographers were famous in their time.⁸ Hence to construct a life delineating the reverse might be seen as failure according to the standards of the patriarchal society, but portraying a life which leads to accepting a final disenchanted identity merely serves to emphasize the divergence noted in the style of female writers. Romance and Socialism (both with capital letters) are the core of Oriel Gray's existence, and her story details not the fulfilment thereof, but their demise in her life. Perhaps one might suggest that a career in theatre could lead to blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, but in Exit Left the boundaries do not exist. "Romance" in all its meanings is demonstrated actively in Gray's life. As love it influences many if not all the decisions she makes, and as fantasy it is the organizing factor in the life and the story of the life.

Gray has divided her re-creation of a life in four parts (or as designated, Acts) each with an epigraph and she commences the story with the plot of a play she attended at the age of seventeen. This strategy immediately frames, distances and references

⁸Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), p. 41.

reality, intertwining the values and roles of theatre, fantasy, socialism and life. This theatrical metaphor, evidenced in content and structure, gives greater significance to the quotations used as epigraphs and chapter headings. The first epigraph is from Alice Through the Looking Glass and the chapter heading is a quotation from Twelfth Night. It is no accident that both of these are masterpieces in fantasy - theatrical and literary. Just as Alice, a special favourite from childhood, provided "a family language, a social comment [and] even political satire" when Gray was growing up (p. 7), so its far-reaching ramifications now provide a structure and rationale for her to write a life. The epigraph:

'The horror of that moment' the King went on,
'I shall *never* forget.' 'You will though,' said
the Queen. 'if you don't make a memorandum of
it.' (p. 1)

has a number of implications. It shows her awareness of the way time alters truth, the role of memory, and an inherent justification for the written word to become a permanent record. To add to the notion of framing, the quotation heading the second chapter (also from Alice):

'It's a poor sort of memory that only works
backward,' the Queen remarked. (p. 7)

illustrates another view of memory and further entrenches the integral role of this work in her life and its story. The final sentence of the book duplicates the first sentence of the second chapter and is a practical illustration of the Queen's remark.

After all Gray starts with an event in 1937, then returns to 1920 and finally ends in 1949 effectively, although she does refer to other events which occurred later, such as the 1955 split of the Labor movement. This frame upon frame allows for time to be manipulated by memory. It also figuratively and structurally creates the image of a looking glass. This metaphorical looking glass allows her to acknowledge the contribution which her father's dramatized reading of Alice made to her view of Theatre and Audience. It provides a framework to see herself "through four year old eyes" (p. 8). In addition her memories of childhood come back as dreams reinforcing Carroll's view of "Childhood's dreams ... twined in Memory's mystic band" (p.23).

The first chapter heading taken from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night:

Enter Viola:
'What country friends, is this?'
'This is Illyria, lady' (p. 3)

supports the view that the "titles read like clues from a cryptic crossword." The connections are many - here is the playwright to emulate; just as this heroine in disguise traverses a mythical land, so Gray enters the mythical land of the New Theatre, disguising her tendency for romance with an overlay of socialism. This comedy (a genre which she likes and can "write ...

'Elizabeth Butel, "Sharing the Mistakes and the Betrayals of the Past," rev. of Exit Left: Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman, by Oriel Gray, National Times, 15-21 Feb. 1985, p. 32.

reasonably well," p. 105) also includes the story of duping the unfortunate Malvolio which echoes her final disenchantment with the Communist Party.

The theatrical metaphor has led other critics to suggest a lack of character analysis, or to comment on the dramatic entries and exits of some characters and even the "rough hewn and haphazard prose" although conceding somewhat grudgingly that this could reflect an oral quality due to her experience as a playwright.¹⁰ Certainly there are "occasional patches of banal writing and flashes of sentimentality,"¹¹ but there are equally patches of brilliant description where the image is conveyed with succinct and razor-like accuracy. There could be no more complete description of a "spiv" than "Jack was shiny - his hair, shoes, wristwatch, the buttons on his close-cut pin-striped suits shone with an unholy gleam" (p. 54), or the effect of the local publicans taking how to vote cards from the Communist Party table: "they swept in to vote through a colonnade of dropped jaws" (p. 170), or the caustically graphic sentence which encapsulates the Japanese invasion of South-east Asia: "The cartoon men with cardboard teeth and servile manners rode their bicycles with nightmare speed across Malaya." (p. 93)

The obvious structural division of the book into

¹⁰Gary Catalano, "Two Women Rebels," rev. of Exit Left: Memoirs of A Scarlet Woman, by Oriel Gray, Overland, 99 (1985), 74-5.

¹¹Shirley Walker, "M memoir of a Scarlet Woman," rev. of Exit Left: Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman, by Oriel Gray, Australian Book Review, 71 (1985), 34-35.

four Acts has given rise to Colmer's initial analysis which suggests that it "describes the stages by which she broke free from father, lovers and comrades to live as a free spirit."¹² Not only is it questionable that Gray ends up as a free spirit with its implications of joyous innocence and exuberant unconventionality, but the comment ignores the web of connections which she makes between her domestic and the social and political world. It ignores, too, her exploration and exposition of moral and political questions. Act 1 certainly shows the physical demise of her father, although his spirit and influence are pervasive as Gray reiterates his beliefs and values throughout the book:

My nearest thing to a moral guide had been 'What would Dadda think about this?' and I knew I had failed often enough by that standard. (p. 191)

But this part also covers her childhood and marriage; she attempts to explain and expiate her guilt over her neglect of her socialist father and she provides an extensive and personal view of the political and social role of the New Theatre and the Communist Party in Sydney around the time of the Second World War. She includes the news of Russia's pact with Germany and her subsequent bewilderment which is an early

¹²John & Dorothy Colmer, ed., The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987), p. 200. In a later analysis Professor Colmer revises his assessment, calling the structure a "shapely form" which describes the "four main sections of her narrative". However he still maintains the view that she lives as a free spirit, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, (pp. 140-3).

intimation of her problems in blindly accepting Soviet doctrine. The news of Germany's invasion of Poland is set in the scene of spring flowers and fashions; and the pay-night splurge of "window shopping, paying our lay-bys, having dinner at Cahill's" (p. 48). It ends with an almost classic example of style in female autobiography - a recognition of the general (the macrocosm) signified by the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany, juxtaposed with the personal (the microcosm) which describes Hepworth (the political correspondent and her future lover) going to war.

Act II consolidates her role as the female recorder of the wider Sydney scene, but without losing the focus on self. Rather than "breaking from" her ties or shedding any outside influence, Gray further embeds the theatrical metaphor by following the practice of the playwright who elaborates on and affirms the first act before the dramatic revelation of the third act and the resolution of the fourth. Again the epigraph validates this view:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ... it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness ... the spring of hope - the winter of despair ... (p. 75)

since it reflects a view of the world looking at the vicissitudes of life and comments on the extremes of a world at war - albeit from Dickens, it is a Churchillian exhortation at its best. This is both life as Theatre and the stuff of social history. She portrays the general and personal euphoria at society

accepting the Communist Party; she is incensed by personal knowledge of the racism and injustice that surrounds her. Gray's account of the arrival of the Americans in Sydney during the Second World War demonstrates the multifocal style she adopts. She reports an essentially, if not literally, true story of their effect on Australians still at home (p. 82); she repeats a well-worn joke and includes vignettes of those she met, particularly the nicer ones who came to the New Theatre because they "were interested in theatre, or they were left wing, usually both" (p. 84). The domestic again intrudes with hints (unfortunately in vain) on how to get the same knife-sharp creases in the coarser Australian khaki. The political, feminine and personal are constantly juxtaposed: Churchill's speech welcoming Russia as an ally is combined with the advent of the boiler suit as fashion and the sentimentally received news that a cat was with him during the Blitz.

Act III certainly shows her breaking from husband to live with her sister's husband, but the event of greater significance is breaking the ties with her sister/surrogate mother (a view ignored by Colmer) so that the overwhelming feeling is not one of joy, but again, as reflected in the quotation chosen for the epigraph, almost a longing for life as it was, and regret at the change. After all her relationship with Grayce was described earlier in vital terms: "together we were a unit, each other's challenge, each other's

strength" (p. 25), and she questions whether it would have happened if she and John Gray had been happy. Of course it can be argued that she is putting on her "best face", trading on her relationship with the reader, demanding unwarranted sympathy, but the conviction and sincerity with which she has recorded other aspects of her life in the verifiable records of trivia and custom lend a patina of personal truth to her total story.

The tendency for critics to judge according to the existing patriarchal values finds expression in such comments as, Oriel Gray is "the kind of person in whom the natural egotism of youth remains unchastened by a lifetime of experience."¹³ This type of response ignores the different styles of writing constantly being used, and the manner in which these women attempt to tell their personal truths. Of course it is possible that Grayce leaving school early *might* have "entailed some sacrifice" on her behalf, and that it could perhaps be said that the theatre replaced Gray's family as the "bulwark of her life,"¹⁴ but that she "forgets to inform Grayce" of their father's death only highlights a blatant misreading. Gray makes every effort to explain her reactions and reasons for all her actions but frequently uses understatement or a tragi-comic approach which veils, but doesn't hide, what she calls "our self-reproaches" (p. 32). She deliberately puts

¹³Catalano, p. 74.

¹⁴Catalano, p. 74.

off telling Grayce of their father's death, not from forgetfulness but to avoid having to face the truth; the sisters joined New Theatre together: so for "family" a more precise reading should be "father", and finally Gray reports that it was Grayce's own decision to leave school early (p. 12). This style is used again when Gray talks of the commencement of her relationship with her brother-in-law and as a result the severing of her closeness with Grayce, "It sorted itself out in a painful, guilty, angry, embarrassed sort of way" (p.157). The list of adjectives suggests that honesty and memory have their own inbuilt hesitancy; that "the horror of the situation" frequently defies the language available to memory.

Act IV does not show the joy of living as a "free spirit" but in her final rejection of 'the party' she demonstrates her acceptance of the reality of life "the very last step into the loneliness of being 'grown up'. It was the last leaving home" (p. 226). Certainly she has cast off all she started with, she has indeed "exited left" - but it is obvious that the fear of not belonging, of being out in the cold which caused her on a number of occasions to quell her doubts and questions of the party, have indeed been realized. She has become a unique and self-sufficient identity but at considerable cost. Her commitment to the party line had been dictated, not through intellect, as her ongoing assessment of the international and domestic situation is meant to imply, but through the fear of "not

belonging". As early as 1940 while questioning the Stalinist approach she suddenly confronted a terrifying reality:

I had had a frightening glimpse of the No-Man's land lying out there beyond the shelter of unquestioning party convictions. My marriage, friendships, theatre, enjoyment of living, even my sister were all contained under that shelter, and Baby it could be cold outside! (p. 62)

Research into the role of Communists in the Coal Strike of 1949 now suggests that for once they "may actually have performed something like the mischievous role so often ascribed to them,"¹³ and Gray who had questioned many previous party stances found this to be the ultimate problem.

Without undermining the impact of this decision on her life one could suggest that the growth of anti-communist feeling in the country as a whole would have tempered the feeling of not belonging - after all, it was the CPA which no longer "belonged". But overall it was the death of dreams as can be seen in the epigraph she selected which is from a master of sceptical tragedy, Euripides. He bleakly shows the helplessness of mankind and the dissolution of hopes, suggesting a determinist view of destiny and the lack of personal control over one's own life.

Gray's greatest need is to "belong" - not like Adam-Smith to family, but to society generally. The

¹³Tom Sheridan, "The Trade Unions and Postwar Reconstruction," in Better Dead than Red: Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1959, Vol. 2, ed. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 3.

puns of sexual freedom and political persuasion evident in the word "scarlet" in the sub-title, Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman have been noted,¹⁶ but equally it could suggest the mental and emotional blood-letting she has suffered in becoming her own woman; after all "scarlet women" have always been ostracised by conventional society. In like manner, the combination of fantasy, theatre and film have their roots in this need. Films suggest methods of how to belong; they offer a false pattern for life, which then takes her most of that life to overcome. Only in hindsight is she aware of the irony of going into marriage with ideas "nurtured by Cecil B. de Mille" (p. 55), or childbirth being undertaken with the guidance of Hollywood (p. 142). Even during the war, films, albeit documentaries, still provided her view of reality.

In Journey With a Stranger Knörr too uses structure to reinforce a life metaphor, and one which equally reflects the title. She divides the story of her life's journey into three sections - the separate childhoods of herself and Hans; their early married life; and the destination, symbolized by the purchase of land and building a house. But her love of music enables her to weave the more important metaphor of finding a voice as a counterpoint throughout the entire story. Her search for a voice brooks no arbitrary divisions, since it is needed to express identity. She

¹⁶Walker, p. 35; Colmer, Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, p. 140.

explains her awareness of the importance of words early in the story:

Father said once that tongues were terrible things. He said if she wanted to say something bad it was better to write it down on her slate and then rub it out, because you couldn't rub things out after your tongue had said them.

But it was very hard to get down what you wanted to say - there were so many words to choose from. Her father used very complicated words sometimes, which he would always explain if you asked, but her mother protested he was confusing the child. Her father said he had to use the best words, and went on explaining.

She couldn't spell them all, nor could she always find the word she wanted but she soon knew that it didn't matter ... and [words] were very, very important. (p.7)

In the writing of the life the importance of this philosophy is reflected in her style. The first two segments which introduce the boy and the girl in their separate family situations are written in the third person, thus distancing both childhoods and suggesting the limitations of personal knowledge and memory. In these paragraphs the vacillation between third- and second-person pronouns, the lack of clarity over who exactly is "you" serves to engage the reader and implies shared knowledge of the past being revealed.

With the passing of time and the progression of each child to adulthood, the girl in the story becomes "I" and equally the story of the boy changes from the objective third person to reported speech, where the author is merely the recorder, not the narrator. The first evocative descriptions of smelling warm milk,

touching cows and comparing the memory of her father's kisses to thistles which mirror the tactile perceptions of the child, give way to her awareness that words can also be used to portray economic privation: "new expressions like 'bankrupt' and 'gone broke' entered our lives" (p. 21), or to reveal the "darker things inside people" when she listens to her parents hurt and be hurtful (p. 23).

It is not surprising therefore that she postponed finding her "voice" in words by initially discovering that music, and the violin in particular, with its "variety of tone and nuance" was a sufficient means of communication (p. 26). It was the violin and music that enabled her to avoid the reality inherent in words, as she knew that outside music lay "the pain of the world, as well as disorientation and loneliness" (p. 44). It is not until the end of her story and the public recognition of her words that she realizes that the word or the voice she sought was experience:

All my life I wanted the word that would make me other than I am. Only much later did the lives of others become bare enough for me to realise that my bond with the many was far greater than any longed-for tie with the few - my own experience as it happened to me was as valuable as that which came to anybody else. (p. 157)

Like Spence and Adam-Smith, Knörr acknowledges that the basis for her fiction is her life. Her novel, Shoemaker's Children is autobiographical¹⁷ - her experiences are "the base material" for her words (p.

¹⁷Hilde Knörr, Shoemaker's Children (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1988).

26), and in turn her words, through the act of writing, become her experiences. However while distancing the autobiographical truth in this self-designated novel through naming the girl narrator, 'Jan Douglas', she simultaneously reinforces it through the character of 'Aunt' who appears synonymous with Aunt portrayed in Journey with a Stranger. The interaction of autobiography and fiction lends credibility to the psychological truths portrayed in this novel, and its public patriarchal success enables Knörr, like Spence, to vindicate private truths.

Although Gray has written a number of plays, she does not have an equally public voice and so uses Lawler's play The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll as a yardstick for assessing the extent to which plays demonstrated Australian content and successful drama. She states that she had become a playwright in "the hard winter of the forties and fifties, before 'The Doll'" (p. 104), and that the New Theatre had presented "definitive Australian figures on the stage" (p. 111), long before the acclamation and financial success of The Doll which became the epitome of Australiana in drama. She cannot explicitly acknowledge the joint first prize her play The Torrents shared with Lawler in the Playwright Advisory Board Competition of 1956 since it is out of the time span allocated to her autobiography, but this explains why it becomes a criterion by which she measures theatrical worth. That "she enjoyed no share of the fame" is evidenced by the

fact that her play was not published until 1988 and helps elucidate her defensive position and somewhat bitter outlook concerning the public recognition of her contribution to Australian drama.¹⁸

It is in these subsidiary metaphors that the reader can discover each author wrestling with the development of a personal identity and realize that the metaphor of life's journey is merely an aphorism, or, to continue the domestic imagery, an appliqué of a traditional image.

That readers bring to a text many different ideas, values and experiences is well established and that they extrapolate information which is consistent with these pre-formed concepts means that lack of clarity or confusion of authorial intention (which is not the same as the multifocus evident in the female writings so far discussed) may well lead to misreading.¹⁹ I believe this is what happens in Nancy Keesing's Riding the Elephant. Keesing sets up in the title a personal symbolism which she then explains in the first pages. She commences, "I was four years old and it happened like this:" and she continues, in perhaps the most imaginatively visual prose in her story, to portray her first meeting with an elephant and the role this event

¹⁸Dale Spender, ed., The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women's Writing (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), p. 791.

¹⁹See for example Janet Varner Gunn, Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), who posits a double reading activity in the autobiographical situation; the author who "reads" the life of the self and the reader of the finished text (p. 8).

had in her total life:

One morning I was escorted (by father? by whom?) to the elephant's hold where monstrous shapes loomed in brown gloom and pachyderm legs rose like vast but flabby tree trunks, supporting flanks like the shapes of old coats that slowly move in a cupboard when an opened door admits a draught. High above me their ear-flaps, and their great docile heads from which trunks uprose to the pinholes of light far away, down which peered the eyes of ordinary children holding bread and apples in ordinary sunlight.

