The Secret Life of Us: Eve Langley and her Family

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Tasmania

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Declaration of Originality

I declare that the material in this dissertation is original, except where due acknowledgement is given, and has not been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

Eve Langley (1904-1974) is an enigmatic figure who made her mark on Australian literature with the publication of *The Pea Pickers* (1942). As Eve destroyed the original journals and letters upon which *The Pea Pickers*—and subsequent fiction—was based, her two published and ten unpublished novels stand as the only existing account of her life up until 1942. Although all researchers have been mindful of the hazards of reading the fiction as autobiography, in the absence of an alternative account of her “self,” the fiction has segued into her biography and her biography has leached into readings of her fiction. In this thesis the often contradictory material available about Eve Langley from primary and secondary sources has been meticulously examined from the perspective of the distanced investigator, in order to provide a fuller history of the Langley family, and to deal with the fiction from a new critical perspective. I adopt the role of literary detective to unravel the story of Eve and her texts, a task made more complex by the Langley family’s pervasive culture of secrecy.

My first chapter is a biography of the Langley family that is constructed through reference to historically verifiable, publicly available documents, and excludes the fiction as a source of biographical evidence. This family biography provides a back-ground for the chapters that follow. In the second chapter I provide a reading of Eve’s texts, focusing on the representation of family. The third chapter deals with June Langley’s commentary on the family, using a variety of sources. June was Eve’s muse, audience and subject and later, biographer; the relationship between the two sisters was intense, fraught and significant. Drawing on anecdotal and documentary evidence, in the fourth chapter I put forward an overtly speculative but, I believe, persuasive explanation for Eve’s unusual life and writing.
This thesis untangles the web of misrepresentation that has surrounded the enigmatic Eve Langley. As a “literary detective,” my initial goal was to create borders between the life and the writing. Having met this objective, the imperative to maintain the separation diminished: the gaps, silences, and obfuscations by both Eve and June became increasingly transparent, leading to a re-evaluation of the relationship between the fiction and the life. The blurring that has confronted all critics has been addressed through the meticulous review of available sources, which has provided a framework for reading the fiction and the life.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the professional expertise, encouragement and interest of Professor Lucy Frost and Professor Ralph Crane. As an external student living interstate, and with three young children, it would not have been possible to proceed with and conclude this project without a supportive and flexible environment. My discussions over several years with Professor Frost about Eve Langley and her family were always stimulating and sparkled with a genuine sense of discovery. Professor Crane brought a sharp eye to the project and invaluable knowledge about New Zealand. I wish also to acknowledge and thank the University of Tasmania for the provision of a post-graduate scholarship. Arthur Easton, Jim Andreotti and Jennifer Broomhead from the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, provided greatly valued assistance during my trips to Sydney. Thanks also to Greg, Chloe, Harry and Bonnie, who all knew how much this project meant to me. I have really enjoyed my experience as a post-graduate student at the University of Tasmania.
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Note on the text

In order to distinguish between the ellipses that Eve Langley herself constantly uses and those that indicate editorial intervention, the latter are enclosed in square brackets.

Abbreviations

ML: Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
NLA: National Library of Australia
NSL: National Sound Library
OH: Oral History
PROV: Public Records Office Victoria
SLNSW: State Library of New South Wales
TRC: Transcript
VPRS: Victorian Public Records Series
Plate 1: The Langley family in Australia.

1 Forbes 7 Waterfall 13 Bruthen
2 Gumble 8 Albury 14 Metung
3 Molong 9 Bright 15 Crossover
4 Fifield 10 Peechelba 16 Dandenong
5 Katoomba 11 Mt Bogong 17 Ballarat
6 Gosford 12 Omeo 18 Newstead
Plate 2: The Langley family in New Zealand.

1 Arthur’s Pass
2 Paekakariki
3 Wanganui
4 Mangawhai
Introduction

"This morning Australia awoke and remembered me"¹

(Eve Langley, June 1941)

Eve Langley has been a curious figure in Australian literature. Many people have tried to understand her, evaluating her writing in search of the woman who produced it, and analysing her image and imaginings to develop ways of reading the unusual fiction. She is something of a Jane Doe—even the name “Eve Langley” was contested: “Of course, Eve Langley is not my name either”;² she admitted, and neither were her aliases Dolly, Darcy, Steve Hart or Oscar Wilde. So who was she? She was christened Ethel Jane Langley. Official documents tell us she was a daughter, a sister, a mother, a wife, an involuntary psychiatric patient, and a published, famous author. But in what order might these roles be considered, and where should the emphasis lie? My unease with readings over several decades of Eve’s fiction as autobiography, and her representation as a mad woman with gender issues, has prompted me to reopen her file. Like a detective approaching a cold case, I set myself the task of assembling the clues to Eve’s life and writing, and of reviewing them with a fresh forensic eye. I discovered in the course of my investigation that what was missing in this curious case of wild Eve and her wilder texts was an understanding of the culture of secrecy that permeated the Langley family. Eve’s silence about her “self” was not entirely self-imposed.

This thesis reviews the often contradictory and confusing primary and secondary material that is available about the enigmatic Eve Langley in order to provide an alternative history of her life, and deal with her texts from a new critical perspective. I adopted the guise of detective, meticulously searching the archives for facts and clues to explain the writer's bizarre representation of her “self” in her fiction and in interviews. The question “who was Eve Langley” became a series of questions about the family environment in which she and her sister were raised and its repercussions throughout their lives. Inconsistencies in dating in recent scholarly works indicated that a thorough investigation of contemporary historically verifiable documents was required. For example, the date of Eve’s birth is given in standard reference works (AustLit and Adelaide, Australian Women’s Literature) as 1908, and not as 1904. Eve’s birth certificate is a publicly available document but in her fiction are numerous false trails about her origins, leading to a troubling blurring that has resulted in dispute over the most basic of facts. What other information was buried or exposed in Eve’s writing that had led some critics to conclude that she was mad and believed she was a reincarnation of Oscar Wilde? No one had tried to prise the life and the writing apart. Was it indeed possible to do so? My first task, therefore, was to separate the life and the fiction, in order to develop a clearer understanding of the relationship between them. As I went about this process, I kept a running list of questions that I hoped, eventually, to be able to answer.

Eve’s writing indicated that her past was fraught; a place she would not willingly revisit yet she did so compulsively in her fiction. As Eve did not leave an account of her formative years, I wanted to understand what lay behind this obsessive preoccupation. Why would Eve write about her family in erotic terms? What led to the intense co-dependence
that characterised the relationship Eve experienced with her sister, and her weird representation of that relationship in the fiction? On their deaths, both sisters left numerous letters and fragments of letters and other documents that had not been systematically deciphered and interpreted. What might these letters tell us about the family that Eve sought to both protect and expose in her fiction? How reliable was June as a witness to her sister’s life and career, especially given their fraught relationship and her significant contribution to Eve’s biography? What lay behind the strange letters that June wrote in 1922 as she travelled about the countryside seeking work masquerading as a boy? Why did June deny so much of her past, including the birth of a baby long vanished? Aside from Eve’s fiction there was no evidence that she had been a mother. If June wanted this to be a secret, why did Eve tell? Why did June seek to be a controlling influence in her sister’s career by establishing a dialogue with Eve’s editor?

As I set about writing up my findings, having collected data from all available primary and secondary sources in order to construct a history of the writer, and combed the fiction in search of the character Steve/Eve, the problems of “cross-infection” became starkly obvious: both the life and the fiction quickly became enmeshed in a convoluted, complicated narrative that made both the life and the fiction appear bizarre, without rational explanation. I therefore decided to present my findings about the life and the fiction separately, and this thesis stands as my report delivered from the perspective of the distanced investigator.

Eve was born in 1904 in the outback town of Forbes in New South Wales, a harsh, dry and desolate landscape famous in the past for its association with bushrangers, and quite near the childhood home of Henry Lawson. She spent her adolescence and youth in
rural and suburban Victoria, and migrated to New Zealand in 1932, following her widowed mother and married sister, June, who was pregnant with her first child. Several years later, Eve was married and living in poverty with two young children, but managed nonetheless to write a funny and brilliant account of her youth entitled *The Pea Pickers*. The book, narrated by the feisty yet introspective Steve Hart, told of the adventures of two sisters called Steve and Blue who dressed up as boys in the late 1920s and journeyed about Victoria and New South Wales on trains seeking work in the country-side as itinerant labourers. The book was based on the real life experiences of Eve and her younger sister June. *The Pea Pickers* was awarded a major literary prize in 1940, (an award she shared with Kylie Tennant and Malcolm Ellis), but within months of its publication in 1942, Eve was committed to a mental asylum in Auckland, where she remained for seven years. She had one other novel published—*White Topee*—in 1954, and wrote many more “novels” that were presumed to be autobiographical, but none were published. Estranged from her children, divorced by her husband, and at loggerheads with her devoted sister, Eve eventually returned to Australia in 1960 to die at the age of sixty-nine in anonymity in the Blue Mountains, completely and utterly alone, surrounded by a family of dolls, the encroaching bush and her manuscripts.

The beginning was so bright. Eve’s publisher, Angus & Robertson, recognised immediately that her first novel, *The Pea Pickers* represented the arrival of a major literary talent, and early in 1944 the rights were on-sold to a New York firm, E. P. Dutton and Co.\(^3\)

The American publisher was “frightfully keen” and although aware that Eve had been institutionalised, sought to secure an option on the author’s next three books as well as dramatic, film and radio subsidiary rights, and Canadian rights also. Prior Prize judge and Angus & Robertson literary editor Beatrice Davis anticipated that the author would rate alongside other major Australian writers: she later mentioned Christina Stead and Patrick White (Interview with Suzanne Lunney). “The clique is gushing over The Pea Pickers,” Miles Franklin wrote in June 1942 to her fellow novelist Katharine Susannah Prichard (Ferrier 85). Poet Mary Gilmore professed herself “stabbed through and through [...] by the observation, the pity and the understanding and the response to creation that is in the book,” and wondered if Miles Franklin was not herself the author (Wilde and Moore 179-80). Frank Dalby Davison (also a Prior Prize judge) declared in The Bulletin that the book would “live.” The third judge, H. M. Green, “did not care much for The Pea Pickers,” Beatrice Davis later observed. In 1944 artist Elaine Haxton painted an oil on panel called “The Pea Pickers” that was purchased in February the following year by the Art Gallery of New South Wales Travelling Exhibitions Committee. Douglas Stewart entitled his 1948

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8 Helen Campbell, Assistant Curator. Australian Art. Art Gallery of New South Wales. Letter to Helen Vines. 2 Sept. 2004. This painting is reproduced in Janine Burke’s Australian Women Artists: 1840-1940. 188.
essay on *The Pea Pickers* "A Letter to Shakespeare." *The Pea Pickers* was sold out by January 1943 and a reprint ordered,⁹ despite paper shortages due to the war.¹⁰ Eve had little opportunity to savour the pleasures of critical acclaim, and even the writing itself had been undertaken in the most difficult circumstances. Her marriage, which took place in 1937, was unhappy in the extreme and the two children who were toddlers when Eve wrote *The Pea Pickers* were encumbrances confined to a back-yard enclosure while their mother worked on her manuscript. She was physically unwell, deep in debt and struggling to feed herself and her children. Two years later, in circumstances that are contested by the only two direct witnesses—her husband Hilary Clark and her sister June Langley—Eve was admitted to Carrington hospital on 8 August 1942 and certified under the "Mental Defective Act, 1911." There she remained until 1949, when she was released into the care of her sister on a year’s probation. On 11 September 1950 she was readmitted to the hospital, and finally released for good on 6 October. In 1954 when Eve’s second novel *White Topee* was published after a hiatus of more than a decade, it was widely reviewed across Australia and New Zealand.¹¹ Readers were not just mesmerised by her fiction; they wanted to know who this woman was. Literary philanthropist Nettie Palmer wrote to Eve requesting information about her life.¹²

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¹¹ There were more than a dozen newspaper reviews across Australia and New Zealand. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/713-757.

biographical statement. The sensibility behind the novel intrigued all who read it and this fascination continues. In spite of the high profile attention and the predictions of a brilliant career, the promise heralded by *The Pea Pickers* was never fulfilled and after *White Topee*, none of the dozen or so novels she submitted over the next decade to Angus & Robertson was published.

In 1958, *The Pea Pickers* was reprinted with the assistance of Commonwealth funding; in 1959 novelist Ruth Park bought the dramatic and film rights to the book, and in 1964 an adaptation written by Eve’s friend Joyce Goodes was performed in Canberra and Sydney. Newspaper interviews followed and in May Eve was interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Australian National Library Oral History unit. On each occasion that Eve was interviewed, she offered a peculiar commentary on her past that included references to odd subjects such as cabbages, imagined ancient civilisations, and her objective as a writer to sweep across the landscape in a caravan of embroidery, creating a fantasy past for herself. When she had the opportunity, Eve declined to offer a stable account of her “self,” and her past. “I’m safe. You don’t know anything about me,” she said to Hazel de Berg (Interview 626).

A nomadic writer has more to say than a settled writer could ever say. The gipsy can speak, but the man who is settled, he can’t speak. Therefore, as a Sythian, part a nomadic race and part a Tartar race too, I’m just like a caravan and like a caravan I am born to wander across all the plains of

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14 The exact number of novels is not clear. Some of Eve’s novels were sent back to her and not resubmitted; others that she described were possibly not written at all and some manuscripts were lost.
fantasy [...] that's what I really cultivate, a sort of embroidery of literature. I
don't think myself that I have done very much in this world as a writer
except as one who chatters and embroiders all the time, endlessly, a great
fantasy of romance. I just like to stroll across the plains of the imagination
[...] and I just don't care [...] when I am tired of the gods, I like to go up
amongst the barbarians. (Interview with Hazel de Berg 626-27)

Following the publication of White Topee, Eve's writing had been put to one side by
Angus & Robertson. During the late 1960s and the 1970s the publisher was subject to a
series of takeovers and under pressure to increase profit margins. Beatrice Davis later
wrote:

Eve's other novels were not published because they were not, it was
thought, publishable as they stood, and because, at the time no senior editor
capable of dealing with such imaginative material had the time to spend.
Nan McDonald or I would have done this job with great pleasure; but
commercial publishing is such that we could not be permitted to take months
on such a project, no matter how worthwhile from a literary view point.  

In 1979, Davis was hopeful that "a writer or critic with the right qualifications and
sympathies (I'd like it to be Doug Stewart or Hal Porter) [would] rescue the unpublished

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7638/5/23.
work or part of it, from oblivion. There should be at least several worthwhile novellas in the manuscripts."

It is interesting that Davis nominated novelist Hal Porter, because if there was a moment in time when Eve’s body and her body of work began to fuse into a new and extremely odd doppelganger it was in 1975 when Hal Porter published *The Extra*. He wrote of Eve’s strange attire when she visited him nearly two decades earlier in Gippsland, and how she had wafted about seeing Oscar Wildes “ev-er-y-where” (150). This was the unusual woman, Steve, who used to dress as a man, according to the “local legends” (141), he wrote, and here she was, now
clerkly chalk-striped, double-breasted navy-blue suit, blue shirt, striped tie, shiny black shoes [...] a flung-open, ankle-length coat of some unopulent black fur—rabbit? Cat? She’s topped off by a snowy sola topi. The brim just covers her eyes. It’s not until much later in the tousled and captivating day I discover those eyes are green as Becky Sharpe’s. (144)

Hal Porter proposed that Eve was bewitched by the past, but it was he who first set her up to be trapped by it. “Recorder-writers lay themselves open to the attention of recorder-writers” (151), he observed presciently. Both he and Eve were “cuckoo spiders,” “caught in the silk of other’s lives” (151). Now that she was dead and unable to write back, and having spent just one day in her company, Hal Porter spun his web. As a woman who dressed as a man and was obsessed by Oscar Wilde, Eve became fodder for his creative autobiographical enterprise:

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I’ve become used to the graph of Eve’s moods. Now she lets green eyes be seen; now they’re under cover. Now she’s fluent, ironic, amusing, a Firebird. Now she slows down, folds wings, goes to earth, she and those eyes with amazingly white whites. Lassitude invades her intonations. There are distant insinuations, enigmatic waverings, pauses charged with doubt. Sometimes she’s silent as a fish. (146)

No one who knew Eve ever suggested—or even hinted—that she was a transvestite or believed herself to be Oscar Wilde. In fact, they said it was very hard to feel you knew her at all, “although you wanted to love her.”¹⁷ Beatrice Davis described her as “elusive,”¹⁸ mysterious and strange and [...] I do not think anyone could say he knew her or felt her to be a friend, though she was most generous and affectionate in her appreciation of other people. [...] The personal side of Eve’s life was coloured with madly poetic aberrations that would make any biographer pale if he wanted to get to the facts.¹⁹

In 1981 came the first of a series of scholarly articles and theses that focused on questions of sexual and gender identity as being intrinsic to understanding Eve and her fiction, beginning with Marian Arkin’s “Literary Transvestism in Eve Langley’s The Pea Pickers,” published in Modern Fiction Studies in 1981. Arkin argued that gender identity


was the key issue in the novel, and concluded that Eve/Steve (she did not distinguish between the two) was “both transvestite and picaro” (114). In an article in *Australian Literary Studies* in 1988, Susan Sheridan described *The Pea Pickers* as “a portrait of the artist in drag” (326). Harry Heseltine wrote of the “death” of Oscar Wilde in the Blue Mountains (114); and Susan Walton of the search for identity in the novels in a dissertation at the University of Newcastle. Both of these latter writers mentioned the “idiosyncratic psychological baggage” (Heseltine 122) implicit in *The Pea Pickers*, and identified the father of Steve as the source (Heseltine 118). Walton commented that

> of the four points of [Jungian] consciousness [Steve’s] desire to be male rather than female is least explained and can promote confusion among readers of the novel. Textual implications, however, gradually reveal that the other three points [to be tragic rather than comical; to be free; and to be loved] are factors of the first and show that all are inextricably linked to the memory of Steve’s father. (178)

Heseltine indicated that, based on his readings of the fiction, Eve had outed herself as a lesbian (119-20), a proposition expanded on by Lucy Frost, in her introduction to *The Pea Pickers* (viii), and Joanne Winning, in a 2002 essay published in *Australian Literary Studies*. Eve/Steve’s appearance, sexuality and gender issues, then, had come to define both author and text: each contaminated the other (Frost, “The Body in the Vault”).

In 1989 Joy Thwaite’s biography *The Importance of Being Eve Langley* was published. Based on her PhD thesis, it drew extensively on the fiction, particularly the unpublished manuscripts, and positioned Eve as a mad woman who believed she was Oscar Wilde: thus the title of the book. Thwaite’s thesis hinged on Eve’s desire to be a man, but
this assertion was not subject to analysis. Thwaite thought some “clues” lay in “Langley’s increasing inability to define herself as a female artist […] and her growing obsession with time and immortality” (4). Other scholarship during this period drew on The Pea Pickers for evidence of “mateship” (Jones and Jones 83), and the depiction of migrants, particularly Italian labourers (Gorlier, Pesman Cooper). Nevertheless, as Gabrielly Maupin Bielenstein argues in an article entitled “Environment and the Australian Novelist,” it is the narrator Steve who fascinates:

Would it be too much for the reader to point out that he would willingly know less about Gippsland and its picturesque inhabitants, and more about such a complex young woman as Steve? (28)

Although critics such as Colwill, Frost and Winning were alert to the problem of “cross-infection” between the life and the fiction, the “clues to the enigmatic Eve lay in the fiction” according to the Oxford Companion to Australian Literature and it was through Thwaite’s biography that Eve “the person” came to be known to the general reading public (Wilde et al. 448). The titles of critical essays highlighted gender ambiguity: “Cross Country Dressing” (McMahon); “Eve Plays her Wild Card and Makes the Straight Flush” (Colwill), “Oscar Wilde in Eve Langley’s White Topee: The Transvestic Origins of the Australian Self-Made Man” (McMahon). These essays used the lens of gender ambiguity to read both The Pea Pickers and White Topee, and the author of the novels, Eve.

Despite widespread recognition in all the critical literature of the problematic blurring that has occurred between the fiction and the biography, the fiction has continued to segue into the biography. I found it was relatively straightforward to document historically how this had happened, but I became intrigued about why and whether I could
untangle the web of misrepresentation that has surrounded Eve Langley’s life and work, and construct an alternative history. What would Eve Langley’s biography look like if it was approached exclusively through historically verifiable documents? What would Eve’s families look like if they were approached exclusively as a theme in the fiction? Was it possible to create borders between the life and the fiction? This had not been done before; Joanne Winning had argued in 2002 that in fact the life and the writing were inextricably entwined (301). I imagined myself a detective, opening a cold case on this “Jane Doe” of Australian literature, casting a fresh forensic eye over material that was publicly available, but which had not yet, I suspected, surrendered its story.

I examined the copious private papers of the Langley sisters and read the fiction, and followed the clues. Having done so, I am able to offer a new reading of the case. The problem with her strange representation of her self in her fiction seems to me to have less to do with the author’s gender alignment and madness, and more with the pervasive secretiveness of the Langley family. This dissertation has been organised as my review of the evidence, and my analysis of what it means.

The first chapter is a biographical study of the Langley family, assembled through reference to verifiable historical documents, covering three generations: the parents of Eve and June, the lives and relationship of the sisters, their marriages and offspring. The purpose of this chapter is to weave a family biography that will provide a ground for the chapters that follow. Historical documents are located and assessed, and information assembled from all available primary and secondary sources. Every clue and snippet of information available to me has been reassessed for information about Eve and the circumstances of her life, particularly the critical events of births, deaths, marriages,
divorce and incarceration. Information pertaining to Eve’s writing career forms a background to the development of this chapter, which is assiduously independent of her fiction as a source of evidence. Eve’s relationship with her sister June Langley is foregrounded partly because of June’s significant role in Eve’s fiction as character, muse and audience, but also because this was the single enduring relationship for both sisters. June’s representation of herself in her texts is testament to the extraordinary circumstances of the sisters’ childhood, adolescence and youth. Like Eve, she offered no stable account of the family history despite several opportunities to do so. June’s role as one of Eve’s biographers is inherently problematic, undermined by her bewilderment at her sister’s behaviour towards her, and their lifelong emotional entanglement. Despite the efforts of Mia, Eve and June, to suppress, deny and mislead, my role as literary sleuth has been largely successful, resulting in a confronting portrait of a family blighted by secrets that the children were not, under any circumstances, to divulge.

The second chapter provides a reading of the representation of family in Eve’s fiction, considering her two published works separately, and dividing the unpublished works according to location—those written about life in Australia, and those dealing with life in New Zealand. My search for a strategy that would allow me to analyse Eve’s texts and “side-step the biographical data” (Ellis) results in a method that austerely isolates the fiction from its context and circumstances of production. This chapter therefore presents a new reading centred on the representation of family in the fiction of Eve: the Langley family, the family of June and Harold Holmes, and the family that she formed with Hilary in 1937. The nature of the disclosures made about these three families indicates that the narrator’s experiences as a child had a profound effect on her ability to form lasting and
appropriate relationships with other adults and her children. While the representation of the family (that is identified in the unpublished texts as the Langley family) is characterised by secrecy and hints of mysterious goings on that are sometimes disclosed, the dysfunctional Clark and Holmes families are represented with a degree of candour that left one Angus & Robertson reader tearing his hair out. This was material people should keep to themselves! The representation of Steve and Blue’s parents undergoes profound revision over the course of the fiction; there is no stable history that explains the psychological suffering of the narrator or the weird relationship she has with her sister, whom she alternately worships and reviles. The two published and ten unpublished novels comprise more than five million words, and in the absence of a substantial autobiographical account by Eve outside her fiction, they stand as her only explanation of the family/families that shaped her life.

The third chapter evaluates June Langley’s commentary about the family, examining the context and content of interviews and documents. June was interviewed after Eve’s death by three young women over a period of nearly ten years and during that time her anger towards her sister intensified significantly. Her willingness to comment on her sister’s body and personal habits and her unwillingness to be drawn on matters relating to her own history and her sister’s writing subverted what might have proved an enlightening process of discovery about Eve. This chapter seeks to unravel the “fiction” in June’s commentary from the facts, revealing in the process the strategy of secrecy and denial that characterised the Langley sisters’ lives. June has been held up as the model of femininity and conformity that Eve resisted: her opposite in appearance, temperament, proclivities. But through the close analysis of all her utterances on the public record, it became apparent to me that the truth about June was far stranger than Eve’s fiction. June’s documents
demonstrate that, like Eve, she struggled to maintain relationships outside the immediate family—two marriages ended and a baby vanished, its existence denied over the course of her life. Her representations of herself as both male and female, and her assumption of the role of the father as head of the household long after Eve had ceased to be a part of it, help to articulate why her contribution to Eve’s biography is so distorted and fraught with misery. After Eve’s death in odd circumstances in 1974, June demonstrated that her anger towards her sister was boundless and expanding: Eve, whom she had once loved and admired, was now a “green-eyed guts” (Thwaite 138) who threw herself at unsuitable men and suffered the dismal consequences of her own inappropriate choices. My close examination of the archival sources has led to a profound revision on my part of the role June played in her sister’s life, and in her representation after her death. By sifting through all the anecdotal and documentary evidence available at this point I have been able to provide a rich historical record of Eve’s and June’s life, so that I have found myself in the rather odd position of knowing more about these sisters than they almost certainly knew about each other.

The fourth chapter is a speculative account of the sources and consequences of the family secrets that so blighted the lives of Eve and June. That Eve’s childhood predisposed her to depression and other mental illness seemed probable at the outset, but the lack of evidence, cited by Heseltine and Walton as impenetrable barriers to any further revelations, diminished as my scrutiny of the documents and anecdotal evidence expanded. My construction of a family biography, coupled with Eve’s and June’s representations of themselves and their family of origin, triangulated evidence that had been overlooked by other researchers. I believe I have offered a strategy to address the literary problem of
reading Eve’s fiction independently of the biographical details, but in order to understand
the woman I have been taken into areas where the material is riddled with silences and
secrets. The secrets centre on family; they are imprisoning secrets, and this final chapter
provides an alternative reading of Eve as a product of a particularly disturbed childhood
environment.

My concluding thoughts revolve around the representation of children in Eve’s
fiction as vulnerable creatures—and the words of her own son reverberate here: “I did not
know her very well, in fact not at all, and would be interested in finding out more about
her.”20 At the same time, I do not want to lose sight of Eve as her friends perceived her: a
“dazzlingly original and lovable creature,” said Beatrice Davis (Thwaite 497), with a heart
“brave enough to receive everything,”21 according to her friend Gloria Rawlinson. A
woman of mesmerising conversation, whose letters were a joy to receive: “an extraordinary
mixture [of] prose […] of romantic verbiage,” commented her long time friend Douglas
Stewart to his daughter Meg Stewart in the radio drama “The Shadows are Different: An
Appreciation of Eve Langley.” Warwick Lawrence, who knew the author in the mid to late
1930s, wrote in his 1999 memoir of Eve:

I recall her as a diminutive young woman, tanned skin, bright green eyes,
and dark hair parted down the centre and caught in a small “bun” at the nape
of the neck. She was fond of bright colours and rather outlandish in dress.
She was extremely vivacious and excitable, talkative, and amusing. […] I

gained the impression that she was not quite of this world and would not

have been surprised if she had flown out of sight on a broom-stick. There was something impish about her character. I do not think she ever really came down to earth during the time I knew her.\(^\text{22}\)

Chapter One

The Langleys: A Family Biography

The Langleys were a curious Australian family who would not be of great interest today if the elder daughter Eve had not written herself and the family into Australian literature. Chapter one is a biography centred on three generations: Eve’s parents’, her own, and her children’s. It seeks to answer fundamental questions about the family that had produced this remarkable and original writer. Who were they? Where did they live? What did they do? In my guise as detective, I trawled the complicated, often elusive and fragmentary family archives, searching for connections in order to provide an alternative reading of Eve Langley’s family history. I wanted to locate and examine original documents, adhering scrupulously to those which were historically verifiable. In order to sidestep the problematic blurring of the life and the work, I decided not to use the fiction as a source of evidence, although clearly Eve’s writing contains clues such as the birth of June’s baby. Family documents were read and reread, as I searched for clues and connections amongst the often confusing material that appeared sometimes to have been manipulated to conceal information that turned out, in some instances, to be quite unremarkable. Other information was more potent, and hinted at family secrets that had disturbed their keepers.

