

"The Lang Women" and "Leaving Home", *The Home Girls* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982); "The Christmas Parcel", *A Long Time Dying* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987); "War Gave Women a First Taste of Liberation", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1985; and "Monet: *The Meadow*", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June 1985; to McPhee Gribble Publishers for Beverley Farmer, "Place of Birth", "Home Time" and "A Woman with Black Hair", *Home Time* (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1985); and for Helen Garner, "Postcards from Surfers" and "Civilisation and its Discontents", *Postcards from Surfers* (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1985); to Barbara Mobbs for Helen Garner, "What We Say", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 January 1987; introduction to Eleanor Dark, *Lantana Lane* (London: Virago, 1986); "Elizabeth Jolley: An Appreciation", *Meanjin* 42 (June 1983); review of *Thea Astley's An Item from the Late News*, *National Times*, 17-23 October 1982; and "A Woman's Word", *National Times*, 24-30 October 1982; to Pan Picador Books for "Writing as a Neuter", from interview with Thea Astley by Candida Baker, *Yacker: Australian Writers Talk About Their Work* (Sydney: Picador, 1986); to Penguin Books Australia Ltd for Thea Astley, "Heart Is Where the Home Is", *It's Raining in Mango* (Sydney: Viking, 1987); and "A Northern Belle", *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1979); for Jessica Anderson, "Under the House" and "Against the Wall", *Stories from the Warm Zone* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987); for Jennifer Ellison, interviews with Jessica Anderson, Thea Astley, Beverley Farmer, Helen Garner and Elizabeth Jolley from *Rooms of Their Own* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986); and for Elizabeth Jolley, "Hilda's Wedding", *Woman in a Lampshade* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1982); to Gerry Turcotte for interview with Kate Grenville, *Southerly 47* (1987); to the University of Queensland Press for Kate Grenville, "Federation Story", *Joan Makes History* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988); and "The Test Is, If They Drown", *Bearded Ladies* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984).

Introduction

Elizabeth Jolley has dubbed the 1980s a "moment of glory" for the woman writer, a phase in the national literary history when women writers and readers have entered the mainstream.¹ Thea Astley takes a more general view when she typifies it as a "decade of the minorities".² It is no accident of course that these should coincide. The prominence of women writers causes a move to heterogeneity rather than homogeneity and stable definition. National mythologies are undermined as, to adopt the title of Kate Grenville's latest novel, Joan makes history; the traditional centres and oppositions are displaced to allow space not only for the experience of women but also a marked sense of regional, ethnic and class based difference. As readers cast their eyes over the writings here there may be an impression of affiliation amongst these Australian women writers. However Astley is quick to speak as a Queenslander; Hanrahan pursues the obscured working class voices of Thebarton, South Australia; Jolley is careful to be faithful to the peculiarities of the West, and Garner goes forth from an urban Carlton which is far removed from Master's Cobargo, on the far south coast of New South Wales, "a terribly dull place in 1935".³ These women spin local mythologies rather than national or sexual stereotypes.

The prominence of women's writing this decade has been such that the WACM (as Elizabeth Webby dubs the white Anglo-Celtic male who has been the icon of Australian literary traditions and patronage)⁴ has suffered considerable anxiety. It is striking then that, as we look to previews of the decade, we find little in the way of precursors for this surge. For example in her review of Australian women's novels of the 1970s, Margaret Smith ruefully concludes that, whereas some of the earlier twentieth century literature by women can be seen as a product of first wave

feminism, "as yet in Australia there has not been a groundswell fully emerging with the second wave".⁵ At about the same time, Stephen Torre observes a dramatic increase in the publication of short stories in Australia and a "new wave" of writers coming into view.⁶ Although Torre's bibliography of the Australian short story 1940-80 includes entries for Thea Astley, Kate Grenville, Helen Garner, Barbara Hanrahan, Elizabeth Jolley and Olga Masters, their presence is a slight ripple, easily subsumed into the category of "new writing" capacious enough to accommodate them alongside the likes of Peter Carey, Michael Wilding and Murray Bail. That the short story would emerge as a particularly suitable vehicle for women's voices could not be foreseen.

This literary landscape changed dramatically during the eighties; a decade when women writers came "out from under" to be labelled variously as feminist, woman-centred or, most notoriously, as sacred cows.⁷ In a recent appraisal of directions in Australian fiction Brian Matthews identifies three surges in Australian writing: in the 1890s with the impetus to write nationalist literature; in the 1970s with the pressure to write protest literature; and the 1980s when "probably the greatest single and coherent pressure is the voice of second-wave feminism, whose tones many women writers convey with great assurance despite the fact that such an adoption still, in our time, commits them to confrontational stances of some degree or another. It is a voice which . . . has become a dominant note in our literary culture. It is one of the elements in the current exciting mix which could change the rules."⁸

This anthology presents a selection of stories, criticism, reviews, interviews and commentaries from the most recent work of eight Australian women writers: Jessica Anderson, Thea Astley, Beverley Farmer, Helen Garner, Kate Grenville, Barbara Hanrahan, Elizabeth Jolley and Olga Masters. Together these stories and prose writings present an array of different kinds of writing and different perspectives upon women's writing in Australia now. In interview extracts these writers discuss feminism, colonialism, regionalism and what it means to them to be thought of as a "woman" writer and as an "Australian" writer. They also comment upon the situation of writers in Australia in

terms of relations with publishers, readers, critics and funding agencies. In the reviews we can perceive a sense of community amongst these women. This is most obvious between Elizabeth Jolley and Helen Garner, for example, who clearly influence each other's writing. It is also apparent in comments Astley and Garner, Jolley and Grenville have to make about each other's work. The reviews, interviews and commentaries by these writers are not merely a background to their fictions; rather they set out a series of issues and considerations which are frameworks within which the stories can be read.