And one trunk snaked down. 'Hold your apple out. See she's putting her trunk down to your hand. Now place the apple in her trunk and see how she gets it to her mouth.'

The description which follows of the animal and the surroundings, the details of the smells and sights take on all the qualities noted in the *Childhoods*. Her recall of the multiple sensory perceptions demonstrates the power of language, the eye of the child and the strength of childhood memories. Having been lifted onto the elephant she experiences an almost spiritual moment:

The face of a child I knew in another life appeared close by through one of the holes in the deck. I returned its stare seriously. This was no moment for poking grimaces. For I am supreme. I am the lord, I am the lord, I am the lord of everything.

The trainer utters another call. His hands guide me back to the trunk. Head upright I am enclosed; lowered; reduced ...

Against injustice, failure, sheer laziness. For ever after, for evermore, I say to myself: '*Once I rode an elephant. When I rode the elephant ...*' (p. 3)

I have quoted this extensively as it demonstrates not

only the possible misreadings, but also the ultimate in her descriptive prose style (as opposed to the poems she includes) and evidence of the lack of clarity in authorial intention. On the one hand it would seem as S. E. Lee points out that:

"Riding elephant", then is about adventuring, taking risks in life and art. It is also about the artist's commitment to aspire to the highest levels.²⁰

and it could be argued with some conviction that this was the reading intended by the author. Certainly she demonstrates an artist's commitment, but closer examination suggests equally valid alternatives.

The first and most obvious alternative is the metaphor of the circus with the author in the role of ringmaster. Using an unacknowledged quotation from Hugh McCrae,²¹ Keesing describes herself in the above passage as "lord" of all and in the following chapter entitled "Three Ring Circus" she details her ancestors and family. The final chapter - "The Ring Completed" - when she again refers in detail to her parents' final years, continues the metaphor. In the course of her story it becomes obvious that the ability to manipulate reflects class, and in turn militates against the role of gender, so that Keesing's obviously upper-middle class background with its private schooling and choice

²⁰S. E. Lee, "A Kind of Memoir," rev. of Riding the Elephant, by Nancy Keesing, Southerly, 48 (1988), p. 336.

²¹These are the last three lines of the poem "I Blow My Pipes," by Hugh McCrae in The Penguin Book of Australian Verse, ed. Harry Heseltine (Ringwood: Penguin, 1972), p. 125.

of university endows her with distinctive skills in dealing with the patriarchal society and achieving greater, if unrepresentative, access to power.

It is interesting to note that Keesing, like Knörr and Gray, uses her poems, her public voice, to validate and authenticate personal truths, by including those which depict her family and childhood nurses, or even her falling out with Patrick White. Despite her ability to use and manipulate the social order she recognizes that this voice gives added weight to her private world and personal views. But here the similarity with the aforementioned writers ends. As ringmaster, "the lord of everything", it is her world and it is her story which enables her to include or reject at will. With the flick of a whip (or slash of a pen) she uses this arena to have the last word on the argument with Patrick White (pp. 135-8); to give her version of the incident detailed by Frank Moorhouse (p. 70); or even to correct and set straight events told in Kylie Tennant's autobiography (p. 142). She is also able to justify the events which led to her chairmanship of the Literature Board and subsequent "contretemps" with the previous chairman, Geoffrey Blainey (p. 199).

Keesing's "shyness and lack of confidence," deplored by Miles Franklin (p. 73), is contradicted in content and style. As a child her self-confidence was called "being impertinent" or "unkind" (p. 24), but as an adult it becomes pompous and pedantic. Her acceptance of patriarchal values and not so much her

desire for power, but her achievement of it, is reflected in this autobiography which, more than any of the others, exhibits many of the male traits of autobiography.

The sense of personal superiority gained while on the elephant permeates much of this story; perhaps this was not the intention of the author but its presence is undeniable. There is very little sense of the development of an identity; of trying ideas or beliefs. She found out not to "dob" early in life (p. 21) (a discovery not maintained in the writing of this book) and she includes some anecdotes which reflect personal learning experiences, such as the touching account becoming aware of the power of language to hurt, which she sees as a loss of innocence (p. 26), but there is little other evidence of how her identity developed. Keesing is prepared to evaluate and expound her views on a wide range of topics, from the role of women to the value of private schooling, all with equal self-assurance so that her story, which she suggests is not quite a memoir nor quite an autobiography, becomes not quite an apology as well.²²

But just as she manipulates the characters within her story, so too she manipulates the reader. In most cases she is very open about her dislike of certain

²²I am using the term "apology" as defined by Francis R. Hart in "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography," New Literary History, 1 (1970), 485-511. He suggests that an apology is concerned with the ethical, that it is a "personal history that seeks to demonstrate or realize the integrity of the self" (p. 491).

people whom she names and she relates why they have incurred her wrath, such as with Guy Howarth (p. 173). Her account of his offences against her details her inability to initiate retaliatory action at the time and shows her now exacting vengeance. In a small number of anecdotes she does not name the antagonist. Instead she inveigles the reader into becoming detective by giving blatantly obvious clues as to the identity under discussion. She tells of "Miss Q" who, on receipt of a critical review would then "raise Cain" pestering all and sundry (p. 107). Under the guise of discussing her values concerning the ethical question of pseudonymous reviews, Keesing points out that one of Miss Q's novels won her her third Miles Franklin Award. It is no great feat to establish that Miss Q is Thea Astley, particularly as Queensland is strongly represented in all her works and there is only one female who has received three Miles Franklin Awards.

It is not surprising, bearing in mind Keesing's social position, that her life story is most readily compared, not with Gray and Knörr, but with Donald Horne's The Education of Young Donald.²³ Born in the same decade, he too has received public acclaim for his role in the practice of the humanities, and just as Keesing finds it difficult to explain what she is writing, so he rejects the term "autobiography" as suggesting inflated self-importance and favours

²³Donald Horne, The Education of Young Donald (Ringwood: Penguin, 1967).

"sociography" since the central character "is a social animal, his adolescent revolt shaped and coloured by social circumstance."²⁴ Riding the Elephant reflects the values of a writer who "began to realise how enjoyable it is to read novels about one's own city and its people" (p. 54). Keesing is the recorder, the sociographer, the cultural historian who celebrates having lived in Sydney both as it was and as it is now. She writes about the famous people she has met and, by using essays written by other people such as Maxine Poynton-Baker, she is able to include those she hasn't. Keesing justifies the inclusion of Poynton-Baker's account of the social milieu of Sydney Tomholt the doyen of Sydney's creative life, "because he, his circle of friends and The Room she describes are a part of Sydney life that should be recorded" (p. 123). She includes works by other poets, such as G.H. "Ironbark" Gibson which she suggests is an example of true Australian Arcadia (p. 212), and even a summary of an autobiography by her father (pp. 217-20).

Some of the characters she depicts are masterpieces in description like that of Stella Davis, but she also reports hearsay stories about others such as Bill Fitzhenry's visit to Frensham (p. 91). These multifarious voices and points of view whilst maybe reflecting an innate self-assurance do not contribute greatly to autobiography. Although other autobiographers use different forms of self-writing

²⁴Horne, Foreword, n.p.

such as diaries and poems, these can be seen as still originating from the self, albeit a past self.

The multifocus which I suggest is evident in the other works so far studied, presents a world which includes many other details, aspects or vantage points but the self is always there, growing, changing, reacting. The self Keesing portrays is not. In trying to paint too wide a canvas she actually loses sight of the self. That one critic can suggest that the book would obviously be compulsory reading for the literati "to see if he or she makes the index" is further evidence of the drift in focus away from the portrait of self.²⁵ She briefly relates the effect of her Jewishness on her schooldays and other people, she glosses over personal puberty, meeting and marrying Mark, and one could be forgiven for not even realizing she had a sister.

It is obvious that there is a direct correlation between the personal metaphor chosen to represent, explore and portray a life, and the extent to which one is able to manipulate and control the surrounding world. It is the story of gaining this ability which gives piquancy to women's autobiographies. Gray's and Knörr's journeys build on the past, they are accounts of cumulative movement resulting in the development of a self. Gray's exit from the party stage is paralleled by her rejection of a fantasy world; Knörr's journey,

²⁵Mollie Missen, "A Bumpy Ride on Elephant," rev. of Riding the Elephant, by Nancy Keesing, The Age, 12-13 Mar. 1988, p. 12.

while shared with the stranger, is also an individual search for language and culminates in her ability to enter Hans's European world. She has the assurance to accept her own history and his; she can participate in the experiences of others, husband, children and friends and make them her own. But Keesing's metaphors, while purporting to be movement, are in fact stationary. This reflects the lack of development of self as a character. The ringmaster stands still while the action surrounds; her "ride" on the elephant chained in the hold of a ship was a change in stature, not progression, since it went nowhere.

V

ETHNIC WOMEN - the double invisibility

To be Australian is the one certainty evident in all the previous works. The authors revealed a wide range of doubts in their analysis of personal identity but not one even questioned her national identity. However in the writings of ethnic women, whether migrant or Aboriginal, the question becomes one of paramount importance.

The four works which represent the minority experience based on ethnic grounds make a valuable contribution to the definition of Australian women's autobiography within the limits imposed by this study. The paucity of life stories by Asian immigrants of similar age reflects previous Governmental policy. The Immigration Restriction Act (1901), known as the White Australia Policy, was one of the first Acts of the new Federal parliament and prevented the immigration of non-Europeans. This act was not repealed until 1966 but now, although the British are still the largest single nationality among new entrants, they are followed

closely by the Vietnamese.¹ Recent publications such as Uyen Loewald's autobiography of childhood, Child of Vietnam have received support from the Australia Council - an unlikely event in an earlier age.²

Although first- and second-generation migrant writers are included in multicultural anthologies (the usual criteria include "a basic language other than English,"³ British first- and second-generation migrants are not only seen by critics in the area of multiculturalism as neither ethnic nor multicultural,⁴ but more importantly, they see themselves differently. Taylor illustrates this point clearly. As the child of Yorkshire-born parents, in hindsight she is aware of the difference in the habits and customs of their lives, but her perception of life is conveyed in the subtitle of her book An Australian Childhood. On the other hand Inglis, who arrived in Australia at the age of three and had the advantage (dubious perhaps, as her family became aware of the narrowing subject choices she had to make) of an Australian education, sub-titled hers An un-Australian Childhood. Bozic was twenty-eight when she migrated at the end of the Second World War and yet there is a greater similarity in perceptions of experience between Bozic's story of the adult and

¹Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope, Michael Morrissey, Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1988), p. 25.

²Uyen Loewald, Child of Vietnam (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1987).

³Peter Skrzynecki, ed., Joseph's Coat: An Anthology of Multicultural Writing (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985).

⁴See for example, Sneja Gunew & Jan Mahyuddin, ed., Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing (St Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1988).

Inglis's childhood than there is between the stories of childhood by Inglis and Tavior.

The recent promotion of migrant writing has been questioned by a number of critics. Susan Hawthorne suggests it is cultural voyeurism as a result of "systematic exoticisation" imposed by the dominant culture.⁵ Although she compares the position of migrants with that of women and reaffirms the female role as "other" in relation to the dominant culture, she does not attempt to evaluate or explore the experience of a writer being both woman and migrant, notwithstanding that all her examples are from female writers. Moreover she suggests that migrant writing is not perceived as innovative or original but often pejoratively evaluated as autobiographical.⁶ That migrant writers occupy a marginal position is undeniable, however the thesis and rationale offered by Hawthorne seems based more on the biases and prejudices of previous decades than the actuality of the eighties. If "exotic" is defined as "bizarre" or "strange" then the derogatory act of voyeurism is a plausible consequence. However if the alternative of "alien" or "from abroad" is accepted then "exotic" becomes a reasonable, objective description of writing the migrant experience. The migrant presence (first- and second-generation) now accounts for two of every five Australians. This could, on economic grounds, easily

⁵Susan Hawthorne, "The Politics of the Exotic: The Paradox of Cultural Voyeurism," Meanjin, 48 (1989), p. 264.

⁶Hawthorne, p. 262.

account for an upsurge in the publication of migrant writing, while the recent plethora of autobiographical criticism, demonstrating the scope and fluidity of the genre, suggests that few modern critics could afford to ignore the ethnic contribution to this strand of Australian Literature.

It is quite apparent that for earlier Governments the Australian national identity was a clearly identified, desirable, and achievable state of being. Moreover, this view was equally endorsed by people who were not of this superior state so that assimilation was seen to be not only possible but essential, although there are differing opinions about the origins of this state. Labumore (Elsie Roughsey), one of the aboriginal authors to be studied later in this chapter, sees the white way of life as European, but if the difficulties faced by Bozic and Inglis are any indication then the so-called European "cultural baggage"⁷ originally carried to the new land must have changed so radically in transit that it no longer provides a welcoming ethos for later arrivals. In fact the exclusivity and chauvinism of the dominant culture in Australia meant that all minority groups had to adapt and conceal individual differences for acceptance. It is clear that the societal roles, the inherent values and self-image, and the alienation and disorientation suffered by migrants and aboriginals differ markedly in origin and degree, so that, in order to do justice to both, there is a need to examine these

⁷White, p. ix.

autobiographies separately whilst still applying the same criteria.

These writers therefore, in detailing their difference, depict the norm. For migrants the ingredients of being Australian are tangible, finite and precise, so that an examination of these components as detailed in autobiographies will contribute not only to a study of the genre but also to the debate on personal, cultural and national identity. Again we find that the gender difference is not in essence but rather in focus and emphasis.

Autobiography has been seen as a form of history⁹ and yet it has been argued that without a sense of place a people can have no sense of history.¹⁰ Further, a sense of place is convincingly posited as the only variable for analysis in the New Literatures in English in that all other elements such as plot or characters are the same for all literature study.¹¹ As I have established, a sense of domestic or local place is integral to women's autobiography in general, how much more will it be to those written by women who migrate to a post-colonial country? And how much more will it affect and permeate the portrait of the personal identity of such women?

"Place" it has been argued is not only "a fixed

⁹Forgunson, p. 139.

¹⁰Glenda Sluga, "Dis/placed," Meanjin, 48 (1989), 153-160.

¹¹Stephen Gray, "A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English, particularly South African" in A Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English, ed. Peggy Nightingale (St Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1986), p. 7.

and bounded area of land" but it can also include "a particular way of knowing a cultural as well as physical landscape."¹¹ And yet this definition brings more problems than solutions, in that "culture" now becomes an equally indefinable term, a "carry-all" with vague and seemingly limitless boundaries containing an unrelated miscellany of concepts rather than an objective evaluation of what "place" may entail. Indeed, the thesis established so far suggests perceptions of culture differ according to gender and that the characteristics of the female perception are detailed in these autobiographies.

Albeit recognizing some artificiality in such divisions, to isolate and examine the separate components of "place" as portrayed in migrant autobiographies sheds light on personal values and connections and ultimately on personal identity. At its most basic "place" is the physical landscape - generally the visible and usually including climatic conditions. For the European migrant the physical surroundings frequently symbolize the initial shock of alienation. In Gather Your Dreams when Bozic returns to Europe she describes "the pastel colours of the world in gentle light that was not piercing to the eyes."¹² In celebrating her past landscape she simultaneously disparages her present one by using the harsh word "piercing".

A humorous coincidence in Amirah: an un-Australian

¹¹Sluga, p. 153.

¹²Magda Bozic, Gather Your Dreams (Richmond: Hodja Educational, 1984), p. 93.

Childhood shows that Inglis's patronym combines these physical elements.¹³ Gutstadt translates as "Good Town" while the Australianization of this as 'Gust' caused frequent comments, both at its inception, and throughout Inglis's childhood, about "blowing in like a gust of wind" (p. 2). The title of her first chapter "The Good Towns and the Gusts of Wind" where she details her ancestors' and her parents' lives prior to her arrival in Australia, gives added emphasis to the connection between place, past and identity.

But for these women "place" includes much more than this. It is a personal response to physical surroundings which can become a totality of tactile experience. By including all the senses they elaborate upon Spence's and Lindsay's conclusions that the olfactory and aural stimuli offer the greatest impetus to recall and hence to recreate identity. Bozic particularly demonstrates this approach, at first generally:

Everything we looked at, everything we touched or tasted reminded us that we were a long way from home, (p. 9)

as she details such unrelated items as gumtrees, the shape of door handles and the cries of newspaper boys. But later with absolute certainty and specificity she describes her reaction to

... that messy Circular Quay, the old wharfs dotted with sandwich bars and fruit stalls, the drop-a-coin exits, the smell of fish and dusty

¹³Amirah Inglis. Amirah: An un-Australian Childhood (Richmond: Heinemann, 1989).

planks, the sound of ship horns and bells, and the sight of white yachts tossing on the waves ... (p. 18)

Inglis too, away from home on holiday at Coogee, "tasted and smelt a new sort of life" (p. 72). This personal response demonstrates the combination of the universal and the particular, with an emphasis on the domestic as already noted. The female multifocus is evident in Bozic's description of her arrival which combines the memory of a Sydney heatwave and the chagrin she felt over the inaptness of her cherry-red woollen suit and "brave new hat" (p. 6). Her later acceptance of the land as home is indicated by her recognition that the wrong order of the seasons has gone unnoticed which shows her at ease with her ethnicity, while the inclusion of the beauty and bounty of the domestic garden continues the female reference.