This is the first time that a biography of the Langley family has been constructed and also the first time that Eve’s life has been documented using a uniformly austere and historically verifiable methodology that does not rely on her “autobiographical” fiction.

Drawing on documentary and circumstantial evidence, I approach my subjects as a detective might review a cold case: following leads, assessing clues, locating original
documents and then putting together the stories of the Langley family from the archives. This archival material forms the central core of this biographical chapter, and comprises letters, photographs, drawings, paintings, notebooks, journals, documents, newspaper articles, film, interviews, ledgers and audio material. It has been crucial to go back to the original sources because so much of what we know about the family has been dependent on retrospective sources which are contaminated in ways that will be described progressively. The task here is to adhere as closely as possible to the historically verifiable record—in all its confusion. The focus of the biography is family, so this biographical account necessarily excludes a vast amount of information pertinent to Eve’s career. The critical events in the lives of the family members—such as births, deaths, marriages, divorce, and illness—are the essential matters dealt with here. Particular emphasis has been placed on aspects of the family biography—such as the early years and education of the two sisters—that have been largely overlooked. The chapter is divided into sections reflecting the chronology of family life: the Langley parents (?1854-1903); childhood (1904-1919); youth (1920-1929); marriages, lovers and children (1929-1941); incarceration (1942-1950); final years in New Zealand (1951-1960); ageing in Australia (1960-1994). For each section the material available to me is different, and it will be introduced at the beginning of that section. The term “exhibit” is used throughout this chapter as a way of presenting evidence including documents, photographs, letters and drawings. Eve’s fiction provides clues and, on occasion, a description of a person or place, but it is not produced as evidence of an event.

The bulk of the material relating to the Langley family is archived at the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, situated in Macquarie Street, Sydney. The Mitchell Library was the recipient of both Eve’s and June’s personal papers. The Eve
Langley papers were deposited at the library in 1974 and 1975 and are catalogued as ML MSS 4188. Eve’s manuscripts and her correspondence with her editors at Angus & Robertson are held in the Angus & Robertson archive that was purchased by the Mitchell Library in 1977. This substantial consignment of manuscripts and letters covers the period of operation of the publisher from 1933 to the mid 1970s. It includes editorial and publishing correspondence relating to Eve Langley dating from 24 October 1941 to 31 July 1975. It is catalogued as ML MSS 3269. The June Langley papers 1901-1979 were donated to the library in 1981 and are catalogued as ML MSS 3898. Photographs and drawings pertaining to both sisters are catalogued as ML Pic. Acc. 5031. A portrait of June Langley is catalogued as ML P3/160. The Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, also holds letters, photographs and documents relating to Eve in a number of other collections: the Harry F. Chaplin Album of papers concerning Eve Langley, 1938-c.1955 was purchased in 2002 and catalogued as ML MSS 7154; Beatrice Davis’s papers, catalogued as ML MSS 7638; Douglas Stewart’s and Meg Stewart’s papers catalogued as ML MSS 5147; Mary Dobbie’s letters from Eve, catalogued as ML MSS 7487, and the Ruth Park papers, catalogued as ML MSS 3128. In addition to the massive Eve Langley archive at the

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23 Material found at Eve’s hut by police following her death was handed to the Public Trustee of New South Wales that administered Eve’s estate (she died intestate). The Langley children donated Eve’s papers to the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. This material consists of seven boxes (1.3 metres) of drawings, photographs, documents and manuscript writings: novels, short stories, poems, letters, rewritings of journals, notes and miscellaneous material including shopping lists. The boxes contain folders with individually wrapped notebooks, etc. which are then tied with ribbon. The pages are not individually numbered, and much of the material is illegible due to deterioration (age and environmental damage) and method of production (thin paper, use of pencil and ink, writing on both sides of page, for example) (Plate 3).

24 There are two boxes organised in the same manner as Eve’s material, with folders containing a broad description of the contents.
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, I have also used other official documents such as birth, death and marriage certificates, and relevant material in libraries in Queensland and Canberra, state schools and the Public Records Office of Victoria. If Eve Langley’s children have further material, as seems likely, it is not at present publicly available.

Although these archives represent a vast resource, there are significant gaps in the chronology which I believe are a consequence of deliberate editorial intervention by the family. Eve’s unpublished novels derived, sometimes obviously, from diaries or journals which have since disappeared. On 7 December 1950, June wrote that she held “all of Eve’s manuscript […] mostly a daily chronicle of her life […] I have had possession of it and most of the journals for nine years.”25 Very few original letters from the period 1926-1941 memorialised in Eve’s fiction remain, although they were available to her when she was writing her fiction. On 9 January 1951 June wrote to Beatrice Davis: “I could show you letters that cover most of her life, all of amazing beauty,”26 and on 20 April 1952 she again referred to Eve’s original documents in a letter to Beatrice Davis, claiming she had “many of Eve’s early letters.”27 The letters and journals (and Eve’s typewriter) were returned to


Eve via the Public Trustee before September 1951. These are missing from the archive, perhaps because Eve (or June) later destroyed them.

The gaps in the archive, I will argue in this chapter, are motivated by a family penchant for secrecy, even when the secrets seem trivial. Some seem inexplicable, such as the secrecy surrounding June’s pregnancy in 1931-32. Mia issued a directive to Eve in January 1932 when she wrote to her about the imminent arrival of June’s baby that Eve was not to tell anyone of her sister’s “misfortune”: “You know how very secretive we are” (emphasis in original). June had been married for more than two years, and there could be no scandal attached to the arrival of a baby. But oddly, this “secret” had been kept from Eve for the duration of the pregnancy: June did not want her sister to know she was pregnant. Some secrets were far more important, such as the fate of June’s baby and husband who disappeared in about 1933. The effect of this culture of secrecy is isolation from each other as well as from friends and partners, and perhaps children. The cause of the underlying secrecy surrounding the Langley sisters’ early years was, I believe, revealed by Eve in the months before her death in June 1974. Eve wrote notes and drew a very descriptive picture that left no doubt in my mind that something important had occurred in her childhood and that this involved her father. A lifetime of obfuscation about the past collapses under the weight of a particularly powerful image that depicts a young girl by the name of “Dolly” being pulled along by a near-naked man named as ”Apollo,” at Forbes, in the year 1913, the year Eve was eight (Plate 4).

The Langley parents: ?1854-1903

The "exhibits" for this account of the Langley parents are scanty: birth and marriage certificates, a letter, a photograph of "Myra" Davidson, and reminiscences.

Arthur Alexander Langley, Eve and June’s father, is a shadowy figure. The order of his given names is not firmly established: he is variously called Arthur Alexander, Alexander Arthur, and signed his name with an ambiguous "A. A." I will call him Arthur, because that is what his daughters called him. There is no birth certificate or record of baptism for Arthur, so we do not know for certain his year of birth which, however, may be surmised to be 1854 given that he gave his age as 48 when he married on 14 April 1902. Arthur’s father is named on marriage and death certificates as William Henry Langley and his mother as Barbara Pincher. His most likely place of birth is Sandridge, in Melbourne, which is cited by Arthur on Eve’s birth certificate. Sandridge was an area that came to prominence as a transport hub during the Victorian Gold Rush in the 1850s. It became known as Port Melbourne in 1884, and this is named as Arthur’s birthplace on his

30 His signature is "A. A. Langley" on his marriage certificate and strangely (given the endearments and implied intimacy), also on his letter to "Myra" Davidson in 1901. The name on the marriage certificate is Alexander Arthur, but on Eve’s birth certificate of 1904 (for which he was informant) it is Arthur Alexander.

31 An internet search of the Registry of Birth Deaths and Marriages, Victoria, using key word of "Langley" 1840-1860 located 19 Langleys born in that time, four of them boys, none with the name Arthur Alexander or Alexander Arthur. The results of a search of early church and civic records between 1 Jan. 1837 and 31 Dec. 1857 conducted by the Office of the Government Statistician (State of Victoria) dated 24 Apr. 1969 similarly recorded a "no record" result on the name Alexander Arthur Langley. This document is held in June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898. Victorian Pioneers Index c. 1837-1888 Version 2 showed no result.

marriage certificate, and on his death certificate.³³ Civil registration of births was made compulsory in Victoria in July 1853, and Arthur’s birth probably fell on the cusp of this date. Given the chaos of the gold-mining era and the transience of the mining populace,³⁴ it is therefore perhaps not surprising that Arthur’s birth was not recorded.

There are no photographs in the archives identified as being of Arthur. Nothing is known about his childhood or his youth or most of his adult life prior to February 1901, when, as a bachelor approaching fifty, he sent a letter to “Myra” Davidson in which he stated his expectation that they would soon marry. Just this one artefact exists in which we hear his voice, written on 18 February 1901, from the Victorian town of Omeo in East Gippsland. The letter, preserved in June Langley’s papers, has been opened and refolded so many times it has fallen apart, but it is possible to decipher most of the text (Plate 5). This folding and unfolding could indicate curiosity or attachment—or both. It is a conventional courting letter that “Myra” kept; it establishes Arthur as a literate shearer who is known to “Myra’s” family, although there is some question over whether they support the anticipated marriage. Arthur indicates he has been very persistent in his letter writing. Given what was to come, this letter is a strange and incongruous item to represent Eve’s father in this biography. As it is the only opportunity to hear directly from Arthur himself, his letter is cited in full:

³³ On June’s birth certificate of 1905, where “Myra” was the informant, the location of her husband’s birthplace was given as Bendigo, in north east Victoria. This would place the family in Bendigo near the beginning of the gold rush which began “unofficially” in August 1851 and precipitated the “great rush” there in March 1852 (Flett 64).

³⁴ On Arthur’s death certificate it was noted that William Langley was a miner, although on Arthur’s marriage certificate he was identified as a carpenter.
Dearest Myra,

Received your loving and ever welcome letter Wednesday evening.

Dear Little Woman, 35 you said you would write me a nice letter but this letter is beyond all I expected since the day I learnt to read I have never read anything like it and did not wait to get back to the Hotel to read it but sat down in the street and read it by the street lamp. I have never known such happiness in my life but I would put up with it all again if I thought I would receive another like that from you. You do not know nor have you any idea how happy that letter has made me little [indecipherable]. I know they will laugh at me writing so often but for the life of me I cannot help it for I love you so.

I am very sorry to hear you have had such a bad head and poor little girl I do feel so much for you just before I got your letter I was on my way to the Concert to drive dull care away but when I got it no more concert for me my little woman was in my thoughts but there is not one hour that I do not think of you and I have kept to myself here. I am stopping at Riltons Hill Top Hotel. I did not win the shearer’s prize. They could not fault my shearing but my time was slow. Two men that have been shearing all the year won the prize.

Dear Girl you must not fret too much but just think of the happy time that is in store for us. For if ever man tried to make a woman happy I will.

35 This term of endearment turns up on the first page of *The Pea Pickers.*
Oh Myra what would I give today for one loving embrace from your dear self. I seem to feel that I live for you for I will not think that there is any chance of me losing you God knows what I would do my last days would end in misery but I am going to face it like a man because I know that I have the best little woman in the world waiting for me. You need not write for a week. I am going out to [indecipherable] today and will start work on Monday so now I will say good bye loved one and may God watch over you my wife that is to be one day. God bless you dear Girl. I remain yours forever, A. A. Langley.

[Indecipherable] to be taken at night. XXXXXX

The handwriting (except for two words) is legible and even, and the syntax correct, lending support to Eve’s later assertion that he was a “well educated man.”36 “Myra” was thirty-one years old and living in Maffra, a township south of Omeo, where Arthur was working. The Great Alpine Road which passes through Tambo Crossing, Ensay and Swift Creek connects the two townships.37

“Myra” was christened Mira, but was cited on official documents as “Myra.” Her children called her “Mia,” however, and this is the name that will be used here (except when quoting from manuscripts or official documents, where the original citation will


37 This road traces the route through the Victorian Alps that Eve undertook in 1929 and wrote of in the first half of her “novel” “Wild Australia.”
stand). She was born on 18 June 1868 at Kangaroo Flat,38 a small gold-mining township that is now a suburb of Bendigo, Victoria. Mia’s father was Thomas Davidson—a Scottish immigrant who was first a miner then a hotel proprietor in Ballarat and Gippsland, according to June.39 Mia’s mother was Jane Flood, who had also arrived from Scotland in the early 1800s. There are no letters from Mia from this period. June told some stories of her mother’s family, but had virtually no information to tell about her father and nothing at all to say about his parents and ancestors.40

There is a studio portrait of Mia from the 1890s in Helen Hasthorpe’s thesis, supplied by her cousin Thomas Davidson. In this photograph Mia has dark hair with a middle parting and symmetrical features with a long straight nose41 and perfectly arched wide black eyebrows. She has pearl earrings and buttons, and a high-necked fur wrap; her


39 June Langley. “Eve Langley (Author of PEAPICKERS).” c. May 1950. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/123. On June’s birth certificate (for which Mia was the informant) and the marriage certificate of Mia and Arthur, Mia gave her place of birth as Ballarat—another gold mining town in Victoria. The inconsistencies in biographical details mirror Arthur’s and such inconsistencies are also apparent in Eve’s and June’s official documents.

40 “ARTHUR ALEXANDER LANGLEY, the father whose birth and origin was somewhat shrouded in mystery, was apparently a man of good birth, of English descent, a restless wandering type of man very common to those early days, he often described himself as a ‘Man of all trades and master of none.’ ” June Langley. “Eve Langley (Author of PEAPICKERS).” c. May 1950. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/123. Eve wrote several versions of the protagonist Steve’s mother’s life prior to marriage in The Pea Pickers. According to June, her mother “packed a few belongings into saddle bags and rode out at midnight from Tambo Crossing” (Hasthorpe fn 26).

41 In The Pea Pickers (2), Mia is described as having a grotesque nose that had been broken in childhood. This was clearly not the case.
clothing indicates that her circumstances are comfortable. This photograph contrasts dramatically with the serious dour woman with the straight middle parting to her hair who sits with a small child on her lap in a later image.

Arthur was sixteen years older than Mia when they married on 14 April 1902, at a registry office at 434 Queen Street in Melbourne. Neither had married before, despite their respective ages of forty-eight and thirty-two. The marriage document raises a number of questions that may be relevant to understanding the relationship Mia had with her family. It is not apparent what business the couple might have had to be in Melbourne apart from the purpose of marriage. While the couple both gave their addresses on the marriage certificate as the Mechanic Restaurant, in Bourke Street, Melbourne (close to the registry office), their usual addresses are listed as Maffra (for Mia), and Buchan (which is more than one hundred kilometres north of Maffra in the Snowy Mountains, for Arthur). Perhaps they chose to marry in Melbourne to avoid the two families. As is the case with Arthur, we do not know what Mia was doing in the years prior to her marriage, or why she married so late. As Arthur was shearing nearby it is likely that they met in the Gippsland area, but the personal circumstances of their meeting and marriage are unknown. A cousin of Mia’s, Bruce Davidson, remembered Arthur as “a small quiet man who played the violin.” Helen Hasthorpe wrote to all the members of the Davidson family she could find in 1977, but came across no information that was remarkable in any way. There is nothing to suggest that Arthur would be responsible for any secrets in the family.

**Childhood: 1904-1919**

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42 Bruce Davidson per father, William Davidson. Letter to Helen Hasthorpe. 30 July 1977 (Hasthorpe 15).
The “exhibits” for this period 1904-19 of the Langley’s family life are birth certificates, school records, local histories, retrospective reminiscences by June and the sisters’ cousins and friends, and letters.43

The marriage of Arthur and Mia marked the first of many changes in location and domicile that characterized the life of the Langley family. They moved town frequently, making it difficult to track them, especially in these early years. When Eve was born, Arthur Langley was working at Bogabogil Station, Forbes, a town situated in a remote area of central western New South Wales famous for its connections with bushrangers: Ben Hall and Ned Kelly’s sister, Kate Foster, are buried there. When explorer and New South Wales Surveyor-General of Lands John Oxley passed through in 1817 he noted that “it was impossible to imagine a worse country.”44 This harsh, almost featureless landscape represents an archetype in the early Australian bushman experience. Henry Lawson spent his formative years at Eurunderee just north along the Newell Highway from Forbes, and wrote of “dark lonely gullies of stringy-bark trees […] voice-haunted gaps, ever sullen and strange” (cited in Pierce 42). This defining pioneering landscape is Eve’s heritage yet she

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43 In 1957 Eve returned to the central western plains of New South Wales where she and June spent the first decade of their lives. She wrote to her sister about her journey there, and these letters include references to locations as well as reminiscences about their past. There are also some accounts in Eve and June’s personal papers relating to their childhood.

44 This anecdote is referenced in numerous travellers’ guides, although without a source. The Dictionary of Australian Biography makes reference to journals kept by Oxley during an expedition “to ascertain the course of the Lachlan River” (Serle 210).
makes virtually nothing of it in her fiction, where it is recalled only occasionally in brief intense flashes of memory connected with her father.  

The Langleys' two children were born eighteen months apart. On 30 November 1904 Arthur registered the birth of his first daughter, named Ethel Jane, who had arrived nearly two months earlier, on 1 September at Johnston Street, Forbes.  

"Ethel" was known throughout her life by six different names—Ethel, Dolly, Darcy, Eve, Steve and Oscar Wilde. I call her Eve, the name by which she is known as a writer; but I do not know precisely when she began to call herself by this “most feminine of all names […] clearly indicating [gender]” (Dunkling 135). In 1930, before any of her work was published, she was already signing herself “Eve.” On 6 November 1905 the second Langley daughter Lillian May was born, and her birth was registered in Molong on 18 November by Mia who journeyed from the small township of Gumble where they were then living.  

Like Eve, “Lillian” had numerous monikers over the course of her life, including May, Julie, Jubes,

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45 Eve made reference to a book she had begun called “Ben Hall. I come from around Forbes and Jerilderie and generally Ben Hall country”; however there is no evidence of this text (Letter to Beatrice Davis. 17 Sept. 1951. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/155).

46 Ethel Marie (Eve) Langley. Birth Certificate. Forbes: 1 Sept. 1904. Registration no 1904/032068. Arthur’s place of work was named as “Bogobogil Station.” “Killen’s” or “Killeens” station is usually given as his location at this time, but “Killens” built in 1860 by the surgeon who attended to the bushranger Ned Kelly, is actually in Euroa, Victoria. Eve wrote that she “woke up” at Kileen’s station in White Topee (244) and that Mia said she had “met” Steve at Kileen’s in the book “Wild Australia” (381). In her biographical statement about her sister, June said Eve was born at “Killeens.” Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/123. These references prompted Joy Thwaite to posit this as Eve’s actual birth place.

47 There are several documents with this name written by Eve. Mia also had a sister called “Dolly.”

Junior, Blue-Peter, June, Blue—though June is the name by which she is now publicly known, and the name used here. There are three photographs in the Langley archive from this first decade of the children’s lives. One is the photo of Mia framed by the blossoms of a fruit tree, with the toddler. There are also two conventional studio images of the girls dressed in matching frilly dresses and long ringlets (Plate 6). There is no indication as to where the photographs were taken. The Langley family’s last known address in New South Wales was Forbes, but the sisters’ papers refer to Fifield, a small township within a hundred kilometres of Forbes, as the place of Eve’s first school, indicating that the sisters’ early education was interrupted by several changes in domicile, a situation that is almost certainly reflective of their father’s occupation as an itinerant shearer.

In an action that was never explained by any of the Langley women, Mia travelled with her daughters—who were then aged ten and nine—to Crossover, in Gippsland, Victoria, in 1914. It seems likely that they travelled from Molong to Crossover by train via Sydney: Molong was the terminus of a train line established in 1886, and Crossover was the terminus of a train line which opened in about 1891. Virtually all the sisters’ journeys

49 In addition there were names such as “Beesknees,” “Bluie,” “Grazia,” and other appellations by which she is denoted in Eve’s fiction.

50 This photograph calls to mind the “kipsy” in which Mia and daughters live in The Pea Pickers, with its “giant plum trees which held the soil in their hands and brought up snow out of its blackness every spring” (3). This idealising of her earliest childhood home is transposed onto the house at 23 Walker Street Dandenong, which was a basic worker’s cottage in the centre of town.

51 Crossover State School. Register. June 1914. The sisters’ previous school was listed as Forbes. Wombat Street is named by Eve as the location of their house in Forbes, and Forbes Primary School in Brown Street is nearby. According to the current principal the school does not hold any records from that period.

52 State Records New South Wales. Western Sydney Records Centre. Fifield pre-1939. 5/15887.4. There are no pupil records. June refers to Fifield on several occasions; Eve visited there in 1957.
Plate 6: Eve and June Langley.
across the east of Australia were defined by inland railway lines, and train journeys feature prominently in *The Pea Pickers*.53

Crossover—so called because of a bridge built to cross a deep gully—is pretty, hilly, bushy country, and has an isolated feel even now. It was originally settled by gold miners, but in the early twentieth century its primary industry was timber. Crossover State School,54 a typical one-roomed country school built in 1901, still stands on a grassy knoll beneath a patch of sky hedged in by a canopy of tall, fragrant eucalypts. According to local historians, this site was originally gazetted as the site for the Crossover railway station, but a local landholder with timber interests persuaded officials to relocate a mile further down. The township was clustered around the station, and the school was an uphill walk along a winding track. A contemporary report notes that “This school is in a very scrubby place.”55 On 15 March 1910 the head teacher wrote asking for a fence to keep out horses and on 18 November there was a request for wire to keep out the rabbits.56 In August 1911 it was

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53 “The train moved away from the rusty station ... I remembered no more. Like a child, covered by the oblivion of my obsession ... love, love, love ... I sat swaying beside Blue through the forever of that day” (*The Pea Pickers* 368).

54 The school was designated number 3130 by the Victorian Education Department when it was opened as “Neerim South” in 1891. The name was changed to “Crossover” in 1894. Neerim South Primary School, in the nearby township of Neerim South, now has the early school records of “Crossover,” which were found under the school when it was closed in 1980. They are now kept in a plastic box in a cluttered storage shed. The groundsman, John Freeman, located the box for me.


noted that the access road was "dangerous and at times almost impassable." Eve and June were registered at Crossover in June 1914 under their christened names of Ethel Jane and Lillian May, although according to their cousin Jean Davidson they were known at the time as "Dolly" (Hasthorpe f/n 15) and "May." She remembered that "the two girls were inseparable companions until they reached adulthood and people often remarked that they were never seen apart" (Hasthorpe 13). There is no reference to the Davidsons on the school register. Twelve desks were required to accommodate the enrolments at 14 May 1914. A photograph of the school from 1915 may include the sisters (Plate 7). For Eve, Crossover was an idyllic place. She did not make her childhood or her school years a subject in her fiction, although she occasionally briefly reminisced in notebooks about this period in her life: "walking down the long steep hill, silent of coach whip birds down its ruts and corrugations we had trodden so often coming home from the Crossover School.

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58 This is also supported by a letter written to Eve by a friend from Crossover that addresses her as "Dolly" B. (H. Mason. Letter to Eve Langley. 17 Sept. 1957. Eve Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 4188).

59 In 1983, Joy Thwaite interviewed Jean McAlpine (nee Davidson), a cousin of the Langley sisters, who said she "was a constant companion of her Langley cousins at Crossover." Jean was in her mid seventies when she was interviewed (she was born in 1909) which means that she was about six when she played with the Langley sisters (she is not on the school register). Thwaite refers to Jean as "One of the most reliable accounts of [Eve's] childhood personality" (20).


61 Eve referred to a manuscript she was planning called "The Crossover Hotel" in May 1955, but this is not extant (Letter to Nan McDonald. 12 May 1955. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/351).
Plate 7: Crossover State School. c.1915.
our beloved dewy glittering track [...] that led to the station [that was a] little galvanised iron shed.\textsuperscript{62}

Eve was enrolled in grade three\textsuperscript{63} and June in grade two; both were steadily promoted so that Eve was in grade six for the second half of 1917 and June in grade five. Years later, June reminded “Steve” of “the old school at Crossover and the two dogs drowsing beneath the old cloak racks, which supported tattered leather bags some gaping at the mouth.”\textsuperscript{64} On the school register it was noted that they lived a mile from the school, presumably in the town where the school register also says “Myra” was engaged in the “hotel business.” There is, however, no record of Mia’s employment at that time at the Neerim Hotel, which had regularly changed hands since 1880. In 1914 the business was owned by Len Fowler (Williams) (Plate 8).

There are two half-year gaps in the records of attendance for all students: one in the first half of 1916, and another in the first half of 1917. It is not apparent why this occurred; the same head teacher—Mary Manson—was employed at the school in 1915 and 1916.\textsuperscript{65} While they were at Crossover, the sisters attended school regularly; their attendance at “meetings”—as classes were called—was consistent when compared with most of the other


\textsuperscript{63} Eve was quite old to be in grade three. There were six other students born in 1904 at the school and apart from one child (who was in grade two), two were in grade five, and three were in grade four.


\textsuperscript{65} A history of Crossover drawn from anecdotal and unreferenced documentary sources was compiled in 1991 to commemorate the school’s centenary. This photocopied booklet “Crossover” was compiled by Sandra Virgona. I was loaned a copy by John Mason, whose wife, Lyn, had taken a keen interest in the Crossover Centenary celebrations and collected material such as newspaper reports (which were generally undated and not sourced).
Plate 8: Neerim Hotel. c.1914.
students, and their names did not appear in the Absence book (which was kept with the register) at all. In June 1915, Arthur Langley died, and in September the following year, Mia remarried.

June recalled—in a very detached tone—the approximate timing of the death of Arthur Langley in her “biographical” statement about Eve for her sister’s publisher, Angus & Robertson, in 1950. The family was in Crossover when “news of the death of husband reached her [Mia].” On 29 June 1915, Arthur Langley died from a heart attack at Rookwood State Hospital and Asylum for Aged and Infirm Men, Lidcombe, in the inner western suburbs of Sydney. Even his manner and date of death have an element of vagueness about them, with crossings out on his death certificate, and uncertainty about his medical history. It was not known, for example, how long Arthur had had cardiac arrhythmia, and there was some confusion over whether he had seen the doctor on 28 June, or died on 28 June. According to Arthur Langley’s death certificate (the informant was not a member of the family), he was aged sixty and had suffered from “ostitis deformant”—inflammation of the bone. His occupation was listed as blacksmith/pensioner. His wife was recorded as “Myra” Davidson, and it was noted he had two daughters, their ages unknown. The fact that Arthur’s death certificate is not in the Langley archives is notable, as the search document for his birth certificate is there along with Mia’s birth and death records. His death, alone in such an institution, is the first indication that something out of the ordinary has occurred within the family system; the fact that we do not know why the

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family was split up is significant. His wife and daughters were more than six hundred kilometres away, but he knew where they were because Mia was informed of his death, and wrote her status as "widow" in September 1916 when she married again.

Until I retrieved the marriage certificate of Mia and Patrick Cullen, there was no certainty that Mia had in fact formalized her relationship with this man who Eve referred to in her fiction as "The Head." Mia's cousin Bruce Davidson had mentioned "an Irishman" called Patrick Cullen who he said had married "Myra" in 1915 (Hasthorpe 17). In the sisters' papers there is no mention of their mother having married again, and Mia's death certificate does not suggest a second husband. The marriage certificate is not in the family archives, and there is no photograph of Patrick Cullen. As with much of the information that has been cited about Eve based on references in her fiction, this is the first time that confirmation has been provided that on 4 September 1916 at the age of forty-eight, Mia married Patrick Cullen in a civil service in the inner Melbourne suburb of Coburg. Mia's birthplace is listed on the marriage certificate as Neerim, near Crossover, which was incorrect of course. This propensity to submit false information on official records is a characteristic of Mia's history and becomes a feature of Eve's and June's. This was the second time that Mia had left her family to marry in Melbourne. Cullen was described as a bachelor from Drouin, a township adjacent to Crossover. Nothing more is known about him, although there are Cullen children on the Crossover school register. In her manuscript "The Victorians," Eve wrote a description of Patrick Cullen: he was a "mystery man,

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68 James Taffy's *Australian Nicknames* notes that "The Heads" refers to someone who "has a mouth as wide as the Sydney Heads" (55).

somewhat of a relative and something in the nature of a parent. He [...] wore Brown Harris tweeds, a flat hat and had a long brown thick soft moustache which he gave a good stroking year long. [...] Mira was supposed to have married this gentleman at some indeterminate period of the remote past, [...] but we flung the episode lightly over our shoulders and dismissed it completely" (92-93). The "secret" of Patrick Cullen’s role as stepfather in Eve and June’s lives was never revealed, nor therefore is it known why—or when—the couple separated. “Disappearing” men are a feature of all three women’s lives; men whose existence is expunged—almost—from the family history.