Together these writers have been typified as the "crest" of the current wave of women's writing, the "prize blooms in the perfumed garden".⁹ Recently Carmel Bird objected to women writers such as Hanrahan, Garner and Farmer being routinely represented as "eclipsed" or obscure on the basis of their gender; these women, she argues, cast a good deal of light.¹⁰ If this is so, and certainly women writers are by no means equally or necessarily marginalised, who or what put an end to the dark ages for women's writing? What brought women's writing and gender-based readings of Australian writing generally onto the agenda? Why is the spotlight cast on these writers in particular?

These large questions need to be addressed in the process of reviewing this past decade of Australian writing as something of a literary phenomenon for women writers and readers. The context which is sketched in the following introduction will begin by focusing not so much on these individual writers, though differences between them will not be overlooked, but on their place in a process of feminisation. From looking to the larger arena of cultural politics we can then move on to consider ways of locating this particular group of writers as a community. Notions of a women's room or a female tradition will be deliberately avoided here, for the choice of this group of writers, and the quite specific context of this anthology — eight women writers in the eighties — suggests a different framework for interpretation. Finally, given that the focus of this edition is short fiction by Australian women writers, we need to ponder issues of gender and genre and gender and nation. Why might the short story be particularly useful for the woman writer? To what extent does the

national context remain a useful frame for thinking about their work?

Cultural Politics

One should not underestimate just how substantial a shift in cultural politics has occurred for feminism to emerge as a powerful force in Australian cultural and literary affairs, given its potential "to change the rules of the game" and displace well-established interests. By a shift in cultural politics I have in mind changes and reorientations in various institutions (academic, journalistic, publishing) over the past decade. Although the sense of the passage of text from author to reader is often cherished as a direct and quite personal relation, it can be useful to turn to a different paradigm and think about texts as commodities which are, in some respects, produced and marketed and consumed like much less hallowed objects. This is not to impugn the quality of the writing itself or the status of each of these writers individually; the labelling of the reasons for the success of these women writers as merely "sociological" has quite rightly been recognised as a slur.¹¹ In her recent discussion of the commodity status of culture, Judith Brett points out that books are commodities, bought and sold in the marketplace; authors are workers trying to make a living. However books are also bearers of culture, writers are also artists and thinkers in a system of exchange quite other than that of the market.¹² In this particular instance, as we consider the emergence of women's writing as something of a phenomenon of the decade, it is useful to begin by looking not only to the author but also to the publishers, readers and critics who have played a significant part in this reorientation.

From this perspective, we can see that the emergence of women's writing in Australia (and elsewhere) has been related to a series of effects produced by the re-emergence of feminism. Feminist politics have shaped both the production and reception of what women have to say. In "A Woman's Word" Helen Garner ponders the question of who makes a book a feminist book, suggesting that finally "perhaps it is the reader, and not the

writer . . ."¹³ What we see over the past ten years or so (perhaps AMG, or "After Monkey Grip", as some critics have suggested!) is a number of factors which have come together to alter significantly the range of books available to a growing woman-centred audience who have become increasingly aware of the politics of reading.

The establishment and success of, for example, a number of small and specialist presses has been a significant part of this process. Sybylla, Redress Press, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, McPhee Gribble and Sisters have attempted to "upset the economy" by fostering women's writing in particular. Larger publishers, such as Penguin and Collins, have also greatly expanded the amount of women's writing on their publishing lists. The significance of women as editors in publishing houses and their close relationship with writers is a hidden yet vital part of the emergence of a female voice. Helen Garner asserts that women publishers have been "crucial" to her success; "A Time of Hard", the additional chapter to Grenville's *Lillian's Story*, was produced by editor and author working closely together; Olga Masters likewise has paid tribute to her very close relationship with editors at UQP.¹⁴

Important too is the discussion of ways of reading women's writing. Reviewing and criticism determine what texts get read, and how, and by whom. I shall return shortly to the issue of how we read writings by women; it is sufficient to say at this point that the success of women writers has been facilitated by the emergence of sympathetic feminist reviews and criticism. Helen Garner has spoken of the value of the critic "who will come and put their elbows on the desk with you metaphorically . . . they're marvellous, real jewels."¹⁵ Although, as Beverley Farmer's "Letter to Judith Brett" reveals, this meeting of critic and writer is not always harmonious and constructive, second-wave feminism has helped to shape a receptive audience for women's writing. If we look at the antagonistic reviews of those early examples of women's writing, such as *Monkey Grip* (McPhee Gribble, 1977) or *Country Girl Again* (Sisters, 1979), we can gauge how fundamental this shift has been in the ways we receive women's writing. This has been effected by feminist journals such as *Hecate*, *Refrac-*

tory Girl, *Scarlet Woman* and *Australian Feminist Studies*, and especially by the "feminisation" of *Meanjin* and *Australian Book Review* during the editorships of Judith Brett and Kerry Goldsworthy respectively. To some extent this has percolated through to the review pages of major weekend papers such as the *Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*.

Significant too is the emergence of a number of academic women who are able to publish and teach about women's writing; although their place tends to be tenuous rather than tenured, they too have helped to rupture a male preserve. A small group of feminist critics, and the work of Carole Ferrier, Kerry Goldsworthy, Sneja Gunew, Bronwen Levy and Susan Sheridan comes to mind in particular, have constructed the groundwork for an ongoing commentary focused on Australian women's writing quite specifically. Furthermore the influence of feminist criticism and the sheer volume of women's writing recently has percolated through mainstream journals and criticism to the extent that it is by no means a specifically female or feminist preserve. Most importantly — given, as Beverley Farmer (following Barthes) reminds us, that "literature is what is taught"¹⁶ — women's writing has found a specific place on undergraduate and other curricula and has become an increasingly respectable topic for postgraduate study. When these writings are taught and researched with a notion of their potential to "change the rules", and it is by no means the case that women's writing is necessarily read with a mind to its oppositional potential, literary canons and orthodoxies of the national literature are open to debate and redefinition.