For Inglis there is no comparison with a previously known land or climatic conditions. Although she describes, almost as the omniscient narrator (where the "I" becomes an allseeing eye), the journeys and adventures of her parents prior to arrival in Australia, it is the Australian landscape and cityscape which is depicted, not the unfamiliar European, Israeli or American settings:

... Melbourne he thought was lovely. On the sunny mild winter's day of their arrival the city looked grand and comfortable from the Yarra River where their boat had moored. Cable cars rocked down the centre of wide streets, substantial buildings rose on both sides of the river; it looked like a real city. (p. 21)

Carlton is described as a "suburb of wide streets lined

with rows of terraces and groups of small cottages" (p. 21), and her mother's later arrival in summer reveals "a sliver of terraces built almost on top of wide, hot streets" bounded by "the dry waste lands of Royal Park" (p. 26). Inglis's descriptions of place are those familiar to her and any strangeness is received secondhand, conveyed through her parents. These mixed messages impart obvious tension to the settings depicted in Amirah. For her strangeness of place is found more in the cultural experiences she recalls and portrays; again like Spence and Lindsay describing more than just the visual. Her first Christmas at the age of ten was spent on a farm near Werribee:

It was my first Christmas and it remained the greatest: ... The kindness, the happiness, the plenty, the good roast food, the pudding and mince tarts and the gifts. I met it all later in Dickens. The difference was only in the climate. (p. 51)

Inglis, like most of the authors studied so far, resorts to random lists of events, reactions and scenes when wanting to convey special memories. It is as though memory becomes volcanic with myriad impressions bubbling over while language attempts to express and control its still present force. Sentences are long, with discrete images conjoined by semi-colons:

Everything about that holiday was superb, including the train trip to Werribee and the evening ride in the jinker to the farm, all rugged up under blankets; the farmhouse, with its kitchen door that was never shut and its front door that was never open; the rides out to the paddock in a sulky to round up a sheep to be killed for the table; the return with it tied up under our seat, our feet resting on its doomed woolly side; the frightening but amazingly beautiful sight of the bright red blood pouring

out of the throat of the sheep when it hung from a hook in the shed; the warm milk which Merle's brothers squirted at us when we hung around the cows at milking time; feeding the chooks and the hissing geese; jumping up on the hay stacks and riding the large horse. (p. 50)

Inglis's depiction of the complete event, of which this one sentence is a typical example, combined with her reference to Dickens, the master of precise and imaginatively original description, shows her trying to convey the same totality of experience that he achieves so well. The difference between them lies in his combination of the bizarre with the ordinary, while Inglis details the logical and expected; but even so, there is a sense of an overwhelming abundance of sensations, a cornucopia of experiences evident in this re-creation of personal significance.

Inglis and Bozic differ in their sense of history. Inglis portrays the particular and includes her extended family. Although she had no relatives in Australia, her description of Jewish and Polish customs practised by the family she didn't know personally, and recounting events, trips, actions in which these people featured, create the impression of a strong European environment. Bozic sets out to tell "from the start, the first 20 years in the personal journey of one migrant" (p. 74), but she seems to want to portray the universal, in that she gives no specific place of origin for herself or her husband, even though they come from different countries, with different languages. It is as though the experience of Europe is sufficient specificity. In fact she is aware of a

" ... special kind of nostalgia that comes from isolation and distance, not only from one's own country, but also from Europe in general" (p. 90). If a sense of history is dependent on a sense of place, then the suppression of her particular past shows the extent of her commitment to assimilation and explains the rebirth of a "New Australian" when, with the birth of her child, she is able to experience the customs of an Australian childhood and education. The ubiquitous sense of alienation which, when she least expects it, floods into her life can also be explained by the suppression of her past. Her sense of history is at odds with the sense of place required by her adopted land.

Place includes language. The artificiality of analysis is most evident here as language is equally a component of the factors contributing to personal identity and a major factor in itself. But since language, as opposed to other means of communication, has been chosen to present these life stories, any duplication will only serve to heighten its importance. Bozic personifies the forbidding landscape she passed through on the way to Canberra. The parched, brown land looked "uncommunicative", it "seemed to be absorbed in its own million-year-old thoughts", and she questions how writers can "conjure" the words required to convey their perceptions. Language itself becomes metaphorically, a land - the birth of her baby shows her a new "word territory" which needed to be "conquered" (p. 54).

For Inglis language is not connected so nearly to the physical landscape as to the cultural-scape. As Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis suggest, "Australia" and landmass have become indivisible;" so it is with Inglis. To be Australian requires not only language competence but no accent either. It must be without the flamboyance demonstrated by her mother or her father's misuse of idioms.

The dichotomy of language rests not only in its usage - the manner in which the speaker conveys meaning - but also it crystallizes the evanescent knowledge and impressions of the past. If loss of language is to lose touch with one's ancestors," then both Bozic and Inglis confirm their dislocation from personal history. Both families ended up speaking English at home, and Bozic particularly details the loss and grief she felt when she realized that for the rest of her life she would speak a borrowed language with an accent (p. 56). Inglis's knowledge and pride in her immediate European past is at odds with her desire to be completely Australian.

Language has been described as the connection of all the components of culture while simultaneously being its presenter; it becomes "the culture carrier".¹⁶ Hence as these writers describe what for

¹⁶Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, "Criticism Against the Current," Meanjin, 48 (1989), 223.

¹⁷Susan Beckman, "Language as Cultural Identity," in Language and Literature: ACLALS Proceedings, ed. Satendra Nandan (Suva: USP & ACLALS, 1983), pp. 66-78.

¹⁸Lolo Houbein, "Language Without Culture and the Multilingual Writer," in Language and Literature: ACLALS Proceedings, ed. Satendra Nandan (Suva: USP & ACLALS, 1983), pp. 189-201.

them is the essence of Australia or being Australian, so a definition of culture appears. Bozic's view ranges from the grandeur of the centre of Australia as "part of an indifferent universe" (p. 31), to "drinking 'Nescafe'" (p. 25), and participating in Melbourne Cup sweeps (p. 29). For her all these things offered partial keys to Australia, but she became aware that just as there was one Australia for the new migrant, so there was another for the employee and yet another for the mother. According to her situation so other facets are presented which required reactions and responses in order to become the assimilated Australian.

For Inglis too, to be Australian involved customs, ranging from the literature read to the style of education obtained. She too delineates the important and the trivial, giving all equal exposure. To be Australian includes "mums" reading the New Idea (p. 35); having parents who were not Jewish or communist; eating dripping on bread (p. 85), and indiscriminately going to the pictures on Saturday night (p. 76).

Fry & Willis argue that the existence of a single people occupying the whole continent has led to the underdevelopment of political nationalism in opposition to the emphasis on cultural nationalism, but the autobiographers suggest another explanation. Bozic found the Australian male entirely forgettable except for one most important point - she was unable to envisage him following a tyrant and causing the same horrendous chain of events as in Europe (p. 51). The right to protest practised at the time of the Vietnam

War transmitted messages to the migrant not only about warfare but about the joy of freedom of speech (p. 81). Inglis's parents, according to their daughter, found in Communism "a strong internationalist direction ... congenial to European migrants who had rejected nationalism" (p. 39). Thus, a more obvious reason for the underdevelopment of political nationalism could well have its source in the increasing incidence of migrants in the total population, for both these writers demonstrate antipathy to political nationalism while taking cultural nationalism to their hearts.

Place for these women is the ability to negotiate customs and to function in strange surroundings; it includes familiarity with language, knowledge of host country history, a national as well as personal identity, but mostly it is concerned with belonging, of being "home". In fact it is interesting to reflect on the peculiarly Australian colloquial expression "Come to my place" meaning to visit my home, which has not transferred to other Anglo-cultures such as the American.

Both these writers place great emphasis on the physical home - Bozic's red-brick bungalow is "a very special place where all the disconnected chapters of the past came together" (p. 72), and her story describes how she combines these separate disconnected chapters of her life. It culminates in finding the solution to the "treasure hunt" or identity (p. 96), and echoes the sentiments expressed in a popular song of the eighties, "Call Australia Home" which has fast

become a surrogate national anthem. Inglis describes in great detail each house in which they lived, and each shows not only an upward mobility but a move towards a "wider and more Australian world" (p. 66). The Gusts achieved the ultimate "Australian Dream" when they moved finally to a 'maisonette' which was again, not only bigger and better than those before, but was owned by them (p. 112).

But for both women home signifies more than normal security; it is also the place where the customs and habits of their personal complex pasts can be manifested in an idiosyncratic way, demonstrating their individual integration without concern for the opinions or approval of the dominant culture. The female 'I' depicts the minutiae of domestic practices; Inglis comments on their combination of Australian dishes during the week and European cooking at the weekend (p. 88), and Europe lived on for Bozic in apple strudel and strong Turkish coffee and foreign-language magazines (p. 61).

The child as teacher or part of identity noted in Gray and Knörr receives even greater emphasis in the migrant story. It is the child who provides the link with what may be seen as the "real Australia". Bozic's son engenders her cultural rebirth and is described as "forg[ing] our real link to Australia" (p. 57), and Inglis's attendance at school makes her "the family's bridge into the new world of English language and learning" (p. 33). The use of engineering metaphors in both cases demonstrates clearly each writer's awareness

of the need to build or construct new sets of references to overcome the gap between the migrant experience and become part of the dominant culture. It also suggests that each family by the very virtue of their foreignness remains and will remain inherently separate.

Educationists now argue that the previous Government policy to institute assimilation through education and laws was, as Barbara Falk puts it, "to impinge on individuals in a destructive way - to force them to reinterpret their world and to constrain their choice of the personal identity."¹⁷ Falk believes that realistic teachers are aware of their limited influence yet for both Bozic and Inglis the child's participation in education is crucial for the Australization of other family members. Education is of course only partly concerned with academic learning since the contribution of peers and others is perhaps of greater influence; but, to continue the metaphor, in all aspects language is the connector. Both child (Inglis) and mother (Bozic) suggest that this is the key to being Australian. It is the young generation for whom the English language is mother tongue, despite all the alien customs and culture received in the home, who are able to participate easily in the Australian culture.¹⁸ It is Inglis who recounts the story of the child as

¹⁷Barbara Falk, Personal Identity in a Multicultural Australia (Hawthorn: ACER Ltd., 1978), p. 4.

¹⁸This argument obviously refers to Caucasian migrants whose alien state is not generally visible. An interesting area of study would be the perceptions of personal identity of Asian second- or third- etc. generations.

teacher of pronunciation and language (p. 54), while Nicholas, Bozic's son is the culture carrier to both his parents and also acts as a language link between them. It is interesting that when both women returned to Europe they make much of the fact that they flew with Qantas, the national airline, as if they are aware that even the physical carrier can become a symbol of culture.

Modern historians and sociologists offer as a truism the notion that cultural and national identity are not the same, and the model designed by Alan Hodge based on the theory of Smolicz offers an alternative to legitimize cultural diversity.¹⁹ They suggest that there are components of a lifestyle which must be shared to ensure social and therefore national cohesion. In this category they include democratic government, education and English language, while they suggest the individual domain should guarantee freedoms in religion, diet and leisure pursuits, language, ambition and aspirations. But even Hodge is aware of the areas of potential conflict between the theory and the practice, such as religious holidays, and of course language again is a component in both sections. However, if identity involves identifying "with a specific world of meaning that is socially constructed,"²⁰ then these life stories confound even further the specific definition of an eighties

¹⁹Alan Hodge, Australian Identity in a Multicultural Society, A Policy Options paper prepared for the Office of Multicultural Affairs (Sydney: Sydney College of Advanced Education, 1988), p. 30.

²⁰Deidre Jordan, quoted in Hodge, p. 2.

multicultural lifestyle offered by Hodge, and lead one to surmise that even for the recent migrant, cultural and national identity are not as separate as the theorists might like to think.

But for these stories of the life of the migrant woman born in the 1920s, regardless of her date of arrival, there is no such reconciliation. The aim was to be completely Australian, and the way to achieve this was through wholehearted participation in the way of life which for them was culture. Bozic sees herself as "two persons living in the one body - this New Australian, this other me" (p. 13), and feels like an actor who is unable to understand the required role. Unlike Gray, who used the theatrical metaphor to avoid reality, Bozic employs it to demonstrate her inner confusion and her reactions to the perceptions of others while attempting to create a new reality. Like all women she is the outsider who defines herself according to other, and yet simultaneously, as migrant, redefines herself according to the quintessential "other" of her past, with further conflict inevitable as she is aware that her past is inimical to a new life: "A plague on all my memories, good and bad" (p. 16).

Life too is a series of games, the "treasure hunt" to find the answer to "Where do I belong?" (p. 88) the search game in Europe to find medicine, food etc. (p. 6), or the twentieth-century parlour game "Find a new life" (p. 21), but the importance of the games and the actor is that neither is in control - the game player

doesn't know the rules and the actor doesn't know the lines. Inglis, having the advantage of language, learns and knows both - she is the child but also the quiz master (p. 54). She sees herself as living a double life; having home friends and school friends (p. 58); home books and school books making "a double literary life" (p. 58); as well as the conflicting political loyalties she needs to conceal (p. 128).

At school [she is] a satisfactory Australian girl and at home a satisfactory daughter of European Jewish communists. (p. 83)

But the outcome is still the same confusion and anxiety to please. Although she cannot decide whether these traits are a result of being un-Australian or merely of spinelessness (p. 149), the answer to the separate confusions seems to lie in the migrant identity of both these writers.

To analyse or describe portraits of double national identity, regardless of the alien or dominant cultures, gives rise to similar metaphors. Curiously much of the critical language has its origins in traditionally feminine occupations such as spinning and weaving and the previously derogatory term of spinster is now reassessed as a celebratory metaphor of the female self.²¹ Just as Inglis describes her "strands of identity" (p. 150), so Margaret Miller in her analysis of Chinese-American Kingston's The Woman Warrior investigates the "threads" of dual identity.²² However

²¹Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology : The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (London: The Women's Press, 1978).

²²Margaret Miller, "Threads of Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*," Biography, 6 (1983), 13-33.

the complexity of identity seems to create dissatisfaction with the appropriateness of this metaphor, and indeed Miller in the course of her article reclassifies these threads as dichotomies.²³ I would rather suggest that the manner in which each of these writers depicts the formation of her identity leads one back to the engineering metaphor introduced earlier and the more pertinent analogy of conduits - alien and host country conduits (Australian and European, American and Chinese) in which lie identical cultural cables of diet, clothes, values, customs etc. However the mixed components of these cables differ with each individual, and so the power and energy which flows through them culminate in an idiosyncratic and variable illumination of self. But equally they, like all the women studied so far, show that development of self is indeed a process, whether it is to adulthood, to acceptance of self or to attain a national identity.

The life stories of the aboriginal writers pose very different problems. Firstly they are writing for an audience which they perceive as having access to much greater social and political power (whether male or female), but most importantly, although ostensibly of the same nationality, this audience is marked by their disparity of life experience and also their ignorance of, if not lack of interest in, aboriginal culture. Shirley Smith in MumShirl when describing the mission system says, "I had forgotten that most white

²³Miller, p. 28.

people do not know about these things:"²⁴ and Elsie Roughsey in An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New points out "that people of other states and continents do not know of my people really,"²⁵ and moreover, that greater knowledge of their customs and laws can only promote peaceful coexistence. In her analysis of American black women's autobiographies, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese establishes that the problem of audience is a particularly critical one;²⁶ and it is no less so for Aboriginal women. Both Smith and Roughsey are not only telling their life stories but also exhorting, informing and indicting their white readers. Smith, in honouring the role of the young Black activists, is asking the whites, particularly the bureaucracy, to take into account the special needs and circumstances of her people, while Roughsey is celebrating the old ways of the tribal life - the good things which were dismissed by the whites and will be forgotten if not recorded. But above all, as Hooten

²⁴Shirley Smith, MumShirl: An autobiography with the assistance of Bobbi Sykes (Richmond: Heinemann Educational, 1987), p. 12. It has been impossible to ascertain Smith's actual birthdate through publishers or other sources. However in the text she states that Laurie her brother was not 20 when he was jailed (p.25) and that this took place just prior to WWII, so that he must have been born in 1920 at the latest. There were two other siblings Olga Sion & David (p.7) born between him and the author which suggests a birthdate of mid 1920s. But as she also states that she was 16 at the time of the war the most likely year is 1924.

²⁵Labumore:Elsie Roughsey, An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1986), p. 4. I will use the author's European name in this study as she uses European names for most characters, including herself, in her text.

²⁶Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "To Write Myself: The Autobiographies of Afro-American Women," in Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship, ed. Shari Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), p. 166.

puts it, "they expose the thoughts and emotions behind the stereotypes of the boong, the gin, the half-caste, the mission child, and the fringe-dweller."²⁷

One important factor which must be considered is the role of editors or co-writers. Although Roughsey wrote her own manuscript, her editors and publishers believed editing was essential to "make it accessible to the average white Australian reader" (p. 240). With commendable thoroughness they detail the changes which were implemented with authorial approval. The subtitle of *MumShirl, An autobiography with the assistance of Bobbi Sykes* is perhaps a little misleading, in that, although Smith refers frequently to her lack of literacy skills, it is not until the last chapter that she actually says:

Even this book is being written down for me by this young girl from bits and pieces I have told her over the last ten years and some tapes she made about my younger days. (p. 161)

It is obvious that these two works extend the boundaries of *auto* and *graphie* in the genre of autobiography which has led one critic to suggest that there should be a new category of "life stories" for the products of collaborative writing.²⁸ There does however seem to be a special case to be argued for the life stories of an indigenous population, particularly bearing in mind their childhood access to literacy skills. Using an American Indian example, the far more

²⁷Hooten, p. 313.