Victorian Education Department building records from the period confirm that Crossover was a “sparsely populated locality” in the early 1900s, and on 30 January 1917 with only twelve pupils enrolled it was proposed that Crossover State School run part time.70 This may be why Mia, who had sent the girls to school on a regular basis, decided to leave Crossover and travel to Melbourne. Perhaps the relationship between Mia and Patrick Cullen broke down. Instructions on the front of the school register direct teachers to enter a “destination” (occupation, school, home) for each student who leaves the school and with only a couple of exceptions—the Langley sisters were one—this was complied with at Crossover. At the end of 1917, Eve and June disappeared off the register: in the relevant column it was noted that they “left.” Given that the head teacher had known these girls for nearly four years in an intimate setting it seems surprising that she had nothing to write in this column. Other students are recorded as having left to go home, or to be employed. The Langley sisters—now aged twelve and thirteen—seemed to have simply vanished.

The trail might have gone cold at this point.\textsuperscript{71} Eve’s cousin Jean Davidson told Helen Hasthorpe that after the family had left Crossover they moved to Brunswick—a bustling working class suburb in inner Melbourne of about forty thousand people—where Mia’s younger brother “Ely” lived (Hasthorpe 24), a move confirmed retrospectively when the girls changed schools again and registered at the Dandenong State School on Melbourne’s rural fringe. The Dandenong State School register states that the school last attended by the Langley sisters was Brunswick Central State School (number 1213),\textsuperscript{72} where the sisters spent less than a year before they left on 3 May 1918.\textsuperscript{73} The contrast between Crossover State School and Brunswick Central State School could not have been more dramatic: Brunswick Central was overcrowded, with poor infrastructure and facilities and inadequate sanitation. From a one-roomed school with twelve pupils, the girls suddenly had to find places for themselves in classes of two hundred—far more children than they

\textsuperscript{71} June Langley omitted information about the remarriage of her mother and their time in Brunswick in her biographical account of her sister. Instead she observed vaguely that the “family […] set out again and after various wanderings in search of a house settled in Dandenong” (Eve Langley [Author of PEAPICKERS].” c. May 1950. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/123).

\textsuperscript{72} The early records of many schools were given to Public Records Of Victoria when the Education Department commissioned a history of Victorian Schools called Vision and Realization (Blake, ed.) in 1973 (it had no reference for Crossover). Brunswick Central State School records from 1912 predominantly comprise requests to the Victorian Education Department for repairs and capital works. There are no student registers relating to Brunswick Central State School.

\textsuperscript{73} Brunswick Central State School was closed on 31 Dec. 1996. The records held at that point date from 1950. These were deposited with Archives and Records at the Victorian Department of Education and transferred to the Public Records Office Victoria in 2006, ten years later. They are now held at VPRS: 14420.
had ever seen at any one time. Although Eve did not write about Brunswick Central in her fiction, she made reference to the school in her notes:

> It was a huge dull red blue brick place, roaring with children [...]. It was terrible. I felt lonely. I missed the small school room at Crossover [...]. The change of scenery was dreadful. The godlike faerie existence we had led at the Crossover, was gone, there was only hot asphalt, the dingy fly spotted shops [...] and the sad dull company of city children.” (cited in Thwaite 26)

Leaving Crossover had disastrous consequences for Eve’s education. Her schooling effectively ceased at Crossover, when she was barely thirteen.

Contrary to previous accounts of the family’s whereabouts in 1918, they did not move to 53 Walker Street, which is just around the corner from Dandenong State School (1403) in Foster Street Dandenong, but to a house in Potter Street. Once again, this was on a train line. George Walker, who was a year older than Eve, the son of a large main street Dandenong store owner, and a friend of Eve and June’s, described the location in the early 1900s as a “pretty town—gentle slopes, vistas of blue mountains and Port Phillip Bay and the unusual Bald Hills, the rustic creek and natural timber … a woodland [...] and then, beyond that the sapling forests of Ross’s Paddock” (43). This picturesque landscape was not replicated in the site of Dandenong State School (number 1403) which opened in 1874

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74 In March 1913 there were 1,542 pupils and twenty-seven teachers (a ratio of nearly sixty students per teacher) leading to the establishment of other primary schools in the area (noted in a request to the Department of Education by the school for more accommodation). At 1 June 1918, there were approximately two hundred children in two rooms at Brunswick Central State School (Public Records Office Victoria. “1213 Brunswick. Building Files: Primary Schools 1909-1949.” VPRS 795/P0000/2166). See also a reference in this file to Mr. Jewell (MLA). He noted that “at one school in Brunswick there are about 200 children in each of the three rooms” (Extract from Hansard. 15 Aug. 1918: 708-09.)
close to the centre of town at the corner of New Street and Foster Street. In June 1915, the condition of the grounds was described as “wretched.” Despite this, a photograph of a “cadet parade” from 1906 shows all the girls in white full-length pinafores over long dresses. The school was smaller than Brunswick, but still a profound change from “the godlike faerie existence” of Crossover.

The Dandenong State School register dating back to the early twentieth century is still kept at the school, and Eve and June’s names are on it; they are first registered as “Ethel” and “May” on 4 June 1918. Both were now in grade six. These records provide the only contemporary information about the sisters’ activities and although they are brief, they provide significant links to the past and the future.

It is of interest to note that the only other student who was younger than Eve was in grade eight, his sister in grade seven, indicating that the sisters were significantly behind in their schooling, particularly Eve. While June attended “meetings” every day, (210 out of a possible 212), Eve attended only twenty-eight, which represents an average of once every ten days. Perhaps she was at school for the first five or six weeks and then stopped, an interpretation supported by June’s reminiscences years later: “This morning over our breakie […] we [June and Mia] harked back to the time when you were young and ill at Holland’s. The terrible stupor which overcame you and so frightened Mira and I. Your exemption from school and the removal to Dykes. The little room above and the

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77 The principal, Mrs. Greenleas supplied me with a photocopy of the school register.
newspapers of Dogville or Ratville that you used to prepare in detail for my reading.”

Eve’s education had clearly come to an end with the sudden onset of an undefined psychological illness at the onset of puberty. Anecdotes by June (which are almost always vague) indicate that her sister was considered “delicate” in her youth, but offer no explanation as to the cause or prognosis.

The following year, 1919, “May” attended 273 out of a possible 367 “meetings,” but there is no record of “Ethel” having attended school at all (as was the case at Crossover, the “destination” column was left blank). “May” left the school on 28 November 1919 having obtained her Qualifying Certificate on 18 November. It was noted that her destination was “at home.” Both sisters therefore completed the minimum legal requirement for attendance, the leaving age being fourteen (Blake 217-18). There was some suggestion that the sisters had attended Dandenong High School (Thwaite 508), which opened in 1919, but their names are not on the list of the original students printed in “A History of the Dandenong High School 1919-1966” (Mitchell).

“Myra Cullen’s” occupation was listed as “domestic duties” on the school register, but we know virtually nothing about the family’s circumstances in Dandenong: who was paying the rent, and how they were living. There is no indication that Patrick Cullen was there, but there is a mysterious trace of another man. Two students Donald and Muriel

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80 Neither achieved their Merit Certificate, which was introduced by the Victorian Education Department in 1912 as the standard of education required for exemption from compulsory attendance before the age of fourteen (Blake 218).
Carle, whose birthdates were eerily similar to the Langley sisters, had left Brunswick Central State School a week after the Langleys, and enrolled at Dandenong State School two weeks before the sisters. Muriel left school within three days of "May," and there is no record of what became of "Donald" after 1918. Muriel and Donald with father Thomas Carle moved literally round the corner from Mira in Scott Street, Dandenong. Whether this represents coincidence, or another family secret—perhaps a new domestic alliance—we do not know.

**Youth: 1920-1929**

The primary source for the family biography for 1920-29 is June—even though this is the period about which Eve wrote compulsively in her fiction. The sources of information are sketches, photographs, letters, local history, reminiscences and a marriage certificate. I have found it useful to think of the various and fragmentary items of evidence used to construct this section as "exhibits" which build a case for the secrecy and odd family relations that became more pronounced as the sisters emerged from adolescence into adulthood.

With their schooling now over, Mia, Eve (aged fifteen) and June (fourteen) moved back to Crossover; a local history of the Neerim Hotel, states that "Myria Cullen" was "looking after it" in 1920 (Virgona 22). In the same year, the business was de-licensed, and the building relocated. The family then returned to Dandenong, where they took up
residence at 53 Walker Street, remaining there until 1927.\textsuperscript{81} A photograph of the house is in the family archive.\textsuperscript{82}

The first “exhibit” is a pen sketch dated 30 January 1922 when June had just turned sixteen entitled “The Nymph.” It shows a naked female being watched covertly through a window by a man (Plate 9). The “nymph” is posed seductively and appears aware of her observer, but unperturbed. Oddly, the sketch is signed “Junior,” a name usually reserved for males and “traditionally associated with linking a son to a father in a subordinate way” (Dunkling 23-24). “Junior,” appearing for the first time on this sketch, is a name June will come back to over the next thirty years: it is repeated on her marriage certificates, on her daughter’s birth certificate, and on her mother’s death certificate. To sign a sketch of a sexually provocative woman with the name signifying a male seems to align the sketcher with the man peeping at the naked nymph. The sketch emphasises gender ambiguity, with the naked female body contorted—head, shapely legs and feet are turned towards the front and the torso is turned away. As other highly accomplished sketches by June from the 1920s demonstrate, this distortion was not because she couldn’t draw.\textsuperscript{83}

The next “exhibit” is letters written by June in 1925 when she dressed up as a “boy” (she called herself “Jim” or “Jimmy”) with her breasts compressed by bandages (she called

\textsuperscript{81} On 2 Dec. 1970 Eve wrote in her diary that they lived at 53 Walker Street from 1921 to 1927 (Eve Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 4188).

\textsuperscript{82} June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML Pic. Acc. 5031.

\textsuperscript{83} A series of pen and wash studies of women in elaborate costumes created by June mainly in the 1920s using a derivative art nouveau style are held in the June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML Pic. Acc. 5031 and ML MSS 3898.
them “bust reducers”\(^8^4\), and went to work for a farmer in Newstead near Castlemaine, Victoria, an historic gold-mining town. Mr Tankard, her employer was suspicious and persistent in his endeavours to establish the true gender of his employee. Two handwritten pages from letters written by June to Eve and Mia are dated 29 September 1925 and 15 October 1925 and there are also three undated pages. The letters are fragmentary in nature and located in two different folders in the June Langley collection in the Mitchell Library.\(^8^5\) That there were many more letters is clear. June refers to their frequent correspondence: “I can’t think how I could keep pegging along only for your letters.”\(^8^6\) These letters have not been closely examined before, and merit detailed attention because they are the first records of the emotional relationship between the mother and daughters, and also the first account of either of the sisters as “trouser women.” They are kept amongst bundles of letter fragments that show definite signs of editorial intervention. Quite possibly this reflects Eve’s attempts to organize the letters for her 1964 enterprise, “The Letters of Steve and Blue.” Only selected pages of very long letters are kept (leaving page twenty orphaned from the first nineteen pages, for example), with dates added in another hand. Recipient and writer can usually be determined only by content, as salutation and signature are frequently not attached. A letter by June to Eve was rewritten by Eve in her own handwriting. The letters are not in chronological order and sometimes a sequence of letters is neither in the same file, nor in the same box. The letters are in very poor condition: the paper is curled and has deteriorated through exposure to light and water. New letters are written on the


\(^8^5\) June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898.

backs of old letters so that one side indents the other. The writing is difficult to decipher, with its flourishes, and compressed and small letter formation. The letters as primary source material seem to offer so much, and yet even the most basic enterprise of putting them into chronological order and deciphering the language requires enormous time and patience. June’s letters from the period 1922-25 introduce into the biography a decidedly obsessive preoccupation with gender alignment, a preoccupation she seems to take for granted as shared with her mother and sister. Issues surrounding gender ambivalence have formed the basis of most critical work on Eve, as I demonstrated in the introduction, so it is of some consequence that June is the only one of the sisters for whom there is evidence (outside Eve’s texts) of gender ambiguity “in real life.”

According to Eva Rueschmann, “female sexuality is potentially one of the most important and sensitive areas of sororal influence” (44), and the effects of role-modelling by older sisters on their younger counterparts is well documented (McNaron, Fishel). Photographs of Eve and June from the 1920s—the third “exhibit”—suggest that the sisters were very close; they mirror body language, garments and expressions (Plate 10). Letters confirm their emotional dependency. It is therefore significant that June was experimenting with gender concealment from at least the age of twenty—and possibly earlier. Yet these photographs also show that the young women emphasised their femininity, with clinched, belted waists, indicating that their clothing did not represent disguise. What sororal influences were operating? Why did both sisters adopt elements of cross-dressing as a means of conscious deception (June) and pretence (Eve)? What underpinned their mutual fascination with the clothes assigning gender roles? These were the questions in my mind as I tried to make sense of the documents June kept through the years.
Plate 10: Eve and June Langley, 1920s.
June’s narrative in her letters focuses on the oppressive workload she had to endure to be a convincing “boy”; the problems of maintaining her charade in the face of a suspicious employer; relationship difficulties with her family, and the relative merits of girlhood versus boyhood. There is no explanation offered for her decision to masquerade as a boy, although she may well have been influenced by practical considerations. The required apparel for female farm-workers at the turn of the century—long dresses—was highly inappropriate for the task, as a letter to the editor of *The Age* in 1903 testifies. June went to significant effort to create and maintain a masculine identity in her workplace, binding her breasts with bandages to conceal them: “Jube’s bust would surprise (Bluies) Tankard if he could see ‘her’ now. It feels dammed free after being squeezed up so long.”

A 1981 text containing advice written by psychiatrists and psychologists for parents of adolescents has a brief article written by a psychiatrist, Anke A. Ehrhardt, regarding young girls who attempt to conceal their breasts. Such individuals are, she notes, exceptions to the norm in terms of adolescent development, and the flattening of their breasts indicates “a gender-identity problem” (308). However, although June describes romantic encounters with local lonely maidens ("on the front veranda I made violent love [to Ivy Pitts] and she reciprocated") she does so with a sense of amusement at the effectiveness of her disguise. This is a very complicated scenario that June writes. She does not “want” to be a boy, and

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observes "I am a girl" and a "rather crude boy as boys go." She draws a picture of her anatomy with the words "big" pointing to bust and buttocks, and "small" genitals and feet (Plate 11). She asserts her femininity: she misses her boyfriend "Keithie," and "longs to feel her dear dresses about [her] once again." Anticipating Eve's garment-driven narratives in her fiction, June refers to her "little silk pants [...] wondering where Jubes is," thereby introducing yet another moniker. "Jubes" is a diminutive of her "pet" name, Julie. She also refers to herself as "Blueie." The women have a range of aliases, and the names Junior (June) and Darcy (Eve) appear at this time. Eve is called "Darcy"; Mia is "Madame" and "Carlisle"; June calls them both "boys" and queries whether "Mad" is jealous of her "son" when another woman takes a motherly interest in her. She describes herself as a "brother" to Eve. June demonstrates in these letters a pattern (she also expresses suicidal thoughts and refers to depression) that is apparent across all her texts. This is an unexpected psychological profile, because until now, it has been assumed that only Eve suffered from psychological or psychiatric disorders brought on by difficult circumstances and problems associated with gender identity—evident in her "transformation" into Oscar Wilde, her masculine attire, and commentary in her fiction.

91 "Keithie" was Keith Angus Wilson, "a student of electrical engineering when I knew him," the only son of a large Dandenong draper named as A. B. Wilson. That was "Kay in Peapickers an early love an only love." (June Langley. Letter to Beatrice Davis. Sept. 1951. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/129).
Plate 11: Sketch by June Langley. c.1925.
In her letters, June reports that she has been looking for evidence of her father, and in one of her letters seems to identify with him. June “answers back as dad would do” when Mr Tankard chastises her mistakes: “As he raves madly I regard him with contemptuous pity.”95 She searches unsuccessfully for traces of her father in a “Vic [Victorian] Directory” which she bought at a sale. She finds Thomas and George Davidson “but no Langley I can trace to dad.”96 June’s search for her father is a theme throughout her texts. There are no letters saved from this period written by Eve or Mia, so we do not know what they were doing.

The fourth collection of “exhibits” from this period comprises letters and documents that reveal the circumstances of June’s first marriage. Retrieving this story from the archives was circuitous and problematic, a consequence of the selective—and often poor—preservation of letter fragments, and the sometimes random organisation of the documents within the Mitchell Library files. It is a condition of accessing the archive that everything remains in the order currently allocated. I could only access one box at a time, and since documents are scattered in different boxes and files, and related documents need to be linked up to be deciphered and interpreted, this process was often tortuously slow and frustrating.

June seems to have kept her marriage to Harold Wedgwood Holmes a secret, and later letters suggest that Eve knew nothing about the wedding until after the newly-weds had left for New Zealand at the end of 1929. In the Langley archive, the marriage is still enveloped in secrecy and as a “detective” seeking to prove that the family routinely

constructed barriers to obstruct discovery about the past—whilst also selectively preserving archives—I knew that establishing the circumstances surrounding the marriage of June Langley was crucial. Unless I could discover the family name of June’s husband (which was a secret), it was impossible to locate the birth certificate of their daughter Lido Capenera (who was meant to be a secret). June vehemently denied to Davis, Hasthorpe and Thwaite that she had ever had a child, and had Eve not written of the event in “Land of the Long White Cloud” (1959), and “Demeter of Dublin Street” (1960), thereby knowingly disclosing her sister’s most potent secret, it is probable that its existence might never have been revealed. With the birth certificate of Lido I could prove that June lied and invented “stories”; without it I could only assert that June’s version of Eve’s biography—and her own autobiographical statements—should be viewed with caution and perhaps scepticism.

On reflection, it is clear that all the clues were available in Eve and June’s texts to enable me to identify when and where this marriage took place—and to whom. Several diversionary trails were laid by Eve in her 1954 “novel” “Bancroft House” where she writes that June married “Mr. W. H. […] a scion of the English Wedgwood family and a veteran of Gallipoli” in April 1930 (75). The most vivid account June herself gives of her marriage is in a letter to her sister’s editor in 1951:

John was the scion of the Josiah Wedgwood pottery family in England and with whom I had travelled on the Sydney Express in Sept 1929, myself bound for Gosford, where Peppino had offered me work […] I didn’t reach Gosford, for here my lone journey ended. Not that marriage appealed to me, in fact I was afraid of sex, and had no wish to adventure in this matter. John, evidently had been recalled to England, and had just received money from
his family there. He was a nice person, 20 years my senior and my mind then was terribly young so when he agreed that we would be companions, ONLY, we were married at St James Cathedral I think it is but you will know which church I mean. I refused his offer to take me home, for Mia’s permission, for I knew, once I saw Little Mia, I would not go on with the marriage. Of course I was attracted to him, for he was an attractive man, of good family. I had seen evidence of this in letters from his solicitors. My mind was still full of desire for travel, and here was an opportunity, and I could help little Mia, when we returned from N.Z, where he intended to take me. John always lived beyond his means, so I was treated as a child, and the future held no hope of independence for me, so I left him in 1933, once again to work toward this end, security, and independence.97

The most striking feature of this account is the failure to mention their daughter. The second observation is that, like her mother, June married a much older man, and she married in secret without telling her family, and before long her husband, Harold Holmes—like Arthur Langley—“disappeared” without explanation. The third notable aspect of June’s marriage is that—like Mia’s two marriages—it involved removal far from her relatives: the newly married couple sailed for New Zealand shortly after the wedding. A fourth observation is the strange assertion that the alliance was entered into on the basis that it was platonic and opportunistic: June believed that John had recently come into some money and that he had important family connections that would facilitate her desire for

adventure and travel as well as provide financial security for herself and Mia. June’s strategy of obfuscation revolved around omission and denial; the lack of transparency of some aspects of her marriage whilst providing stark insight into other intimate details supplies yet another example of the strange family system that characterized the lonely, often volatile and always unsatisfactory marital situations of Mia, June, and later Eve.

I have constructed the story of June’s marriage from fragments of letters and photographs. On 23 August 1929, the sisters’ previous employer in Metung, Mr W. Sutcliffe wrote separately to both Eve and June about their request for work picking peas. He was unable to promise that work would be available, but offered them accommodation that they could share. On 24 September 1929 an Italian pea picker called Peppino Nicholas wrote to June, begging her to come and work with him in an orange grove in Gosford, north of Sydney, and enclosing “20 pount [sic]” to assist with her travel expenses. He seems to have been in love with her. The date on this letter is significant because June was married two weeks later to a man she met on the train to Gosford—presumably when she was on her way to meet up with Peppino. The events leading up to the marriage were described by June in letters to her mother: there are three dated letters (29 October, 23 November and 24 December), and five undated letter fragments that assist in establishing June’s actions at this time. June described how she had “come in contact” with a “tall and splendidly featured [...] well educated and splendidly spoken” man at Albury Station (on the

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100 June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898.
Victoria/New South Wales border). "A typical sun browned English officer you'd be amazed when I tell you that as usual the height in stocking feet was 6 foot 6 1/2 inches—always go in for length. He invited me to share his carriage which was empty but later decided to occupy mine."\textsuperscript{102} He had been injured in an accident at work "slightly maimed through falling down the lock of the last ship he was engaged in," and was travelling to Sydney for an operation (subsequent pages of the letter are missing).\textsuperscript{103}

In a letter fragment, June refers to a visit to the zoo in Taronga Park, an event that links up with a dated photograph which has the caption "John Taronga Park Sydney 6.10.29" (Plate 12). The photo was taken two days before the marriage. In writing to her mother about this trip to the zoo, June deliberately eroticizes the sight-seeing:

I rec the enclosed note when I was in this bath, which he had prepared for me. It was slipt under the door. Couched in endearing terms but he's not a trifler. Today we go to Manly or the Zoo [...] he wants to bring me clothes and an engagement ring. Wants to marry me and all that. Very serious chap but I cannot say I have any answers not yet will tell you more later.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} June Langley. Letter to Mia Langley. 29 Oct. 1929. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898. The quotation which follows is from this letter.

\textsuperscript{103} This was not the first time that June had met up with a man on a train and stayed in a hotel at his expense. In a letter dated 31 Mar. [no year] June wrote to her mother, that she had left Steve at Eurobin, and abandoned the hop picking for the broom field. She included a short anecdote about "a chap I know" who had collected her at the station in Myrtleford and transport her and her luggage back the next morning "after paying all expenses" (June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898).

Plate 12: John. Taronga Park, Sydney. 6 October 1929.
She signed her name "Blue Peter," which was the *nom de plume* of her adventuring self.\(^{105}\)

Mia kept June's letters, and after Mia's death, June kept them, but she kept no copy of her marriage certificate and I might never have found it if June hadn't told her story to Eve's editor in 1951, mentioning, "we were married at St James Cathedral. I think it is but you will know which church I mean."\(^{106}\) The editor was in Sydney, which sent me looking for records in a city to which, as far as I knew, June had never been at this stage of her life, except perhaps to change trains when Mia took her young daughters away from their father in 191-. In a microfilm copy of the marriage register for St James Church I found the entry which has eluded earlier researchers. On 8 October 1929 "Junior Langley (artist)" married "Harold Holmes (ships officer)."\(^{107}\) June always referred to him as John, and this is the name that will be used here. John gave his age as thirty-five and June as twenty-three. Both listed their usual place of residence as Sydney. He was born in Rockferry, England, to

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\(^{105}\) In a letter from the 1920s, June suggests the origin of the moniker "Blue Peter," the precursor to the name "Blue" used in *The Pea Pickers*. In her undated letter June writes of a sailor she has met at a dance "with a great chest" whom she decides to call "Blue Peter" (June Langley. Letter to Eve Langley [n.d.]. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898). The "Blue Peter" is actually a nautical signal (a flag hoisted at the masthead) that announces the imminent departure of a ship. The signal is a rectangular flag, a white rectangle on a blue ground (Kemp 90). For the Langley sisters, this was also the signature of the adventuring June, the "vagabond at heart" (June Langley. Letter to Eve Langley. 7 Feb. 1931. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898).


George Robert Holmes, estate agent, and Ann Woodcock. June wrote the word “dad” after the name Arthur Alexander Langley. Her mother’s name was cited as “Myra” Davidson, and the witnesses were an unidentified couple named as George and Irene Carr. There is no wedding photograph.

This marks the end of June’s life in Australia. The next letter is dated 23 November 1929, written from New Zealand, where she was to remain until 1961. June’s hasty marriage precipitated a fundamental alteration in the balance of power between Eve, June and Mia. The sisters were used to being apart, but in the absence of any sense of “place,” Mia represented “home.” For the next few years—from 1930-33—June’s life revolved around a conventional nuclear family.

Marriages, Lovers and Children: 1929-1941

The sources of information for this period of the women’s lives are birth, death and marriage records, letters, photographs and reminiscences. There are breaks in the narrative where there is no documentary evidence. This section also refers to three people who developed crucial friendships with Eve: Douglas Stewart, Henry Brennan and Ruth Park. All three were writers and poets who later reminisced about Eve. Only Stewart maintained the friendship over the course of Eve’s lifetime, however, and he did not offer any information in interviews that breached the confidences that Eve shared with him during

108 Harold Wedgwood Holmes was registered as having been born early in 1892 in the District of Wirral, Cheshire (England and Wales Births Marriages Deaths birth index 1837-1983; Volume 8a, page 446). This makes him fifteen years older than June rather than the twenty she stated in her letter to Beatrice Davis.

the 1930s. Eve’s letters written to him from 1937-41 were acquired by the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales in 2002, and are held in a collection called the Harry F. Chaplin Album of papers concerning Eve Langley, 1938-c.1955.

The first “exhibits” for this section relate to June’s early married life and Mia’s migration to New Zealand a few months later. On 18 November 1929, June and John left Sydney on the Marama for the three-day trip to New Zealand. A photo of June and John on board ship is in the June’s personal papers (Plate 13). June is dressed in the height of fashionable 1920s femininity with a cloche hat, a neck-tie and a swinging coat, and both are laughing. She is looking up at John, who is indeed very tall. The day after their arrival in Wellington June wrote to “My dearest little Mia” describing her voyage: “it was glorious on board.” She asked her mother to “bunk” the letter on to Steve with her “most humble affections.” On 24 December June wrote to the “Bravest little woman” telling her that she and John had hiked from Christchurch through to Arthur’s Pass: “following the Alps […] past snow clad peaks (in Dec!) and with country thick with game.” She enclosed a money order and a present. They went goat shooting and rowed across a lake. Despite these adventurous pursuits, talk of “buying a schooner and trading copra,” and of solicitous attentions from the “kind thoughtful and gentle” John, June was anxious about the domesticity looming ahead, “darning sox” and the like. Within a month of her marriage she wrote to her mother of her desire for “freedom and the old mate: ’spose I’ll find Steve and

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wander as of yore." June expressed her insecurity in relation to her sister ("I feel as though I have done ill in her eyes"), and yearned for them all to be reunited. In an exchange of letters with their mother—who was acting as an intermediary—both Eve and June revealed the intensity of their affections for each other, particularly now that they were separated so decisively by the Tasman Sea. June wrote:

I woke up happy the other night dreaming that you both were here—it's the one thing that mars my happiness both my loved ones being so far away […] When I read her letter I cried bitterly. No one hurts me like Steve […] the thought of parting is agony. I love you both so dearly and your hurt is pain to me. I have read her letter many times and tears are always the result […] I am most unhappy when I think of her. Tell her I love her.