Finally, economic considerations need to be noted. The feminisation of Australian literature has been facilitated by new federal programs of support for both writers and publishers. The Literature Board has been under considerable pressure to increase funding of women's writing in particular. There has been some acrimonious debate about sexual politics in the funding process — Margaret McClusky, for example, has argued that women writers routinely ask for and get less support.¹⁷ However a number of the writers included in this collection have benefited from a wider

array of sources of funding, from federal and state grants, to writer in residence schemes to literary prizes.

A Community of Women

These shifts in the cultural economy are both a pleasure and a danger for women writers. Does incorporation compromise the potential of women's writing to "change the rules of the game" and upset the balance?¹⁸ Certainly the celebration and canonisation of particular writers deserves close scrutiny. Although the cultural shifts outlined above have enabled a structural shift so that, as Kerry Goldsworthy remarks, there is a "trend in Australian writing — and publishing — away from the dominance of people called John, Peter, Alan, Patrick, Hal and Frank and towards a more equitable representation of people with names like Serge and Angelo and Ania, and Marian and Elizabeth and Kate", it is not the case that ethnic, Aboriginal and women writers have been favoured equally.¹⁹

For example, Gina Mercer has commented on the promotion of women writers in a "star" system. She notes how the particular acceptability of Helen Garner seems to go hand in hand with the presentation of a "small", "modest", "housewifely" person.²⁰ Ever since Jane Austen, the miniature and the domestic have been acceptable and neutralising categories for the woman writer. They allow her a "place".

It seems both disingenuous and misleading to deny notions of a canon when dealing with these eight writers who have so obviously represented the acceptable and popular face of women's writing in Australia. To some extent this canonisation must amuse writers such as Beverley Farmer, whose work has been declared offside according to some feminist criteria, or to Thea Astley, for whom the term "woman writer" has often been cast as a form of thinly veiled abuse, and who wrote for years "in the wilderness". The "star" system has not been without its costs for Garner also. "Star" billing can trigger a process of neutralising the oppositional potential of this writing and taming it to coffee table status.

Garner correctly identifies this as a way of silencing and denigrating the woman writer: "I read in a review of Barry Humphries' new show that on Edna Everage's coffee table Helen Garner and Doris Lessing have replaced the *Women's Weekly*". This information provokes a flinching, of course, and an urge to protect myself from mockery either by vanishing completely or by pretending I was never really serious about anything much when I wrote the books."²¹

However, given the lesser attention paid to the writings of black, migrant and avant-garde women writers, we need to consider why the writings of these women have been paid particular attention. Putting to one side judgments on the basis of that slippery notion of "quality", we can see that this most recognised and celebrated community of women writers are not disadvantaged by class and ethnic background; a white Anglo-Celtic culture is maintained. All have had access to tertiary education of one kind or another; all speak English as their first language, although Jolley is a migrant. Jolley and Farmer have written about lesbian relationships (most notably in *Palomino* and *Alone*), but neither is a Radclyffe Hall or a Jane Rule, raising issues of lesbian sexuality in a way which forces critics to acknowledge it as a major feature of their writing (as did, for example, Elizabeth Riley in *All That False Instruction*). Even so, Jolley's *Palomino* and Farmer's *Alone* have caused some discomfort and been regarded less favourably by critics. It is also noteworthy that writings about party politics tend to be put to one side. The best known example of this kind of marginalisation is the lack of attention paid to Amanda Lohrey's novel, *The Morality of Gentlemen*; however as Astley points out in her conversation with Jennifer Ellison, the political content of *An Item from the Late News* is rarely noticed.²² Lohrey has alleged recently that the quarantining of women to the domestic sphere has the consequence that they have to fight anew to write about work, sport, war and politics.²³ To some extent this comment ignores feminist reconceptualisations of "work", "war" and "politics"; when we turn to the stories included in this collection there is no dearth of politics. However, given traditional notions of "politics", it is true that in the stories that follow here (and in the wider array from which they were

selected) there is little attention to trade unionism or the committee room, or to explicit ideologies.

No doubt the eminence of these writers is due largely to the fact that they have provided women readers, many middle class and urban, with a powerful representation of their own experience; they have also written a style of fiction which is amenable to the most common varieties of feminist criticism: the experiential and thematic modes of reading. Together, readers and critics have constituted an interpretive community receptive to this kind of writing in particular. There is a powerful shock of recognition when details of women's lives and conversations are presented intimately and naturalistically. Although this has sometimes been dismissed as domestic trivia, readers have found in recent women's writing a powerful authentication of their own experience.

This, in itself, lends to the writings the oppositional status which Matthews has commented upon. However the tendency to place all women writers in shared opposition on the margins, with the implication that all are equally oppressed, needs to be questioned. Recently a number of editors have introduced their selections in the context of a trans-historical tradition of Australian women's writing. This approach tends to yoke together writings from different historical and sociological contexts on the basis of a quite fixed "eclipse", a fixed and immutable binary opposition between the masculine and the feminine which, it is suggested, produces amongst women a common consciousness and a distinctive literary tradition.²⁴

It may well be that anthologies are generically given to this kind of generalisation; that they tend to homogenise. Furthermore, as an editor, one sends an anthology out to sea with little control over what cargo it will bring back to port; it is more the case now than ever that there is no single way of reading a text with an eye to gender. Certainly some of the extracts selected here could be used to develop notions of a transcendent Australian female tradition. For example Thea Astley's comments on Barbara Baynton's work, "The Teeth Father Naked at Last", and Kate Grenville's return to history through her characters Joan and Lillian could be

used to bring these contemporary writers into a kind of continuous relation with earlier counterparts in terms of their concern with masculinity and the national mythology.