²⁸Colin Johnson, "White Forms, Aboriginal Content," in *Aboriginal Writing Today*, ed. Jack Davis and Bob Hodge (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985), p. 24.

obvious collaboration between the illiterate Black Elk and John Neihart in Black Elk Speaks has received critical approval as an autobiography because of the integrity of authorial intention to convey a story of a life," while Hooten sees it as "an interesting Aboriginal replication of a form common in white female autobiography."³⁰ Equally MumShirl fulfills the criteria of authorial responsibility defined by another authority. Philippe Lejeune states that one of the criteria for autobiography is identity between the author, the narrator and the protagonist and furthermore that the printed text is a total product so that the cover and flyleaf cannot be ignored.³¹ Hence the "I" of the life story refers to Shirley Smith who is MumShirl of the title. The subtitle acknowledges both that it is an autobiography and that it has been written with the assistance, not the responsibility, of Bobbi Sykes.

The recent acclamation of the value of the oral tradition in autobiographies such as Facey's A Fortunate Life is unmistakable. Jan Carter states: "The styles of both Bunyan and Facey came from an oral tradition," thus drawing a most complimentary analogy between Facey and Bunyan.³² It seems that it required

³⁰Carol T. Holly, "Black Elk Speaks and The Making of Indian Autobiography," Genre, 12 (1979), 117-136.

³¹Hooten, p. 332.

³²Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Contract," in French Literary Theory Today: A Reader, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press & Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de L'Homme, 1982), pp. 192-222.

³³Jan Carter, Afterword, A Fortunate Life, by A. B. Facey (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), p. 326.

males with similar literary problems to enable the establishment to come to terms with variations in personal literary input without denigrating the genre or the work. Obviously the role of editor and peers has been integral to writing for generations (one has only to peruse the Acknowledgements in the front of any major publication), and this should receive equal consideration when evaluating all works.

The present examples provoke a number of questions. To what extent does Sykes influence Smith's story? Sykes has published extensively, both poetry and political prose, and Adam Shoemaker sees her as being "one of the best known and most active Black Australian spokespersons of the 1970s."³³ Thus to what extent can style or even sentiment be evaluated as truly emanating from Shirley Smith?³⁴ Or does the repositioning of sections of Roughsey's story alter the inherent authorial voice? Again we come back to authorial intention, integrity and responsibility - Smith commences her story with a validation of herself and her product:

My full name is Colleen Shirley Perry. I am the daughter of Isabel Agnes Perry and Henry Joseph Perry of Erarnbie Mission, West Cowra, New South Wales. But I am better known as 'MumShirl'. This is my story. (p. 1)

³³Adam Shoemaker, Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988 (St Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1989), p. 215.

³⁴It would be interesting to make a linguistic and philosophical comparison between Mumshirl and texts which Sykes has written, such as Black Majority (Hawthorn: Hudson, 1989) which looks at how citizenship has changed the Black experience in Australia, or Love Poems: and Other Revolutionary Actions (St Lucia: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1988).

Roughsey likewise begins:

I'm a full blood aboriginal, born 1923, on Goonana mission, Mornington Island. Goonana is the name of my native home, far up in the North, in the Gulf of Capentaria, Queensland ...

So one day, I desired to put my time to write a book of my childhood to this present days, recalling back the things of my tribal people.
(p. 1)

An initial reaction concerns the style of each extract which prefigures each author's main purpose; Smith's is political, almost as if she is embarking on a legal deposition and ironically one that reflects European law while Roughsey, in the traditional, oral way, starts off with reference to race and place. The intention and integrity of each author is attested and evident so that their works demand inclusion in the genre of autobiography. They are part of the challenge now being issued to the traditional boundaries of literary genres. The stories they tell, and the manner of telling are part of the minority onslaught against those prevailing conditions.

If "place" was a complex concept for the migrant woman, it is even more so for the aboriginal writer, because laws and legality, death and survival, influence the other factors already isolated. In addition, the desire for unity in one's sense of place within the dominant culture so evident in the migrant, becomes less apparent in the aboriginal. Physical place sets the scene for immediate conflict, between the land and the authors' delight in it and the white-run mission which is a tragedy but at the same time holds

some loving memories. Roughsey depicts the bush, rivers and sea of Mornington Island, from which cannot be separated the tribal laws and customs that dictate usage, such as diet, or the access to various places according to gender. Here too, the weather conditions play a large part, not in the tactile sense as noted earlier, but as an influence on the mind. The North-East wind brings memories: certain nice things, or some sad thoughts (pp. 119, 239), while the Westerly breezes seem to make her feel a different person (p. 28).

But more importantly, the land is synonymous with survival. The bounty of the bush ensures survival, not only for the individual but for the tribe, and killing or harvesting tie in with tribal customs and culture, like sharing to denote a pregnancy, or even in payment for a compliment. The seasons are known not by their European names but frequently for the means of survival, the bounty produced at the time - "water lily time" or "palm nut time" (p. 54).

The inverse of survival is death and Smith in her portrait of urban Aboriginal life reinforces Roughsey's statement that Aboriginal people are supposed by law to be buried where they are born, a factor which strongly influences personal identity as well as political land-rights claims.³ Both writers emphasize that an aboriginal's place of birth is the place of identity, regardless of where their lives take them. Although Smith's grandparents, who reared her, were expelled from Erarnbie mission when she was six, she points out

³Roughsey, p. 65; Smith, p. 147.

the injustices of the system and its long-ranging implications for individuals. For Roughsey who was part of the "dormitory" for most of her life, the details of hard work and often brutal treatment are unpleasant memories which, although recognizing their inherent inequity, she tries hard to justify:

the toughness of my time made me to be what I am today ... nice, kind, helpfulness, forgiving, to be honest and not to be dishonest with anyone, to be happy. (p. 24)

Conditions improved as she grew older and in hindsight she is able to describe some past happinesses such as Christmas festivities, but the overwhelming sense of continual pain and sadness convey deeply ambivalent memories of the conflict posed by the diametrically opposed physical places of her childhood which are not apparent in the other autobiographies.

It is in the sense of history that these women differ most clearly, not only from the migrant writers, but from each other. The separation of land and personal history is marked in Bozic and Inglis, and their emphasis is on their desire to be at one with their host culture. The aboriginal women do not demonstrate this particular alienation. There is absolute certainty of the nexus between their land and their history - the problem for them is that this view is not accepted by whites. Smith rejects the prevailing version of the white man's settlement, and while providing a brief résumé of the Aboriginal view of history, blames the white intruder for the ill-treatment and genocide of her people (p. 13). In

contrast, Roughsey combines European and tribal history. For her, the tribal stories of the ghostly ancestral Goonanamanda people and the Bulletgearmandas are as real as any other history. Her belief that the tribal One and the biblical God are the same enables her to make a cogent argument for reciprocal recognition of European and Aboriginal pasts. She explains that the oral and written traditions are merely examples of the different skills of each race, each with its own objective truth. The written word does not, in her mind, convey greater validity (p. 203).

Place is far more bound up in family than has been evident. For the white reader used to nuclear-family patterns there is great difficulty in establishing just who is Roughsey's family. She says, "I have not a slightest idea of my dear mother" (p. 6), and yet the only happy times she recalled were the visits of her mother and father to the mission (p. 16). Her father is William; (p. 32) her youngest father is Gully (p. 118), and we also meet a young man called Spider who "in our custom ... was our father or uncle" (p. 29). She explains the use of European kinship terminology to illustrate that everyone in their tribe was seen as being in "full-blooded relationship" (p. 182) - a mark of respect and caring for each person. When writing of the very close relationship between the Roughseys and the Tresizes, she suggests that the greatest sign of respect would be for her children to call Mr & Mrs Tresize Mum and Dad (p. 225). The universal closeness

and caring in tribal relationships portrayed by Roughsey is used also by Bozic to signify belonging. Bozic expresses her feelings of estrangement on arriving in Sydney by detailing local customs as those of another tribe (p. 9), and her regret that her European relations would never see her baby brings the recognition that she is no longer part of the old tribe (p. 58).

It is apparent that the traditions and lore which surround the establishment of tribal relationships create and reinforce a wider sense of place leading to an ordered existence. The ultimate extension of this view is demonstrated in an autobiography My Place by a younger, contemporary Aboriginal woman who finds her identity and knowledge of her place in a total genealogical sense.³⁴ She inverts the denigratory "knowing of one's place" into pride in her racial history.

The lives of Roughsey and Smith revolve around the credo of "life-debts" which would seem to reflect their tribal background and resultant community responsibility rather than any Christian input. Smith, because of her frequent epileptic attacks, believed herself to be in debt to each person who helped her during the life-threatening fits, and she sees herself as having worked all her life to pay off these debts (p. 12). Roughsey, with her ability to heal, has worked as nurse and teacher's assistant and subscribes to a

³⁴Sally Morgan, My Place (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987).

similar credo. She suggests it is part of the Aboriginal nature that everyone should help each other (p. 195), and that they will never forget when someone does them a good deed or saves a life (p. 172).

The Aboriginal stories are, in a number of ways, antithetical to those of the migrant women. Each is political in her own way. Smith takes pride in the feats of the young activists, and while not condoning violence as a means to obtaining justice, sees it as a possibility. Roughsey makes many pronouncements on justice and offers suggestions on how the races can co-exist. In marked contrast to the secularity of white Australian literature both women emphasize the role of religion in their lives and comment at length on the deep spirituality of their people.¹⁷ Although Smith is not into the "going to church on Sundays sort of church" (p. 19), she tries to attend Mass daily and Roughsey's special blend of both cultures shows her reconciling the aboriginal gift of healing as coming from the Lord when there were no European medical people available (p. 76). This becomes yet another discrete cable in the conduit of identity.

A sense of place therefore is integral to a portrait of personal identity, but the extent to which this contributes to being Australian is questionable. There is absolutely no doubt that Australia is home for the Aboriginal women, but whether they become part of the dominant culture is just one of their options. Deidre Jordan has suggested that there is a choice open

¹⁷Also noted by Hooten, p. 328.

to them, they can "opt for a positive image within the white world", or accept an alternative identity "with a different culture and different value system".³⁰ Smith in her concerns with the misfortunes of her fellow aboriginals would appear to be choosing the latter, while Roughsey's synthesis of beliefs suggests she could function well in the former. Bozic and Inglis did not have this choice: the assimilation policy meant that they were to become Australian, regardless of personal cost, although of course there was the initial choice of electing to live in this country.

Apart from writing in English and following a generally chronological structure, there is a marked variety of style and form in these autobiographies. In the stories of Bozic and Inglis, the present, unified narrator and the past, diversified protagonists dovetail to recreate experiences incorporating the various selves - the new arrival, the foreign wife, the student, the child, the worker, the New Australian and the ex-European. Bozic writes in her second language, and the role of language is a continuing metaphor which becomes structural in its intensity, signifying belonging. Her formality of approach results in a curious blend of the banal and the original. At its best it is evocative and imaginative as she describes the man who promised not to come to farewell her (p. 7), at its worst it is hackneyed as she compares the interactions at parties with a merry-go-round (p. 16). Although her narration of events is chronological, the

³⁰Quoted in Hodge, p. 4.

pattern is cyclical as is evident by her story starting and ending in Europe, albeit with a twenty-year time span, and reflected in using the same heading, not only for the total work but for the first and last chapters as well. Inglis writing in her first language, never loses sight of her intention, which was to convey the ambivalence of a dual cultural experience. She employs a linear chronological approach to events through which the cultural theme spirals and interweaves.

As already stated, it is not really appropriate to discuss the form and style of MumShirl apart from commenting on its inclusion in the oral tradition, which of course applies to Roughsey's work. Roughsey also writes in her second language and the editing policy has allowed Roughsey's idiosyncratic use of English to remain. Billy Marshall-Stoneking in his review criticizes the grammatical and syntactical errors suggesting that misuse of language is always a focal point for the prejudiced which would prevent communication with any but the already sympathetic.¹⁹ Certainly her story is not "an easy read" because of the language, but surely this has never been a criterion for literature. Certainly also, it does not fit into white literary traditions, but then neither, on initial publication, did a number of now recognized works. Just as there is awareness that Western aesthetic values cannot apply to Aboriginal art,²⁰ so

¹⁹Billy Marshall-Stoneking, "Lament for a lost past . . .," rev. of An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New, by Elsie Roughsey, The Weekend Australian, 31 March-1 April, 1984, p. 14.

²⁰Fry & Willis, p. 229.

too with Aboriginal literature. As in art, the onus is on the audience to interpret and to come to terms with the message. Roughsey's style does not have to be defended, the idiom is spirited and striking as she intersperses the chronological unfolding of her life with philosophical statements on matters of universal concern and local interest. She, like Bozic, feels herself as living in two worlds (p. 224), and, like Inglis, her parents did not speak English (p. 236). For Western tastes her language is often elliptical and repetitive, her expression at times creates confusion rather than illumination, but there are highlights of poetic explanation and humorous narrative such as the chapter entitled "Going out for the new life: A pregnant woman who never rode a horse before, but galloped away" (p. 167), where the authorial voice wipes away any doubts about the effectiveness of her style.

An interesting comparison is the autobiography Moon and Rainbow written by her husband.¹¹ Although there is no editorial comment, this has obviously been sanitized for white readers, as he too had little formal education (up to Grade 5)¹² and did not attend the Mission until he was about seven or eight.¹³ There is a disturbing imbalance between the life-story which is pleasingly simple and the expression and language which is at times inappropriately sophisticated. One

¹¹Dick Roughsey, Moon and Rainbow: The Autobiography of an Aboriginal (Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1971).

¹²Dick Roughsey, p. 18.

¹³Dick Roughsey, p. 38.

can only be grateful that publishers today appear to believe that society now accepts a wider range of language experiences which can only help extend the boundaries of the accepted literary canon.

The fascination of these life stories lies in their similarities as much as their differences. The double invisibility of being ethnic and female is banished for, through writing their lives, they reveal and consolidate their participation in the dominant culture on their own terms. The overwhelming similarity in these four life stories is the continuing theme of conflict, and it is through an analysis of place that the courage and integrity of each woman is evinced as she resolves and forms her own personal, cultural and national identity. Unbeaten and not cowed they present yet another illumination of resilience and the process of being female.

VI

THE WILD CARD IN THE PACK - the exposed 'I'

The works studied so far illustrate the manner in which each writer perceived her participation in the process of female development. Each portrays the gradual increase in the scope of her personal world and her often reluctant assimilation of, and subordination to, cultural mores and traditions. Although each autobiography is complete in itself, it is easy to envisage a sequel to most of them, a continuation or the revelation of the life process which seems just to have paused for printing, or ended with a comma rather than ground to a major stop. Equally, the tacit invitation by some of the writers for the reader to explore their other works in order to establish how personal experience is used and changed in fiction embellishes the world of the writer and provides a more complex view of the persona. But Dorothy Hewett offers an even wider insight in her autobiography Wild Card.¹ Not only has Hewett incorporated other writings into her autobiography but through a number of articles and

¹Dorothy Hewett, Wild Card: An Autobiography 1923-1958 (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1990).

interviews she details the problems and confusions she faced when writing an autobiography. From her we obtain valuable information not only on the process of the life but also on the process of writing about the process of the life. Furthermore, having been a tutor of English at University, she is the most aware of all the authors of the academic perceptions and questions surrounding this perplexing genre.

The factors noted as valuable by the women of this generation and the skills and techniques they use to present a life are echoed, reiterated and embellished by Hewett. Like Adam-Smith, Hewett is aware of the advantages of living in a family "who were all obsessive oral storytellers" (p. 27); like Gray, she sees the Communist Party as her salvation (p. 251); and like Spence, she is aware of "the divided self", the girl who lives and the writer who watches and remembers (p. 90). The ambivalence noted in previous mother-daughter relationships is even more volatile in Wild Card where she portrays a mother who is both violent and short-tempered, whose "switches of mood from protective love to destructive hatred bewilder" her and about whom she says "the struggle to come to terms with my mother dominated most of my life" (p. 25). Although Hewett accepts and depicts many of the same societal values and cultural traditions as the preceding autobiographers, she differs markedly in one major respect, in that she unreservedly discloses her sexual activities:

It she were a man, her life would be described as Rabelaisian and she, a hell-raiser. As a woman, she has to make do with "sexually depraved".²

To describe the frenetic lifestyle Hewett portrays in either way is to misread this profoundly sad and disarmingly honest autobiography. Events are recounted in their totality, the good and the bad, almost without any self-justification. The fun of drinking and parties is juxtaposed with her description of being "systematically sick on every landing" and having to discard her "favourite white skarkskin dress ... ruined with grass stains and vomit" (p. 99). Although admitting to being known as "the university bike" (p. 101), she is led by one lover's rejection to attempt suicide (p. 107), and by another's to the violation she felt at the hands of the abortionist (p. 116).

For a writer whose works have been noted as "recklessly autobiographical" (as one critic suggests in a review of Alice in Wormland) or whose poetry has been seen as "big letters 'confessional',"³ Hewett's decision to write an autobiography throws new light on the nature of truth in this genre. For Hewett truth in autobiography is the most contentious and problematic issue if the number of times she has discussed it in interviews and articles is any guide. In

²Yvonne Roberts, "The Purgatory and Pleasures of a Rebel," The Age, 20 Aug. 1988, p. 9.

³Jennifer Strauss, rev. of Alice in Wormland, by Dorothy Hewett, Overland, 110 (1988), 80. Dorothy Hewett quoted by Craig McGregor, "Confessions from a Woman of Passion," The Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Jul. 1990, p. 65.

"Autobiographically Speaking" Hewett wrestles with the perception of truth and its meaning for the individual, concluding, "The truth, as such, doesn't exist ... with the best will in the world, ... [autobiographical fiction] is all that any writer can really do."⁴ Five years later at an interview on the release of Wild Card the essential nature of truth is still elusive:

Truth is a very difficult commodity and it changes in the eye of the beholder ... truth is suspect, truth is changeable and an autobiography is just as much a fiction as any other book.⁵

Despite her qualifying protestations or limited truths and half-truths and that "autobiography masquerades as truth",⁶ there is still the acceptance of a palpable and quantifiable difference between the poems, plays and novels she has written as fiction and this autobiography. In fact she has been most condemnatory of those who have made the "accusation" (usually disparagingly) that all her work is autobiographical and castigated those who play the "insidious game" of "spot the author in the work",⁷ stating elsewhere that "though there are bits and pieces of my life in my writing, isn't there in everybody's?"⁸ Even in Wild Card she elaborates on "the Australian habit of equating fiction with reality" when

⁴Dorothy Hewett, "Autobiographically Speaking," Southerly, 45 (1985), p. 41.