Eve, to whom the letter was sent by their mother, wrote back to Mia:

The story of the sad dream comes to me—lay on my rough bed—exhausted with the stories of sorrow—and deep and terrible despair seized me […] Sobs choked me and waves of pain tortured my whole body—and I wept the slow reluctant years of agony: my mother, are we not all of us—we three—little children crying in the dark? […] all through the night we dream, and are haunted: Before us—the wide dark waters of death are—and we that so pitifully love each other, must at its first creeping line, loosen hands and go hesitatingly into the strong tide, alone, without any company.

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And the thing that we possessed on the earth shall comfort us—the strong
love and the high dreams are at the last—deserters. Therefore, in sorrow and
retrospection—I have lost anger. I think of Blue ... I would throw
everything away to go with her. I feel as though she is dead—and that never
again in this life shall I see her.

We should never have separated—yet even then. She would have
married—and I think marriage will be the best after all: she was not hewed
out of the metal that cuts gleaming through lonely furrows. The long hot
days in the sun and mist on the hill tops of paddocks, are never hers again.

[...] I have the finest mother in the whole world—and I am not spending
half enough of my days with her: Mia, Mia, remember the joy of our
returnings—of the secret of “facto Lucia” we kept for Blue? We both loved
her, Mia, didn’t we? I cannot bear to sing that song, now. 115

Mia too was almost certainly alone, although there is no documentary evidence of
where either she or Eve was living at this time. Mia wrote: “[I have] long since grown tired
of the wall’s silent company and [...] one day heaved a great sigh and toppled onto the
yellow roses.” 116 An old-age pension scheme had been introduced in Victoria in 1901 and
was subject to Federal legislation in 1908, when the pension was ten shillings a week.

According to the 1930 year book the pension was £52 per annum in 1925, but this was
reduced in 1931 by the Commonwealth Financial Emergency Act (Barker 295). June was

is the observation: “The continuation of letter not enclosed—everyday life,” giving a clear indication that
these letters have been selectively saved.

alert to her mother’s difficult financial situation—Mia was now in her early sixties—and sent her money. But more than that, Mia represented “home,” and in February, June returned to Australia with John and took her back with them to a seaside village called Ngaio, which rested on the outskirts of Wellington.\textsuperscript{117} Both sisters agreed in later years that this was against Eve’s wishes: indeed, she may not have known about it at the time (she later referred to June as a “coward” for her migration to New Zealand).\textsuperscript{118} Over the course of the next two years June expressed profound misery at their separation, but neither sister acted decisively to affect a reunion: June did not send money for the passage as requested by Eve, and Eve did not use her own resources to travel.

On 15 June 1930 June asked Eve to come to New Zealand.\textsuperscript{119} She offered to save her sister’s letters for “future use,”\textsuperscript{120} signalling for the first time in the correspondence Eve’s vocation as a writer. On 1 July 1930 June was fretting about the sororal relationship: “I fear I have made myself unpopular with you, intense love, Blue Peter.”\textsuperscript{121} On 2 September 1930 June wrote to Eve, and then again on 6 September, soon after Eve’s


\textsuperscript{121} June Langley. Letter to Eve Langley. n.d. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898. Then, once they had been reconciled through their letter writing: “what a great feeling of happiness it gives me to think that we two are so young and so eager and so much to each other and to fill the cup, our whole lives and the whole unexplored world of people and places are waiting for us—yes, waiting and I hope to God you’ll have me for your mate,” (June Langley. Letter to Eve Langley. n.d. Eve Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 4188).
twenty-fifth birthday, June sought “to hold converse by proxy”: Mia was not happy. June conceded that “she is happy in one sense, unhappy in another [but it is] you she longs for”; “haunted by Madame’s poverty,” she had done all she could to make her mother comfortable, only to discover it could never be enough, “I can only sympathize and persuade you to come over soon.” June, who had been reading a life of the Brontë sisters, reflected on the parallels between them, and herself and Eve: They “in their close affection for each other remind me of us, you and me, the very fact that they treasure each other’s letters strengthens the similarity.” She included a long descriptive passage written by Oscar Wilde about his mother: “Seems not impossible he must have suffered from the eccentricities of his parents.” June declared herself “hopelessly lost to the world I know or knew […] married and yet debarred from the old life.” On 9 September June wrote for the third time in a week:

To think that I have forfeited a year of your company. Love is a thing that fades damnably fast and leaves one no heritage but a sturdy child named fear. I have been through much since I saw you last. At the end of Sept I gave birth to twins, they to me are grotesque things and I have learnt that their names are discontent and unrest so similar and so disturbing. I cannot content myself at all. I need, sorely, the comradeship of an understanding heart. I can’t find one that appears to me. I don’t make friends easily—and you are the only person that can think as I do.  

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Still Eve did not come. She had bought the Remington typewriter on which she would type all her manuscripts in August and was living at Metung.\textsuperscript{124} John was declared bankrupt, and this crisis, along with the loss of their house and new car brought June’s dreams of financial security to an abrupt halt.\textsuperscript{125} In March 1931, John was ill,\textsuperscript{126} and then about mid-year, June fell pregnant. Although missives were ricocheting across the Tasman between the sisters (only June’s letters survive), June made Mia promise not to tell Eve the baby secret. The withholding of significant information within this otherwise intimate triad is a critical feature of the relationship.

The following “exhibits” (letters, a birth certificate, a marriage certificate and photographs) are my source for describing the events surrounding the birth of June and John’s baby, Eve’s migration to New Zealand, and June’s remarriage. At the end of 1931 Eve indicated she would not be travelling to New Zealand after all. June dropped her bombshell on 1 February 1932: “the cricket” (Mia’s word, code for “baby”\textsuperscript{127}) was just weeks from being born, and June was worried about what Eve would think of her predicament. June was mortified at the prospect of impending motherhood, and repulsed by the coddling efforts of those who tried to nurture her. She wrote: “under the circumstances, what would you do? […] I simply can’t be maternal.”\textsuperscript{128} June referred to the unborn child


as a boy, and was emphatic that although she “can’t stand children,” she would raise him in her “very own way.” “I can’t be a mother at all, I’ll be an advisor and mate,” she wrote. She was disparaging of “motherly stewpots” and “kapok mothers” “wasting their youth” (“I don’t give a damn about their opinion”), and declared that as soon as her “cargo” was unloaded she would be searching for “new ports.” Mia wrote to Eve the following day: “June has just told me she mentioned to you about the coming of the ‘little cricket’.”

This letter is in a different folder to June’s letter and is without salutation or signature; it is cryptic and almost indecipherable. I read it several times over a long period before I appreciated the information it contained. June was initially very distressed at her predicament, Mia informed Eve, but was now “reconciled and ready to go through it all,” although she had “no time for children” and was fearful of dying in childbirth. “June would be very hurt if you mentioned anything about her misfortune dear … keep it to yourself. You know how very secretive we are” (emphasis in original). June wrote again to Eve, contradicting her mother: “They daren’t mention the word ‘baby’ to me. […] John says ‘You’re a wild thing and I expect the cricket will be wilder still’. Still I think he’d sooner have me so.”

Lido Capenera, June and John’s baby, was born on 24 February 1932 in Wellington. On the birth certificate, June, as “informant” named herself as “Junior” Wedgwood-Holmes Langley (born Molong, New South Wales, and aged twenty-six) and the father as Harold Wedgwood-Holmes (merchant, aged thirty-eight). The family was now living at Paekakariki on the North Island just north of Wellington, and the birth was registered on 22

March 1932.\textsuperscript{130} The precise circumstances of Eve’s arrival in New Zealand cannot be determined, although both sisters stated independently that it precipitated the onset of June’s labour. (There had been severe fires in Gippsland early in February [Barker 296], and this may have prompted Eve to leave Metung; in addition unemployment was nationally running at over thirty per cent [Barker 298]) Although there are two photographs of a clearly pregnant June (Plate 14), she later vehemently denied to Beatrice Davis, Helen Hasthorpe and Joy Thwaite that she had ever had a child: “June claimed she was childless and had never married. She was quite vehement on the subject. Later, however, she talked of an Englishman who ‘got her pregnant’ and found a house for her. She stated that she didn’t have the child. “There was this encumbrance in my belly and then the blood came”’ (Thwaite 206). Had Eve not written of the event in “Land of the Long White Cloud” and “Demeter of Dublin Street,” it is probable that Lido’s existence might never have become public knowledge. According to June, she separated from John in 1933: “I was treated as a child and the future held no hope of independence for me, so I left him in 1933, once again to work toward this end, security, and independence.”\textsuperscript{131} I made intensive efforts to discover what happened to John and Lido to no avail. It seems possible that they went back to England so John’s family could help look after Lido—and she may have changed her name to something less exotic—and less traceable. There is a listing for Harold W. Holmes in the British Phone Books 1880-1984 from 1944-53, but there is no way of knowing if this is him.


Plate 14: June Langley. February 1932.
June now had sole responsibility for Mia, and later said that for four years (1934-37) they lived in boarding houses. Through “diligence and frugal living”¹³² and an office job, she told Beatrice Davis, she was able to purchase a sweet shop. “Never think it was my ambition to be a satisfied small shop owner. But it meant that after four years of living in rooms in other people’s dingy houses, we would be alone, in some place of our own.”

There is no documentary evidence to identify where Eve lived from 1932-35, although June, in her reminiscences, said Eve went to Wanganui in 1932 for several months, and worked in a hostel.¹³³ Eve published numerous plays including “The Hiding of the Moa” (1934) and poetry and short stories in the New Zealand Mercury and Art in New Zealand that demonstrate her vigour and industry as a writer.¹³⁴ There are no extant letters written by either sister to the other in this period. June began a relationship with a man named Cameron Galbraith in September 1939; a substantial bundle of letters (the first dated 25 September 1939, the last 9 October 1954) is carefully preserved in her papers. Almost immediately, he was sent for training in the army, and on 19 July 1940 June was married in a registry office in Auckland to David Munro, an Australian herd tester. Once again, she referred to herself as “Junior” Langley on the marriage certificate, relationship status “spinster” (he, bachelor). His mother was named as Mary Stewart Munro (gardener), his


¹³⁴ Helen Hasthorpe cites a significant number of references in her bibliography.
father Alexander Allen Munro. Both their ages are cited as twenty-eight, although June was in fact thirty-four.  

The next “exhibits” are the birth and death certificates of Eve’s first child—also a daughter—who died at three months of age, and Eve’s letters to Douglas Stewart describing the traumatic circumstances surrounding this event. Stewart did not speak of Eve’s illegitimate baby when he was interviewed following Eve’s death. Stewart was about ten years younger than Eve, born in New Zealand in 1913. He died in Australia in 1985. He was an up-and-coming writer when Eve met him, and had already travelled to Australia (in 1933) and England (in 1934) (Smith 272). His first book of poetry—Green Lions—was published in 1936 (Smith 270). Stewart now has a relatively minor place in Australian literature, with his “greatest contribution” described as his editorial work “and his lifetime encouragement of Australian writers” (Wilde et al. 720). He was certainly a sincere supporter and trusted friend of Eve’s. He recalled in 1977 that “when you got a letter from Eve Langley that was a wonderful event […] it was such lovely prose […]. Nobody else ever used prose in a letter, they used words” (M. Stewart “Shadows”).

Eve was living at Ponsonby, a waterside suburb in Auckland in the North Island, when she gave birth on 29 May 1935 at the public hospital in Auckland to a daughter she christened with a boy’s name: Luis Lingua d’Oro Langley.  

Although Langley was thirty at the time, her age was recorded as twenty-six. No father’s name appeared on the birth certificate of the child, but he can easily be identified as Luis Rinaldi, the lover about whom

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she would later write extensively in “Demeter of Dublin Street.” At the time of her affair, she described to Douglas Stewart what appears to be the moment when she told Rinaldi she was pregnant:

Lui Rinaldi came to my door ... he stayed two days I think. I don’t know. I believe he is still there. Still pacing, dark, impatient and arrogant up and down the room ... saying “Well, what do you suggest?” [...] Everything in me is so still. Only, some mortal part of me knows that it is not loved, it is not wanted, it is not desirable, not ... necessary, and grieves and ceases to live. [...] He is a red and brown and black man, seeming to be formed from old clays ... he is red like flame; brown like earth; black like night and white, yet white like frost; he is coloured with the pigments and the browns of the earth, he is Hades coloured and I am coloured like a rock.”

Whether or not Rinaldi encouraged Eve to have an abortion, he seems to have vanished from her life entirely, and yet she commemorated his existence through the name she bestowed upon their daughter. Eve’s friends knew about the baby. Decades later Henry Brennan would remember that Luis was “healthy” when born, and that Eve had gone to board with a woman called Mrs. O’Loan, who ran an establishment for mothers with illegitimate babies. Ruth Park had been to school with Mrs O’Loan’s daughter Joan and had heard from her that Eve’s baby had died from colic. Perhaps the baby became ill at Mrs O’Loan’s, and its mother could not cope with persistent crying which certainly would

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not have been welcome among other mothers trying to put their illegitimate and possibly unwanted infants to sleep. These circumstances could explain Eve’s admission to Douglas Stewart that she had placed the baby in the “Casa di Compassione, until I am fit to look after her. Toward noon great waves and cyclones of mother-hunger come to me.” A religious order called The Sisters of Compassion lived in Hillsborough, near Onehunga, where Luis was buried, and they may have been providing some sort of respite care for the children of mothers like Eve. Wherever Luis was when Eve felt those “great waves and cyclones of mother-hunger,” mother and child re-united in a home Eve found for them. The reunion was brief, however.

When Luis was less than three months old she was taken from her mother’s house to the Auckland Hospital where she died on 22 August 1935 from entero-colitis and purulent bronchitis, which she had suffered from “for some days.” In the case of pneumonia, “an underlying chronic disease puts an individual at higher risk of complications” (Beers 263). Entero-colitis can be of two types: either “necrotizing” (Beers 1504-05)—a condition commonly associated with premature babies that can be fatal if left untreated—or “acute” (Beers 1521), where death occurs without immediate treatment. As Luis died from a combination of unspecified entero-colitis and pneumonia—which under normal circumstances is treatable (Beers 263)—and reached hospital in a critical condition, it is clear that Eve and the baby had neither the monitoring nor medical intervention required to prevent a fatal outcome. Luis was buried the next day at Hillsborough, and

Henry Brennan later recalled that there were “perhaps five mourners” at the funeral. He described the site of the burial as “set on a ridge overlooking the Manukau Harbour, Auckland’s tougher, less friendly harbour. The wind gives you the intruder’s treatment.” June never referred to this baby, just as she did not speak of her own. Eve may not have told her sister and mother that she was pregnant with Luis, just as June didn’t tell her about the pregnancy with Lido until the baby was almost due. But the fact is that two girl babies were lost to the Langley women within three years, despite their potential to assist and nurture each other and their offspring.

The next “exhibits” relate to the formation of Eve’s nuclear family with Hilary Clark and the birth of their three children. In discussions with Joy Thwaite and in letters, Hilary reminisced extensively about this marriage, which took place on 6 January 1937. He said he was “not the sort of person who can father a bastard, so I succumbed” (Thwaite 294). According to the marriage certificate, Hilary Roy Clark was aged twenty-two and Eve was twenty-eight (although in fact she was thirty-two). Hilary’s father was named as William Roy Clark (no occupation); and his mother as Nellie Clark nee Simpson, born—like Hilary—at Ngaio. Eve named her father as Arthur Alexander Langley (manager), her mother as “Mira Langley (nee Dasoni)” (rather than Davidson), and her birthplace as

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143 Eve Langley and Hilary Clark. Marriage Certificate. Auckland: 6 Jan. 1937. Births Deaths and Marriages New Zealand. Folio no. 1937/323. Reference. no. 6-0215248. Thwaite gave no prominence to this date, merely footnoting it (Notes: 5, 333). This is almost certainly because it did not tally with Hilary’s recollection that he married Eve “about the time that Bisi was due to be born” (294). This was an accurate record of events, Thwaite observed. However, the wedding date was about seven months prior to the arrival of Bisi, and Eve may not have even known she was pregnant.
Forbes, New South Wales. There was no entry in Eve’s occupational status. Hilary’s occupation was listed as “student.” There is no indication that June attended the wedding—or Mia. In a letter to Douglas Stewart written on 4 February 1937 Eve described her new husband:

His name is Hilary, he is a tall black bearded art student of 22 and he lives alone in his garret, like a wolf, and bawls out, ‘Who the hell’s there?’ whenever I go near the door. Therefore, I don’t go near it, often. At odd times he will consent to share the marriage couch […] So, Dhas, I am much alone […] fear and loneliness drive me on, brother, and I will admit them to none but you […] Hilary is a great and glorious drinker; foam lies on his beard, his lips grow rich and wide, and he has a laugh as long as the Wall of China. (Hirst 147)

On 13 July 1937, the couple’s first child, a daughter named Arilev—or Bisi, as Eve called her—was born. A series of twenty-one letters written by and about Eve during the period circa 1938-55 collected in the Harry Chaplin papers describe the desperate circumstances of her life during the late 1930s and early 1940s, including the period leading up to her incarceration in the mental asylum. Eve’s letters to Douglas Stewart in this collection and her correspondence with the young journalist Ruth Park from May-October 1941 (ML MSS 3128) offer a compelling account of her straightened physical circumstances. She sought emotional solace from Douglas Stewart, and quilts and clothing for her children from Ruth. If June was helping as well, as she claimed to Beatrice Davis in

1950, there are no contemporary letters to confirm this. Hilary and Eve’s marriage was represented extensively in Eve’s fiction, and Joy Thwaite’s biography included comments from an interview with Hilary Clark conducted in Auckland on 13 September 1983.

The marriage between Hilary and Eve was difficult and the couple often lived apart. They lived at various addresses in the Birkenhead area on the North Shore of Auckland, near Waitemata Harbour. Eve wrote to “my dear doves” [June and Mia] on 6 December 1937 and described anticipating her first Christmas as a married woman. Hilary had just come home for the first time in a fortnight (he had come home “lightly dancing down the hill on Sunday morning, fingers lightly outspread as though just arisen from the piano”\(^{145}\) and she wrote of lying happily with her husband translating books using an original Greek alphabet. This was an artful construction. The care with which Eve assembled this felicitous message is notable, for it belied the circumstances that she conveyed to Douglas Stewart a month later, on 8 January 1938, when she described the birth of Bisi the previous year and indicated that she had been suffering from depression: “I have had a very difficult time since Bisi was born and much that was joyous in me has died: if I could only bear to admit that I should not be so nerve-force. Bisi is a beautiful & healthy child.”\(^{146}\) She sent June’s “best wishes—she and my mother always ask for you and rake in any of your writing as it floats by on the hulks.” In February she wrote to Douglas Stewart: “I had a bad time after the confinement. Came home. No food. The old Maori lady used to give me half the meat she got for her dog; this orchard gave me thistles—and a wrinkle that ran from my


\(^{146}\) Eve Langley. Letter to Douglas Stewart. 8 Jan. 1938. Harry Chaplin Album. Sydney: ML MSS 7154. The quotation which follows is from this letter.
stomach to my brow. I am now filled with a few shillings grocery order until the Relief Committee says, 'no more'!

Both these letters are different in all manner of ways to the letter sent to her relatives. Her mother and sister may not have been privy to her thoughts and feelings, although it is hard to imagine that they were not aware of Eve’s straitened circumstances if they were visiting her at home. Ruth Park wrote in her autobiography *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* that she was unaware of Eve’s difficult circumstances, adding that Eve didn’t talk about it:

I see her this moment, that lost woman—eyes of pure half-colour, tousled black hair falling over her brow … “I like foliage. I must have something to hide behind.” […] Her mind quaked with the wretched foreboding of an animal in a trap. […] She never allowed me to guess her true situation and I would like to know why. (254-56)

A second child was born to Eve and Hilary on 8 November 1938 at St Helen’s Hospital, Auckland, when Bisi was just fourteen months old. This baby was a boy named Rhaviley Langley, and known as Langley. There was no mention of Eve’s deceased daughter in the column for “previous issue” (Hilary was the informant—he possibly did not know about Luis), and Eve’s age was given as thirty (she was in fact thirty-four) and her address as Birkenhead. Eve kept Douglas Stewart informed of her circumstances, telling him in August 1939 that she was living in Rugby Road, Birkenhead; in December that

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year Hilary was working in a quarry; and in June 1940 that the family was together in a house they had bought in Queen Street, Chelsea. Conscription had just been introduced and she believed Hilary would be anxious to take advantage of the opportunity to escape from herself and the children: "He is sick of civilian life, wife, children and home, and will be a ready warrior [...] Hilary will be going, I know that; and probably not coming back, and I have the two childer to drag along."

The next "exhibits" relate to the publication of *The Pea Pickers* and the birth of a third child. They comprise letters and a birth certificate. Eve described the manuscript of *The Pea Pickers* cryptically to Douglas Stewart. It was, she wrote, the product of a "drunken bushman around 'ere what 'ad the temerity to enter a novel on your competition." In 1940 it won the most significant Australian literary prize of the time, the S. H. Prior Memorial Prize, along with Kylie Tennant's "The Brown Van" (which was published as *The Battlers* in 1941), and the biography *Lachlan Macquarie* (published in 1947) by Sydney journalist Malcolm Ellis. Eve was desperately in need of her share of the prize pool (£100), and on 6 November 1940 she wrote to Stewart saying the money hadn't arrived; the electricity had been disconnected and they were struggling with their house.

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151 Eve Langley. Letter to Douglas Stewart. 18 June 1940. Harry Chaplin Album. Sydney: ML MSS 7154. Rugby Road runs down to Chelsea Bay but there is not a suburb by this name. Rugby Road is in Northcote, a suburb east of Birkenhead, and is probably the suburb to which she refers. The quotation that follows is from this letter.

payments\textsuperscript{153} (instalments of £2.10 a week).\textsuperscript{154} Eve expressed reluctance at the prospect of Angus & Robertson being the publishers of *The Pea Pickers* ("I have never liked A & R") and wanted "no women to touch it, maul it, haul it or shawl it. I know the dainty destruction; the chips here and there at my tree, as you call it."\textsuperscript{155} She was resigned, however, to its alteration, and wished she could travel to Australia for its editing:

I suppose things will have to be done to the Pea Pickers. I haven't got another copy. I wrote it out, and sent over the second writing of it; so the bits and pieces I have are of not much use. Youse blokes, Cecil Mann and yourself, could put in the bare paddocks and suggest to me where the scrub cutting ought to begin. Mind you, I am only just topping it ... not even that ... no burning off, lad. I don't even like the fences going around it. I leave it to you. Ah, arrh, if I could come over ... if only ... I could.

She was thrilled with Frank Davidson's review: "I clasp him in my arms and crush him to the crackles when he says, 'It is rare. I think it will be cherished.' God bless the man. I didn't suffer in vain."

On 7 May 1941, Eve wrote a brief autobiographical statement at the request of Australian literary philanthropist Nettie Palmer. This is the first opportunity Eve had to provide an account of her life, and it is notable for what is not there, and the obscure references to husband and children. It is included here in full as an example of Eve's overt


\textsuperscript{155} Eve Langley. Letter to Douglas Stewart. 6 Nov. 1940. Harry Chaplin Album. Sydney: ML MSS 7154. Quotations which follow are from this letter.
obfuscation about her past, and her willingness to revise the public record: she was at the
time thirty-seven years old.

I am thirty two. I was born in Forbes NSW and have worked on labour
gangs with men since leaving school, and dressed as a man have wandered
about living in the bush until the Depression drove one coward away from
the country. In this country where there is not much work, like Australia, I
had a hell of a time living on the sale of poetry and sorrow. Not in huts here
I lived but in a garret near an old mill ... and across the lane lived a young
artist in a naked studio. And they drove us out from the granary so that we
had to amalgamate and did so sealing the bargain with three seals; a girl, a
boy and an unknown due in October. That is the story. 156.

She had received her prize money and promptly spent it on a wheelchair for a
friend, a studio for Hilary, a wood burner to cook on, warm coats for the family, and the
mortgage. 157 She wrote to Ruth Park asking if she could supply her with bedding for the
children. 158 The following month, Eve still had not heard anything about the expected
publication of her book: “Angus & Robertson don’t write, and I don’t write. But I should
like to know what they are doing about my book.” 159 There is no correspondence in the
Angus & Robertson file relating to the editing of The Pea Pickers, raising the possibility
that Eve was not engaged in the process at all. By 11 October, she had written the “major

part” of a new book.\textsuperscript{160} On 24 October 1941, Eve was sent a letter from the publisher saying that \textit{The Pea Pickers} had been “set” and announced to the book trade.\textsuperscript{161} Just days later, on 27 October 1941,\textsuperscript{162} Eve gave birth to her second son, Karl Marx, at home at 34 Hinemoa Street, Birkenhead, suggesting the excitement may have precipitated her labour.\textsuperscript{163} The birth was registered on 27 November and Eve, who was the informant, gave her age as thirty-three (she was thirty-seven), her name as “Eve Marian Clark,” and her “previous issue” one male and four females, with no deceased children. As far as is known, she had given birth to two girls and a boy, with the first girl Luis d’Oro Lingua deceased. Hilary’s age was given as twenty-seven.\textsuperscript{164} Eve later said that Bisi was sent to stay with June at this time.\textsuperscript{165} \textit{The Pea Pickers} was on the bookshelves in Australia by April 1942,\textsuperscript{166} and reviewed by Norman Lindsay in \textit{The Bulletin} on 3 June 1942.

\textbf{Incarceration: 1942-1950}


\textsuperscript{162} Eve referred to Langley being “born in 1940 or so” (Eve Langley. Letter to Bisi Stenbo. 22 Dec. 1969 [cited in Thwaite 490]).

\textsuperscript{163} Eve’s house was in Queen Street, perhaps she was at June’s house when she went into labour.


\textsuperscript{165} She wrote that June and Mia had looked after Bisi at Campbell’s Bay: “you know who Blue is” (Eve Langley. Letter to Bisi Stenbo. 22 Dec. 1969 [cited in Thwaite 490]).

\textsuperscript{166} Mary Gilmore. Letter to Stella Miles Franklin. 26 Apr. 1942 (Wilde and Moore 179).
The sources of information for this period are records of admission to and discharge from Carrington Hospital in Auckland; a letter from the Public Trustee regarding Eve’s affairs; official documents—Mia’s death certificate and Eve’s employment record at the Auckland Public Library—an obituary, a photograph, personal letters, and reminiscences by June and Hilary.

The first “exhibit” is a letter written by Eve to Douglas Stewart on 17 May 1942 that describes an extraordinary and dangerous voyage Eve undertook with Hilary on a converted lifeboat—a “two masted ketch The Saunterer”—with Bisi (aged five); Langley (aged three) and Karl Marx (aged about two months). They had been sailing along the Coromandel Peninsula collecting drift wood for several months when an accident occurred onboard:

[There was] a great storm on the day Hilary had to go home and enter the army. Some hot water fell on to the two eldest children—the boy Langley and the girl Bisi. She was gravely injured—both have been in hospital for over a month at Coromandel. Imagine bringing two badly injured children over a rough sea on a pitch black night!

Eve had left the children in hospital in Coromandel township while she returned home to collect the manuscript of a new book that “Angus & R want.” She was then “off to

\[167\] In 1965, Langley wrote about the period April 1940 onwards in “Portrait of the Artist” and “The Saunterer” (which was unfinished). She planned to write “Beautiful Isles of the Sea,” a title suggestive of her Coromandel journey, and “Apollyon Regius” which was to be the last in the New Zealand series, but neither of these manuscripts is in existence, if in fact they were written (Eve Langley. Letter to Beatrice Davis. 19 Oct. 1959. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/441).

see my mother and sister,” who were living on a farm at Campbells Bay, on Auckland’s north shore, north of Birkenhead. Eve referred to “a great sorrow” that came upon her “after the birth of the last baby.” She hadn’t received a copy of The Pea Pickers yet. This is the last occasion that we hear directly from Eve until nearly a decade later, in the autumn of 1950.