However a quite different approach might argue that, although all women have been oppressed by their gender status, they have not been oppressed equally. Furthermore, masculinity and femininity are not fixed prescriptions but varying scripts. So, for example, although Australian women writers in general have written within a national culture in which the recurrent icons have been masculine, ideologies of masculinity have varied. For instance Marilyn Lake's study of the *Bulletin* and the writings of William Lane discern quite opposing yet contemporaneous notions of manhood and masculinity.²⁵ Likewise Susan Sheridan's analysis of romantic fiction in this same period discerns a specific alignment of democratic and nationalist politics, realist and vernacular writing and masculinity. Sheridan is careful to avoid generalisations and to locate this alignment within the particular cultural and sociohistorical debates of the 1890s.²⁶

To take another example, it has been argued that one of the continuities of the female tradition has been a sensitivity to race, an ongoing sense of affinity with the Aborigine. However a closer and historically specific analysis reveals a more complex relation. In her study of women writers of the 1930s and 1940s Susan Sheridan argues that at this time the writing of women played a central role in the projection of an Anglo-Celtic nationalist identity. From their place within this the dominant culture, Sheridan discerns that white women tended to represent Aboriginal women as objects or symbols, the "other" woman.²⁷ She goes on to draw parallels between the women's writings of this period and the kind of justificatory myth that Nadine Gordimer writes about among white liberal writers in South Africa in the 1960s. Again Sheridan's approach focuses upon an identifiable group and a specific sociohistorical context.

All of the above suggest that the kind of socio-economic contextualisation we have been exploring for the eight writers selected for this anthology is not merely a sketching in of local colour, a set of considerations which the writings themselves transcend, but a network of relations in which these writings are

embedded. In describing these eight writers as a community of women who are located quite specifically in the terrain of white, middle class feminism, we are not negating the transforming power of their desire but we are bypassing a tendency to subsume women into one sisterly category of "woman" despite real differences of race, class and historical condition. These considerations do not necessarily divide women, but they do demand a sense of multiplicity. Women at different moments in history have been both oppressed and oppressive, submissive and subversive, victim and agent, allies and enemies both of men and one another.²⁸

If this seems far removed from the stories which follow, turn to Thea Astley's "A Northern Belle" for a fictional study of the tangled relations between gender and race, victim and oppressor, power and domination. Or turn to her "Home Is Where the Heart Is" as a statement of the limitations of white middle class liberalism in relation to the Aborigine. Astley's stories demonstrate powerfully the limitations of placing women and, in this case, Aborigines, as similar victims of a unified white patriarchal power. She shows white middle class women to be located instead in an ambiguous relation to dominant power structures, both oppressor and victim at one and the same time. Grenville's "Federation Story" and "A Time of Hard" make a similar point, although here the power relations are those of gender and class. In thinking about these writers and their work we can and should avoid the fallacy of an overarching and immutable schema of masculinity and femininity which places these women in the position of speaking for all women and scripts their stories into a continuing and transhistorical Australian female aesthetic. Rather, we can choose to see women's writing not as a monolith but as a series of clusters which address issues of gender and sexuality from the perspective of different historical, economic, social and generic placings. In the stories and commentaries of Anderson, Astley, Farmer, Garner, Grenville, Hanrahan, Jolley and Masters we can isolate one such cluster and address quite specifically the question of how they represent their difference.

Gender and Genre: The Short Story

A good deal of the burden of a distinctively Australian literary ethos has been placed on the back of the short story. If, as Kerryn Goldworthy asserts, short fiction written before the 1890s is "rather a sort of throat-clearing before the short story beings to speak",²⁹ it is equally the case that what has come after has been cast in the shadow of Henry Lawson's voice and its yoking of the short story to the Australian legend. There is nothing new then about the association of gender and genre here; the short story has been guardian of a strong and masculinist sense of identity. In the 1970s "new" fiction was characterised by a break from realism and nationalist preoccupations in the stories of Bail, Carey, Moorhouse, Wilding and Lurie most notably. However, the masculinism remained intact if not resurgent, as a number of these sexually frank stories appeared in "girlie" magazines.

It goes without saying that women writers in the eighties have used the short story to quite different purposes, and the question arises as to why a broadly feminist impetus might find this genre especially appropriate. One reason which immediately seems relevant is Valerie Shaw's association of the short story with an audience thought of as an intimate group or community and the tendency to the instinctual rather than the intellectual, the speaking voice rather than the literary.³⁰ This suggests a particular appropriateness of the short story for the kind of close experiential and associational reading which feminist writing often evokes. Shaw also notes the traditional association of the short story with submerged population groups and "frontier experiences" of all kinds,³¹ again suggesting that this form of writing may be especially suited to oppositional views and so the woman writer may find it appealing as a means of questioning and reinventing womanhood; a way of asserting a different voice and a different view. Elsewhere the short story is described as generically predisposed to representing experiences "not considered normative or authoritative in society", such as childhood, the non-heroic, the fantastic.³² This too suggests that it may be an especially congenial form for the woman writer.

Language: A Different Voice

These general observations suggest numerous points of entry relevant to the stories gathered here. Perhaps the first that should be taken up is the general problem of women and language which has preoccupied feminist critics. There are a number of ways in which the short story seems especially suited to representing women as a muted or silenced group. For instance one of the strategies which its form allows is the muting of a female character. This can have striking effects. One of the best examples is Beverley Farmer's short story "A Woman with Black Hair", which presents the woman entirely from the male point of view; however it is not merely "male" but masculinist in its ugliest and most violent form. The absolute passivity, silence and helplessness of this woman, as opposed to the power, authority and all-knowing perspective of the rapist, is a representation of the masculine and the feminine taken to horrific proportions. This is the kind of story which has caused the feminism of Farmer's work to be questioned from a prescriptive approach, a criticism which caused Farmer to write the "Letter to Judith Brett" included here. However rather than reading such stories as this with male and female characters in mind, it seems more appropriate to think of their roles more abstractly, in terms of masculinity and femininity. There is an alarmingly slight gap between the violent and distorted playing out of these roles in rape and the socially approved projection of masculine and feminine qualities. In this story the masculine and the feminine have been driven to destructive, mutually exclusive extremes. These kinds of distortion and falsification are, as Farmer herself points out, designed to distort the real, to be "just that little bit wrong [and] make an impression, and produce a friction".³³

There is a sharp contrast between the characteristically authoritative and self-centred masculine discourse and the tentative "exalted gossip" of women, as Garner labels it in "What We Say". For example in "Postcards from Surfers": "The women are knitting. They murmur and murmur. What they say never requires an answer"; "My mother and Auntie Lorna, well advanced in complicated garments for my sister's teenage

These stories are clearly inflected with a strong regional note, and Astley's "On Being a Queenslander" is a useful backdrop for grasping the specific qualities not only of the Mango region of North Queensland which Astley herself chronicles but also for the "Warm Zone" of Anderson's childhood in Brisbane. A quite different and more contemporary image of the north is found in Garner's *Surfers*. Each of these women writers uses the region in quite gender specific ways.