⁵Deborah Bogle, "Confessions of a Life Lived to the Hilt," The Australian, 2 Aug. 1990, p. 3.

⁶Sue Thomas, "Writing Autobiography: An Interview with Dorothy Hewett," Meridian, 7 (1988), p. 158.

⁷Hewett, "Autobiographically Speaking," p. 37.

⁸Hewett quoted by McGregor.

detailing the reactions of friends and family over the publication of her short story "My Mother Said I Never Should" (p. 248).

Her concern with the portrayal of truth is equally evident in her choice of the narrating voice. Although she has used the third person for portraying past selves in a brief life history,⁹ and of course, for characters in other works, she decided that this method was unsuitable for autobiography.¹⁰ Yet believing that pseudonyms work against true revelation, the alternative is the "terrible 'I'", the "self-enclosed, self-obsessed 'I'."¹¹ Again, as the other women have found, although there have been autobiographies written in the third person, the personal commitment to truth and the female signature required the narrating 'I'.

However it is by self-admission that some of her other works are indeed autobiographical. She writes that Chapel Perilous "is the closest to autobiography of all the plays I have written,"¹² and in Bobbin Up that "I split myself and my boilermaker lover into Beth and Lenny, and Nell and Stan Mooney,"¹³ with the first couple representing the golden years of the relationship and the second the later disillusionment;

⁹Dorothy Hewett, "The Garden and the City," Westerly, No. 4 (1982), 99-104.

¹⁰Thomas, p. 157.

¹¹Hewett, "Autobiographically Speaking," p. 38.

¹²Dorothy Hewett, The Chapel Perilous (or the Perilous Adventures of Sally Banner), Currency Plays. General ed. Katherine Brisbane (Woollahra, N.S.W.: Currency Press, 1977), p. 3.

¹³Dorothy Hewett, Bobbin Up (Melbourne, 1959; rpt. London: Virago, 1985), p. xiv.

but these acknowledged connections do not make them autobiography. In fact part of the reason for writing Wild Card was to confound the critics - "Righto you think I've been writing autobiography all this time, cop this, this is it."¹⁴ Although simultaneously pleading the distance between fiction and autobiography and yet combining them by offering autobiographical explanations for aspects of her works of fiction, Hewett still expects that those works will be read and judged as fiction overall. Her concern about the reactions of family and friends, ranging from possible libel suits to being shunned or never trusted again,¹⁵ shows that not only does Hewett recognize that there is a different order of truth and reader expectation in autobiography but so too does the reader.

As she continued in the above interview:

God knows I've tried to tell the truth, but I am sure there are lots of people in my past who would call me the most outrageous liar.¹⁶

She believes she must tell "all the unvarnished truth" and says:

This time I have got to get it right, and I've got to tell it as it really was. *Sometimes this is so unsuitable from an artistic point of view it really annoys me intensely* [my italics].¹⁷

The essential difference between autobiography and autobiographical fiction is revealed in the last sentence, and vindicates the significance I have

¹⁴Thomas, p. 158.

¹⁵Hewett, "Autobiographically Speaking," p. 40.

¹⁶Bogle, p. 3.

¹⁷Thomas, p. 158.

assigned to authorial intention in the definition of autobiography. In fiction the artistic point of view dictates the shape and content of the work; this means that the truths portrayed may well be quintessential truths but not necessarily those experienced by one individual in a particular chronological framework. In autobiography however, to portray the truth of the self in historical time and verifiable space, notwithstanding the fallibility of human memory and personal perception, becomes the singular purpose for the author with all the other aspects of literary creation, plot, metaphor, character becoming subordinate to this truth. Thus the limits imposed by this purpose intensify and enhance the literary devices used by each author.

For the reader Coleridge's dictum calling for the "willing suspension of disbelief" is nullified when reading an autobiography, because of this commitment to truth. Is Alice in Wormland really Hewett because she receives her mother's gift of Jean Curlewis's The Art of Prosody, or is she not Alice because she writes "Alice had six brothers?"¹⁸ The question should not be asked. Sally Banner in The Chapel Perilous, Alice, or Beth and Nell may well be based on aspects of the life of the subject/author of Wild Card but the artistic truth of the fictional works takes precedence over the truth of the self. Connections can be made between the

¹⁸Dorothy Hewett. Alice in Wormland (Paddington, N.S.W.: Paper Bark Press, 1987), p. 5.

known facts and Hewett's fiction, but to have done so before the publication of Wild Card was an intrusion on the part of the reader.

In Wild Card Hewett uses the integrity of poetry with its metaphoric truth to add to "the pact of sincerity", to use Thomas's phrase," with which she writes her life. Ostensibly fictional poems are now confirmed as autobiographical by their inclusion within the text and as epigraphs to divisions. By using them in this way, the reader is now invited, if not directed, to incorporate them into this portrait of the life which is given added validity because of the similarity of phraseology, expressions, scenes depicted in the disparate sources.

"I'll make legends out of this place ... I'll write poems and plays and stories full of ghosts" (p. 49), and so Hewett's declaration in Wild Card interweaves her future writings. The extract from her first prize-winning poem "Testament" which introduces the first section was written "commemorating the memory of Lilla Harper, my first lover [who incidentally is the only character who remains nameless in Wild Card] and the farm" (p. 105). "This Version of Love", the epigraph to the second part, uses events described in Wild Card, V.E. (or V.J.) day at the Ocean Beach Hotel (p. 114), her attempted suicide (p. 108), and the crumbling statues of cupids noted with each visit to the abortionist (pp. 116, 135) to contrast the

external physical beauty and innocence of the lover with the high personal cost of love. Like Spence, Knorr and Keesing, the reciprocal connections made by Hewett between previously disparate works now allows for new and enriched readings of all.

The third and longest part of the book describes her volatile relationship with Les Flood and the epigraph to this section is the third stanza of "In Moncur Street". Although each of the sectional Introductions (which are not part of the chaptering process) details the houses or settings in which the ensuing life process is revealed, the fact that Hewett has not elaborated on Moncur Street in the Introduction to Part III again substantiates the view that the works used as epigraphs are to be incorporated into the reading of the autobiography. When Hewett finally decided she wasn't going to be "a flash in the pan" as she was described to Flood (p. 164), and that she would reject her past and commit herself to him, their new life started at Moncur Street, which becomes both setting and metaphor for this relationship.

Each of the poems selected so far has thematic connotations, but the choice of the last three lines of "Legend of the Green Country" used to introduce the Epilogue contributes to both structural and thematic development, so that the structural patterning must be considered before the final poem can be discussed.

"Autobiographies presuppose pattern, they

presuppose artifice and style,"²⁰ and the result is this intricately and highly structured book which demonstrates Hewett's skills as poet and dramatist. She uses complex, telling dialogue and incorporates a range of genres including letters and articles. The most unusual but effective present continuous tense, appropriately renamed "present dramatic" by one reviewer,²¹ is interspersed with flashes of past and future tense which allows her to manipulate time, thus providing future outcomes to past events or characters. (Coincidentally Wild Card is dedicated to, and was undertaken at the instigation of Hal Porter whose own autobiography, according to Colmer, achieves immediacy by being written in a similar tense which he designates the "historic present".²²) Hewett's delight in playing "ducks and drakes with time" (p. 90), apparent since her university days, enables her to present any number of narrators, dipping in and out of the continuum of time from present day back to her first memory.

The title of this autobiography evinces a most complex implementation of patterning. Firstly it indicates the organising metaphor of card houses; it also creates the reverberations of fate randomly dealing the "wild card" of good fortune so valued by

²⁰Hewett, "Autobiographically Speaking," p. 39.

²¹Chris Wallace-Crabbe, "The Passion of Those Heady Years," rev. of Wild Card, by Dorothy Hewett, Australian Book Review, 125 (1990), p. 43.

²²John Colmer, "Hal Porter: The Watcher on the Cast-Iron Balcony," in Autobiographical and Biographical Writing in the Commonwealth, ed. Doireann MacDermott (Sabadell, Barcelona: AUSA, 1984), p. 59.

all players, in life and gambling. It is echoed throughout the text as when she saw herself holding "all the trump cards" in a confrontation with her parents (p. 104). But above all there is the significance of the printed symbols decorating each chapter. Each epilogue and introduction is printed with hearts; as poet she is the Queen of Hearts and the places she describes become part of the heart of the world of the emotions. The numbered chapters demonstrate a regular, ordered patterning of card suits - spades, diamonds, clubs, hearts.

But is it so regular? Chapter 13 describes the desolation of Clancy's death and is headed with spades; Chapter 12 carries hearts and details her decision to reject all her past to stay with her boilermaker lover, while Chapter 19, decorated with clubs, describes Les as "possessed by two warring personalities" (p. 259), and includes the details of his death threats and violence. Is it really just a haphazard patterning which echoes the coincidences of life itself and allows the reader to make "wild" connections or is it that the patterning of a female life only becomes noticeable as the process of development becomes clearer, both for the reader and the author herself? It is disappointing that there is no symbol of hope in card suits, for despite all her misfortune, hope is a large part of Hewett's story.

Secondly the title provides emphasis on the word "wild". And wild she is in all its definitions -

impetuous, licentious, passionate and rebellious. She wrote at University, "Live wildly today, forget tomorrow" (p. 84). Although she achieved the former, this autobiography contradicts the latter.

Her poetic talents are evident in the sensitive, lyrical and easily visualised settings. Like Gray, the other playwright in this study, Life is a performance which can be structured into dramatic acts, each with its own setting and timespan. Hewett's three acts encompass the farm at Malyalling via Wickepin, her adolescence and first marriage in Perth, and life in Sydney with Les Flood. However underlying this three act division and running in counterpoint to it is another structure carrying her search for the Garden of Eden and its subsequent loss, which is indicated by her almost mythical descriptions of certain rural settings. The farm at Malyalling is the first Garden of Eden even though she knows "the black snakes wait and slide" (p. 32). Exactly half way through the book there is another rural setting described with equal poetic fervour and delight - the house at Darlington, which becomes "an escape into Paradise" (p. 136), but like her first "Garden of Eden" despite "frogs and crickets sing[ing] in the moonlight together" (p. 136), it is not completely idyllic as the modern day Eve wants more than the garden and the account of her infidelity with Sam Aarons follows closely.

1958 completes the autobiography with Hewett leaving Sydney defeated and homeless, but it is the

Epilogue, moving out of the timespan of the book, which completes this underpinning structure and combines metaphor and event. In 1987 Hewett returns to the house which "sits in the hollow of the heart", the first Eden, to find it destroyed. In this section the metaphoric strands are drawn together - she has left behind the solid houses of her past which have sheltered her and witnessed her passionate engagement with life so that they have indeed become the metaphorical card houses without substance which collapse or can be easily discarded. There is no Garden of Eden; all that is left is the clean, light space of memory and writing. So too with the poem of the Epilogue. It returns to the first chapters, revitalising and reintroducing her ancestors, emphasizing the cyclical nature of life and acting as yet another patterning device. Again it is more than this. It becomes a public testimony to her acceptance of her heritage and thus the responsibility for her truths. Just as Sixty-five Marriott Street was her "very own Wigan Pier" (p. 150), like Orwell, Hewett has discovered that she has been unable to maintain the renunciation of her past and that class and heritage made a greater contribution to her development than she realized. Just as she saw herself "condemned to pay penance for the sins of [her] birth" in Sydney (p. 168), she now admits the debt to history, not only in "Legend of the Green Country":

I will pay this debt, go back and find my place,
 Pick windfalls out of the grass like a
 mendicant."²³

but also in Alice in Wormland where she is aware that:

the blood of them all swam in her
 she was caught in the web of their history."²⁴

She is part of her history; she is her mother's daughter recognizing the repetition of history when she and Les attempted to return to the farm (p. 237). It is clear though, from the sparse language of disillusionment, that this return is not part of the Edenic metaphor but rather refers to the mother-daughter discourse.

The self portrayed is rash and impetuous. Although there has been some criticism that there is too little introspection," (a questionable comment bearing in mind the contribution of her poems) it is obvious that this is not one of the character traits or the persona being portrayed. The phrase "Too Late" echoes throughout the book. It was too late for a romance with Bill Hart-Smith (p. 111); in reply to an Adelaide journalist it was too late for her to return to Perth (p. 158); it was too late for Lloyd's offer of a reconciliation (p. 164), and finally, most heartrendingly, it was too late for the doctors to continue Clancy's suffering (p. 182). Life rushed by and, for good or ill, had to be taken immediately.

²³Hewett, Dorothy. A Tremendous World in Her Head: Selected Poems (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989).

²⁴Hewett, Alice in Wormland, p. 6.

²⁵Candida Baker, "Hewett Work Comes into its Own," The Age, 27 Jul. 1990, p. 14.

VII

ACCOMPANYING IMAGES OF SELF - name and icon

To explain and recreate the self Australian women of the 1920s have employed a range of metaphors from the domestic to the abstract, but one image of self consistently evident in all the works is the naming of self, and to a lesser extent, the naming of others. However the emphasis they give to naming as an aspect of individuality indicates their awareness that the societal imposition of name changes for females is yet another barrier to the full development of female identity and personal autonomy. As Hewett comments,

it was easy to take on the protective colouring of a different man, a different name, a different city, harder to hang onto any real sense of your identity. (Wild Card, p. 174)

In "Ceremonies of the Alphabet: Female Grandmatologies and the Female Autograph" the authors discuss the patriarchal control of the alphabet and through it the empowering of male names. They refer to the many women writers who, over the years, have assumed male names or accumulated three or more surnames to reflect their "compound identities". They also detail those who completely reject patronyms or

total nomenclature such as Judy Chicago or Renee Vivian.¹

Apart from Adam-Smith who hyphenates her paternal surnames none of these Australian women make any such statement - Taylor, Corbett, Knörr, Spence and Inglis use their married names; Gray retains her ex-husband's name; while Keesing, Lindsay, Eakin and Hewett continue with their paternal names.

For women the first, or given name seems most clearly to affect the view of self. Chicago wished to "divest herself of all names imposed on her through male social dominance,"² and in "freely" choosing her own name retained her first name while replacing Gerowitz. But one must question whether her choice was as value-free as is implied or whether she is still unwittingly reflecting the traditional social norms. After all the last names of women are expected to change, while the first or Christian names stay the same and thus seem to contain the more personal sense of identity.

There is a marked difference in attitudes of women to surnames and first names. It is no accident that in Anglo-Celtic and hence Australian educational practice, boys have been generally called by their surnames and girls by their first names. The importance of first or

¹Sandra Caruso Mortola Gilbert & Susan Dreyfuss David Gubar, "Ceremonies of the Alphabet: Female Grandmatologies and the Female Autograph," in The Female Autograph, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 21-48.

²Quoted in Gilbert & Gubar, "Ceremonies of the Alphabet," p. 31.

given names to identity is borne out through examination of these autobiographies. Not only does Inglis entitle her book Amirah but her opening paragraphs are a discussion on the singularity of her name and her "irrational fury" even nowadays when it is pronounced incorrectly (p. 4). Although superficially the bane of Inglis's existence the arrival of a cousin with the same name made her aware that she had regarded this unusual name as a personal, unshared possession.

For Spence, Eleanor is a distinction, it is her mother's name, one that was never abbreviated and it had "such romantic possibilities" (p. 13). The power of her first name is such that the discovery of the Australian author Eleanor Dark was regarded as a personal portent for literary fame. Oriel Gray tells us her name was suggested by the nurse attending her birth. Even this mundane source of naming is affirmed so that there can be no blurring of the genesis of her identity.

Adam-Smith confirms the role of first names in the search for identity as the ambivalence of her childhood makes her reject the "Jeanie" by which she was known as a child in order to become Patsy. The "chains of belonging" (p. 152), which were broken with the knowledge of her adoption, are reforged in adulthood with the resumption of her first given name.

It was Inglis who gave her long-awaited brother his two "Christian" names, ensuring that the non-Jewish Ian was his first name, as if through this care he

would avoid the outward signs of difference and hence the accompanying constant soul-searching for the resolution of identity. Bozic too, and her husband, spent much time choosing the name for their son; in rejecting names of those who are regarded as villains by history (p. 48), they again implicitly recognize the power of names.

Hewett remade her life by having a total change of name. When joining the Communist Party shortly after she married which changed her surname to Davies, Dorothy was nicknamed and became known as Toddy. The fervour with which she took on Marxism is expressed in religious terms as the CPA was going to be her "salvation" (p. 111); it was a "conversion" (p. 174), and as in religion, naming is part of baptism which symbolizes casting off the old and putting on the new. As a sign of this commitment Hewett wrote under the byline of Toddy Flood and rejected all association with her previous name.

Mary Lassiter's study of names suggests that "it's better to have even a derogatory or absurd nickname than to have none at all."¹ She states that these names are usually the province of the more popular and noticeable people. She does however point out that those perceived to be unflattering are not usually admitted to once the bearer is no longer part of that society. In autobiography the authorial contract to

¹Mary Lassiter, Our Names, Ourselves: The Meaning of Names in Every Day Life (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 124.

truth transcends this rule - Taylor admits to gaining the hated nickname "Squib" because of her size (p. 42), while Adam-Smith was called "Paddy-the-next-best-thing" (p. 7). Gray owns up to the less-than-flattering "Sniffy" (p. 152), and Hewett had a myriad of nicknames - "Nip" and "Honeytop" as a child; "Hermit" at school; "Skin" at the factory and "Flash" by Les. Using Lassiter's measure these revelations not only confirm the commitment to truth of the autobiographers but demonstrate their need to be loved and to belong so that even a seemingly derogatory name can be used to denote singularity.