The second “exhibit” is a letter addressed to Eve from Mia, written in June 1942. Sister June had spent about a week with Eve, and following June’s return Mia wrote of June having enjoyed herself in Auckland, but now feeling lonely. Eve’s children, she had been told, were well again. She referred to The Pea Pickers: “The book is good. I enjoyed it much [...] wouldn’t Dad enjoy your book Eve. How little did we think in other days this would all occur? No one knows but you were always a great dreamer.” 

169 This letter gives no indication that anything was seriously amiss with Eve, but two months later, she was considered so unwell she was certified under the Mental Defectives Act, 1911. Mia’s comment about how much Eve’s “Dad” would enjoy the book is odd, given the representation of the narrator’s father in The Pea Pickers as “perverted” (354).

Eve was admitted to Carrington Hospital on two separate occasions: 8 August 1942-18 April 1950 and 11 September 1950-6 October 1950. 

170 Carrington Hospital was built in 1865 on the peninsula of Point Chevalier, west Auckland. It stands as an example of “grim Victorian institutional planning on the giant scale in solid bricks and plaster” (Nelson). In the absence of drug therapy, physical restraint and (from 1944) electric shock treatment


170 Maggie B. Mackenzie (Mental Health Act Administrator and Clinical Records Officer, Mental Health Services, Auckland District Health Board). Email to Helen Vines. 26 Nov. 2004.
were used on patients in the New Zealand mental health system who suffered from mania (Williams). Carrington Hospital was decommissioned in 1994.\textsuperscript{171} As Eve’s records can only be revealed to her next of kin (or with the permission of the next of kin, which was not sought), an accurate picture of her diagnosis and treatment is not available. Joy Thwaite is the only person to have published an account of Eve’s illness after interviewing contemporary witnesses in the early 1980s, forty years after the event. Her perspective on Eve’s mental health has not been challenged.

The “witnesses” Joy Thwaite put forward, however, were notably unreliable. Hilary Clark, Eve’s husband, claimed not to understand the reasons for her breakdown (417). He wanted a divorce, and he eventually got it. He did not appear to especially want the children, who he sent to an orphanage. By his own admission he sought to have Eve hospitalised, saying she had abandoned the children (with no mention of his own escape to join the army). The doctor Thwaite called on to describe the treatment Eve might have undergone—had she exhibited certain symptoms—had no memory of her at all (418). And indeed why should he—he did not work in the hospital until the fifties, long after Eve had gone, according to a footnote (444). Roger Mellsop, who was interviewed in September 1983 (27) was a patient himself with whom Eve had a romantic relationship. He described her as a “naïve countrybumpkinish type” (419), adding she was “very easy to talk with” (419) although he treated her as “a bit of a joke” (419). He proposed marriage, and Eve accepted—a situation that would only have occurred following her divorce (there are references to him in Eve’s letters and diaries in the late fifties and early sixties). He subsequently said he was only joking, which was, Thwaite concluded, evidence of

\textsuperscript{171} It now functions as an architectural school of design, administered by Auckland University of Technology.
Langley's "delusions." Ruth Park, another witness, was a very young Auckland journalist who said she tried to see Langley but was not allowed. She said she spoke to a "most uncommunicative" person at the hospital who nevertheless declared Langley a schizophrenic who was sometimes violent and could not be visited (Thwaite 421). June said in 1950 that Langley had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and then did not refer to the specific nature of Langley's illness again until December 1964 following her relocation to Katoomba in New South Wales, when she suddenly shot off a brief bitter missive to Beatrice Davis (with whom she had not communicated for about thirteen years) stating that Eve was, like Nijinsky, a "Schizophreniac [sic]." 172 Robyn Colwill cited schizophrenia as the cause of Eve's problems, but I have not seen any contemporary evidence to support this assertion.

The next "exhibits" relate directly to Eve's incarceration at Carrington Hospital. There are no contemporary documents that describe the circumstances under which Eve was certified, but Eve's chaplain G. M. Colgan noted in a letter written to June on 18 August 1942 that "she could not be in a better place suffering as she is from the nerve strain of the last few years." 173 About four months later, as no-one had been appointed by Eve's "estate" to have custody of her affairs this responsibility was undertaken by the Public

Trustee for the district of Auckland on 18 December 1942. A document that stated that Eve had been certified under the Mental Defectives Act, 1911 “on or about” 14 August 1942 was drawn up, giving her location as Auckland Mental Hospital. This letter was forwarded to Angus & Robertson, along with a request that a copy of The Pea Pickers be forwarded to Eve at a post office box address. The Public Trustee had the carriage of Eve’s affairs for twelve years until 1954.

The next “exhibits” are two letters from Eve’s friend Gloria Rawlinson written to Douglas Stewart on 26 May and 22 June 1947 nearly five years after Eve had been admitted to Carrington Hospital: “At last I have some news of Eve for you. [...] It was only after making extensive enquiries that I have been able to learn anything [...] no one knew where she was, her relations, in-laws and husband seemed to have vanished.” Rawlinson said that Eve was still in hospital and that the children were in a “Home.” Eve was being cared for by the same psychiatrist who had looked after their mutual friend, the poet Robin Hyde: “he is a man with a great interest in literature and has a deep understanding of the human mind. Eve could not be in better care. He will assure her that she and her work are not forgotten and encourage her to write again.” A month later, Rawlinson wrote again to Stewart and included a report from Eve’s doctor:

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174 There were eighteen letters exchanged between Angus & Robertson and the Trustee between 18 Dec. 1942 and 5 May 1949, relating to publication and royalties for The Pea Pickers and publication of the book in America under the title Not Yet the Moon (1946) by New York Publisher E. P. Dutton and Co.


Re Mrs Hilary Clarke. She is on the whole more settled and certainly far more reconciled to her own vagaries than a year or so ago ... Her physical health remains satisfactory ... Unfortunately Mrs. Clarke prefers to remain among the more noisy and deteriorated patients rather than make what is to her an effort of conforming to more normal standards of conduct in quieter wards. I think she probably feels that among the more frankly insane, she is in some way acquiring novelist's material for an unwritten and probably unplanned book.\footnote{Gloria Rawlinson. Letter to Douglas Stewart. 22 June 1947. Harry Chaplin Album. Sydney: ML MSS 7154. The quotation that follows is from this letter.}

Rawlinson was appalled, and observed that Robin Hyde, who had committed suicide in London in 1939—and whose journal was in Rawlinson’s possession—had “often contemplated an inside novel [...] about this hospital, but after six years, she writes that she was convinced everything possible is done to help those who really tried hard to make the grade and for the rest it was of medical interest only.”

A year after Rawlinson’s letters, a neurosurgeon named Dr Hugh Cairns wrote from Dunedin in response to a letter from June, in which she had presumably enquired about a frontal lobotomy for Eve. In the archive, the letter’s salutation to June has been snipped off, but her identity as correspondent is obvious from the content.

Thank you very much for sending me your sister’s book *The Pea Pickers*. I haven’t had time to read it yet as I have been heavily involved with medical meetings but I shall hope to do so before long.
I am very sorry to read of your sister’s illness. I am afraid it will not be possible for me to see her as I have to go to Australia and will be fully occupied before my departure. But Mr Donald McKenzie might be able to help and I think you should discuss the question of calling him in with your sister’s doctor. The question at issue would be whether the operation of the frontal lobotomy could help your sister, and the difficult part of the question would be the decision whether to operate. This is a problem for an expert psychiatrist: it is not a question on which I am able to give an expert opinion myself. The actual operation is surgically a straightforward and standardised procedure which Mr McKenzie does as well as I do.

I hope very much that something can be done to help your sister.178

Two years later, on 18 April 1950, Eve was formally released from Carrington Hospital, and on 5 May 1950 she obtained employment in the bindery section at the Auckland Public Library, residing in boarding houses nearby, first in Wellesley Street, then Liverpool Street, both in the central city.179 In autumn 1950 Eve wrote a chirpy letter to June from Auckland. She was very busy at the library, and was being “faithfully maintained” by her husband.180 “Hilary is very good, really. There is no one like friend husband, after all. He never troubles me in any way; just sticks to his job, and helps keep

178 Hugh Cairns. Letter to June Langley. 7 July 1948. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898. Sir Hugh died in London, less than a fortnight later (obituary kept in June’s papers). This extraordinary development recalls the narrow escape of Janet Frame from the same fate at the same institution a decade later.


me going.” She had met up with Henry Brennan at a writers’ evening and was just off for Friday night shopping “under brilliant lights among a brilliant people.” She added: “I have no other heroes June, and am still waiting—not wasting, waiting for a letter from you, ‘when you are indisposed.’”181 This felicitous little missive contrasts sharply with a letter sent about the same time to June from Hilary: “Am interested in your report of Eve’s recovery. Sorry the money is not up to date […] I have absolutely no intention of resuming life with Eve […] the only thing in the meanwhile is to arrive at some amicable arrangement. I shall go immediately to see the solicitor who was going to handle my divorce for me (as a result of the lapse of seven yrs) and find from him the best solution.”182 The “lapse of seven years” referred to the period of separation required for the marriage to be annulled.

On 11 September 1950 Eve was again admitted to Carrington Hospital. Eve wrote to June that she was there “for a rest”;183 June said that Hilary had had her recommitted, but June did not know she had been recommitted until she received advice from Carrington Hospital.184 Eve was released for the last time on 6 October 1950. Eve herself ever made any direct comment about her time spent at Carrington Hospital, although she periodically referred indirectly to the difficulties of 1942.

June’s movements throughout these years are tracked through letters written to her by her lover Cameron Galbraith whom she had met in 1939, and the reminiscing in letters she sent to Eve’s editor at Angus & Robertson, Beatrice Davis, between 1950 and 1952.

June, David and Mia were still at Campbells Bay in November 1942, but by September 1943 they had moved a hundred kilometres north of Auckland to a poultry farm just outside Mangawhai. June wrote to Cameron Galbraith the following month with her new address, having sent him two birds she named as Tristan and Isolde (unfortunately the cage for the birds failed to arrive): “I am spending my own money, my very own and no one has the power to dictate or interfere in any way with my methods of spending it.”

On this property, named nostalgically “Crossover,” Mia lived for the final year of her life. She died on 12 November 1944 at Greenlane Hospital in the Auckland suburb of Epsom, close to Hillsborough where Eve’s baby was buried and to Avondale where Eve was being held. Two days later she was cremated at Waikumete Cemetery and Crematorium. Her death certificate gives her age as seventy-six, and the cause of death as “senile decay.” June was with her during her last week in hospital—and sent telegrams to David reporting her deteriorating condition—but Eve was not. When their mother died, Eve was forty and June thirty-nine. Mia had lived in New Zealand for fourteen years without ever returning for a visit to Australia, but after her death June wrote an obituary and sent it to Gippsland’s most prominent newspaper, the Bairnsdale Advertiser, which printed the tribute on its front


187 There are three telegrams regarding Mia’s condition around the 8 and 11 Nov. 1944 sent from June to David (June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898).
A photograph of June dated 1947 that shows her looking healthy and relaxed. A caption reads: "1947. Elam. Three months of art school. 'Blue' of Not Yet the Moon" (Plate 15).

The final "exhibits" for this section relate to June's attempts to re-form a family with Eve following her release from Carrington Hospital. The "exhibits" are a collection of six long descriptive letters written by June to Beatrice Davis between 8 May 1950 and March 1952 that provide an account of Eve's behaviour after nearly seven years of institutionalisation, and the impact of her release on June's physical and psychological health. These letters are considered in greater detail in chapter three. On 8 May 1950, June sent a letter to Beatrice Davis and enclosed a short biographical statement about Eve, which was a response to a letter that had been forwarded to her by the Public Trustee. Angus & Robertson was seeking biographical information about Eve and wished to convey to her the possibility of a reprint of The Pea Pickers. June—who was feeling very upset with Eve at the time—did not tell her sister about the letter from her publisher, and advised Beatrice Davis not to contact Eve either. June wrote to Beatrice Davis describing recent events as well as providing information about her own and Eve's past. June's version of what had transpired in May 1950 was that she had lobbied to have Eve released on probation into the care of herself and her husband David Munro, and Eve had stayed from 6 March 1949 until

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188 "The death occurred at Auckland NZ on the 12th November, of Mrs. Mira Langley (nee Davidson), 76 years, daughter of the late Thomas and Janet Davidson, of Sir Walter Scott Hotel, Tambo Crossing. She married in 1902 Mr. A. A. Langley whose parents (the mother having remarried) at one time had the Criterion Hotel, Sale. Mr. Langley died more than thirty years ago, and his widow later managed for her brother, Mr. F. A. Davidson the hotel at Crossover, Gippsland. There were two children of the marriage, Eve, the elder, now a famous writer; and her sister, Junior, farms her own land north of Auckland. Mrs Langley lived with her daughter at Crossover Farm." (Bairnsdale Advertiser. 22 Dec. 1944: 1. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898).
May 1950 before absconding without notice while June was at the doctor, leaving behind her manuscripts and journals, and the typewriter on which June was now writing these letters. June described how she thwarted Hilary’s attempt to avoid financial responsibility for Eve by having his marriage annulled after seven years’ separation, and how the pressures generated by Eve and her circumstances pushed June into a nervous breakdown of her own.

June calls herself “Junior” in these initial letters to Beatrice Davis, reprising the gender issues that had first surfaced in adolescence (she subsequently calls herself “Blue”). The sisters’ parents are dead and June represents herself textually as taking on parental responsibility for her elder sister. She was advising Beatrice Davis not to contact Eve directly about a reprint of The Pea Pickers saying, vaguely that this “might upset her as before—unbalance her I mean.” This was clearly not necessary for Eve was establishing herself independently in Auckland. June also seeks a special intimate relationship with Eve’s editor—whom she calls “Beatrice Mia”—that excludes her sister. Beatrice was quite quickly alert to the significance—and sensitivity—of the disclosures that June made in her letters: “I felt it would be better for her not to know that I had enquired of her from you and that you had written telling me so much.” June, who was used to secrets, understood immediately: “let me be the only one to be ashamed to have as you truly say ‘told you so

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much."¹⁹¹ On 26 October 1950 Beatrice Davis wrote to Eve via June seeking permission to publish the poem "Celtic Guest."¹⁹² June did not forward the letter to her sister perhaps until as late as June 1951,¹⁹³ citing concerns about Eve’s health, although she said she sent it before December 1950.¹⁹⁴ June sought advice from Davis as to whether she should return to Eve her manuscripts and typewriter, which had been left at the farm when Eve went to Auckland. Although June had not previously read the manuscripts, she did so now. “I feel I must resist fiercely, such a great responsibility to posterity […] no I will not let them pass out of my hands.”¹⁹⁵ On 22 November 1950 Davis advised June not to “hand over” Eve’s manuscripts and offered to keep them at the office of Angus & Robertson in Sydney.¹⁹⁶ June was admitted to Whangarei Hospital on 8 December 1950 suffering from “hysterical paralysis.” She had not seen Eve at all in the previous six months.¹⁹⁷ The matter of the


¹⁹³ Eve wrote to Davis saying she had only just received the letter from June (Eve Langley. Letter to Beatrice Davis. 25 June 1951. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/145).


manuscripts was resolved when Eve’s solicitor sent a letter of demand, and June reluctantly delivered typewriter and manuscripts to the Public Trustee. 198

**Final years in New Zealand: 1951-1960**

The sources of information for this section are letters—particularly the correspondence between Eve and her editors at Angus & Robertson, and June’s correspondence with Beatrice Davis.

Eve’s life became less complicated in the decade following her release from Carrington Hospital. Once she had made contact with Beatrice Davis she resumed her professional writing career with alacrity. After a two-year editorial process, her second book, *White Topee*, was published in 1954 to significant critical interest across Australia and New Zealand. Eve worked at the Auckland Public Library until 23 March 1954 when she resigned. 199 She bought a property at Laingholm, near the Waitakere Ranges outside Auckland in 1952, 200 and was living there by February 1954. 201 She worked on her fiction, mentioning numerous texts to her editors, not all of which she submitted. In 1957, Eve travelled to Australia, returning there to live permanently in 1960. All these events are

198 "The last I heard of her was a letter from a solicitor, asking that her manuscript and typewriter be railed to him, but I disregarded that and returned everything through the Public Trust" (June Langley. Letter to Beatrice Davis. Sept. 1951. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/127/129/131).

199 Auckland City Council Archives.


detailed in the letters she exchanged with her editors at Angus & Robertson with whom she maintained a predominantly professional and congenial relationship. There were occasions when Eve’s representation of herself in her letters perplexed her editors, however, and I will now describe just a few of these.

In December 1952 Eve suddenly insisted that a new section (that she called her “continuity of being’ feeling which I have kept secret for years”202) be inserted into White Topee. She described it as the book’s “most important part. […] a powerful piece of writing, […] my own recollection of being born.” The writing was a fable in which she imagined herself reincarnated as an infant Oscar Wilde. “But to tell you the truth,” she added “it makes me feel so ill, sometimes, as though I had not been born […] I cannot bear to think on it too long.” In 1953 she told Nan McDonald, who edited White Topee, that she was required to produce twenty books as she had been given a grant of £300 from the New Zealand Literary Fund.203 On 6 February 1954, Eve Langley sent biographical information to the publisher, apologising for it being “dull.”204 She “wished she could have written something interesting for the form, but there was nothing interesting, really.” She described June as a sheep-farmer, a watercolourist “who has had a few exhibitions” and said her family’s most famous member was “Darcy Langley, an oarsman of Oxford or in Oxford.” Her father, she said, was well educated, the step-son of Decimus Lamb who owned a hotel

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in Gippsland, and related to "Fatty Lamb" the bicycle rider: "nothing is ever small in
Australia," she quipped. Eve covered her life and experiences with a broad brush,
mentioning Forbes, Gippsland, Dandenong and Melbourne; noting briefly her marriage and
children. She sent a series of publicity photographs of herself dressed in trousers with
various odd accoutrements: a fur coat, a pith helmet, white sandals, a long walking stick.
These pictures, she suggested, might be used for the launch and publicity of White Topee.
She included accompanying narratives to explain each "character."\footnote{Eve Langley. Letter to Shirley Tebbut. 10 May 1954. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/303.}

For example:

Regarding these portraits, I thought I would give you a rough and
hurried reference to the fact that they lead up to the writing of WHITE
TOPEE. I have numbered the portraits.

No. 1 is a sort of composite of the young Mikado of Japan in 1868;
he is wearing the fur coat and carrying the stick, these two being the official
symbols of office of his No Mia, or uncles, or Prime Ministers. This Mikado
was a shareholder in the Indian Tea Planters Combination in London and
had an office there. This office brought out a brand of tea called White
Topee Tea, and it was very popular for a while. A manager or clerk named
Waring thought of the name.\footnote{Eve Langley. Letter to Shirley Tebbut. 10 May 1954. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/303. These photographic images show Eve in different clothes, shoes, postures and settings that deliberately represent her as both male and female.} (Plates 16 & 17)
Plate 16: Portrait of Eve Langley. 1954.
Plate 17: Portrait of Eve Langley. 1954.
She exhorted June to send her “any press cuttings with Eve Langley on them,” and referred to her “prodigy self” that she had been “creating of late.”\textsuperscript{207} Angus & Robertson were keen to establish biographical information about the author for publicity of \textit{White Topee}, but while Eve was relatively transparent about the life she was currently living, all aspects of her past were represented by complicated inconsistent stories. At no time did she shed any light on her childhood or adolescence: “I don’t seem to have anything in my life of Australia to tell,” she commented to Nan McDonald.\textsuperscript{208} A major exception to Eve’s overriding congeniality was her outrage at the rejection of her third book “Wild Australia,” in April 1954. The text of “Wild Australia” dealt with Eve’s past and the Oscar Wilde motif, and articulated her determination to move beyond the difficulties associated with her childhood and incarceration. Eve left no doubt that the rejection of “Wild Australia” represented a significant crisis on a personal and professional level. As a protest, she changed her name by deed poll to Oscar Wilde but—apart from a few exceptions in May and April 1954\textsuperscript{\textit{209}}—continued to sign her letters as Eve. The letters Eve sent at this time to Nan McDonald proved to be highly damaging to her reputation, with her biographer Joy Thwaite seizing on one particular letter that she believed demonstrated conclusively the


disintegration of Eve's personality. The correspondence as a whole provides evidence that
this was not the case.

Eve's vagueness about her past was replicated in interviews with the press. On 6
October 1954, an article appeared in the New Zealand Observer in the “People in Passing”
section, with the headline “Her Purple Jewels on Reddish Fields” which was a reference to
her stated desire to pick cabbages: “But I found you have to cut them. I hate knives.” She
claimed she could read at the age of two, and was “reading novels translated from the
French at the age of four.” Eve simply refused to be drawn on matters relating to the past
and there is no occasion in which she represents her past—or her personality—with a stable
and clear narrative.

Eve's industry in preparing eight full-length works of fiction from 1952 until 1960
is a testament to her physical and psychological vigour. The books (as she called them)
were of a uniform length—four hundred pages—with fifty pages to each chapter, typed on
thin sheets of paper known as “onion skin” (Frost, “Who Speaks” 6).210 Eve had a “novel”
she called White Topee “practically ready” when she replied to Beatrice Davis’s letter (that
had been forwarded by June) on 25 June 1951.211 The manuscript arrived at Angus &
Robertson on 25 February 1952.212 She was actively engaged in editorial negotiations over

210 I worked from microfilm printouts.

3269/383/145.

3269/383/179. Handwritten note at bottom of page: “(MS arrived 25.2.52).”
the manuscript throughout the next eighteen months, concluding by 1 October 1953. In August 1952 she was working on “Wild Australia,” which was completed by February 1953 but not sent until her birthday on 1 September 1953. “Bancroft House” was completed on 10 May 1954. She retyped and resubmitted “Bancroft House” in November 1954. It was considered the most likely of her “novels” to be published.

From May to August 1955, four books were submitted or in the process of being written: “Ship Me Somewhere East of Suez” was submitted 12 May 1955; “The Nimrod Type” was completed in August but not submitted; “The Australian,” and “The Crossover

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Hotel were both begun in August, however only the former is in the archive. In 1959, Eve submitted four books to the publisher. These were “The Victorians” (23 March); “Land of the Long White Cloud” (12 October); “Last, Loneliest, Loveliest” (20 October) and “The Old Mill” (14 December). In addition to her writing, Eve took an extended trip along the east coast of Australia from November 1956 to August 1957 travelling first to Sydney then to Brisbane in Queensland, and down to Hobart in Tasmania. She visited the places of her childhood—including Manildra in New South Wales—and youth, and met her editors in person for the first time, staying with Beatrice Davis’s cousin in Snails Bay in Sydney.

Eve’s visit to her editors at Angus & Robertson was fruitful (she left manuscripts with her publisher), and her unexpected presence revitalized the flagging relationship. Langley wrote to June from Snails Bay, saying she was “wearing mans clothes.” In December Eve was in Brisbane, Queensland, a place she found inspiring, then far north to Cairns. She returned to Sydney and from 23 February-29 March Eve was back at her pea-picking haunt Panlooks in the Ovens Valley, and in Eurobin picking hops. In April

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Eve was in Tasmania, travelling from Devonport through to Hobart\textsuperscript{229} and on to Port Arthur.\textsuperscript{230} She returned to Launceston on 29 April and sailed on the Taroona from Devonport on 30 April. She met the writer Hal Porter in Bairnsdale, Gippsland, on 9 May.\textsuperscript{231} Porter subsequently wrote of this day in his 1975 book \textit{The Extra},\textsuperscript{232} and in this way became something of an authority on Eve. On 13 May Eve sent “Dear Blueie” a gossipy letter from Metung,\textsuperscript{233} and on 30 May she was at Tambo Crossing. Her visits to the sisters’ old haunts prompted June to write nostalgically of family from her flat in Parnell, Auckland: “I have followed your journeying and have accompanied your small figure mentally up strange byways in unknown land … and so to far shores which we remember as we remember our youth, a little sadly and yet with a sturdy acceptance of the inevitable.”\textsuperscript{234} She referred to their “wonderlust,” which, she noted, stood in stark contrast to those who had remained in Gippsland, and this she put down to their maturity, family, and an abiding interest, as well as the means of providing a loving home, and most important a father, and I think that security rests there with a father … someone to whom all look for Love, guidance and


\textsuperscript{231} “It was wonderful to hear from you as it was wonderful to meet you: I shall never forget that exciting day at Metung. […] I loved meeting you and hearing from you […] love, Hal” (Hal Porter. Letter to Eve Langley. 23 Sept. 1957. Eve Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 4188).


stability, and a sense of HOME that can never exist without either ...

FATHER OR MOTHER.\(^{235}\)

What is missing in this catalogue of activity by Eve is any sense of family, although family was at the centre of all her fiction, and Eve was writing out the sister relationship in all its odd permutations. Eve reassured June that her representation of her was benign, but this was far from the truth: “Wild Orstralia ... you make it. The passages devoted to you and your comical way of looking at life are best of all. But you’re very restrained and ornamental, so don’t worry about it.”\(^{236}\) Eve lost touch with her three young children while she was in hospital, and these relationships do not appear to have been renewed until Eve had left New Zealand and moved to Australia, and even then the connection with her sons in particular remained tenuous. The marriage to Hilary was dissolved by Decree Absolute on 31 March 1952,\(^{237}\) and Eve lived alone at Laingholm in a bush land setting, without car or telephone—and sometimes electricity. Although she seems to have led an isolated—and, one might surmise lonely—existence, Eve described to June her routine in glowing terms—up at ten, lunch at twelve, then to work in her “warm room overlooking the blue tidal creek.”\(^{238}\)

Eve’s letters to her sister demonstrate that their relations were congenial, but June’s optimism about “the pea pickers” re-establishing a domestic unit once the sisters were reunited, was not fulfilled. She wrote gloomily to Beatrice Davis in November 1950:

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\(^{237}\) This was granted in the Supreme Court in Auckland—and is stamped across the copy of Register of marriage. Folio no. 1937/323. Reference no. 6-0215248.

I thought we would have happy times together, but sometimes I think she still hates me, still sees beauty in me, God knows where, I wish I could grow a beard, so that she would not envy me. It has always come between us, the hair, the teeth, the face. I have never sought men, in fact I don’t greatly care for anyone except my family$^{239}$

June’s comments reprise the strange gender ambiguities that characterize the sisters’ relations with each other. The letters June wrote to Beatrice Davis in 1951 and 1952 indicate that the sister relationship was strained following Eve’s release from the hospital: in fact they did not see each other again for more than “two sad and lonely years.”$^{240}$ June wrote ecstatically to Beatrice Davis in March 1953 describing how she had flown to Auckland from Whangarei to meet with her sister, indicating that she did not know where she was living:

> The only address I knew was the library. To think […] I would see again, the most important person in my life … now that little Mia is no more. I struggled along … those cramped feet … wooden hips, stiff gait, but at least I was in sight of Steve Hart.”

Afterwards, June wrote that she was “happy and proud […] of Mia sorella,” but “still uncertain of my position with her.”


June's relationship with her husband David Munro had been significantly compromised by Eve's presence. David had actively assisted in preparations for her arrival, but both he and June found themselves adhering to a routine of early bedtimes, "strange disturbing moods, and general upset of our very peaceful lives [...] I tried to fall in with her desires but not David, he said let her get used to normal living or our life is going to be Hell. After 6 months of this I became ill with a nervous breakdown."

June and David moved again, in October 1949, to a four hundred acre property at Kauri Mountain, Parua Bay, east of Whangarei in Northland, overlooking the Pacific, with the intention of establishing a Jersey stud. June said she raised three thousand pounds for the purchase, though how she could have done this remains a mystery. This represented yet another radical upheaval in June's life, and a potentially highly risky venture into agriculture for which she had neither training nor experience. Although David and June had been married for more than a decade they were now deeply at odds over Eve, and June's physical and mental health deteriorated profoundly. In March 1952, June wrote: "I hope we will be together, although David tells me, Eve thinks nothing of me, but I am now aware of the wedge the unwanted man is trying to lodge between inseparables [...] I can see how cunning he is, and treat him accordingly, with contempt."