The difference of Anderson's idea of the "warm zone" is immediately apparent if we contrast her story "Under the House" with David Malouf's representation of this archetypally Queensland space. In Malouf's fiction under the house is a dark, gothic space, a place where the subconscious looms along with the spectre of a suicide from the rafters, "a dream space, dark, full of terrors that lurk behind tree-trunks in the thickest forest . . ." ³⁵ Anderson's version of this space is quite different. What hangs down there are relics of the grandparents' household and old dog collars, with the occasional hand of ripening bananas. Most significantly, Anderson's under the house is orientated in relation to the sound of mother's footsteps above. Bea always knows where her mother is, and what domestic rituals are underway, as the sound of footsteps above maps her movements. Here the wilderness is not under the house but away from mother's surveillance, by the creek, where she can meet children from the camp.

Language is the key issue in these stories. In an interview Anderson has admitted to a factual basis in her own childhood to the stammer which Bea develops. ³⁶ However the translation of autobiography into story produces psychological and feminist resonances. Recent psychoanalytic feminist criticism has debated the question of women and language, and the relationship between the child's entry into language and sexuality. In the light of these debates the conjunction of incidents in "Against the Wall" is striking. Bea's stammer coincides with the dominance of an authoritarian female teacher at school and is curiously related to the onset of a deteriorating relationship with her father and the finding of condoms down at the forbidden creek. Bea is able to make a "lightning" connection between the "treasure" found at

children, conduct their monologues which cross, coincide and run parallel." In "The Lang Women" Olga Masters creates a wonderful tableau of a "female world of love and ritual". ³⁴ The lack of punctuation and the fluency of the prose in the first part of this story are part of the projection of a female language, in which conversation between women is like "frolicking together in the sea". Significantly this female ritual is spied upon and known to the rest of the town as the "cock show", which immediately recontextualises the ritual in terms dictated by the male gaze. The deterioration of the conversation between the women and the destruction of the language of this nightly ritual is an inevitable corollary of the intervention of the appropriately named Arthur Mann.

The search for other kinds of language for speaking proliferates in women's stories. So the semiotics of the postcard enters Garner's "Postcards from Surfers"; given the inappropriateness of words the narrator looks for pictures without words, only to find postcards in which a bikini-clad, big-breasted young girl poses seductively, her whole head covered by a latex mask representing a witch. In *Lilian's Story* Lilian's bulk is in itself an attempt to speak outside the terms of the conventionally feminine; her other strategy is to turn to a master text, the plays of William Shakespeare, so she can make herself heard. Finally the mother in Anderson's "Under the House" conveys her affection and concern through giving food.

Throughout the stories the women are in various ways smothered, and the most articulate and perceptive female characters tend to be children. It is here that the writer finds what Barbara Hanrahan calls "an other-worldly view"; "someone who isn't labelled", in Valerie Shaw's terms. This use of the child's perspective is another way in which the short story tries to escape the "authoritative view" and enter the world of fantasy.

Childhood, the Non-Heroic, the Fantastic

A sustained study of childhood and language occurs in Jessica Anderson's stories "Under the House" and "Against the Wall".

the creek, the ritualistic "showing" of the genitals, her mother's "frightening" disgust and her sister's speculation about what con-
doms are used for, "but the reminders, the allusions, [her] treasure bore" make her sink back again into silence. The conjunction of these various discoveries with the onset of Bea's inability to master the language invites us to read Anderson's story with recent French feminisms in mind. These suggest that women are required to suppress their female identity in order to speak in the discourse of a male-oriented language; as Adrienne Rich writes: "This is the oppressor's language/I need it to talk to you".³⁷ To speak about the difference of women's experience requires then that the writer find ways of subversion, of using this language differently, and of adapting it to represent the feminine — oppositional functions which, as we have already seen, the short story seems particularly suited to undertake.

Of course it is not only women who are cast as outsiders in the terms of the dominant discourse and it is too simplistic to assume that only women speak from what feminist criticism has conceptualised as a feminised or non-authoritative position. A decentred, non-heroic discourse allows room for a number of muted groups to speak and we can conceptualise Bea's awkwardness and inability to enter the language more broadly in relation to a number of stories included here.

In "Beginnings" Barbara Hanrahan points out that in her pursuit of the regional, working-class voice of Annie M. she was influenced by what black women writers of the United States were doing, "writing against stereotypes", getting "behind the silences". Annie's story is subjective, there are no climaxes or epiphanies and the medicinal properties of Fairy margarine loom large in her universe. War and Depression are represented through the day to day realities of Annie's existence and on a par with local marriages, accidents and illnesses. As David Parker suggests, what is chronicled in this kind of fiction is a conventionally unmemorable daily existence.³⁸ In "Annie M" and "Dream People" it is the ebb and flow and detail of a small and private life which calls the tune.

Annie is one example of a number of "non-heroic" speakers who find a voice in the short stories collected here. We might

broadly conceptualise two speaking positions adopted by characters in these stories. Firstly there is the central, authoritative discourse which tends to characterise the father figures. Lilian's uniformed, brutal father is at the masculinist and authoritarian extreme of this spectrum, personification of Virginia Woolf's fascist figure that he is.³⁹ So too is the rapist narrator of "A Woman with Black Hair" and, to show that this speaking position can be appropriated by a woman, Jolley's Night Sister Bean, who is silenced for most of "Hilda's Wedding", so allowing carnivalesque, fantastic play. Less violent but no less authoritative are Garner's Father and Philip characters and the Academic, the narrator of "The Fellmonger", who almost silences but does not impregnate the surrogate female: "... he feels he wants a chance to talk with Rosie, to know and understand her. It is the excitement of offering her his intellect, which he wants and, for this, he needs to have time alone with her".