Special nicknames symbolize particularly close relationships. Eakin's grandfather, with whom she had a special relationship, is "Sammie" rather than any of the popular generic terms (p. 53). For Corbett her mother called her Barbara, while to her beloved father she was Bab. Taylor's revelation of her father's pet-name for her provides further evidence to contradict the statement that she did not want to be anyone's favourite. Not only did she achieve victory in the "Castor Oil Battle" but she was "his 'Roslyn the Gosling'" (p. 66). Success and popularity are combined in the retelling of this event, and signified by this name, while the structural placement of the anecdote, which becomes the climax of Part III, also contributes to its importance.

Equally teachers who are perceived as influential in the development of the author have their nicknames

revealed for posterity - Inglis's Miss Mary Hutton is "Hairy Mutton" (p. 121); Spence's Miss Moore was "Winnie" (p. 126). These artless nicknames have their origins in the adolescent tendency to name personable teachers; this again contributes to the notion of belonging. The knowledge and use of these special names indicates that the individual was part of an exclusive group or had a singular claim to the named which also reflects the uniqueness of the writer.

Although it has been suggested by American critics that ethnic women suffer a double dispossession based on being female and coloured,¹ this study bears out the opinion of Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin that there are three dispossessions in the Australian context since non Anglo-Celtic should be added.² For the migrant woman identity involves both first and last names, and the insensitive reactions of the host culture to their unfamiliar names create additional conflict in identity. The immediate symbol of alienation for Inglis is not appearance, language or family habits but names. This perception is reinforced metaphorically when she describes the corruption of Gutstadt to Gust as having been "hacked by bush surgery out of a 'real' name" (p. 3), and the dropping of suffixes from foreign names as being "sliced off" (p. 5). The implementation of the surgical metaphor depicts some of the pain involved in what she perceives to be the cavalier dismissal by the

¹Gilbert & Gubar, "The Ceremonies of the Alphabet," p. 24.

²Gunew & Mahyuddin. p.xvii.

host culture of one's identity and the imposition of another.

For the aboriginal women naming is just one more almost futile attempt at gaining acceptance in the mainstream culture. Smith explains how they just "took" the surname of Perry "in order to fit into the white world" (p. 5). There is almost a sense of *déjà vu*, a reversal in miniature of the taking away of the aboriginal identity by the Europeans. From Colleen Perry she "became" Shirley Smith so that she could visit the prisons freely. The lack of consequence given to European names is obvious as her acceptance of her Aboriginal identity grows, and in her chapter entitled "Remarkable People" she reinforces Roughsey's comments on naming and respect from the Aboriginal point of view. These individuals, whose contribution to the Aboriginal people she celebrates, are all known by names denoting relationship; Mother Williams, Granny Robinson, Aunty Ellen, etc. She does not detail who gave her the name "Mumshirl" but, because of the concepts of respect and relationship it connotes, its usage is restricted. She describes two events where she does not accept the right of the speaker to use this name, and in both cases, the attitude of the speaker was patronizing (pp. 105, 117). She too had a special relationship with her grandfather and a personal Aboriginal name for him which she tries to explain, but for her the English language is insufficient and does not contain the wholeness of the one Aboriginal word.

Roughsey's aboriginal name receives pride of place on the cover, perhaps reflecting the later publication date and the greater sympathy now apparent in the white audience. But it could equally be seen to attest to her keener participation in aboriginal rather than white culture, although she is able to function in both. When writing of her husband she calls him Dick Roughsey, particularly when referring to his movements in the white world as in the publication of his book, but when describing his tribal activities in the bush she calls him Goobalathaldin (p. 148).

It as Lassiter suggests names "mark that boundary between our selves and the outer world which encloses our personal identity,"⁶ and if, as I have suggested, the process of feminine development is bound up in the domestic, it is obvious that first or given names are the substance of self, and that childhood nicknames are not as Lassiter suggests, of lesser importance, but are an important part of the base from which women commence their search for identity. This study of Australian women writers whilst confirming Joyce Penfield's assertion that surnames and the changes made to them fundamentally affect women's social image, particularly for migrants, does not corroborate the idea that surnames "represent self-definition in its most symbolically meaningful form."⁷ This is the role and significance of first names.

⁶Lassiter, p. 129.

⁷Penfield, p. 117.

In each discussion there has been an implicit acceptance of authorial integrity in portraying truth, and there has been progress towards a tentative definition of what this truth might entail. Yet it still remains the major complexity of autobiography and indeed the shoal on which the critical barque founders, or more appropriately the loose thread which unravels the nearly completed literary garment. In the chapter entitled "The Elusiveness of Truth" Pascal attempts to isolate and analyse what he describes as the main types of untruths in autobiography and concludes that truth is selective and subjective by being based on the needs of structure as well as the fallibility of memory and unconscious censoring.⁸ This is just the beginning of the continuing, inconclusive debate contributed to, not just by critics, but the writers themselves.

If, as Barthes suggests, "language is, by nature, fictional",⁹ how do critic and writer overcome this inherent problem in autobiography? Lejeune suggests that one way is through logic or sworn oath, which as I have pointed out, was a particular feature of the works by the aboriginal women, or it could be through the autobiographical contract which has been noted in all the works. But a more obvious suggestion, and one that has received little attention in previous analyses, is

⁸Pascal, pp. 61-83.

⁹Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo/Fontana, 1988), p. 87.

through the study of the photographs which make an important and complex textual contribution to the genre or autobiography.

Obviously the influence of publisher's costs, the fashions of the time in publishing, and editorial opinions must be taken into account, but the inclusion of photographs is more than just a whim on the part of author or publisher. Lejeune advises that the total product including the cover must be considered, so how much more important to the written portrait of a life will be the photographs of the past? Too frequently they are dismissed as almost incidental to the narrative, which is suggested by Chris Wallace-Crabbe. He posits the view that there are at least five levels of experience being invoked in the portrait of a self and almost in parenthesis suggests that the reader is "even happier if it contains photographs, since they seem to inhabit a different order of reality from mere print: they show people really *at it*."¹⁰ Yet surely photographs are indeed the invocation of another level of experience, a reiteration using another means of communication, thus attempting to minimize the fictionality of language.

Of course photographs have not been completely ignored in literary criticism. They have been seen as a supplement to analyse the presence of nostalgia in

¹⁰Chris Wallace-Crabbe. "Wangaratta, Not Carthage." The Age Monthly Review, 6, No.7 (1986-1987), p. 10. [his italics]

migrant writing," or as evidence of one woman's ability to use "establishment" or male techniques by successfully combining portraits or the personal with documentation from the patriarchal "capital-H. History,"¹¹ but in both these cases, the critics see photographs as peripheral, an addition rather than integral to the text itself. Judith Fryer in her analysis of Edith Wharton's autobiography tentatively touches on authorial selection of photographs which she suggests are "presumably intended as commentary" but again she does not elaborate at any length on this aspect of autobiography.¹² Mandel draws a correlation between the changing manifestation of one's past within the experience of the present and photographs, the meaning of which, he argues, changes according to the passing of time and relevance to the viewer.¹³ As an example he suggests that a photograph of a particular little girl has identity - it is his cousin; for a stranger it is merely a very ordinary little girl, in somewhat old fashioned clothes. But while using photographs as an example to illustrate his concept of time he does not then investigate their special role in autobiography.

¹¹Sneja Gunew, "Nostalgia in Australian (Migrant) Writing," in Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture, ed. Paul Foss (Leichhardt, N.S.W.: Pluto Press, 1988), pp. 35-46.

¹²Thompson, p. 226.

¹³Judith Fryer, "Edith Wharton's 'Tact of Omission': Harmony and Proportion in A Backward Glance," Biography, 6 (1983), 162.

¹⁴Barrett J. Mandel, "The Past in Autobiography", Soundings, 64 (1981), 75-92.

It is a truism that the act of reading commences a process of identification with the subject by the reader, but since the subject is also the narrator and author in autobiography, a special relationship develops, as the reader becomes privy to the author's personal inner reactions. The reader is no longer a stranger as the revelation of a life (limited or controlled as it may be) has admitted him or her into a unique position of intimacy. This converging of writer and reader means that the changing meaning of photographs over time and person is minimized, reduced or at the very least, altered.

However the presence of photographs requires an additional skill on the part of the reader. Photographs are recognized as the dominant form of visual language in our society, yet there is concern that we have not been taught how to interpret their message with the same emphasis given to teaching the interpretation of, and fluency in other means of communication such as reading and speaking.¹⁵ A recent model to assist in the analysis of photographs incorporates observation of their content and components, interpretation of the technical, symbolic and written codes, and then formation of conclusions about the ideology and cultural values contained therein - the less evident meaning.¹⁶ The development of this skill is seen as

¹⁵Annie Ilett, "The Language of Images," English in Australia, 83 (1988), pp. 2-16.

¹⁶Barrie McMahon & Robyn Quin, Exploring Images (East Perth: Bookland Press, 1984).

crucial, for:

in establishing meanings [of photographs] for themselves. students are able to position themselves and their values in relation to the world."

Although Annie Ilett's major concern is to ensure awareness of bias and intentional propaganda in society generally, to read the messages of photographs in autobiographies correctly, will ensure a greater understanding of the identity of the self and world being portrayed. Hence in this analysis a side benefit may well be the establishment of guidelines to assist in the interpretation and understanding of these messages and thus greater insights into the meaning and truth of autobiography.

One must agree with Hazel Rowley that a photograph is not an "unmediated representation,"¹⁷ and that many other contributing factors must be considered, such as the implications of the skill and intention of the photographer and the subject's view of self, but in autobiography there is one overwhelming consideration in reading photographs which involves the actual physical selection of the photographs. If, as Roland Barthes puts it:

in front of the lens I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."

¹⁷Ilett, p. 15.

¹⁸Hazel Rowley, "The Beautiful and the Damned: George Johnston and Auto/Biographical Fictions," Island Magazine, 34/35 (1988), p. 148

¹⁹Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 13.

then the autobiographer is able to emphasize doubly *the one I want others to think I am*. Not only can the self be posed or staged in front of the lens, but the final product can be vetted physically or destroyed by textual commentary. Of course there may not be the range of photographs that the author ideally requires to substantiate a particular event, convey an image, or to justify a view but as the number of those published is generally limited, the ones that are included carry great significance. As Spacks suggests when comparing women's self-portraits with autobiographies both are "acts of expression and communication to help define us,"²⁰ and so although the illustrations and photographs are not self-portraits, their very selection and inclusion indicates ownership and offers a further definition of identity.

Equally one must question the extent to which memory is assisted or even formed by the existence of these physical objects and hence what may have faded into oblivion without them. One autobiographer suggests that "a batch of photographs will both fix and ruin" the wide ranging elements in an insubstantial memory, in that they can be seen actually to curtail the process of remembering.²¹ Of course, diaries, sketchbooks and journals are used frequently to assist

²⁰Patricia Meyer Spacks, Afterword, "Self As Subject: A Female Language," In/Sights: Self-Portraits by Women (Boston: David R. Godine, 1978), p. 110.

²¹Annie Dillard, "To Fashion a Text," in Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), p. 71.

with memories of the past, albeit often unacknowledged, but photos become a different order of remembering.

The extent to which photographs are really a validation of the past has been the question posed by a number of critics. Susan Sontag suggests there is "a presumption of veracity" because in one sense the camera captures reality, but in another it also interprets it,²² prior to even further interpretation by the viewer directed, in autobiography, by the author. For Barthes the "mechanical" capturing of a scene is a guarantee of objectivity while man's intervention as photographer becomes part of the connoted meaning; that is, it imposes a second level of meaning on a photograph.²³ In a more recent essay the role of the viewer receives greater elaboration as Barthes posits that viewer interest in a photograph rests on two elements - *studium* - the generalist perception and participation in the photograph and the *punctum* which is an accidental, individual, emotional involvement.²⁴ For the reader of autobiography, and hence the viewer of the photographs included, I would suggest there is a third element - one that does not just concentrate on the role of the viewer as does Barthes, but reflects the complex and intimate reciprocity between the reader as actor and the subject

²²Susan Sontag, On Photography (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 6.

²³Roland Barthes, Image - Music - Text, Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), p. 44.

²⁴Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 27.

as narrator, author. I offer the term *acceptatio* with its meaning of accepting and acceptance to denote simultaneously the writer accepting the reader into her world while the reader experiences her own acceptance of that world. Using the word empathy in its strictest sense, the empathetic nature of the reader/viewer experience is *acceptatio*.

It is obvious that the debate on the deeper truth of photographs merely adds to the already existing plethora of "presumed veracities" in the analysis of autobiographies, with the real danger that, in totality, they could lead the critic away from participating in the main purpose of the author which is to communicate the meaning of a life using print media. To read fully is to obtain the meaning of photographs in conjunction with, not in spite of, the printed text.

Of the works under discussion those by Spence, Gray, Knörr and Bozic are unillustrated and I suggest that in each case the lack of photographs validates the already stated literary analysis. That Another October Child has no photographs adds credence to my view that Spence focuses on childhood as being the intangible development of the writer, since she does not attempt to fix the immutable past as reality nor to bring to her recollections the passing of historical, chronological time. Spence does use photographs as an adjunct to memory, but as she translates the message of unseen photographs into words, the all-encompassing

visual representation becomes the precisely literal. She describes not just the appearance of her mother-as-child in "buttoned boots and white frilled pinafore" but also her manner - "ir not quite glaring at the camera, at least giving it a thoughtful, considering stare" (p. 16), or later the quizzical expression on the face of her much loved English teacher in a staff photograph (p. 160). Spence's interpretation ensures that, through words, the reader, although without the visual information, is able to gain access to the author's/subject's view of the less evident meaning of the photographs.

Exit Left is in this category, which reinforces Gray's metaphor of theatre and fantasy as life. It is fitting that she does not include photographs of her past for the successful achievement and resolution of her life and her story is her acceptance of reality. The underlying theme of the acquisition of a personal language in Knörr's Journey With a Stranger equally excludes the role of photographs, since they would undermine the manner in which she accomplishes this goal. Again in Gather Your Dreams the anonymity of the personal specific and its purpose or universality would be negated by the substantiality conveyed by photographs of the particular. Bozic (like Spence) describes photographs in the text, carefully interpreting their personal meaning because for her they become yet another symbol of freedom and security. Photographs of her first eighteen years were

possessions which, when under threat of losing the ultimate possession - life, became unimportant luxuries. But as she lists the photos of her son Nicholas, depicting the various activities and stages of his first decade, the reader gains two impressions - firstly, that she is thumbing through the actual physical objects; and secondly, that the list itself is symbolic of abundance and plenty. Photographs are indeed only to be expected for a "first generation Australian who grew up in the never-disturbed security of a free country" (p. 77).

The remaining works all include additional information through use of extended visual communication, either photographs or illustrations, or both. In Lindsay's Portrait of Pa all the photographs included have particular relevance to the text and are not only indexed but paginated for easy reference. Family, Olympus, models, Norman's drawings and statues, and of course horses are included, captioned generally with direct extracts from the text, or with a somewhat obvious annotation providing a short-hand version of the much longer verbal description. Of the thirty three photographs included, only six are of Norman Lindsay either alone or as an artist which further supports the assesment of this work as autobiography. Although snapshots, the photos are generally posed and the lack of any with other friends restates and reinforces Lindsay's account of the isolation she suffered.

Even Roslyn Taylor's book published by a small

alternative press includes a number of photographs, equally clearly indexed and receiving similar weighting to chapter headings. Her delight in knowing "the security and warmth of the extended family" (p. 72), is reflected in the number of photographs relating to the trip to England when she met all the relatives (accounting for seven of the total fifteen); and although she has two sisters and mentions joint games and activities, it is worthy of comment that the only members of her immediate family shown pictorially and identified through captions are her parents (twice) - there are none acknowledged of the sisters. The only possible one of the three daughters shows three children and is captioned vaguely, *Camping 1928*. Again the photographs echo the conclusion I reached that, although she states it to be an advantage to be "nobody's favourite child," she might have secretly liked having to live up to the responsibilities of being "Mum or Dad's girl" (p.90). This implication which idiomatically could be called "reading between the lines" can equally be designated "reading all the messages."

Inglis too uses photographs to reinforce concepts which are of personal value and thematic importance, and many of them serve a double purpose. She allocates a double-page spread to her European relatives, most of whom she never met. Although Taylor had to visit hers for them to be real in her world, for Inglis (and hence the reader) the extended family was the source of both

fantasy and reality. It is noteworthy that the majority of these depict her father's family, of whom in her childhood he rarely spoke, but about whom he wrote for her some thirty years later (p. 6). On the other hand, her mother kept in frequent touch with her relatives, and Inglis states that she knew them much better, both through family stories and photographs (p. 10). Referring back to the text we find out that most of those in the photograph did not survive the war, while the Adlers only lost two of their number (p. 161); so the photos of the Gutstadts not only portray the extended family which was important to her, but also act as a memorial to them and underscore her un-Australianness. Inglis's selection demonstrates most markedly the lack of photographic resources, as noted in the caption under the photo of her maternal grandfather:

The only photograph we have in our Australian family of my mother's father. There is no photograph of Hannah Pozmantier, his wife.

and yet contradictorily, we know from the text that she had in Australia a photograph of her maternal uncle Henryk/Hermush as a member of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War (p. 77), and a photo of his wife (p.133), neither of which have been included. Obviously one must question this exclusion, and perhaps find the answer in the final pages where she intimates the terrible events that beset him after demobilization the truth of which she only discovered much later and

is not revealed in this autobiography.