The marriage was over by May


1954, and for unknown reasons, June’s longstanding relationship with Cameron Galbraith also came to an end at this time. June’s finances were embroiled in legal argument over the Parua Bay property and this issue was not resolved until at least 1960. 

Ageing in Australia: 1961-1992

The sources of documentary evidence for this period in the sisters’ lives are: letters, diary entries, reminiscences, interviews, drawings, photographs, reviews and official documents.

Eve left New Zealand on the Manowai on 20 May 1960, she had resided in New Zealand for twenty-eight years, and was now fifty-five years of age. She purchased a small house consisting of four rooms at 1 Clydebank Road, Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. At the beginning of 1960 Eve was unwell and exhausted. Her application for an invalid pension in Australia was supported in writing by Beatrice Davis, and was eventually obtained in September 1960. At £192 per annum, it was

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significantly less than the £234 she had been getting in New Zealand. Not surprisingly, it took the rest of the year for her to begin to feel settled in "Dear Australia! Such a lovely land." Regardless of her physical health, for the remainder of her life, Eve was almost obsessively busy. She had three principle areas of interest. She travelled extensively within Australia, and sailed to Greece in 1965. She wrote (and rewrote) letters, journals, poetry and fiction. And she sought to re-establish relationships with her three children, even inviting Hilary to join her in Katoomba when his relationship with his second wife ended.

Eve’s travelling destinations for the next decade covered, by and large, the same terrain as the sisters in *The Pea Pickers*. February and March was the hop-picking season at Panlooks, and Eve went there in 1964, writing copious letters to her sister about her experiences. These letters were bound in a booklet, but they are impossible to decipher. On 2 August 1965 Eve set sail for Greece. This was a land that she had long imagined as the home of Apollo and the other gods—she was in no way prepared for the actuality of Greece. The trip was a disaster as she had insufficient funds and no return ticket and within a week or two of her arrival she succumbed to an illness she described as the "plague." Destitute, she appealed to the Australian Embassy in Piraeus for assistance and was repatriated a short time later with the help of one hundred pounds from the Commonwealth

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Literary Fund, and an advance on royalties of fifty pounds from Beatrice Davis. She lost her manuscripts along the way, and this included the draft of her final "novel" "The Saunterer." Eve noted in her diary of this time that she wrote frequently to June in addition to her copious, descriptive diaries (most of them now illegible). Two letters about this trip are in June's papers (dated 3 November and 18 November 1965), but June does not appear to have offered to help Eve while she was marooned in Greece, and nor does Eve seem to have asked, although she wrote to her sister and told her about her illness: "The plague has left me so weak, I can scarcely walk." Eve was home again in the Blue Mountains on 17 December. She was back at Panlooks in March 1966, 1967 and 1968, and picking grapes at Rutherglen, in Victoria from 19 March-14 May 1970.

In addition to her travels, which she documented obsessively through journal and letter writing, Eve produced two more four hundred-page works of fiction: "Remote Apart" was submitted on 29 September 1962, and "Portrait of an Artist" on 14 April 1965. Both "novels" centred on the family she had established with Hilary Clark, and both were

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254 Douglas Stewart had been taken on by Angus & Robertson as an editorial assistant in 1960, and he negotiated with the Literary Fund for assistance for Eve.


rejected amidst concerns about libel.260 Early in 1965 a review of all eight of Eve’s manuscripts was completed by Nan McDonald,261 who was overwhelmed by the editorial problems the manuscripts raised.262 The decision not to publish more of Eve’s fiction was based in part on practical considerations—there was no one who could spare the time necessary to edit and organise the manuscripts—but there were also other factors involved. Angus & Robertson was undergoing significant organisational change (Vines 67-75), and issues of profitability influenced decisions more than they had in the past—thus the decision to seek a subsidy from the Commonwealth Literary Fund to reprint The Pea Pickers to coincide with the interest generated by Joyce Goode’s dramatic adaptation of 1964.263 Vincent Burns, who had been a major shareholder, became director and then managing director of Angus & Robertson in 1960. He was instrumental in carving up the company into independent subsidiaries.264 A senior figure in the firm, Alec Bolton, later expressed the view that Burns prevented the publication of many pending works (Bolton). In February 1966, a reprint of The Pea Pickers was released to positive reviews.265 In 1968 and 1970 Eve was writing out the seventy-three poems “that comprise the volume I call ‘The Book of Kells’ and which with its delicate printing and drawings, all watercolours is


the true record of our days, Junior's and mine at 53 Walker Street. The delicacy of her painting and drawings, all watercolours is to me, very beautiful, and the book should be placed in a Government library or museum.»

Eve actively sought to re-establish relationships with each of her three children now that she was in Australia. She paid £123 to assist her youngest son Karl Marx to travel to Australia to see her in the middle of 1960, and after he left, she wrote to Beatrice Davis that she felt “quite sad and not very well.” She wrote to June in October about her son “so very handsome and brown,” and June responded warmly on 9 September: “So glad you have heard and seen members of your family.” Eve invited Hilary to join her in Australia when he cabled on 30 July 1962 saying he was now “solo again.” Karl Marx recalled in an interview with Joy Thwaite on 23 January 1983 that the last time he saw his mother was at the end of 1964:

She was really pleased to see me. We never did a lot of talking together, but she was thrilled at my visit. She asked to go and see June at Hindman Street. It was a beautiful old house and June was living with The Colonel. I kind of saw June as a very delicate, beautiful butterfly, a fragile butterfly. She was

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very frail and had this transparent skin and an angelic face. It was a pleasant afternoon [...] I never saw Eve after that. (465)

Eve’s eldest son, Langley, arrived for a visit in August 1968, and a photo he took of his mother is in June Langley’s papers. He was, she noted in her letter, “lively and humorous [...] we drank rum and coke and read books on WW II till all hours.” Langley, for his part, recalled in a letter to undergraduate honours student Wendy Anderson that he “had a marvellous night with her. Got super stoned on some nice hashish and listened to her cover the cosmos with her Greek stories” (cited in Thwaite 481). On 15 October 1968 Eve travelled to New Zealand to visit her daughter Bisi who was now married with two children. Eve wrote that “Garth [grandson] gave me a little pink hat and we all cried together and I was sort of the happiest I’ve ever been.” Bisi recalled in an interview with Joy Thwaite in Gisborne, New Zealand on 15 September 1983, that she “had very strong feelings for her” when they met, and that “tears ran down both [their] faces” (481). Nevertheless, Bisi noted, Eve “seemed quite troubled and sad and she sighed a great deal.” She still had her bach at Laingholm. Eve wrote coherently about her warm connection with her family, enjoying outings to see the musical “South Pacific” on 3 December and Russian dancers on 7 December. On 25 December she wrote in her diary

of being “home with Bisi.” Eve returned to Australia in July 1969.\textsuperscript{278} It seems from these traces of conversations and letters that Eve’s ex-husband and children and grandchildren remained central to her emotional life.

Eve was still secretive about her past with her parents and sister. She had several opportunities to author a clear version of her early life in Australia, and her circumstances in New Zealand, but on each occasion she hid more than she revealed.\textsuperscript{279} On 9 May 1964, Langley was interviewed by Australian National Library oral historian Hazel de Berg. In a rambling monologue she revealed virtually nothing about herself, and made no mention of June, although there were several references to \textit{The Pea Pickers}, and talk of Macca. “I’m right. I’m safe, you don’t know anything about me” she commented (Langley, Interview with Hazel de Berg 626).

While Eve was reticent about the past in public, her private papers left a clear indication that the relationship she had with her parents was fraught and unusual, and the diaries and notes comprise the next “exhibits.” These drawings and written fragments indicated a place and a time wherein something significant had occurred in Eve’s childhood. On 1 May 1962 Eve wrote in a small diary that is approximately five cm x eight cm archived in the Douglas Stewart papers: “After I had grieved for myself a child at Forbes in 1913, lying on the floor and weeping over the bible, I went out and did some lovely work in the garden.”\textsuperscript{280} On 12 November 1971, the twenty-seventh anniversary of Mia’s death, Eve scribbled on the back of a yellow envelope: “you, who were his wife and

\textsuperscript{278} Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/615.


you died, you will only deny it all and punish me ... You have always punished me.”

On 6 December 1971, a handwritten scribble by Eve on an envelope: “I have always loved or been dedicated to the God Apollo, god of the planet Mars, God of war and Peace.”

“The only other new thing under the sun is that the father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary broke down in 1971 and confessed to me that He was a she, and has been the de facto of Apollo for aeons,” Eve noted cryptically in an exercise book she titled “D. H. Lawrence and Thirroul.”

On 3 June 1973 Eve wrote: “Our body would like to be born again.”

And a scribbling in a school book dated 4 March 1974: “Dear God of the planet Mars, how we wonder how you are! Your dear girl weeps but I feel sleepy and soon will sleep” (Plate 18). And: “‘Hello Dolly’ 1913. When the young god was always near me.”

In the same book is a pencil drawing of two figures: an unclothed man holds the hand of a very young school girl. At her feet lie a book and a doll. Above the man is the word “Apollo” and above the girl the word “Dolly.” Across the top of the page are the words “Forbes, 1913.”

This evidence from Eve’s diaries and notebooks indicates conclusively that in the year 1913 at Forbes, something transpired that profoundly affected her future. That the man in the drawing was her father seems clear and that her mother was aware of the situation—but disbelieving—also seems clear. The reference to “Dolly,” her childhood name, indicates that Eve is the child in the picture. This material produced at the end of Eve’s life, is the most precise documentation (outside the fiction) available at this point to

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285 This is not a complete transcription of the text of Plate 18.
Apollo is really the greatest of all the gods.

"C'hoi C'hoi C'oim".
Sempre pur briol i shi.

Dear god of the planet Mars, how are you now?
Hew new one! I am deel sleep now.
Suee seel sleep.
March 4, 1974

"Hello Dolly!"
1973 March
Your god was always very new one.

suggest that something untoward had occurred within the family. Eve died less than three months after the dated pages that precede the drawing.

The lonely circumstances of Eve's death indicate that she had no one nearby who had a sustained interest in her well being. Eve’s body was found by Ron Smith from Lithgow social services on 1 July 1974, but she had been dead for several weeks. The coroner’s report (3 December 1974) put the cause of death as “coronary occlusion following the long-term effects of arteriosclerosis.” Her body was retained in the mortuary for a month and buried on 29 July at the Katoomba cemetery. June was not an informant on Eve’s death certificate, which was dated 15 August 1974, and there were significant gaps in the record:

Surname of deceased: Langley-Clark

Other names: Eve

Occupation: —

Sex and Age: Female 69 years

Marital status: Divorced

Date of death: Between 1st and 13 June, 1974

Place of death: “Iona Lympus,” Clydebank Avenue, North Katoomba

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286 This date was made in a journal written by Meg Stewart as she was researching her film She's My Sister in August 1974. She interviewed police about Eve’s death. Film Journal. Meg Stewart Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 5147.

287 Copies of Death Certificate issued to Helen Hasthorpe on 18 July 1977 and Joy Thwaite on 30 Nov. 1982. Due to changes in privacy laws this certificate is not now publicly available.
Usual residence: “Iona Lympus,” Clydebank Avenue, North Katoomba

Place of birth: Forbes, NSW

Father: Not known

Mother: Not known

To whom married: Hilary Clark

Children of marriage: three children, names and ages not known

Informant: M. J. Hinchley, no relation, Court House, Katoomba

Cause of death: (1) a. Coronary occlusion Hours b. Atherosclerosis Years

By whom certified: Inquest dispensed at Katoomba on 3rd December 1974.
M. J. Hinchley, Coroner

Particulars of burial or cremation: 29th July, 1974. Church of England Cemetery Katoomba

Particulars of registration: M. J. Hinchley, Local registrar.

Date: 15th August 1974. (Thwaite 411)

The incomplete record on the death certificate is an indication of the degree of estrangement between the sisters: June did not supply basic information, although she was contacted by the police after Eve’s death. Notably, the entries relating to Eve’s occupation and parents are empty.

This tragic scenario was not envisaged when June left New Zealand in 1961 to be near Eve once again. Eve’s departure from New Zealand in May 1960 resulted in a bereft sister who was anxious to follow at the earliest possible opportunity. Once again, June
imagined that she and Eve would establish a family together. She bombarded Eve with letters, and waited anxiously for replies. There are eleven letters written by June to Eve in 1960: in June, 9 August, 13 August; 6 September; 9 September; 28 September; 2 October; 6 November; 25 November; 14 December; post Christmas. June wrote on 2 June 1960: "I feel more mad than ever now you are not here, and I know for sure that I will go to Australia." June’s finances were tied up with her farm and she was living in a boarding house in Parnell in Auckland, a situation she hated. “I am that MAD about everything, just endure from day to wretched day, cooking meals, sitting in the kitchen, where the stove keeps the air warm, I am fed up with everything.” She was advised by her lawyer that she needed to settle her financial affairs before she left New Zealand, and that could not occur before July 1961. June was bemused by her sister’s verve in resettling in Australia, and wrote admiringly:

I think you are wonderful, the old STEVE of Metung ... Steve I would just love to be there to do what you like, the Langleys are wonderful for sudden colossal moves which change a whole lifetime. Other clods aren’t a bit interesting. I can’t help but think of little Mia and the Arabs. Fold our tents like the Arabs and silently stole away. It’s a good line that and if only we were men we would be colossal ... Love Blue.

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288 All archived at Ruth Park Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3128.
The names Blue and Steve recalled their early days together, and June was brimming with hope for a future in which “I can come to your little happy domicile and you can come to mine. Won’t that be marvellous to be in Australia forever?” Eve might have invited June to join her in her four-roomed house, but she didn’t. As the months passed, June became increasingly cynical and depressed by her circumstances: “I feel uncertain of the future [...] I know your extravagant moods.” June expected that Eve would assist her in locating a suitable property, and she asked her to “keep a look out for something.” June hoped for sympathy for her physical disabilities—which she contrasted with the robust health of Eve (“You’re normal physically, I ’aint”)—and friendlessness, and felt confident of Eve’s assistance: “I want you to see if there is a Doctor handy because I have to have injections every week.” All this needed to be done “before I make any decisions.” June imagined her sister luxuriating in the comparatively tropical climate of New South Wales while she suffered alone with little to do but put on the vegetables and write letters to a sister less than tolerant and sympathetic than she might have hoped and imagined: “You sound contemptuous of me and my requirements [...] you wrong me Eve. I would give the world to be strong like you and have all you have now. I am timid and not in good health and never will be I expect, but to be safely in Australia is all I desire.” On 28 September 1960 June indicated she would travel to Australia, but her views about her life and her sister had changed:

I am going to be like you and think of myself first, you were right, I was the mug, but it's me forever, with everything. No offence meant, but I've got to admit you were sensible and I was the mad martyr and I wanted everyone to fall in line, but I couldn't care less for anyone now, I could tread on anyone, and crush them into the soil, just exactly the opposite to what I used to be, we are both BUGGERS in a different way, far better alone and in our own company. Pass a bit of that Cream cake Steve. HA AHAHAHAH. Must be like Dad I think, poor little Mia, she was never like that but she drove me: 'Lets get out of this DUMP'. Always wanting change, but she loved the EARTH. Hate and love, never hate with me, I loved you dearly for your greatness, richness never bothered really, only I had an ambition to better things for Mia, so worked hard, tried to drag you along, never realising we were different ... stupid ... but I've changed everyone does more or less, through shame, repentance, pity, just old age ... maybe ... but there are a lot worse than me, I've only ruined my own health, only through going too hard, nothing to be ashamed of, I am only sorry I was so tough on myself, most people depend on parents, most youth, but the bad old days, didn't give our parents a chance.

Ah dear how Mia loved your descriptions from the past, squeezing her eyes tight to stop the tears. It's easy to forgive you anything ... that touch of genius ... remembering the years ... Thanks for the invite, I will come.297

June sailed on the *Wangarella* from Auckland on 4 August 1961. Her cat “Taboo” travelled under the pseudonym of “Princess.” She purchased a house at 7 Hindeman Street, just a block away from Katoomba’s central business district, quite different from Eve’s lonely abode on the outskirts of the town. Eve expressed pleasure at June’s arrival in her diary. “Thank god Blue is in Australia” she wrote on New Year’s Eve 1961. And on 10 June 1962: “To go out into the lovely morning and down to June’s place was great.” Their early days together in Katoomba augured well. Eve’s diary of 1962 indicates that the sisters saw each other about every fortnight for that year. June told researcher Helen Hasthorpe that she and Eve soon quarrelled and after that rarely saw one another (16). On 18 August 1964 Eve wrote to June to ask her to confirm dates for a “novel” based on their collected letters. She began her letter with the words “Dear old timer, dear Blueie” and concluded affectionately “Yours ever, Stevo, a few days before the first of September [Eve’s birthday]. You fella, man, with love, Steve.” And then on 2 December 1964 June wrote to Beatrice Davis and denounced her sister as a “schizophreniac”:

> Dear Miss Davis,

> I must inform you of my sister’s (Eve Langley) true mental condition. She like Nijinsky is a Schizophreniac [sic], incurable. After all the years of distress I am now disabled with Disseminated Sclerosis, also incurable.

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299 Diary. 1962. Douglas Stewart Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 5147. I am grateful to Jim Andreotti from the Mitchell Library for bringing this diary to my attention as it was being catalogued.


After 7 years of care of my sister, during which time she remained in the Avondale Mental Hospital, I was told by Doctor Buchanan Superintendent, that she would never be released. Eventually my care was rewarded, my sister was released in my care, but still as a Mental case, but as long as she was free, that was all I wanted. Dr Boyd who is her Doctor, told me she should never have been released, and that I should have left her there. She is obviously Mental and everyone knows it,

Kind Regards. ³⁰²

While Eve was actively engaged with her work and travels and family throughout the last decade or so of her life, the records do not demonstrate that June had any specific occupation or that she travelled. Her dreams of becoming her sister’s close companion in Australia were not fulfilled. June, who had been prepared to “up anchor, as long as Eve will be my fellow traveller,”⁴³⁰³ was not welcome on her sister’s journeys. “I used to write lovingly and ask: ‘ Couldn’t I come back to her and be with the pea picking?’ And she said ‘No,’ She liked being alone.”⁴³⁰⁴ They did not spend significant occasions such as birthdays and Christmases in each other’s company, according to Eve’s diaries, although they lived nearby. Eve’s writings demonstrate that she was busy, but they also indicate that she too was often desperately lonely. Neither sister could overcome the breach in the sister relationship—a breach that from June’s perspective had no obvious cause.


A first-hand account of the state of the sisters’ relationship during this final decade was provided by a close friend of June’s named Harry Glover, who was interviewed by Douglas Stewart’s daughter Meg Stewart in 1974. All of the following quotes derive from this source. June’s comments to Harry Glover confirm that she was isolated from Eve for much of the decade prior to her death. Harry Glover was an articulate sprightly and sensitive gentleman aged eighty-five who lived a street away from June in Katoomba. A confidant and regular visitor for about ten years, he knew about Eve although he had never seen her. He reported that June’s physical and mental health had deteriorated significantly over the period she had been in Katoomba, and she was now a virtual recluse. In the 1960s she had been “young, attractive, used to walk everywhere,” but now she was ill and suffered from a “brain trouble” that made her “cantankerous” and petulant. He put this down to June’s relationship with Jim Ryan, a convicted petty criminal who extorted money from June over a period of several years. Harry Glover’s relationship with June now depended on his being of service to her. He was her “errand boy,” he said, and visited three times a week, drove her to appointments, and did her gardening. Paranoia and altercations with neighbours meant that he was the only one she would open the door to—and that included the time the police arrived to inform June about Eve’s death: “I had to go and let the police in.” He was forbidden by June to approach her sister and he thought this was because “June was jealous of her.” He knew that Eve was a famous writer, and had been in

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306 There is a significant collection of letters relating to Jim Ryan in June Langley’s papers. They are graphic, and there are also letters from another of Ryan’s lovers as well as requests for assistance written by him on prison letterhead. June eventually took legal action to recover money she had used to pay his fines and a car. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898.
an asylum ("mentally unstable") and June had got her out after promising to take care of her. He said that when June was told about Eve's death she "wasn't a bit upset." This he put down to years of "jealousy amongst the two girls." He had seen a photograph of "two happy teenagers" but was unable to get a close look, "for fear I'll draw comparisons or something." He gathered that Eve "did not have any friends visiting her and she passed out of this world unloved and uncared for," and had "neglected herself." June had told him that her sister was "well nourished, quite plump, too plump." She was "fatter than her [June]."

Harry Glover told of a time when he and June were in the car together and June said of a woman they had just passed, "That's my sister and she'll be jealous because I've got a man with me in the car." He said June hated her sister because while Eve was chasing "pleasure [...] boys" she had to look after their mother. Harry Glover had formed the view that June had enjoyed a "nice" childhood, and lived in public housing, but that there was mutual antipathy between herself and her father who did not make friends and was very conservative. June did not want Harry Glover to "link up her early life" or read The Pea Pickers (he didn't). June "loved her mother absolutely [...] She lived for her mother, and her mother lived with her," but he knew nothing about her life prior to her ownership of a cake shop in Auckland.

Following Eve's death, June was interviewed by three different researchers—all of them young and naïve. The first was Meg Stewart in 1974, which resulted in the film She's My Sister (1975). June was admitted to a psychiatric institution in July 1975, but subsequently returned to her home in Katoomba. June was then interviewed in 1977 by undergraduate researcher Helen Hasthorpe for her thesis "Eve Langley: A Biographical

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Account" (1979). In April 1981 June donated her papers to the Mitchell Library and she entered a nursing home. On 19 May 1981 she was interviewed for the first time by Joy Thwaite who was researching a biography of Eve. Joy Thwaite returned to interview June again on 29 November 1982 but June remained bitterly angry towards her deceased sister for the remainder of her life. Over the next few years twenty-five relatives and acquaintances and past friends of Eve and June were interviewed by Joy Thwaite. Despite the obvious hostility of some "witnesses," the extreme age of others who were trying to recall what Eve was like when they were barely at school, and others who were clearly under the influence of The Pea Pickers, all were woven into Joy Thwaite's tale, called The Importance of Being Eve Langley (1989) published by Angus & Robertson. Its central premise was that Langley was mad. Joy Thwaite treats Eve’s novels as transparent autobiography, and relies heavily on June’s testimony. On 5 March 1992, June Langley died in hospital, at the age of eighty-seven. She did not leave a will, and the Public Trustee administered her estate, at the direction of what is now called The Protective Office. Her beneficiaries were her niece and two nephews, Eve’s children.

Conclusion

This biographical chapter has established the dysfunctional nature of the Langley family relationships and the culture of secrecy that enshrouded the lives of the parents and

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309 "One of the most reliable accounts of her childhood personality" came from an informant born in 1909 (Thwaite 20).

daughters. Having meticulously gathered every shred of information I could find about the family, I have come to the conclusion that an incestuous encounter at the age of about eight, and a culture of secrecy initiated by Mia to protect the family from the ignominy of public disclosure, are keys to understanding why Eve’s life was so tormented and her fiction so odd. There is a distinct lack of information about Arthur Langley and Mia, and although their presence in their daughters’ lives was significant, their personalities are strangely absent. The lack of transparency about childhood and adolescence contrasts with the high levels of disclosure about many of the sisters’ activities in New Zealand. The culture of secrecy permeated Eve’s representation of her family in her fiction. June’s representation of the family in her texts is also distorted, influenced by the imperative to conceal family matters and her distress at the behaviour of her sister towards her.

The Langley women’s wall of silence and pro-active obfuscation about their family history have acted as a significant—and largely successful—barrier to researchers in the past. Documents have been destroyed, rewritten, edited and selectively preserved in the family archives and in Eve’s fiction. Eve edited and rewrote the copious and lengthy letters that ricocheted between herself and her sister and their mother and then destroyed the originals, whilst maintaining a running tablet of the first lines of hundreds of letters, suggesting a codified system that probably only she could decipher and which triggered her memory. Parts of some letters were kept, but frequently without date and salutation. Eve willingly divulged some of her sister’s secrets in her fiction however, thinly disguising the facts, providing just enough clues for a dedicated sleuth to locate the necessary documents relating to June’s marriages and the birth of her daughter.
June’s letters and interviews provide an insistent and complex counter-voice, a dialogue with Eve’s truncated version of their family history and respective careers. The strange voice of June Langley emphasises the distorted relationships of the Langley family: the unknown father, her own gender ambiguity; the strangely absent mother who nevertheless lives with the youngest daughter until Mia’s death in 1944; and the angry, soulful, sad and frustrated dialogue with her beloved sister whom she alternately revered and hated. The breakdown of the relationship between the sisters I attribute to June’s lack of knowledge of certain events in Eve’s childhood, and the culture of secrecy that undermined opportunities for intimacy. June had over-determined and unreciprocated expectations of the sororal relationship that Eve was unable or unwilling to fulfil. Critics have recognised the significance of June in Eve’s life—and several (including Heseltine) have also mentioned the problematic role of the father, but no one has methodically analysed the family system for clues to the enigmatic Eve. Following Arthur Langley’s death in 1915, the mother and daughters lived together—or in close physical proximity—for much of the remainder of their lives. Although the sisters were often estranged from one another, the sister relationship remained the single enduring relationship for both over their life span, despite the presence of husbands, children and lovers. Their behaviour towards each other and their own families, however, speaks of the damaging long term consequences of family secrets. My detective work on the Langley family biography raised questions that had not been asked before, about the representation of family in Eve’s fiction.
Chapter Two

_Eve Langley and the Representation of Family in her Fiction_

Eve Langley's fiction centres on an Australian family that was formed at the turn of the last century amidst the dry dusty plains of rural New South Wales. This was a real family that was brought to life in the fiction of one of its members. This family, like most families, harboured a number of secrets, some of which were significant and others less so. But this family was a little out of the ordinary in that it made a habit of secrecy, whilst also celebrating the fact that there was a chronicler in its midst. The chronicler was Eve, the elder of two daughters born to Arthur and Mia Langley, and the subject of this chapter of the thesis is the representation by Eve of several generations of her family.

In this chapter the voice of the central character/s named Steve and then Eve narrates a family saga spanning three generations. Steve's stated quest at the opening of _The Pea Pickers_ is to leave her childhood home and enter the adult world in which, typically, the search for love and a vocation figure prominently. As a "coming-of-age" novel it has the unusual feature, however, of the hero exhibiting a regression back to a childlike state, raising issues about the past—particularly her relationship with her father—that are unresolved at the novel's conclusion. As a detective who has examined the real life family of Eve Langley for the purposes of biography, I now report on my close reading of the fiction as family saga, asking a question that has not been asked before: What did Eve's family look like in the fictional realm of her novels? In order to maintain a clear border between the biography and the fiction I treat the fiction as another "cold case," meticulously tracking the "clues" and the "facts" in the two published and ten unpublished "novels" for patterns and connections that have been overlooked.
Having set myself the task of addressing the problem of blurring between the life and the writing I was attempting something that had not been done before, and I proceeded to comb the fiction for answers to questions that were similar to those raised in the biographical chapter: Who are these people? What do they do? Where do they live? What is the nature of the relationships between parents, siblings, spouses, children in this representation of family in the fiction? What does the domestic situation of the married character Eve look like? Are there parallels between Eve’s representation of her parents and sister, and the representation of her husband and children? What are the key differences in representing generations of the Langley family? What happens to the sister relationship during periods of crisis, and how are critical life events narrated?

Eve’s fiction was written between 1939 and 1965, using as its content the period of her life from 1926 to 1941. The narrative voice shifts between past and present, although the texts are predominantly retrospective. The fiction is considered here in two parts: the Australian fiction that comprises her two published novels *The Pea Pickers* and *White Topee*, as well as her unpublished “novels” “Wild Australia,” “The Victorians” and “Bancroft House”; and the New Zealand fiction that comprises “Land of the Long White Cloud,” “Demeter of Dublin Street,” “The Old Mill,” “Last, Loneliest, Loveliest,” “Remote Apart,” “Portrait of the Artist” and the unfinished manuscript “The Saunterer.”