A feminised or non-authoritative speaking position is, quite clearly, expected of Rosie in "The Fellmonger". More generally it can be associated with women, especially the child and mother figures who, as we have seen, tend to seek other forms of communication. It is also the province of the poor, as in Masters's Depression stories, and working-class characters such as Annie M. This space, then, is determined not only by gender but also by region, race and class. Indeed there is some ambiguity here, as it is by no means always the case that women do necessarily enter these stories as non-authoritative and marginal speakers. In two of Grenville's stories, for example, we see different hierarchies drawn. Lil's attempts to appeal to a community of women in "A Time of Hard" are rejected because of her privilege in relation to them; the other prisoners refuse to speak to her. In "The Test Is, If They Drown" an act of betrayal hangs upon the choice of a girl, by use of a few words, to remain part of the gang and assert the labelling of an aged woman as a witch.

Thea Astley's stories are especially interesting in this respect. Astley's essay "Being a Queenslander" is a classic statement of the regional, decentred voice; it casts the Queenslander as speaking from a periphery. Writing about a space cast as "deep north", mango and wild pineapple territory, has allowed Astley, more

than any other writer selected here, to grapple with the relations between different races and between race and gender. In "A Northern Belle" she experiments with translating a character type from the post-bellum United States of William Faulkner to the Australian north. In fact the story is as much about an Aboriginal man, Willy Fourcorners, a story which is difficult to capture, like "photographing in shadow". Finally the narrator gives "Willy's story, my words". As this short prologue suggests, it is Willie the Aborigine who is the non-authoritative speaker here. As the story goes on to present the history of the lonely spinster, the "belle" Clarice, who, as her body begins to seize up with age and rheumatism, turns to Willie for help, it is seemingly Clarice who is the outsider. However, in the space of a scream in the last line of the story, the hierarchy of gender over race is asserted and the power of the woman to impose the label of "sexually maddened blackfellow" makes Willie an outcast. Clarice becomes her mother's daughter.

The later story from the "Mango" collection again demonstrates the language gap between the races. In "Heart Is Where the Home Is" Astley attempts to represent Aboriginal English in her prose. Again the final stages of the story are crucial, with the seemingly anti-authoritarian settlers asserting their own dominance and normative view, as in "A Northern Belle".

These narratives of the child and the non-authoritative figure are paradoxical, marked as they are by hesitancy, obscurity and an overwhelming sense of the inadequacy of received narrative forms and language to represent the muted. Here the open-endedness and discontinuity of the short story form are exploited in a self-reflexive way to demonstrate the inadequacies of literary language and representation itself.

The fantastic is a third and quite different way that this non-authoritative perspective can find a voice in the story. Elizabeth Jolley's fiction frequently uses fantasy to trace the unseen and unsaid of culture: "that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent". In recent criticism fantasy has been associated with the carnivalesque, subversion, disorder and illegality.⁴⁰ This is apparent in Jolley's "Hilda's Wedding", where the absence of Night Sister Bean causes the institution to explode

in anarchy. Jolley frequently presents marginal characters; not only women but migrants, the aged, the "mad" and the solitary, who undercut the structures of power and authority in the most repressive type of institutions: asylums, prisons, hospitals. The grotesque and fantastic scenario of "Hilda's Wedding" culminates in an absurd inversion of man and wife, marriage and birth. The patterns of repetition and revision in Jolley's writing which are commented upon by Helen Garner, the frequent reference to literary and musical themes, the linguistic playfulness and carnival are all elements which have been linked to a specifically female language in Jolley's writing.⁴¹

Brush, Lens and Pen

As a final observation about the liaison between the short story and the language (or silence) of the feminine it is worth keeping in mind Valerie Shaw's comparison between the short story and other forms of visual art, such as the picture and the photograph, which focus on illumination through a single image.⁴² A number of these writers comment upon the similarity between the techniques employed in their stories and impressionist painting in particular; for example Helen Garner finds vindication for her "small and domestic scope" in Van Gogh's painting of the chair in his bedroom. Beverley Farmer compares the abruptness of her narrative with a Cézanne painting — "impulsive", "awkward". The suggestion in this case is that literary language is being pushed to its limits. In her commentary upon the post-impressionist exhibition in Sydney, Olga Masters chooses Monet's "The Meadow" as especially attractive to her because Monet broke with the conventions and traditions of his art. As Masters describes this, Monet diverged from the "man-made" roads for straight and narrow feet, to include the familiar, the non-authoritative, the child-like.

In several stories here the narrative frame is expanded by inclusion of another artistic medium, and in each case this is related to a sense of the inadequacy of literary forms for the woman writer, the need to reach for another image to juxtapose against and supplement the literary. As we have seen, Astley prefaces Willie

Fourcorner's story with an allusion to "inspecting the negative" of the photograph, "framing and hanging its reversals". In "Home Time" the narrator "gives herself over to *Casablanca*". The plot of the film becomes a mastertext which is implicitly read against the experiences of the two women. The "innocence" and romance of the film is thrown into relief by their knowledge that love is not enough: "I wonder if Ilsa would have gone with Rick . . . would it have ended up with her on the floor with her nose smashed? You never know." In the final "frame" of the story the narrator's own authorship, her use of the personal and experiential, is cast as "scavenging" by her lover. The act of writing a different, far less romantic kind of narrative is deeply subversive, and one in which her lover refuses to be included: "I am not to figure in anything you write". Here the code of romantic love is found wanting, although the breakdown in communication between the sexes is to some extent compensated for by the closeness of the two women, who meet in the bar and acknowledge the gap between what they know from experience and what they see and respond to on the screen.