The first two photographs are of houses and explicitly reflect the importance of place already noted. Of particular interest is the number of photos depicting only the mother and small daughter. Although the backgrounds are quite indistinct, the captions reveal that two are situated in Brussels while the other two are connected to each of the Park Street residences. These photos reiterate her un-Australian upbringing and the close mother-daughter relationship prior to school age, a fact commented on in the text, particularly when she contracted diphtheria while her father was in Russia:

The long weeks we spent entirely in each other's company brought the immigrant mother and daughter even closer together. (p. 45)

Later photographs show her in a class group or with other friends, and suggest that her assimilation into the Australian lifestyle was proceeding apace, despite the European homelife. Equally too, the caption for the class photograph draws attention to the different style of her clothing, a topic of continuing importance culturally and personally. One full photographic page is given to a double page-spread of a Russian magazine USSR in Construction with an extended caption detailing its propaganda value and superior technique. As has come to be expected this validates a textual reference (p. 55), and simultaneously illustrates the thematic concerns of education, reading and Communism. Inglis,

like Spence and Bozic, makes textual reference to many photographs. but for those she has included she takes great pains to ensure their correct reading, through textual explanation and captions. There is almost the fear, certainly the recognition, that readers do not read photographs as efficiently as words, and that uninterpreted visual images may not communicate with the reader exactly as the writer desires.

Inglis's own version of photographs seems to be based on the physical only, which can be established from her assessment of herself during the long vacation following her last year at school (1943-4):

How had I turned out? The exterior is easy; there are photographs and I had studied all my parts critically and in devastating detail. A girl of medium height with dark-brown, wavy hair, dark-brown eyes, olive skin ... It was much harder to reconstruct the interior results of the un-Australian upbringing. (p. 149)

and yet the connotations and conclusions that can be drawn from those she has included suggest a much wider bank of information. Although each photo is captioned to direct the preferred meaning (in fact Barthes argues that words are necessary to 'anchor' the preferred meaning against possible variables²³) Inglis keeps open the three-way relationship between photograph, caption and text, although it is obvious that the major means of communication is textual.

This is not the case with the works by Adam-Smith and Corbett. The photographs in these books incorporate

²³Quoted in Ilett, p. 11.

an extensive sub-text and add further complications to the already complex task of reading. They pose questions as well as provide answers, and add a wider social comment. Those in Corbett's work are mostly taken by her father and prove to be a mix between artistic creations and extempore family snapshots. The reader is led to question those which illustrate a poem as to which is a response to which? Having suggested that the bonding between father and daughter evident in this work was the basis and motive for many of the actions of the child, the book with its photographic authorial acknowledgement seems to be a final expression of this relationship - a cathartic revisitation, reworking and resolution of an unfinished childhood.

Adam-Smith complicates the reading even further. Not only does she include photographs of the characters and events of the story but she also includes many which contribute to, or provoke social comment, and through captions, adds yet another sub-text. Thus the reader is led through the text to one sub-text in the form of photographs and then to another in the form of social commentary which is not part of the major text. There are photos of community events such as a knife grinder "who was known all round Gippsland" (p. 25), or the unveiling of a memorial to the fallen with the comment that "Here at Brigalong, like other small towns in Australia 68.5 per cent of the men had been casualties, 1 in 5 had died" (p. 22). There are

advertisements for long-gone conveniences of the time - the "improved cooling safe - An ice chest without ice" (p. 84), or a Maple bicycle for £8/10/- and even the front pages of the newspaper which give details of the start of the war and the bombing of Darwin (p. 173). The captions attached to many of the photographs supplies information not in the literary text, such as Dad having to take the radio ten miles to Numurkah to recharge the battery (p. 172), or the extensive explanation about the photograph of Mick using the separator, and the domestic details concerning the efficiency of a Coolgardie safe (p. 82). Obviously these details do not contribute greatly to the discovery of self but do make a particularly strong statement about the truth of the times in which the subject lived. They impart a further gloss of truth to the story of a life in that public history is used to validate her erstwhile private story.

In striking contrast with the starkly honest story she relates, Hewett's photographs are the epitome of conventionality, and their message of success runs counter to that of the text. They show the outer face of the self; the posed baby photos taken by a professional photographer and the usual parental snapshots. There are no lovers portrayed, perhaps to avoid the libel suits she feared, but this concentration on self only serves to underscore the contrariety. Interestingly, the photos of her parents and grandparents are early ones and portray them as

youthful and set in history. They too faced the same period of life that Hewett describes for herself, and her selection of these particular portraits attests the truth of her description of their pasts as well as demonstrating her final acceptance of her ancestry. The captions are not only from the text but from her poetry, which continue the connections already explained. Despite her emphasis on place there are only three photos of houses - two of Lambton Downs (1930s and 1987) and one of Darlington. Perhaps this confirms the metaphor of the unsubstantiality of card houses and it certainly reinforces the underlying structure of Wild Card which I noted in the previous chapter.

A particular contribution made by Hewett to the reading of photographs is her formal acknowledgement of each photographer. The selection and authority of message is shared openly with the reader, as if to affirm that in all aspects of this autobiography, truth is the guiding impulse. Above all, the contract of truth is unbroken.

Although not to the same extent as photographs, the line drawings in Eakin's book convey social or historical impressions of the era being portrayed and reflect positively on the sincerity of the author. The terrace houses, trams and street lights (p. 19), or the child held by a male hand representing the subject/author being taken for a swim by her grandfather (p. 52), contribute visual images which put the life into context and add emphasis to the text.

It could be argued in all these cases, that the interpretation has been tailored to fit the thesis, and that the consistent and parallel messages received through text and photographs are at best coincidental. Keesing's work through its very difference gives the lie to this view. In Riding the Elephant the disjunction and lack of personal focus in the written text is equally evident in the selection of photographs. They include the the now familiar (familial) selection of parents young and old, offspring and personal literary, academic and social achievement; some reinforce the autobiographical strand, and others support the view of this work being regarded as something different. Unfortunately Keesing's use of photographs mirrors a pejorative criticism of Miles Franklin's autobiography by Thelma Foreshaw which she quotes indignantly: "photos were employed to give body to the people Miles Franklin has only pressed between the pages like flowers" (p. 74), for Keesing too has included photos of those people who are disembodied textually. The striking and impressively vital characters like Stella Davis, the hospital almoner, or the "brown" Bill Fitzhenry, are not reproduced pictorially, while those who are ineffectually portrayed in words (particularly her immediate family) are equally misrepresented through photographs. One could be forgiven for supposing her to be an only child as her younger sister Margaret receives scant attention in the text, and yet there are

two family portraits which suggest a conflicting message of seemingly close family relationships. The few superficial anecdotes which include her son and daughter describe them as small children, such as Margery at six months sitting in the middle of Henrietta Drake Brockman's drawing room (p. 159), or John at three discovering a nun's caliper (p. 160); but their photographs are more recent and show them as adults. This incongruity does not help recreate these characters and in fact is inversely reminiscent of baby photos on the family mantelpiece once the erstwhile child has become an adult.

Apart from those of Douglas Stewart and family, none of the photos included shows characters in their milieu or in any other way as natural. Just as many of her characters are included for the record, so too are their posed and formal photographs. Although most of the writers pictured feature in the text, the extreme case concerns Bill (W.N.) Scott, whose sole textual reference reads: "It was also in Adelaide that I really came to know Judah Waten and Stephen Murray-Smith from Melbourne and Bill Scott from Queensland" (p. 176); yet his photograph is included. One might ask if the visual is intended as a distraction from what might have been left unsaid in the text or is it just another example of the author attempting to depict the total literary scene and thus diminishing the portrait of self?

Each of the chapters has a commencing illustration, of which all but four feature setting.

They depict panoramic views or bush settings, or the exteriors or interiors of buildings, such as the school, hospital or office at The Bulletin. Whilst artistically pleasing and conveying some sense of the architectural period, their relevance is minimal to the chapter content. The remaining four, however - riding the elephant, Ethel Anderson, the judge and the young barrister, and the sketch of the photograph of her father - effectively repeat and embody major aspects of the narrative in that chapter, while the delicate opening sketch of the author when young suggests a daguerreotype of a Victorian writer.

While it was suggested that there *could* be a specific audience for Keating's book, those by the aboriginal authors were undeniably written for a specific (white) audience and the photographs selected have this in mind. In MumShirl, apart from the personal ones of close family, all the others illustrate either her own, or aboriginal generally, victory over white society. The receipt of her MBE, her prison pass, the aboriginal embassy in Canberra all demonstrate visually what has been recognized by white standards and bureaucracy. This is in opposition to the aboriginal causes espoused in her story, and shows that the moral and political struggle she depicts is unresolved, both personally and generically. Pictorially she reinforces the poignancy of her last sentence when she questions the value of this recognition - the MBE, the Mother of the Year Award - "They must be worth something in the

end, mustn't they?"

Through captions it is also implied that Roughsey selected all the photographs included in her book which can be categorized into three sub-groups - personal, tribal and Mission life. All contribute to the one overriding thematic concern of detailing the past and present aboriginal culture, with an underlying message suggesting that the influence of the white man, his "tucker" and even his camera denigrate the tribal dignity. By including some of tribespeople unknown to her she efficiently recapitulates her ownership of the total tribe, past and present. Through her photographs in print, along with her text, she celebrates their collective physical difference and ensures that they will not be forgotten.

From this analysis some guidelines can be deduced that will assist in the reading of photographs in autobiography:

- the critic should be aware of the unique relationship between autobiographer and the reader;
- the very presence or absence of photographs/illustrations generally must be questioned;
- the double influence of authorial intervention must be considered when examining the particular and final selection;
- the text is both the starting and finishing point so that the content and context of the photographs and illustrations must be examined within that framework;
- the technical code (i.e. the photographic processes)

is insignificant in relation to the symbolic and both must be informed by the written code (i.e. captions or headings).

It is clear that the reader plays a contributing role to the truth conveyed in autobiography, and if this truth is to be clarified and no longer elusive then all the author's messages need to be understood. Each of these women has unveiled the self and attempted to detail the images and conditions that have fostered the process of development. Each autobiographer accepts initially and then finally rejects the fictionality of language and self. Over time she has different names and different faces but these are explained, integrated and validated through text and photograph. The fictionality of language has been overcome by authorial integrity as each woman seeks to recreate the reality of the quintessential 'I'.

VIII

CONCLUSION

Past connections and future directions

Thus far I have concentrated on how each autobiographer described her process of development; the contribution of "other", time and place to this development; and the metaphors, style and form she used to recreate and represent the process. In fact the importance of "other", the commitment to truth, and the multitocus which are all evident in female autobiography are not only essential to the formation of the female identity but contain significant implications for history.

But is autobiography history? One critic argues that it is, "even if like other forms of history it is often biased, distorted, inaccurate."¹ Another suggests that there is a "competition between autobiography-as-fiction and autobiography-as-history."² Yet it would seem to me that there is little need for such exclusivity or classification particularly for women's autobiographies, even though they have been doubly

¹Forgunson, p. 154-5.

²Philip Dodd, "History or Fiction: Balancing Contemporary Autobiography's Claims," Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature, 20, No. 4 (1987), 68.

disadvantaged by the critics. As autobiography they are accused of being memoir, while their accent on the domestic has been used to minimize their contribution to history. Women autobiographers and their critics can have it both ways. Their writings demonstrate their dexterity in the art of autobiography and can be evaluated according to literary criteria, and the difference in female developmental patterns which leads to their focus on surroundings and "other" gives added validity to their social observations as history. In fact their concentration on social context provides an answer to John Hooper's question. "Larger social issues are [not] reserved for other literary forms like history or politics"³ - they are in women's autobiographies.

John Murphy argues for the place of oral history and the interpretative act within the historical discourse. In his summation of the main theoretical positions in autobiography, which he finds of little help to historians,⁴ he unwittingly highlights the lack of critical consideration for the contribution which could be made by female writers. The competition between identity and history is not evident in female autobiographies, since the "I" and "other" co-exist - "site" and "sight" are "cited" with equal probity. The

³John Hooper, "Autobiographical Acts: The History of the Private 'I'," rev. of Autobiographical and Biographical Writing in the Commonwealth, ed. Doireann MacDermott, Australian Book Review, 82 (1986), p. 29.

⁴John Murphy, "The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral Memory," Historical Studies, 22 (1986), 170.

emphasis by female writers on the domestic and the world of the imagination does not in any way diminish the worth of female autobiography but should lead to recognition of the difference in skills and values which will benefit both literature and history.

Recent historical criticism has detailed the peripheral role of women in the records of Australian social, economic and political history,⁵ and there has been a concentrated effort to reclaim women's history, for similar reasons as have been advanced for reclaiming women's literature. Despite all efforts, misogynist historical texts are still being studied, such as the one which states:

It is necessary to end this analysis by emphasising the relatively insignificant role which Australian women have played in the public role of the Commonwealth throughout its history.⁶

Fred Alexander's use of the word "public" and indeed his assessment of history cause concern. If history were only about public power and solely a record of political personalities his conclusion might have some merit. However statements such as this often become generalized to subsume all history. Not only are they incorrect but they continue the invisibility of women.

⁵I take the point made by Robin Lakoff in Language and Woman's Place (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) that it is just a felicitous coincidence that the term "history" comes from the Greek "historia", but as it denotes an almost exclusively male record, it is yet another example of the generic becoming the specific.

⁶Fred Alexander, Australia Since Federation: A Narrative and Critical Analysis (Melbourne: Nelson, 1982), p. 397.

History is more than a documentation of past events, for it is the interpretation and the selection of information which skews the thesis and its application to the present. As Miriam Dixon comments, "virtually all serious analysis of Australian character - or identity - is *by males about males*." Her work and Anne Summer's Damned Whores and God's Police form the watershed for the ensuing flood of research and publications revisioning the Australian past from the female point of view.'

It is clear that long before the 1920s women have played an integral and prominent role in all spheres, contributing greatly to Australian character and identity; and that further, many have detailed their successes (and, being women, their failures) in autobiographies. One only need consider the political comments and role of K. S. Prichard (1887-1969) in Child of the Hurricane or even earlier in An Autobiography by Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910).*

'Dixon, p. 13. Anne Summers, Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia (Ringwood: Penguin, 1975).

Rod Radford in his article "Historiography of Women in Australian History: Some Comments," Veritas: Journal of the Tasmanian History Teachers' Association, 5, No. 1 (1983), 12-20, discusses the problems associated with the Dixon/Summers patriarchal oppression thesis and details criticism by other historians of their narrow range of resources and lack of class analysis.

*Katherine Susannah Prichard, Child of the Hurricane (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963). Catherine Helen Spence, An Autobiography, ed. and introd. Jeanne F. Young (Adelaide: 1910; rpt. Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1975). This book was completed by the editor owing to the death of the author. Careful notes were made of the exact contribution of both women with C.H.S. writing two thirds of the book.

Spence's childhood and adolescence occupy the first two chapters, and she states: "Indeed at 14 I felt quite grown up." The rest of her story covers her adult commitment to and participation in education, women's rights and electoral reform in South Australia. She remembers with pride developing her skill at public speaking, which she recognizes as most unusual for a woman.¹⁹

If autobiography is written to celebrate the uniqueness of the writer, one might ask to what extent these women could be seen as representative of twenties women generally. After all at least four of the fourteen went to University (Spence, Hewett, Inglis and Keesing) while Lindsay wanted to but didn't reach the required academic standard. On the one hand this ambition carries connotations of middle-class expectations, but on the other, it could be seen to reflect the generally perceived egalitarian nature of contemporary Australian society where access to personal improvement was open to all. (The Aboriginal authors are obvious and terrible exceptions.)

However I am not making this general claim. It has been argued convincingly that there can be no universal history of women because they are approximately half of every other category of humankind; indeed for the same reasons, there cannot be, nor should there be, a

¹⁹Catherine Helen Spence, p. 18.

²⁰Catherine Helen Spence, p. 45.

universal history of men." What I am suggesting is that women's autobiographies add to the picture of society in a special way, clarifying the values and ideals which were imposed upon the writers as women in their social milieu; these works show the way they came to terms with them. The worlds portrayed by these women highlight the difference between the black and white perceptions and experiences and these differences become an indictment of the vaunted Australian egalitarianism.

There are some interesting conclusions to be drawn from life-stories of women from the same decade, although with clear regional and literary differences. An unexpected one is the lack of direct connections between each of the women. As a child Keesing played with Eakin's cousins, went to the same school, yet didn't know her although there was only three years' difference in age;¹¹ Spence, Taylor and Corbett all grew up in the same region of rural New South Wales while Sydney was the setting for the childhoods of Eakin, Keesing and Gray. Three of the women belonged to the Communist Party which incidentally had only 23,000 paid-up members in 1945¹² - Hewett initially in Perth, and then in Sydney as was Gray, and Inglis in Melbourne. Despite being part of the same decade, their

¹¹Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-Century Australia (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 17.

¹²Keesing, Sydneysiders, p. 53.

¹³Geoffrey Bolton, 1942-1966 The Middle Way, Vol. 5 of The Oxford History of Australia (Melbourne: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), p. 21.

separateness reinforces the view that the domestic and the private curtails the female experience. Equally however, it substantiates the truth of the similarities contained in these autobiographies: there can be no accusation of collusion for the selves and worlds revealed share focus and perception, not inter-relationships.

But what do these similarities reflect? Do they make the stories and the lives revealed Australian, or female, or reflect the development of the artist; or are they a combination of all three? Clearly childhood with its lack of independence determines possible interactions, but even with the comparative freedom of adulthood these women still seem localized and strangely dependent. All of them see marriage or partnership with a male, and the maternal role as an essential outcome of life. Even the stories of childhood include reference to their adult roles of wife and/or mother. Corbett (as noted earlier) makes reference to an incident involving her own son to illustrate her personal belief in the "collective unconscious"; Eakin comments on the difference between her life and that of her children's (p. 20); Adam-Smith and Taylor, who both keep their sights firmly fixed on family and the past, mention their married state and subsequent families.