My approach to Eve’s fiction is to meticulously isolate the fiction from its historical context, the biography of the author and the circumstances of textual production. This

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311 A second version of this text was written in 1958 in response to criticism of the original text by Eve’s editors at Angus & Robertson. This second text largely excised the references to Oscar Wilde, and is not considered in this dissertation.
methodology is a response to a problem recognised by all Eve Langley critics: the blurring of the boundaries between the “character and her creation” (Frost, Introduction, v). Eve’s biography has been contaminated by her fiction (Colwill “Corridors of Memory”), and her fiction contaminated by her life (Frost, “Body in the Vault”). This thesis separates the biography and the fiction, an approach that some Eve Langley critics have suggested is impossible. Joanne Winning, for example, has described the blurring as a “sticky inextricable link” (301). She demonstrates this by describing Eve as a “nineteen year old […] making cross-dressed forays into the Dandenong Public Library to devour its literary holdings, believing herself to be various reincarnated male writers including John Keats and Wilde” (313), and citing Joy Thwaite (27-32) as her source. Winning does not say, however, that Thwaite is in fact quoting directly from Eve’s manuscript “The Victorians” (Thwaite 163). Robin Colwill proposes “a clear authorial warning to any who try to interpret her shifting and multi-layered texts and identities too literally” (“Corridors of Memory” 265), but uses part of the text—letters within the text—as if they were something separate that could be read as non-fiction (“Corridors of Memory” 38). Other writers refer to the narrator Steve as Eve, making no distinction at all between the fiction and the author. Thwaite is categorical that in her view that “After White Topee the works make no attempt to provide a fictional distance between the narrator and character” (63). Harry Heseltine argues for reading the fiction as transparent autobiography:

I need scarcely rehearse the old truism that the materials of fiction must be treated with the utmost wariness as sources for their author’s biography.

312 She refers, for example, to “a significant letter, probably unposted, to Dr Reg Dudding, her physician in Auckland, that is reproduced in the manuscript of ‘Portrait of the Artist’” (Colwill 38).
Nevertheless, I find myself increasingly inclined to use Eve Langley's works exactly in this way. [...] I shall take the opportunity [...] of presenting an account of Eve Langley's life which is an amalgam of the established facts of her career and the information she chose to set down (or perhaps invent) about herself in *The Pea Pickers* and *White Topee*. (115)

One consequence of the failure to "side-step the biographical data," as Cath Ellis puts it, is to be found in the contradictory judgments that emerge from the research. Eve is "both transvestite and picaro" according to Marian Arkin (114); a mad woman who adopts the persona of Oscar Wilde, in Joy Thwaite's reading; and a "brilliant eccentric," a premature post-modernist, and a sophisticated Menippean satirist in Robin Colwill's interpretation ("Corridors of Memory" 42, 50, 316). *The Pea Pickers* is a "portrait of the artist in drag" according to Susan Sheridan (326). Alternately, Eve's contribution to Australian fiction is as a period commentator on working life (Webby 118). The difficulty that this "sticky inextricable link" between Eve's life and her fiction poses is a problem that all critics have faced; however I do not accept the assumption that this link is in fact "inextricable." My solution to this problem in this chapter is to rigorously extricate the fiction from the biography. This allows me to focus very precisely on what Eve said about her family without being distracted by questions of whether these representations were true or not, or by the circumstances of textual production. The fiction—and the narrator in particular—look radically different when approached in this way.
Part One

The Australian Fiction

The Pea Pickers

The family of the narrator, Steve, is at the centre of The Pea Pickers, which is a story set in the early twentieth century about two youthful sisters who seek work as itinerant labourers in Victoria and New South Wales. The family comprises a dead, unnamed father; a mother called Mia; Steve; and her sister June (who is re-named Blue). Steve’s memories of her father are suffused with stress and anxiety and she seeks—unsuccessfully—to ward them off. His image erupts in Steve’s mind at odd moments, and she fears for his influence on her future; however, the precise nature of the father/daughter relationship is not explained. Information about Mia is contradictory, resulting in obfuscation about her character and personal history that has no obvious rationale, although she is clearly the source of some unusual secrets. Blue is a relatively uncomplicated character who shares Eve’s day to day experiences, but does not seem to have secrets of her own, or be aware of secrets within the family. In my reading of the family saga in The Pea Pickers, I look separately at each of the parents and at the relationship between the sisters. In the discussion that follows I explore the effect of secrets on the relationships among all the family members.

The father is a shadowy figure: the sisters are “without a father” (7). It emerges he is “dead” (188). Steve does not name him nor does she describe his appearance in any detail. Rather, he materializes as a shadow at twilight when he speaks with a “tall secret Mongolian” (140), or as a silhouette when “the blinding sun of the Western Plain flashed its rays into my brain and resurrected him in an instant … a small man, with a big deformed
hunchback and a very large skull" (354). His image conjures in Steve’s imagination “a terrible picture” (188). Information about his possessions is gradually revealed. She associates him with inanimate objects (guns, a green blanket, a violin on which he played marches and dance melodies) and animals (a horse and a dog) and with specific aggressive behaviours (for example, a terrible whipping when Steve stole some flowers). He was, it gradually emerges, a violin-playing drover with a dwarf-like body who worked on the Central Plains of New South Wales and had a history of violence towards Steve who was still a child when he died. He had unspecified connections with Gippsland, but owned no property (6) and left no money. Nothing is known of his past, his ancestors, or his relationship with Mia. The only physical reminder of the father is his green blanket that the sisters take with them when they set out for Gippsland.

Steve’s childhood memories provide the filter through which the father is viewed. These memories inspire in Steve a debilitating psychological paralysis, “the blackness of a child’s oblivion” (140) that “seized me and held me at its will” (48). Despite her efforts to suppress these memories, they intrude unbidden at inappropriate times, like the “frozen moments” described by Stephen Bank and Michael Kahn in their study of sibling relations: “intense, ambivalent emotions that later form vivid images. [...] unconscious memories evoked by certain current situations that remind us of the emotional situation we found ourselves in as children” (141). Steve does not herself use the word “frozen” but instead speaks of memory that is petrified, static and embalmed, when she recognises that Blue looks like their father:

I looked at Blue who sat on the end of the rocking seat playing her violin

[...] if, as I believe, every fine memory petrifies into immortality that part of
the brain into which it was entered, then there is a millionth part of an inch of mine that will never die ... for Blue’s big handsome head looked, that morning, just like the head of our father. (13)

This recognition is significant, because while Steve struggles to repress and avoid memories of childhood, Blue’s presence has the effect of dragging her back to the past. There are other “frozen moments” connected with the father where his image is “struck into her brain,” “resurrected […] in an instant” (354). Both love affairs in Gippsland are complicated by images of the father. Her first relationship is with Kelly Wilson, who is described as “short, bow-legged […] with a great head of […] hair. […] The movements of the head, half eagle, half vulture, predatory, uneasy and rapacious, ended in a pair of dwarfed legs” (27), recalling the description of the father. And when Steve is talking to her second lover, Macca, about marriage, suddenly into her mind appears the “terrible picture” (188) of her father. Steve’s memories of her father have a nightmarish quality; they appear to bypass normal cognitive processes and erupt from a black hole in her brain. As a result of her childhood experiences Steve remains fearful of her father’s influence on her future.

When the sisters arrive in Gippsland and are greeted at the gate by their new employer Nils Desperandum, the orchardist, Steve immediately associates him with her father.

I respected the man for he, like my father, began with a large head that terminated in a small rather crumpled body. The sadness that came about me, when I knew that he rejected me, is, and shall be, about me forever. (18)

Harry Heseltine and Susan Walton have recognised that the novel represents Steve’s dead, un-named, father as an authority figure who has inflicted psychological damage upon

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313 In White Topee, the motif of the eagle, as a rapacious parent figure recurs (55).
his daughter, affecting her sense of self, and her relations with her family and potential lovers; what Heseltine calls her “idiosyncratic psychic baggage” (118). The damage that has been inflicted upon Steve operates on many levels. It is apparent in her inability to love and believe herself loved in return; in her apparent gender ambivalence; in her desire for heterosexual love “untainted” by a physical relationship (“the severe gods [...] have ordered me, on pain of death to remain virgin [...] all my days in the flesh shall remain pure” 186); her melancholy and self loathing (“the sorrow of life [...] that ached in me” 75), and in her strange relations with her sister. The father’s character is judged by Steve to be flawed—he is “perverted” (354) and a “twisted moody failure” (188). Steve’s father has “set in me the seeds of destruction [...] he despised me” (188). He is a silhouetted, shadowy figure about whom little is known. Steve’s childhood memories of him appear as “frozen moments,” and his influence on his daughter has been lasting. The father is clearly responsible for a secret—or secrets—that are not revealed in The Pea Pickers. The father has failed to provide a home, so as far as can be discerned in The Pea Pickers, the family has been absorbed into an itinerant droving existence in which, traditionally, there is no room for wife or children.

The mother is set up in opposition to the father. She is associated with ideas of home, but this home is in the city where there are no drovers, no landscape and no father. The mother has no formal name; the sisters call her Mia (1), “the woman” (2); or the “Little Woman” (1). Despite these feminizing titles, her appearance is rough and almost masculine. “She was a short, rugged little woman, as swarthy as a gipsy with a crooked nose [...] her eyebrows were enormous, and her laugh was windy” (2). She “looked like an old bushman” (6). The mother represents the “home” the daughters did not have as
children—an idealized sanctuary comprising flagstones and fireplaces, biscuits and tea. The story opens with an image of domestic harmony; a home and a hearth about which the three females gather, with Mia at the head of the family. The sisters write and draw in the “kipsie.” Says Steve: “the corner of the table nearest the fire was mine, and here I sat, arms folded, breathing deeply” (3). But even in this idealized space there is ambiguity: a dominant image on the wall is the strange drawing done by Blue that Steve says she does not understand. It is an image of a naked withered old man “bearing a veiled woman” (3) into the desert. There is no place—no space and no person—within the family home that is transparent and free of ambiguity: everything is “veiled” in mystery and uncertainty. Steve suppresses information about her mother and the information we do get is contradictory. In the opening pages of the novel Mia is an inspirational character who encourages the sisters to wander (5). Her representation changes, however, as the narrative progresses. Once the sisters have returned from Gippsland, Mia has withered; she is now “a tiny creature [...] frail” (51) and insubstantial. As the novel draws to a close she is a warning voice, entreat ing them to be careful: “You’re young. You don’t understand!” (371). No attention is paid to Mia’s psychology or motivation, information that might have explained why she has changed from a physically and psychologically robust parent who advocates adventure, to someone who is now frail and cautious.

There is no stable account of how the parents came to be together. There are inconsistent accounts of Mia’s marriage—three equally convincing versions are provided with no indication in the text of which represents the “truth.” In the first version, Mia leaves home of her own volition to marry and wander (6), thus avoiding the fate of her own mother who produced fifteen children “before she was finished” (213). As Mia’s brother
Charlie points out, a whole herd of cows has been produced from the single heifer and calf that Mia left behind (7). In another version, Mia is the “dutiful daughter” who “worked for her family for ten years or so, and got nothing except calico underclothes and a few shillings a week in pocket money; but she had to ask for that” (198-99). One day she left to avoid the demeaning position of the unmarried daughter. In the third account, she is the “disobedient daughter” who “laughed at and left the honourable man her father selected for her” (355), thereby suffering the inevitable fate of disinherance and banishment (Sweet 107). In all cases the outcome is the same: Mia was forgotten “when the property was being handed over” (199). There is no indication of how Mia supports the family now, how she became a widow or the circumstances of the family’s relocation from New South Wales to Dandenong in Victoria. Mia is estranged from her own relatives, and does not want her daughters to go near them, thereby exerting a controlling influence over the release of information about the past. The promulgation of multiple stories about the marriage is indicative of the anxiety surrounding the subject of family history. The novel draws attention to the marriage of the parents, but keeps the circumstances a secret. There is neither a preferred reading nor clear explanation: the effect is to signal a secret, but the point of the secret is not apparent. Other secrets, on the other hand, have terrible meanings.

The relationship between Steve and Blue is complicated by the connection between Blue and the father. There is no indication at the beginning that Blue looks like their father: it comes upon Steve as a revelation as they sit together on the train to Gippsland. The body shapes of Blue and the father’s are inverted triangles, polar opposites of Steve with her “tiny head” (4). This connection between father and daughter is offered as a rationale for the ambivalence Steve feels towards Blue, despite the fact that Blue has done her no harm.
Steve’s powerful ambivalence towards her sister works at extremes of repulsion and valorisation and is intimately connected with Blue’s body.

Steve’s appearance is constantly compared with Blue’s. The sisters’ faces are contrasted, emphasising the ways in which they are different. Steve has “a dram of green eyes, long-lashed, heavy with melancholy and dreams” (4), Blue has “brown eyes” alert with “animal beauty” (5): “she stared clearly and fearlessly at everything” (4). Steve’s head is small with thin lips, crooked teeth (no mention yet of the “black tooth” [103] that appears later) and a long thin nose with dilated nostrils. Blue’s head is disproportionately large, with full lips “cut well in the flesh” (4), even teeth and a short straight nose. Where Steve’s “fine” (4) eyebrows suggest an unimposing appearance, Blue’s are “splendid” (5) and dominating. Blue has “carmine cheeks” and a “golden face” (5) with white chin, teeth, eyeballs and brow. Steve has freckles. But the sisters’ bodies are alike in that neither woman appears masculine or feminine, but a genderless clown-like grotesque, foreshadowing their future as “the adventurers, jongleurs, actors and singers, come to [ …] entertain and laugh and sing and then depart (323). Blue has “the body and breast of an Indian wrestler” (4), and “sinewy brown legs, big at the thighs like a grasshopper” (4). Blue is “taller and broader” than Steve, and her head is larger still, “big and out of proportion to the rest of her [big] body” (4) and “covered with black hair” (4). “Her small sharp hands were yellow in hue and held everything crookedly” (4), initiating a theme of jaundice that persists not just throughout The Pea Pickers (for example, she holds Blue’s “little yellow hand” [374] whilst saying goodbye at the conclusion of the novel), but continues obsessively into the unpublished texts. Her “grotesque fingers” (92) creep around the text attached to “her saffron hand” (92), her “saffron wrist” (174), tucking themselves into
mén's pockets. The head, torso, limbs and digits of Blue are thus grotesque and almost hideous. Blue grows "stouter" and "fatter" (217). Her waist bulges, she is like a "deflated toad" (306). Steve's body is also grotesque, with its "twisted flexible legs like a ballet dancer, narrow hips, broad breast, very large arms" (4) and "tiny head" (4). This image of the sisters—particularly Blue—as ugly, is contradicted by the playful nymphs who disrobe at the Tambo River for a swim: "'You look beautiful, Blue ... and I?' 'You look nice too,' and she laughed and hit the water. Her teeth with that faint light on their strong white edges [...] about her cream neck the rosy waters frothed and the spray [...] rose into the air in a smother of small pearls. Such loveliness" (155).

The most startling examples of the valorisation of Blue's body are found in examples of alloerotism. The relations between Steve and Blue are periodically imbued with what Pamela Orlano calls "inscriptions of homoerotic desire" (48), thus adding to the moral ambiguity of this "sister writing." These sister bodies intersect at various points throughout the text in erotic references that weave seamlessly around the utterly conventional interplay of heterosexual relationships in which both young women in *The Pea Pickers* are continually engaged. When at home, the sisters slept in their own beds (2), but once they were travelling, they invariably lived in very close proximity, sharing a mattress and bed as a matter of necessity—and perhaps preference. On arriving in Gippsland, Steve imagines a room with "a little bed" on which the two would sit (19). Arriving in the morning at the orchard of Nils Desperandum, they are shown the kapok mattress that they are to sleep on, and with no word of their first day as pickers, night appears.
A long fat ram lay on the sand, losing its wool by the inch. It had a striped black and white cloak flung over its horns, and as he drew near Mr Desperandum said, “I put that kapok mattress out to get the wind in it.” [...] The kapok mattress lived up to its ram-like appearance that night when we had gone to bed. Somehow or other, we found a way into its entrails, or perhaps it opened them up to bring us in. Towards dawn, the tongues of Gippsland descended upon us, and from that moment we were forever at variance, body, mind and soul. “Gorstruth!” explained Blue, through a mouthful of wool. She sat up in bed with a white beard streaming down her breast, and a shower of white eyebrows, through which her eyes gleamed like a madman’s. ‘Lie down,’ I grumbled, ‘and let’s get some sleep. We’ll have to be up soon.’ Shaving herself with her hands, she did so, and we followed each other into a dream, in which it seemed to me that I had hidden my working shoes in the belly of the ram. I bent double and went in after them. Blue pulled me out, and in the heat of the early morning we sat up and faced each other, covered with chaff and kapok. (21)

It is not clear what precisely has occurred in this mutual nocturnal tussle. Hirsute masculinity (Blue’s beard) is juxtaposed with female anatomy (her breasts), suggesting that a defining characteristic of masculinity—facial hair—is easily removed, while the feminine body is less easily disguised. The sisters “snored side by side in dreams, we toyed with each other’s hands in joyful bliss. When we awoke, we recognised each other with a grunt of disgust and jumped over to the other side of the bed” (31). Their night play/dream play is often ambiguous, but a more explicit example of alloeroticism occurs at Mrs Wallaby’s
house. Here, the sisters are given a bedroom that makes them feel “truly home, at last” (297). Steve admires Blue’s “golden limbs” as her sister parades before her in a “fine piece of red woollen frieze” before they slip into bed together. She wrapped it around her thighs. It looked magnificent against her golden limbs [...] I crawled into bed with her [...] each night [...] we clutched at each other in dreams [...] a fox laughed with a wild silvery note [...] and we caught each other [...] his cry woke in us a desire, half animal, half spiritual, to be of the fox and the night. Against my smooth limbs, the scarlet frieze around Blue’s body brushed as she turned. (297-98) 

A poem comes to Steve’s mind that she wishes to tell Blue, and Blue responds to her mood: “Steve, I knew while I lay beside you that you were making a poem [...] I felt it in your brain. What is it?” The scarlet frieze brushed up against me, eagerly” (298). The sisters, in their closest moments seem as intimate as lovers, but there is no specific indication that their relationship has breached “the taboo.” They have not kissed, although Steve has kissed her male lovers, been kissed by the Black Serpent (165), and other people (she finds such touching repulsive and likens one such kiss to a “bubble of meat” (65). 

314 This passage was repeated in “Demeter of Dublin Street”: “We lay close together with bright crimson loin cloths binding our slim hips, our yellow hips, our hot hips, and touched each other with groping hands when far, far out in the dripping red ranges, in the black and terrible ranges, in the lonely and steep ranges, the fox ran yelping and bounding over slippery logs in the night ... I hate, I think I hate those words that do not bring back the night and the sister flesh beside me” (21-22).

315 Kelly’s kiss she describes in the following way: “Kelly kissed me with the furtive whiskery kiss of youth [...] feeling like a blow from a hairbrush” (35). Susan Walton notes that “A ‘blow from a hairbrush’ is essentially a childhood punishment; that she should associate it with a ‘whiskery kiss’ links it to a paternal image, both the punishment and the embrace being the prerogative of the father. The simile is incongruous but becomes readily comprehensible when placed within the wider spectrum provided by the sub-text” (214).
The sisters do not touch each other at all except in their "dreams." Lucy Frost in her introduction to the 2001 reprint of *The Pea Pickers* writes of "a love of men [as] a convenient cover [...] for a touching that is taboo" (viii), and proposes that the real reason Steve wants Blue to leave her alone at the conclusion of the novel is because she, Steve, has transferred her lesbian desire to another woman: the Black Serpent. But this, I propose, is merely a diversion. The connection is made, conclusively, between Blue’s appearance and Steve’s ambivalence to her sister: how can she love unequivocally someone who is so like the source of her grief?

A more direct result of the connection Steve has made between the father and Blue is that when the sisters are together they seem to revert to a childlike state, a regression that becomes more pronounced the longer they cohabit. *The Pea Pickers* begins with Steve asserting they, the sisters, are "adults. We were eighteen and nineteen years of age at the time" (8) and "women" (18). But as their activities become more frenetic and prankish Steve’s “young bewildered thoughts” (250) lead her to muse at “my adolescence” (324). When an old drover invites them to a country sale the sisters’ diction suggests a regression to the abbreviated language of their childhood: “The children flew to the mother, crying out in delight: Mia, Mia! Going away with T.O.B. in the ranges!” (333). Once they have set off for Gippsland the sisters separate themselves from others (much as they might have done as children thrown exclusively into each other’s company as they moved from place to place) through their language, their clothes, and their odd behaviour: “no one was ever quite like us” (57). They are serial pranksters, with food, bodily functions and garments a source of endless fascination. They speak as one: “we said” this (85) and “we said” that (238): “we know everything [...] nothing can touch us” (332). “We were different” (246). They keep
“yow” (look out) while one or the other gets up to mischief (86, 252). They “want to be like
this forever” (333). “But how can we stay it?” replies Steve with childlike diction (333).

They are “the children” (333), fascinated with bodily functions—diarrhoea (42), their
“writhing bowels” (226), and men’s ablutions ([96], “no one saw us” watching [133]); and
food—voluntary (173) and involuntary starvation (258), overeating (177), nausea and
vomiting (267). Most curiously, a fascination with garments, cloth, accessories,
clothing—their own and other people’s—unite and excite the sisters as almost nothing else
does. Costume, as Joy Thwaite notes, is of the “utmost importance” (5). Images of
fabric—as constructed garment, or fragments of cloth upon which meaning is
imposed—saturate the text. In The Pea Pickers, fabrics fulfil many purposes, of which the
basic function of clothing is just one. Clothing and fabric find expression as narrative, as
remembrance of things past, as disguise, concealment, objects and subjects of
transformation, as ritual, voyeurism, torture, and masochism, as food, medicine, status, sex
and more—the sisters are endlessly amused. Just a few examples must suffice.

The sisters’ pranks frequently revolve around clothing, bedding and food, which are
blended in strange, unexpected ways. They steal and mutilate clothing that belongs to their
fellow workers: Peppino’s socks and underpants are examined (106); Charlie Wallaby’s
clothes are shredded and hung on a barbed wire fence: “We know you’re rich by the cut, or
shall we say, the tear of your clothes” they giggle (234). Thistles are impaled in Charlie’s
blanket and his socks covered in pepper and arranged as a pillow (316). Their mate Jim’s
clothes are nailed onto a tree (202) that is garlanded with old boots, their “tin-metal-edged
eyes gleaming malignantly” (203). The sisters prepare a recipe for “pea soup pants” (202).
They use Charlie’s mother’s night gown as a tea towel (310). Flour is mixed with clothing
to give it “body” (68); flour, soap and water whiten and clean a filthy scarf (68). Starch embedded in the collar of a shirt is extracted through cooking and imbibed to alleviate Steve’s diarrhoea (42). Mia is lifted onto the table “like the Dormouse” while Steve and Blue “operated on her clothes with a bread knife” (52). Pumpkin is boiled into a congealed mess with the sisters’ dirty clothing to avoid them being caught stealing food (231).

Clothing and language are entwined with sexual innuendo in private jokes shared between the sisters: the word “church” evolves from “Cross” to “crutch” in a conversation with an Italian who “with infinite delicacy […] yielded up his hand to a gesture that ended where the tailor’s measure begins for a pair of men’s pants” (292). Discussion over the word “glove” leads to an Italian labourer poking Blue in the breast with his gloved hand and requesting the English word for breast. This part of Blue’s anatomy is called a “toe nail” (301) says Steve wickedly. The Afghan labourer Akbarah Khan who has taken an intense interest in Steve takes her pyjamas and mends them “at a delicate point with black thread” (94) in an incident that depicts clothing as an object of lust, and perhaps assault. A concoction of “soiled socks,” “handkerchiefs grisly from a recent cold” (352) and the dog’s blanket is used to dampen the ardour of the lustful Angelo (353) who is spying on the sisters. This shared obsession with garments and fabric is a distinguishing characteristic of the sisters as a couple; their victims—apart from their mother—are bewildered and astonished at their antics. Their mother finds nothing surprising about being lifted onto a table and “operated” on with a bread knife, nor does she comment on her daughters’ forays into the countryside dressed in men’s clothing and referring to each other by masculine names.
For the duration of their time as itinerant farm labourers, the sisters dress in a confusing hybrid of masculine and feminine apparel for which there is no clear rationale. Blue had already ventured out into the country-side “disguised as a boy” (5) but her “disguise” was so convincing that the “lonely bush girls” believed her to be male and “she had fled to save her manhood”(5). There is no indication that the complex manoeuvrings of Steve in relation to clothing and names has any significance for June: when she went to work in the Goulburn Valley in Victoria dressed in masculine clothing her disguise had a singular purpose. She needed work, and she got it, feeding pigs and cutting star thistles. This is quite different work to picking peas with a sister-companion. June’s work was difficult and unpleasant and there is no suggestion that it was at all amusing. These circumstances are different to those described in the journey to Gippsland where the sisters dress in “tailored pants” (10) and silk shirts that reveal rather than conceal their feminine contours. Once there, they set off to work “dressed in wide khaki trousers, covered to the knees in green and blue dresses, and flash scarves around our necks” (22). In Victoria’s Rutherglen they are “amply feminine in [their] masculine clothes” (55) which are tight and “tailored.” The novel draws attention to the conundrum that the adoption of both male and female clothing presents and offers an explanation in a conversation with the Afghan labourer Akbarah Khan, who scratches his head in amazement and quizzes them: “You got on half boy clothes, half girl clothes. Why you do that?” (89). The sisters, who have “long trousers, ribbons floating from our coloured sweaters and blue smocks over our maiden figures” (89) reply, enigmatically: “Our mother and our sister [...] they like us dress like this [...] they bring us up, dress sometime like boy, sometime like girl” (89). The creation of a third sister is unexplained; the accusation that their mother orchestrated their cross-
dressing from an early age hints at a bizarre back story that is never explicitly told. But it does place the gender ambivalence that has been the focus of so much critical work in relation to *The Pea Pickers* (Arkin, Heseltine, Thwaite, McMahon, Frost, Winning) firmly and unambiguously inside the family. And this is the only direct explanation that Steve offers of the cross-dressing in *The Pea Pickers*.

The naming of Steve, however, offers up another clue to the contradictory gender messages: she is named after a man who dressed as a woman. Steve Hart was a young bushranger from the famous Ned Kelly gang of the late 1870s (a print of Australian artist Tom Roberts’ iconic painting “The Hold up” hangs in the kitchen [8]), but despite his manly “occupation” of bushranging, “he had a habit of dressing himself in women’s clothes,” according to a contemporary report by Chief Commissioner Standish (Hocking 9), and was quite diminutive in stature (Hocking 23). “So successful was this disguise that he was taken to be one of the Kelly sisters, and the police attributed many of his daring exploits to Kate Kelly” (Keneally 30). Steve Hart was born in 1860. Therefore the appropriation of the name “Steve Hart” is not straightforward. This challenges the position that Steve’s assumption of a masculine name cut “across boundaries set up to exclude female from male in a culture with rigid gender separation” (Frost, Introduction, *The Pea Pickers* v). Frost observes that “before she is Steve she is without identity, the undifferentiated ‘I’ ” (Introduction, *The Pea Pickers* v) but arguably, her identity remains a secret even after the naming ceremony. For the narrator of *The Pea Pickers*—a

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316 “So successful was this disguise that he was taken to be one of the Kelly sisters, and the police attributed many of his daring exploits to Kate Kelly” (Keneally 30).
woman—has assumed the name of a man who masqueraded as a woman, and she—the narrator—now masquerades as a man.