There is a similar effect in Helen Garner's story "What We Say". Here it is an opera, *Rigoletto*, which becomes the text against which different and gendered discourses are measured. With characteristic deftness Garner splices together the "small and domestic" — the comforting ritual of sharing salad and spaghetti, the close observation of bright light on grey walls — and the politically charged undercurrents which fragment the mealtime conversation. What women say and mean is conveyed in the sodden handkerchiefs, in quick glances, and in their responses to Barbara Baynton's "The Chosen Vessel". What women say is a "shadow tradition", "It's there, but nobody knows what it is"; The pattern "they" use strikes women dumb, renders them absent.

One is reminded of the narrator of Farmer's "Home Time", "Because she takes all the photographs, she won't find herself in any of them"; "Bare interiors of sun and shade and firelight, in which as always she appears absent". Here the shift to film, another form of representation, reinforces the sense of the difficulty of capturing woman's experience in the established and inherited conventions. In these very self-conscious stories the

parameters of the short story itself are stretched, questioned, supplemented to include the personal and the feminine perspective; they also demonstrate the tensions which come into play when the woman chooses to write about intimate relations between the sexes.

The Politics of "Female Naturalism"

This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book, the critic assumes, because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop . . .⁴³

As we have seen, attention to the private and domestic sphere has caused women's writing to be both trivialised and dismissed. Although the gap between private and public worlds, and the corresponding dichotomy of the personal and the political, has been challenged by the politics of both first- and second-wave feminism, the difference of value which Woolf describes persists. War, depression and poverty, violence and fascism are no less "political" because they are cast in the framework of domestic life and female experience, and yet they seem so.

This may be so because of the way political concerns enter women's writing. Kay Ferres describes as "female naturalism"⁴⁴ that attention to domestic detail and rhythms that is one of the recurring characteristics of women's writing. It is one of the ways in which the influence of impressionism, with its stress on the perceiver and the subjective, is apparent. Elizabeth Jolley comments on this kind of detail in her review of Helen Garner's writing, "the details of daily living come to assume sacramental importance."⁴⁵ The language of such writing includes the careful and detailed reference to objects — food, clothing, furniture, the way the table is set and the kettle on the boil; the subjective impression which tends to resist any final conclusion or resolution; and a chronicling in relation to births, marriages and deaths: events of significance in private life.

Olga Masters's "The Christmas Parcel" is a fine example of this "female naturalism". The story is about a family confronting a Christmas in the midst of the Depression with no prospect of

Christmas dinner. Throughout the story images, metaphors and conversation focus upon food; landscape, character and plot are organised in terms of a language of commodities. So the boy Lionel's chest is "no bigger it seemed than a golden syrup can"; the setting sun fills the sky "with salmon and peach jam and beaten egg white"; the absolute poverty of the family is conveyed in the miraculously thin peel which Mrs Churcher pares from the peaches and the repeated references to Mr Churcher's hands, "the fingers spread as if a cigarette was there." This attention to food is not mere fetish or trivia but accurate sociohistorical detail; Masters herself argues that: "Food had more value then because of the scarcity, the tightness of the times, the hungry times . . . I think food's a story on its own".⁴⁶ It is of course precisely this attention to familiar detail which rarely impinges upon the "made roads" that Masters commented upon in Monet's painting. This technique achieves not only documentary detail but also an orientation in relation to a feminised or non-authoritative view. As Goldsworthy suggests, this is intensely political writing, mingling the emotional and material economy in a way that demonstrates how clothes, food, money, sexuality and love are all inextricably bound to one another; "the exchange, the giving, or the withholding of money and goods become a substitute for language".⁴⁷

From this perspective war and depression are translated in terms of local and personal meanings. It is a way in which the story is oriented to the concerns of social history, the representation of the experience of those traditionally "hidden from history". The same kind of close attention to detail and narrative technique is used by Barbara Hanrahan in "Annie M". Here is the war in Annie's narrative: "When it was the First World War Sammy Lunn was dancing on the steps of the Grand Picture Theatre with his walking-stick . . ."; "When it was the Second World War, I worked at Holdens and had full authority over a hundred and twenty girls and five blind men and five deaf and dumb women. Then I worked in the butter room at the Co-op." This is more in the nature of oral history than traditionally recorded history, it requires that we accept Lilian Singer's assertion: "I am history, and so are you." Kate Grenville's "Federation Story" from *Joan Makes History* likewise reshapes history in the

light of the priorities and subjective view of a newly genteel mayor's wife. Here the "official history", the rhetoric of the newspapers and the books contrasts sharply with the woman's own experience of celebration; her description of the beau-de-soies and the crepe-de-chines, he etiquette for eating asparagus, the smell of feet and the Prince, "a pale puny sort of man . . . a small man with a cocked hat that seemed too large for his head . . ." and the devastating faux-pas with the glove. These are handed down to her granddaughter as a precious inheritance: "What we would be able to tell her was priceless, for it was all that no one else could tell her, all the things no book would ever mention."

Gender and Nation: Remaking the Legend

What happens to notions of national identity when we take the view from the obscured voice? When Joan makes history what happens to national mythologies and stereotypes? Processes of mythmaking and national identity in Australia have been and continue to be particularly masculinist; to draw upon Thea Astley's characterisation of this tradition, the characteristics of the peasant Teeth Father ("the Father of Ockers, the despiser of sheilas") are still respected as virtues. These "myths of oz" are difficult to displace.⁴⁸

We have already seen a number of ways in which these stories by women do decentre this authoritative Father figure. The perspective from Mango, Thebarton and Carlton is local and particular rather than unified and homogenous. Annie M. and Lilian speak with a voice which is in the process of creating its own history and mythic existence. This is not to say that place is irrelevant when we hear woman's voice. To the contrary, most of the writers we are considering here find the adjective "Australian" a meaningful one. For example in "Beginnings" Barbara Hanrahan speaks of the nostalgia for Australia which fuels her books. Although the local is included in her sense of the national very strongly, Hanrahan is nevertheless not untypical when she speaks of being more comfortable with the description "Australian

writer" rather than "woman writer".⁴⁹ For all the ambiguities of "home" in women's writing, features of landscape, such as the hot smell of tea-tree in Farmer's "Place of Birth", are signs of the Australian imprint, an elemental relation between what Astley calls "landscape and flesh".⁵⁰