The prominence given to books and reading becomes an unequivocal indicator of racial difference. The white women give details of the books they have read

(mainly for leisure but also at school) and attempt to estimate the influence that these have had on their lives and their imagination: Dickens, Hardy, L.M.Montgomery, Louisa May Alcott, Kipling, Alice in Wonderland and the ubiquitous English schoolgirl stories. The range and impact of foreign (mainly British) authors is far-reaching, but the Australian contribution is not nearly so extensive for the child and it is only in adulthood that works by authors such as Ruth Park or Christina Stead enter their lives. For Adam-Smith, who was not allowed to read at home, this deprivation was seen as life-threatening; it was "starvation" of the life of the mind as she describes her fortnight at the convent where she "had eaten, devoured, chewed-up, swallowed and digested three books" (p. 140). The others detail their freedom from censorship and depict all aspects of the reading spectrum; learning to read, being read to, receiving gifts of books. Bozic, as a cultural stranger, uses books as an avenue to understanding the new language and the new country.

The role of the cinema is important; it is responsible for the childhood obsession with Shirley Temple, tap-dancing and long curls which Spence and Tavlör depict, while seeing Lew Ayres in All Quiet on the Western Front made Hewett a pacifist (p. 85), and a performance of the anti-war play Bury the Dead led Gray to the New Theatre and Communism (p. 5).

It is clear that these assessments of the impact

of print and other media make an important contribution to history and to autobiography. They provide details of the cultural pursuits of white Australian women and, in contradistinction to establishment history which suggests that American influences on Australia were evident in the nineteenth century," these women propose that it is through the advent of the cinema that America's influence was perceived by the ordinary people to have increased.

Books do not feature in the Aboriginal experience. Smith is illiterate; and Roughsey points out that "yarning" ensures continuity of tribal laws and customs (p. 206). For them the world of the imagination is bound up with their Aboriginality, and for this reading is irrelevant. But storytelling is also part of the white women's worlds and, echoing Smith and Roughsey, its value lies in its contribution to learning about and assimilating familial traditions.

The importance given to storytelling and media provides insight into some of the factors which formed the female imagination and identity and it also confirms the underlying thesis which suggests that the world of the imagination has an integral truth, which is fundamental to the life being recreated.

Family interactions form a large part of female autobiography. The possible options of female behaviour are constantly reviewed and measured against instinctive and personal beliefs. Daughters criticize

"See White, Chapter 4.

their mothers for continuing the traditional role of female subservience which seems inappropriate given their talents as did Taylor, and Knörr's discovery of her parents' imperfections becomes a loss of personal innocence. It is in the small, every-day activities that values for future life are established. Whether dolls were important, as they were to Hewett; or hated, as they were by Corbett; or whether it was a Teddy which was much loved by many of them; toys become a multi-faceted metaphor. They are given identity and personification in the world of the imagination, or they become the embodiment of love, or they foreshadow the development of maternal, child-caring skills. The Aboriginal women authenticate their own stories - the vicissitudes of Mission life and deep concern for their extended families are constants in these life stories which are so geographically dissimilar.

In the portrayal of the domestic surroundings all daily routines receive prominence, so that Colmer's assessment of the importance of the "outside dunny" in Australian autobiography is not as facetious as he has suggested,¹⁵ although to isolate this factor is to misread the female story. Adam-Smith certainly uses it as a hiding place for reading and books, but for Taylor and Lindsay its importance involves the continuing puzzle of adult responses. Why does Charlie become so embarrassed when emptying the pan, which he "furtively

¹⁵Colmer. Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest, p. 9.

stole" and which Lindsay, aptly echoing his actions in words, designates his "fearsome chore" (p. 33)? Tavlor could not understand why she had to hide when the nightcart came and indeed why it was called the night cart when it came in the daytime (p. 18). These women depict and emphasize a wide range of personal domesticity, all of which show the writer in her surroundings and all of which are individual and yet similar - regularity of body and ablutions; cooking, meals and kitchens; but above all, clothing and appearance.

Clothes are integral to these female self-portraits. There are those for whom events are combined with precise details of what was worn, almost as if, in memory, one were synonymous with the other, like Gray as an usher at the New Theatre in a long midnight blue evening dress (p. 33), or Hewett in her pale-green, ballerina-length crepe de Chine going to the pictures (p. 64). Others seem to remember what they were wearing at personally significant events, like Lindsay going to her first lover's house "in a pair of Honey's thin pale blue cotton slacks" (p. 154), or Keesing being the physical antithesis of an ethereal poet, linen-suited with "platform-soled shoes" (p. 46). MumShiri expresses an underlying view that, for women, personal effectiveness and appearance become synonymous when she explains that she aborted her meeting with Mrs Whitlam because she felt underdressed:

I've never been one to worry much about clothes or good things for myself, but I know how they can be used against people, and this one time I felt the most terrible feeling that they were being used against me. (p.118)

Clothing and appearance is, of course, a personal matter but it seems also to be a perennially female concern, albeit at odds with the accepted female goal of marriage and children. It has been argued that what it meant to be feminine changed in the thirties:

Femininity as an attribute of class distinction (emphasizing white hands, soft skin, refinement, daintiness and other ladylike qualities) was succeeded by a sexualised femininity, democratically available (indeed, like voting in Australia, compulsory) for all women.¹⁴

Although Marilyn Lake uses advertising practices to support her thesis she could equally have drawn on these autobiographies. As Hewett sums it up:

It seems years since masculine heads turned when I walked laughing past the Quay on a spring afternoon, my cotton skirt blowing in the wind off the Harbour. The butcher calls me 'Missus' these days ... (p. 232)

Another adult female regret is not really remembering the pain of childbirth. It is seen as a deprivation by Hewett and Gray, while Knörr and Gray accept stoically the patterns of Australian society that make pregnancy a barrier to successfully renting a house. In so many ways sexuality and gender become the basis for stories of personal humiliation, but at the same time, those included in these autobiographies seem

¹⁴Marilyn Lake, "Female Desires: the Meaning of World War II," Australian Historical Studies, 95 (1990), 271.

to amplify and enhance the final outcome of adult female autonomy.

The comments on education point to the inappropriateness of its strong British influence and the absence of Australian artists as study resource is deplored and is an aspect noted by male and female autobiographers, but the view of female employment offered by these women is well worth further investigation. Paid employment is not seen generally as having any great intrinsic value. There is little sense of vocation, and Knörr, Keesing and Taylor comment on the belief held, certainly by their parents and to some extent by themselves, that work for females was only a stop-gap before finding the ideal man to marry. Gray's job as receptionist at Steele & Housmans', for which she was paid 27/6 per week, is the means wherewith to pay lay-bys and provide entertainment (p. 21), while Smith received 12/6 to work at a factory when she lived in Sydney, which she suggests "was a lot of money in those days" (p. 37). Even bearing in mind that women received half the male wage for the equivalent work, the difference in remuneration between these two women is marked and is another pertinent comment on issues of class and race.

Eakin was a secretary for the Ordnance Department, but this is just the background (and one sentence) for her family and social life which continued apace (p. 84). Hewett's job at the factory was a symbol of her commitment to the working-class struggle and Marxism,

and Keesing's and Adam-Smith's contribution to the War Effort was from patriotism rather than vocation. Only for Spence is teaching a vocation (as well as being all that one could do with an Arts degree), yet, as it happened, it was not the career for her.

It is their purpose in life - frequently voluntary, always personal - which receives the female commitment and dedication. Smith lives on the invalid pension but is committed to her voluntary welfare work with the black community; as a young woman Knörr uses any employment to further her study in music; Keesing and Hewett transform their jobs into novels; Bozic uses work to get to know her adopted country and Roughsey's main purpose in work, as in her writing, is the transmission of Aboriginal culture and values. It is those jobs that can be classified as "caring" which receive the greatest elaboration; Keesing, apart from her avowed purpose of celebrating her times in Aust. Lit. lays strong emphasis on her Social Work and Hewett has much to say about her job as a Children's Court reporter and the world as she saw it from this vantage point.

The traditional view of history generally receives short shrift; political and economic events have no intrinsic value nor chronological importance in these autobiographies. One might suggest that all they provide is the lighting (diffused at best) for the stage on which the female life unfolds. There is no mention of the public debt, nor the political failure

of the Labor Party, nor Sir Otto Neimeyer's catastrophic "visit, in the impact of the Depression as depicted by these women." It either did not affect the writer greatly and thus becomes a gentle, dispassionate record of no shoes, although there are still creamcakes at community gatherings noted by Spence; or it assumes a personal face as in Adam-Smith's bitter description of her sister and brother-in-law's failure to sell their rabbit skins; and despite the privations Knörr experienced being one of nine children and living in a house with no windows, she is able to say, "Afterwards, those days were remembered mostly with wry laughter" (p. 25).

War is indeed "a profound metaphor" and is generally pervasive, although the reactions and responses to it are individual. A number of parents met and married as a result of "The Great War"; the stories of parental participation in it are both humorous and solemn and become part of the myth of childhood as does the child's participation in Anzac Day. The Second World War, however, is divisive - for some of the writers it becomes the background for entertainment and short but sweet relationships, as for Eakin, while the glibness of Taylor's ending may well reflect its deep-seated influence on her adolescence although this is not included in her story. For Knörr it brings feelings

"See Alexander, pp. 67-126. His appraisal of the literature of the period is equally misogynist as is evident in Drusilla Modjeska's Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945 (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981).

or guilt (p.55); for Smith it is somebody else's war (p. 26); and its progress brings to the surface the tensions Gray discovered in Communism as an ideology. Indeed for those connected to the Communist Party, it highlights their politicization, as they recount their perceptions of its impact both internationally and locally. Politics apart, one might question the relationship between Communism and free sexual expression, since Inglis, Hewett and Gray all describe their premarital experiences, but their political affiliation certainly wasn't a sign of female autonomy as Hewett and Gray both confirm their (sometimes wry) acceptance of the Party's high-handed paternalistic approach noted by Geoffrey Bolton.¹⁰

All the writers make some mention of religious prejudice, not from an ethical or political point of view but to explain or explore the effect it had on friendships and social relationships. Keesing, Eakin and Inglis comment on their Jewishness, discussing both the cultural habits this involved, its value for themselves and its impact on those around them. The others point to the effect on society of the Catholic-Protestant division, although, apart from the Aboriginal women, only Adam-Smith had a Catholic childhood.

To be Australian is perhaps the most contentious category, and I suggest that the thesis I have advanced for naming can be applied to national identity for

¹⁰Bolton, p. 23.

women. To name implies reality and identity so that to be Australian for women involves a similar style of naming and becomes part of the development of self. To see oneself as Australian, to accept those aspects of life, place and culture recognized by the self as Australian seem to be sufficient criteria. This conclusion has also been reached by Giulia Giuffrè as a result of her interviews with women writers active since the 1930s (which include two of these autobiographers): "On the personal level, mirrored in the personal interview, it appears that you are Australian if you think you are."¹ Indeed as I noted earlier, apart from those works by the ethnic writers, to be Australian is almost the only unquestioned fact. Just as White's main thesis is that Australia is a continuing invention, so too is being an Australian woman.

It is clear that the similarities noted in lifestyles, in childhood observations, and in adult reactions can be used to compile a general view of female life in the 1920s. Future History should not be written without consideration of these valuable references, for as Norine Voss points out in her succinct introduction to women's autobiographies: "women's history does not always follow the same

¹Giulia Giuffrè, To be Australian, A Woman, and a Writer, Working Papers in Australian Studies, No. 18 (London: Univ. of London, 1987), p. 3.

countours, the same hills and valleys as men's."²⁰ Equally, it as Delys Bird states, "knowledge of the culture as well as both the place of women and the nature of female experience in that culture will assume primacy in analysis and criticism of women's writing,"²¹ then these women's autobiographies are in a unique position. They provide knowledge of the culture, place of women and the nature of female experience as well as of women's writing. Again, if as Murphy suggests, metaphor is the dominant mode of oral history and there is a place for the act of interpretation in history,²² then here too is women's autobiography. Its significance to literature and history cannot be undervalued.

Although the purpose of each of these 1920s women differs markedly and the transition to, and indeed definition of, personal autonomy is surprisingly varied, there are some important similarities evident in the form of their works. Their control and use of time is remarkably flexible and confident. In some, like Adam-Smith or Hewett there is an initial impression of linear continuity, but this soon fades as the reader becomes aware of almost omnipresent self. The concept of "multiple selves" or "past selves" so

²⁰Norine Voss. "'Saying the Unsayable': An Introduction to Women's Autobiography," in Gender Studies: New Directions in Feminist Criticism, ed. Judith Spector (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1986), p. 224.

²¹Delys Bird. "Towards an Aesthetics of Australian Women's Fiction: My Brilliant Career and The Getting of Wisdom," Australian Literary Studies, 11 (1983), 171.

²²Murphy, p. 165.

evident for critics of male autobiographies does not rit these self-life-writings by women. The theory of female development being a process is validated by this over-arching, continuous self which does not actually present the self as a fusion of past and present, but uses what might be called a "retrospective-present" tense. Selective though the authors may be, it is evident in these works that all of the past is accessible to, and informed by, the present.

There is also a similarity in the voice with which these women convey their final triumph. The tone may be bitter, rueful, nostalgic or pleased, but each is saying, not that she has gained immortality, but that she has survived, and that each has a unique knowledge of the world which she has shared and now recreates.

The authorial commitment to truth is virtually tangible in the works published in the 1980s, but it appears less accessible in those published earlier. In Aunts Up the Cross one might question whether plot takes precedence over revelation or self, or in Portrait of Pa that Lindsay's multitocus hinders any real knowledge of the self. One might also ask if the reissue of Hear the Train Blow allowed Adam-Smith to supplement textually non-revealed truth by photograph. Yet despite Voss's view that "to be successfully feminine means to learn concealment, deceit, the graceful falsehood", and that this is reflected in women's autobiographies,²³ I suggest that in these

²³Voss, p. 229.

three works truth is not impaired. I would argue that, reflecting the social mores at the time of publication, these women-writers are merely more reticent; they veil, but do not deny, omit but do not lie.

There is a considerable amount of work still to be expended in establishing the art and truth of women's autobiographical writings. The analysis of female autobiographical fiction now needs to be "re-visioned" (a term introduced by Adrienne Rich to define the new feminist approach: "the act of looking back, or seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction"²⁴) in the light of this thesis. The authorial commitment to truth, to the world and to self as revealed in autobiography using all the linguistic devices and literary skills at the author's command shows that the undifferentiated combination of autobiography and autobiographical fiction is no longer valid.

Comparisons with other autobiographies in English from a similar period would provide further valuable literary and historical information.²⁵ Autobiographies by American women would hold particular interest, if we bear in mind the perceptions of the American influence on Australian society noted by writers such as Spence and Taylor. Those by British women could establish the

²⁴As noted by Lisa Tuttle, Encyclopedia of Feminism. (London: Arrow, 1987), p. 275.

²⁵Work has already begun in the general area of Childhoods (male and female); see for instance, Thomas E. Tausky, "'A Passion to Live in this Splendid Past': Canadian and Australian Autobiographies of Childhood," Ariel, 17, No. 3 (1986), 39-62.

difference between the dream and the reality of the United Kingdom being "home" even for people born in Australia.

The almost equal rush of autobiographies written by Australian women born in the decade 1935-45 invites further comparison and exciting exploration. Is it another expression of War as a female metaphor, or does it reflect social or emotional changes in the place and role of women? The representation of fathers and their role in identity appears to change radically between these two periods. Daddy We Hardly Knew You shows Germaine Greer (b. 1939) reworking the motif of Lindsay's work,²⁶ while Faith Richmond (b. 1935) in Remembrance presents a new image of fathers with her portrayal of one who sinks into mental illness.²⁷ The critic would also have to come to terms with a lesser, but still noted fictional component, similar to that expressed in Anderson's authorial comment. Josie Arnold (b. 1941), whose father was killed in World War II and Barbara Hanrahan (b. 1939), whose father died of tuberculosis the day after her first birthday, present female life-stories of a different kind depicting the fatherless family.²⁸ Mary Rose Liverani's (b. 1939) The Winter Sparrows illustrates the migrant experience in a new way and Ita Buttrose's (b. 1942) combination

²⁶Germaine Greer, Daddy We Hardly Knew You (Ringwood: Penguin, 1990).

²⁷Faith Richmond, Remembrance (Sydney: Imprint/Collins, 1988).

²⁸Barbara Hanrahan, The Scent of Eucalyptus (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989).

of identity, success and ambition in First Edition: My First Forty Years demonstrates a female's view of power.²⁹ Other writers such as Beverley Farmer (b.1941), Kate Llewellyn (b. 1940), and Helen Garner (b.1942), have all made autobiographical contributions that would repay study.

There is a change of tone in these writers - not for them the wry, resigned, controlled, sometimes hesitant tone of the twenties women: they are strident, happy to question and to have their say - often angrily, but always confidently. The 1920s women are the pioneers and exponents of this new art of autobiography; they are the vanguard of women who are able to tell their lives imaginatively and with integrity. No longer is the female 'I' veiled nor the eye clouded. Truth is validated by word and reinforced by image; the world is both separate and integrated; so the twenties woman portrays her image of self.

²⁹Mary Rose Liverani, The Winter Sparrows: Growing Up in Scotland & Australia (Melbourne: Nelson, 1975). Ita Buttrose, First Edition: My First Forty Years (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1985).

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