Kate Grenville's notion of two different levels of "place" is useful here: "There's the place you actually know from your own experience, and then there's the place that you know as cultural artefact — that's been built up from what you've read and which you know from art. So there are those two separate 'places', and one of the problems . . . with being Australian, is that there's a big dislocation between those two senses of place."⁵¹ As she later makes clear, as colonial offspring of Albion all Australians to some extent share a sense of cultural dislocation. The ongoing effects of colonialism are represented in the exchange of letters in Jolley's "The Well-Bred Thief". However the relationship between Lilian and her father Albion in *Lilian's Story* places women, "the daughters of Albion", in the condition of being doubly colonised, as it were. Grenville's distinction establishes an important difference between the nostalgia for a personal experience, such as we find in "Home Time", and the representation of women's experience in Australian culture and national myth.

Women writers are still engaged in the task of wresting Australian mythologies from the maws of Astley's Teeth Father, protean figure that he is.⁵² In the stories, commentaries and interviews gathered here a community of women find a voice. They may speak as the "prize blooms" of contemporary Australian women's writing, but they will defy any neat arrangement alongside the *Women's Weekly* on the coffee table. These tall poppies are not for cutting: "whoever tells the story wins in the long run. It's the ultimate revenge of those who've been rendered voiceless".⁵³

Notes

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2. Thea Astley, "In the Decade of the Minorities", included in this volume.
3. Olga Masters, *A Long Time Dying* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), p. 1.

4. Elizabeth Webby, "Short Fiction in the Eighties: White Anglo-Celtic Male No More", *Mearjiri* 2 (1983): 34-41.
5. Margaret Smith, "Australian Woman Novelists of the 1970s: A Survey", in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women's Novels*, ed. Carole Fernier (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), pp. 200-221.
6. Stephen Torre, *The Australian Short Story 1940-1980: A Bibliography* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984).
7. Gerard Windsor, "Writers and Reviewers", *Island Magazine* 27 (1986): 15-18.
8. Brian Matthews, "Directions in Recent Fiction" *Island Magazine* 28 (1986): 34-43.
9. James Hall, "Why Women Writers Crowd the Best Sellers List", *The Bulletin*, 27 May, 1986: 72-77.
10. Carmel Bird, "Speaking Volumes for Women", *The Age*, 2 August, 1988.
11. Kerryn Goldsworthy, "Dense Clouds of Language", *Island Magazine* 27 (1986): 2-27.
12. Judith Brett, "Publishing, Censorship and Writers' Incomes, 1965-1988", in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 464.
13. Helen Garner, "A Woman's Word", included in this volume.
14. See Helen Garner, "Showing the Flipside", in this volume; Olga Masters in *Rooms of their Own*, ed. Jennifer Ellison (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), p. 224.
15. Helen Garner, interview in *Yacker: Australian Writers Talk About Their Work*, ed. Candida Baker (Sydney: Picador, 1986), p. 156.
16. Farmer, "Literature Is What Is Taught", included in this volume.
17. Margaret McClusky, "Biting the Hand that Feeds You", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 October, 1988.
18. See Sneja Gunew's comments in the Introduction to *Telling Ways: Australian Women's Experimental Writing* (Adelaide: Australian Feminist Studies, 1988).
19. Kerryn Goldsworthy, "Short Fiction" in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988) p. 543.
20. Gina Mercer, "Little Women", *Australian Book Review* 81 (June 1986): 26-28.
21. Helen Garner, "A Truth Between Women", *The National Times*, 10-16 May, 1981.
22. Thea Astley, "In the Decade of the Minorities", included in this volume.
23. Amanda Lohrey, "The Dead Hand of Orthodoxy", *Island Magazine* 27 (1986): 19-21.
24. For example Dale Spender, ed., *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Women's Writing* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988); Connie Burns and Marygai McNamara, *Eclipsed* (Sydney: Collins, 1988); Dale Spender, ed., *Writing a New World: Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers* (Sydney: Pandora Press, 1988).
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26. Susan Sheridan, "Temper, Romantic: Bias, Offensively Feminine: Australian Women Writers and Literary Nationalism", *Kunapipti* 8 (1985): 9-58.

27. Susan Sheridan "Women Writers", in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan, pp. 319-336.
28. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosentel, eds., *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. xxvii.
29. Goldsworthy, "Short Fiction", p. 537.
30. Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longman, 1983), p. viii.
31. Shaw, *The Short Story*, p. 191.
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36. See Anne Chisholm, "The Australian Reality of Jessica Anderson", *The National Times*, 11-17 October, 1981.
37. Adrienne Rich, "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children", *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).
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41. Paul Salzman, "Elizabeth Jolley: Fiction and Desire", *Meridian* 5 (1986): 53-62.
42. Shaw, *The Short Story*, p. 14.
43. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 47.
44. Ferres, "Reflections and Revisions", p. 98.
45. Elizabeth Jolley, "Rescuing Fragments: Review of Helen Garner's *The Children's Bach*", included in this volume.
46. Olga Masters interview in *Rooms of Their Own*, ed. Jennifer Ellison (Ringwood: Penguin, 1986), p. 228.
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49. Barbara Hanrahan, "Beginnings", included in this volume.
50. Thea Astley, "Singles", *It's Raining in Mango* (Sydney: Viking, 1987), pp. 65-81.
51. Kate Grenville, "Daughters of Albion", included in this volume.
52. Thea Astley, "The Teeth Father Naked At Last", included in this volume.
53. Kate Grenville, "Daughters of Albion", included in this volume.