The absence of certainty about Steve’s identity is not apparent in the naming of June who is re-named Blue after the sisters have listened to the night man changing the can of their outside toilet. At the opening of the novel, June is a female who accepts the name of an unambiguously masculine figure. The nickname “Blue” is always applied to a male and it is a name that one mate gives another, and “mateship” is a distinctively masculine trait. Blue the night man has “stumbled over a drain” (9) and landed “with his head in a mass of snails” (9) before he extracted the can, replaced it with an empty and returned “thumping heavily” (10) back over the onion bed to a “tumbrel,” all the while uttering obscenities to the verbal encouragement of his mate who calls him Blue. Despite the drains, snails, excrement, onions, night-time (with its traditional associations of ignorance, obscurity, perhaps even evil) the name “Blue” is selected by Steve for her sister: “‘I think the name is Blue’ [...] ‘Yes,’ replied Blue [...] ‘That’ll do me, Steve’” (10). Blue’s passivity and acceptance of the pecking order is established. Blue does not challenge the directives of her sister nor question her motives. Blue’s past and her future are uncomplicated and she seems untouched by family secrets. Steve’s gender is represented by contradictory images, but Blue’s is not. The regression experienced in Blue’s company is at odds with Steve’s attempts to engage with the world of work and men; it reverses the coming-of-age story. But this is not the case for Blue. She grew “taller, wiser and more powerful than myself” (17). Steve’s solution to this dilemma is to separate herself from her sister in order to circumvent the painful legacy of her childhood.
In [Blue's] company a terrible sorrow descended on me. [...] I grew to feel that she must be a menace to me; I fancied that in following her I should come to terrible things; to unbearable loneliness and wild sin. Once away from Blue I thought, life will become rich again and I shall flourish. So, I steadily nourished the tempers between us. I encouraged jealousies, envy and pride that we might part. (351)

Blue, who is oblivious to the fact that she looks like their father, attempts to persuade Steve “to take her as my mate, forever” (351). She has no intention of marrying her lover (338)—or anyone else (200)—but Blue of The Pea Pickers has a future with a clear un-ambivalent narrative. Steve places her back within the family with Mia and tells her to get married (375). Blue is “the obedient one” (74).317

For Steve, the future is not so clear—unless she surrenders to the past, and lives as her father lived:

I was on the lookout for a horse. I had been on the lookout for a long time. Yes, when I bought a horse I should be my father again, and with horse, dog and rifle, I should ride as he rode, playing his violin and singing at every stopping place, and living, as he lived, a melancholy, passionate, perverted, failure. (354)

This scenario implies a pessimistic outcome for Steve, but the narrative does not end there. Instead, as she finally farewells Blue, the tone of the closing lines suggest pain, but also

317 Norman Lindsay in his review of The Pea Pickers in The Bulletin 3 June 1942 described Blue as the “purely feminine woman, satisfied to accept love as a prosaic reality, even if its finality is marriage and a procession of perambulators” (2). There is no evidence that Blue accepted her lot.
strength and dignity: “My heart ached. The owls hooted and the stars shone, and the galvanized iron walls of the hut went “Spink ... Spink” as they contracted after the heat of the day. I opened the door and walked in. I was alone” (375).

Although Eve’s rejection of Blue is predicated on avoidance of the past, the heterosexual love story with Macca provides a positive reason for being alone: “some day, perhaps he will come back” (371). The narrative oscillates, rather than reaches a neat conclusion. The family of Steve is a hub of contradictory stories with the mother at the centre. The father is the source of a major secret that is untold. The sisters’ relations with each other suggest that unusual experiences have preceded the events of the novel. In The Pea Pickers, Eve successfully maintains a multiplicity of convincing yet disparate plot lines and character developments, but it is only through the careful and close analysis of the text that the problematic nature of the interactions between Steve and her family becomes apparent. The Pea Pickers established the template for the depiction of the sister relationship, which to a greater or lesser degree was re-enacted in all Eve’s subsequent texts. The same cannot be said for these unusual parents, however, who reappear in extraordinary circumstances in The Pea Pickers’ sequel, White Topee.

White Topee

The family of Steve is fractured in White Topee: the mother is living in a new house in Dandenong, and the sisters are working as labourers on opposite sides of a mountain range: the Victorian Alps—Blue in Buffalo, Steve in Metung in Gippsland. Although this novel was posited by Eve as the sequel to The Pea Pickers, there is an unexplained alteration in the representation of the parents in White Topee that is perplexing and
contradictory. The parents are not together, but nor are they apart; without explanation, they have risen significantly in the social order. Steve's still unnamed father is an alumnus of Scotch College "the best college in the Southern Hemisphere" according to her cousins who also attended the school (6) (there is no indication that the father is dead). The mother, Mia, has bought a "big two-storyed brick house" with "many rooms," "in the middle of a wide red-brick court, and it was dark with ivy" (59), thereby enjoying—without explanation—resources that were not evident in *The Pea Pickers*. In addition, Mia has a "high, sharp voice" (59), quite unlike the earthy nostalgic voice and "windy" laugh of her predecessor in *The Pea Pickers*. Blue's representation remains largely the same in this text. Blue is "different" (116) to Steve, "clear-sighted" and "far more independent" (116). Her future is anticipated as uncomplicated and conventional: she will be married. Blue has, however, begun to question the motives of her sister, revealing a highly dependent mind-set that contradicts Steve's assertion about her sister's independence:

No lover could love you so wholly and purely as I do. You used to say once, that I was most fortunate. You say so now? How can that be so? Where and how am I most fortunate? Where is my best friend? Where is the only mate I ever wanted? [...] You used to interest yourself in me once; you were my friend, mine only, my tutor, my guide, my sympathizer. You brought me up, lifted me from the mud with your splendid thoughts. Under the mud ... under the mud! What's the use of lifting me out, when you don't want me? It's like the wanton destruction of a flower or the picking of fruit when you have no hunger. Take me under your care again. Will you? (124)
For her part, Steve is now free to live her life autonomously: “I am as I wish to be, at will” (240). The contact between Steve and Blue is confined to the prolific exchange of letters. Steve’s reasoning for being apart from her sister is cast in a slightly different way when compared with *The Pea Pickers*:

> When I am [...] away from my sister [...] I have the feeling of [...] never having been recently a child, or even young; [...] and I love it. And I am what I wish to be, at will. But when I am with my sister, she, who remembers me, can say, “When you were young ... I remember you when you were small”—even as I remember her. And I do not ever want to have been young, although my youth was such a lovely time. But I loathe and fear the first of it, dreadful black-outs in time and space, when I don’t remember even having been alive, and then journeys like concussions all over New South Wales and Queensland. (240-1)

Notwithstanding this insight into her own motivation for being apart from Blue—insight that was not evident in *The Pea Pickers*—Steve chooses to return to an intimate relationship with her sister at the conclusion of the novel. She sets off eagerly on her ride across the Alps on a new horse that is fresh and strong. Once again, the narrative oscillates rather than reaching a neat conclusion with Steve aware that “I shall not be as you know me now” (240). The representation of the family in *White Topee* is more straightforward, less mysterious and fraught. The father does not evince the power over Steve’s destiny that was evident in *The Pea Pickers*.

What makes *White Topee* entirely different is the insertion into the novel of several pages of writing (241-44) that seem neither prepared for, nor relevant to the conclusion
which takes place just six pages later (250).\textsuperscript{318} This insertion seems complete unto itself, a fable told by one character to another with scant reference to the larger narrative. The fable is structured through a series of metamorphoses. Steve and her parents undergo a dramatic transformative process: Steve into the baby Oscar Wilde; her mother into Mrs. Wilde, and her father into a "Princess." The tale includes a centrepiece in which chronology is ignored; as a story within a story, it is completely unpredictable, and occurs in a space where the natural laws of time and place do not operate as Steve is catapulted between London and "Minildra" in the Australian bush. The narrative "slides" between Steve and her parents. It is a fictitious account of the entrance of Steve into her family as the exceptionally famous Oscar Wilde that takes place against a canvas of gigantic skies and to the intonations of the Greek god Apollo.

The structuring image is that of the parents driving a horse-drawn buggy through an iconic bush-land setting in "Minildra," which is a specific location (spelt Manildra) near Forbes, in New South Wales. The tale represents a most striking and memorable piece of Eve's writing; it is infused with imaginative energy and ideas and introduces new figures around Oscar Wilde who will be important from now on. Elements of the tale appear in "Wild Australia" (1953) and in "Bancroft House" (1954). In \textit{White Topee} it is told to another itinerant farm worker called Panucci and concludes abruptly. Panucci does not interrupt or comment on the content except to ask at the conclusion of the fable whether Steve truly believes that what she says is true.

\textsuperscript{318} This fraught and unusual piece of writing was submitted by Eve late in the editorial process of \textit{White Topee}, in December 1952. It was, she said, the book's "most important part" that should be incorporated into the text "even if you have to cut out a lot of other matter to do so" (Eve Langley. Letter to Nan McDonald. 8 Dec. 1952. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/245/247).
Intense anxiety surrounds the occasion of Steve’s “delivery” to the parents with whom, it is indicated, she has no biological connection. Steve comments: “There is only one way for an extraordinary character like me to have been born, and that is for me to walk in on a nice family on a dark night” (241), thus invoking the changeling motif from fairy tales. One moment there is a baby in bonnet and ribbons on its mother’s knee, and then “I woke up again [...] in a small school room [...] and I went on from oblivion to oblivion for years, without a chance to explain” (241). It is as poet John Gay describes: “Your precious babe is hence convey’d / And in its place a changeling laid” (Fables 1727). This “devil’s bargain” takes place against the backdrop of a huge sky “an immense heaven” (241) revealing the figure of “Almighty God” who transforms into Apollo and infuses her mind with his words: “You have been born before. You have never been born before. You will be born again. You will never be born again” (242).

The tale contains within it at least two parallel and contradictory narratives that are told simultaneously and out of sequence: it is as if Steve has entered an editorial production suite and picked up the off-cuts of footage from two films from the floor and spliced them together so that the final cut resembles “a form of picture-show” (243) that flashes above her head. The intensity of these flashing images is different to the intense “frozen moments” of The Pea Pickers. Steve is whisked back and forth in time between Manildra and London, via various methods of transport: buggy, train, plane, boat, taxi, cab and pram. The “logic” of this strange piece of writing seems to be that the mother in the buggy has transformed into Mrs Wilde, however the new born baby that plummets from a biplane into the buggy is actually Steve, so Steve must have metamorphosed into Mrs Wilde’s “son”
Oscar Wilde. The parents have physiological similarities to the parents in *The Pea Pickers*: the father is "a short man with a large head and a small brown moustache"; the mother has "a rugged sort of nose" (242). Unexpectedly, the father appears momentarily transformed into a "Princess," locating explicitly within the family the source of the cross-dressing (and the obsession with garments) that is so pronounced in *The Pea Pickers*:

I became conscious then, of sitting in this buggy between a man and a woman. *At the same time* I had a sense of being out driving with my mother, Lady Wilde, and some Princess. I saw the green linen *driving* skirt of the Princess quite plainly [...] But this picture melted as I stared at the face of the *man driving* the buggy [...] he was a short man with a large head [...] I felt that he was to be my father. (242 emphasis added)

Steve has seen the green linen driving skirt "quite plainly" (242). The picture "melted as I stared at the face of the man driving the buggy" (242). Here, it is suggested, are the origins of the cross-dressing apparent in *The Pea Pickers*: a man dressed as a woman (recalling Steve Hart's cross-dressing history); the man who is her father. She adds, ambiguously, "I regret to say I did not like him at first glance, though in after years I came to love him well" (242), a reversal that leaves open the possibility of a happy ending to the tale—that her real parents were loving and loveable. Steve's statement about her father in *White Topee* is quite explicit. By replacing the name of the place—Manildra—with "Minildra," she has quite literally taken the "man" out of Manildra.

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319 At the time Eve submitted this episode, she was in the process of writing "Wild Australia," which took the Oscar Wilde theme much further.
Having knocked the occupants of the buggy into a state of unconsciousness “with shock” (243), Steve is herself concussed, causing a “black oblivion” (244) of the type described in *The Pea Pickers*, that Steve does not recover from for many years, when she finds herself in school and learning to read. Steve wakes to look at a baby in a pram and realizes “with the most dreadful despair and horror possible, “Heavens, I’m the baby” (244).

It is difficult to know what to make of this tale in which Steve struggles “to be once more, and at once, the always brilliant Oscar Wilde,” whilst periodically collapsing into “deepest unconsciousness” (244). When Steve awakens from her oblivion, she is a changed person (she introduces herself as “Steven” [248]) although just what the oblivion represents she is unable to say. Unlike the secrecy surrounding Mia’s marriage (which has no obvious purpose), this tale is the representation of an important secret about Steve’s past and her childhood. The “incident” (as Eve called it) is a fictitious narrative designed to simultaneously expose and veil in obfuscation Steve’s origins. This tale makes no sense to the reader, and yet it is very powerful, as writer and autobiographer Hal Porter observed in an interview in 1974: “it is eccentric and strange, but beautifully written and chillingly convincing, as if she really had been Oscar Wilde as a baby.” Panucci asks “‘did you really come to your family in this way at the beginning?’” to which Steve replies “in a low, sad, hopeless voice, ‘Life is the most dreadful thing under the sun, mio caro. [...] Life is a hell of unhappiness’” (244).
“Wild Australia”

In “Wild Australia,” Steve travels the Great Alpine Road between Bruthen and Omeo, encountering people who had known her father, before riding across the Victorian Alps and meeting up with Blue at Buffalo. Once the sisters are together again, a character that Steve calls Oscar Wilde periodically overrides her consciousness, resulting in hallucinatory experiences that teeter on the edge of psychosis. This is not a preferred state of being, however, and Eve (as author) explicitly rejects the Oscar Wilde trope.

This complex “novel” is also centred on family, and Steve’s effort to articulate and master the effects of the secret (or secrets) that underscored her life. Steve, Mia and Blue are all embroiled in secrecy about the past, but although the family comprises only the three of them, they are not all privy to the same information. Blue is aware that the past contains some mysterious goings-on relating to gender and kinship, but is non-reflective and indifferent to the maintenance of family secrets: she tells outsiders that her sister was born as Oscar Wilde. Absurd and unlikely as the content of that secret seems to be, Blue says that this is what Mia has told her: “Mia Madame Mother (our mother) told me all about you and the way they met you at Killeens in Manildra. Mia told me you were introduced to her as Mr Oscar Wilde” (381), thereby resurrecting the core of the tale told in White Topee. The nature and effect of this family’s culture of secrecy is “typical” of families that harbour secrets, argues Marcia Millman in her book The Perfect Sister: What Draws Us Together, What Drives us Apart:

Refusing to harbour family secrets or to be silenced by shame is unusual. Many women I interviewed described major family secrets—usually in connection with illness, sex or something that had to do with the body. In
general, maintaining these secrets divided them from one another [...] maintaining a secret tends to create considerable anxiety about its discovery, and secrets often inhibit intimacy or communication. (95)

The narrator represents herself in “Wild Australia” as both Eve and Steve, a contradiction that is suggestive of the tension and internal conflict aroused by the telling of a family secret. At the conclusion of “Wild Australia” it is clear, however, that Steve is not to be silenced, and that the revelation about her father’s cross-dressing in White Topee has had a cathartic effect. She wishes now to “calmly blot out the Oscar Wilde part of myself” and “continue writing as Eve Langley and about Eve Langley forever” (318), although she does not elaborate on what the “Oscar Wilde part of [her] self” is. Her perspective has changed: “A cloud in 1927 has a totally different look to one seen in 1942, or another in 1952 (318).” (Eve’s incarceration and the publication of The Pea Pickers took place in 1942. She is writing “Wild Australia” in 1952.) Eve as the “character” Steve (whose mother is alive) observes that the keeping of this particular secret is not the imperative it once was because her parents are now both dead: “I had reasons for keeping silent. My mother is dead. I don’t care what comes of divulging it now. Two mothers are dead. Thank God, I shall never have any more. The grief of them. The grief of the lord of language! No, I don’t care what comes of divulging it all now” (354, emphasis added).

This narrative concludes positively, with Steve experiencing the birth of a new self. Within her brain’s “huge darkness” she is now able to laugh at “the remembrance of things past and incoherent conversations of the past, long ago” (391). This conclusion does not oscillate. Eve will be a writer with a stable identity. The narrative provides no clear explanation of the Oscar Wilde motif, but Eve’s strategy of creating confusion through
contradiction provides an obvious clue. Oscar Wilde was a married homosexual man, and Steve Hart dressed in women’s clothing to disguise his gender. Both the historical figures Steve Hart and Oscar Wilde were masquerading as something “other” than their true selves. A homosexual man marrying and conceiving children as Oscar Wilde did is arguably in contradiction to his preferred sexuality. A man pretending to be a woman—as Steve Hart did—provides a contradiction in terms of the representation of his gender. Robin Colwill argues that “Langley redeployes Oscar Wilde as Steve/Eve’s reincarnated Other/Self” (“Corridors of Memory” 10), but it seems more likely that the preoccupation with Oscar Wilde in “Wild Australia” is about men addressing issues of gender and sexuality, not a female (narrator Steve or author Eve) questioning her gender and sexual orientation as most critics have suggested. The narrator Steve is not a man, and this is clarified explicitly in the text, when she subjects herself to scrutiny by Blue and another woman:

“help ’er, him, it, off with the clothes, Blue.” [...] I protested feebly against this queer procedure, but Blue nobly helped her assuring her that I had one of the most beautiful bodies she had ever seen. So ... off with my clothes and in my snow white flesh I stood before them [...] they stood off and looked down on me with admiring eyes. God knows why people do these things. I thought I looked frightful. “Yes, in the nude, the body is like a man’s, and yet it isn’t. [...] It’s not like the body of any human being I’ve ever seen. When I saw it under the clothes, I thought ‘It’s a man; all male.’ And now when I see it naked, I still think it looks like the body of a man. But it’s not a complete man’s body.” I felt glad for all our sakes that it
wasn't and lay in an awkward sweat under their deep ardent interested gaze.

(370)

Steve ponders male to female gender reassignment, not the reverse, in her aside about "surgery turning men into women" (402). She experiences a florid hallucination about a "thing" that wears women's clothing, roaming the streets of London, dressed in crinolines but shrieking "Am I a man?":

- a great spread of flesh, ran up and down suicidal, murderous, lank haired, long coated, pantalooned; strapped, booted, terrible handed grotesquely tongued, crinolined, crying, gesticulating, blind through the old, the time poisoned, clattering stony-tainted narrow black streets of London shrieking:
  - 'What am I? Am I a man?' (280-81)

The notion that male gender ambivalence (rather than female gender ambivalence) lies at the heart of "Wild Australia" and the Oscar Wilde motif is supported by the Oscar Wilde tale in White Topee where Steve's father is transformed into a skirt-wearing "Princess." The wild "thing" of London is defined by definitively feminine garments, but the father's masculinity is not defined by clothing in The Pea Pickers, where gender is represented by objects (guns, dogs and horses) and occupation (droving). Conceding that the obfuscation inherent in this brilliant linguistic and conceptual display may be too challenging, Eve (not Steve) interjects into the narrative on page 318 of "Wild Australia" with a typed and clear extra textual addition that instructs the reader to "READ NEXT PAGE." On this page—also numbered as page 318 indicating it was added at a later time—Eve writes: "If there are those who really want to criticise me, I shall reply as I did to Robert Ross, [a friend of
Oscar Wilde] saying "BUT DO WRITE CLEARLY. OTHERWISE IT LOOKS AS IF YOU HAD SOMETHING TO CONCEAL" (318).

This complex "novel" is not written "clearly," but Eve’s observation draws attention to concealment and secrecy being integral to this narrative which centres on family. The secret that is exposed paves the way for reconciliation with the past, however. Although the psychological damage is not undone by Steve’s revelations about her family (she represents herself as an “hermaphrodite” (277) and describes her body as “the ugliest chunk of meat I’d ever seen” [368]), Steve humanises her father and focuses on a positive future apart from her family.

The father’s story is written differently in “Wild Australia.” Steve calls him “Dad” (110) and he is named for the first time as Arthur Langley (344) and situated in a particular place as if he were now associated with home and was an integral part of the family. Steve remembers him with positive longing that represents a distinct juxtaposition to the fraught accounts of prior recollections:

The first time I heard [my father singing] was one night when Dad sang to us in Wombat St., Forbes, in New South Wales. I sat at his feet and listened to him. He was a short man, with an enormous head, lustrous brown hair, brilliant eyes and a short clipped brown moustache. He was a small but massive man. He sang the old song of the eighties; with a strange yearning strong dramatic power. (110)

The father’s masculinity now has a different quality, and his “enormous head” sprouts “lustrous” hair and is illuminated by “brilliant” eyes, rather than the grotesque imagery of an oversized head atop a dwarf-like body. Even his moustache (that appeared in White
Topee) has a kempt and attractive form. He seems to come alive in Steve’s memory for the first time, free of the “petrified” moments of the past. She sits at his feet in obvious adoration. There is no explanation for this alteration in perspective, apart from the fact that Steve has met others in the course of her journey who have provided her with alternative views of her father; opinions that are different to those promulgated within the family. This remembering is an uplifting, exhilarating experience, and Steve dresses as she imagines he might have dressed and “sang an old song […] that my father used to sing […] I felt master of myself and my world” (195). She gives him a heritage: “my father’s mother in the 80s married Decimus Lamb [a famous Australian cyclist] and had the Club Hotel in Sale for many years” (37). But there remains an ambiguous side to this sense of discovery about her father, however: she imagines that “he had drugged my wine and taken me home to his wife and presented me as a new member of the family” (125), thereby reprising the changeling motif of White Topee albeit in a different form.

The mother of Steve in “Wild Australia” has also undergone a dramatic reversal: she no longer provides inspiration and a sanctuary as she did early in The Pea Pickers. Mia now makes crazy assertions about Steve’s gender that have no motive or explanation: she says that Steve “should have been a man” (74). Further, she has told Blue that Steve is Oscar Wilde (370). Mia seems to place Steve outside the family by confirming that she had not given birth to this person and that Steve was in fact someone else—a male. “She knows all about the matter; she could tell you about it, if she wanted to” (370), Blue adds mysteriously. This sinister perspective of Mia is reinforced by Steve’s assertion that it was her mother, not her father (as was the case in The Pea Pickers), who beat her so violently
with a rose bush for stealing flowers (88). There is no explanation of this role reversal for Steve’s parents in “Wild Australia.”

Both sisters perceive that their relationship generates a special energy that takes them beyond the ordinary and the mundane. Their mutual excitement when they meet up after two years apart makes this abundantly clear: “how attractive and vital and humorous existence was as soon as we met. Ah but you and I, Blue, we MAKE life on this planet; without us it would be deathly. Are we not gods, Suave Junono? ’ True O Aristophanes; thou has hit the nail on the head’” (185). But the Oscar Wilde business has drawn the naïve Blue into the dysfunctional family story, and this now seems to be the cause of Steve’s ambivalence; ambivalence that is again expressed as valorisation (Blue is a “pure and holy vestal” [229], a “young and beautiful creature” [277]) and repulsion (she is “fat and greasy” [391]). Steve does not disclose to Blue the psychological conundrum that has permeated the relationship and somewhat surprisingly Blue seems to know nothing. Steve deals with the past at the end of the “novel” by making it clear that the sisters must live their lives apart. Blue protests:

“I want to be with you forever. [...] I have never met anyone like you; no one can compare with you. O I don’t want to leave you or let you go. I know you don’t want me, but as for me, I always want you.”

“But think,” I said enticingly, “on the wonder of it all. If you go away alone from me, and have your own individual adventures, when we meet again of what strange incidents and variety of life will you be able to speak of. Our lives together, we know. But our lives apart, we do not know.” (382)
In “The Victorians,” family members are represented more conventionally, but the novel draws attention to the presence—and maintenance—of family secrets and the divisive consequences for the relationships of Mia, Steve and Blue. The novel is set in the Ovens Valley in 1929 and opens with a reminiscence of Mia’s story-telling about the old days in Gippsland. The daughters listen with interest: they are comfortable together and the family situation looks nothing like the fraught dysfunctional tryst that was “Wild Australia.”

The appearance of an Irishman called Patrick Cullen whom Mia married in 1915 reveals that a father figure has been present in the family throughout the period covered in past texts, but never mentioned: he is “a mystery man, somewhat of a relative, and something in the nature of a parent” (92), Steve observes vaguely. He is a man of property with a farm at Neerim North in Gippsland and according to Mia, is “quiet, respectable and unoffending” (97). But the sisters call him “The Head” (92): “Mia was supposed to have married this gentleman at some indeterminate period of her remote past [...] but we flung the episode lightly over our shoulders and disregarded it completely” (93). The sisters unite against him: “Mira, tell the Head to stop chewing. We can’t hear each other” (94). “When he came, I went” (94). Patrick Cullen represents a “dilemma”; he disappears from the narrative without explanation; the second father figure to do so. The brief appearance of another male “family” member—Patrick Cullen—does nothing to dissolve the perception that there are only three of them in the family.
In “The Victorians” Arthur Langley is represented as a more benign, even somewhat romanticized figure: Steve clings to a reminiscence of him visiting Myrtleford in Victoria on his way to New South Wales in 1890 that is recounted by an old-timer to whom she is introduced:

It was such a nice sort of visit, so fraught with the strange passing of the man long ago [...] I longed to stay in that far off morning and sit in the kitchen with him as he drank his tea, for it was a long time before he married Mia, if it was Arthur, and long before I was thought of. (239)

A man who had “mates,” he is associated with the gold-mining districts of New South Wales, where “the heat scorched the creek beds white dry” (189). Steve specifically avoids her childhood and defines him in general terms as a “typical” (238) man of the past. He has not yet met Mia, and is not yet her father, and in this way Steve continues to suppress and avoid information about the relationship between father and daughter.

“The Victorians” places the matter of family secrets firmly on the table, and at the head of that table is Mia. A significant proportion of the “novel” is taken up by Mia’s complicity in an important secret about Blue’s fiancé Keith Wilson, who has taken up with another woman. Steve and Mia both know about Keith’s infidelity, and this alliance between the two women places Blue outside the intimacy of the family that had seemed so united early in the “novel.” There is no obvious reason for this information to be kept secret from Blue, but it does introduce a new perspective on the mother: she is capable of duplicity that has the potential to set one daughter against another; she is also able to maintain important secrets within this small family constellation, where it is hard to imagine that secrets could be kept for long. Steve makes it clear that from her perspective,
Mia is responsible for the maintenance of this secret, which is not disclosed at the conclusion of the “novel.” Blue never knows that her mother and sister were aware of Keith Wilson’s defection.

Blue hadn’t seen Keith for a long time now and she didn’t know why. She had written but he had not replied [...] I thought it was a wonder Mia didn’t tell her the truth, but we were a curiously morbid and dramatic lot, Mia and Blue and I … anyhow I wrote to both with a merry note, giving all the news.

(370)

Steve’s relationship with her sister in “The Victorians” is demonstrably competitive and disingenuous. Steve is actively involved in maintaining the secret about Keith’s proposed marriage to a woman called “Daisy,” soliciting the company of Keith’s friend and her informant, Lee Crosby. Quite early in the “novel” Steve learns about Keith’s new relationship by accident—literally, Crosby comes off his bike near their house (109) and Crosby and Steve decide to keep this “a mystery” (122). Blue and Keith have been childhood sweethearts (369), and from Blue’s perspective the end of the relationship represents an important, life-changing circumstance—a critical moment. Steve’s loyalties lie with her new “friend” Lee Crosby, however. Steve converses at length with Crosby, revealing intimate details about her sister and the relationship with Keith. Steve shows Crosby letters from Blue in which her sister describes her perplexity about Keith’s failure to answer her letters. She also shares with him a malicious poem she has written about Blue (111) and takes him to the pump-house (122), which was a place the sisters visited to reminisce about their romantic youth. (In The Pea Pickers Steve and Blue had visited the pump-house and “made a cup of tea […] and ate, read and talked, secure in our youth” [74].
They revisit this place in “Wild Australia.” The effect of Steve’s behaviour is to further destabilize the sororal relationship. Now the future—rather than the past—seeps into the present, so that Steve anticipates the events of “Bancroft House” when Blue marries and migrates to New Zealand.

“When Blue learns the TRUTH,” we said sadly and sighed and stared into the fire […] “One wonders, what she will do” […] “Fancy him getting engaged behind her back” [said Mia] “Ambidextrous.” “Better than getting himself engaged behind her front, Mira.” “Hard to say what Blue will do now, when she finds out about Keith.” (146-47)

Against the backdrop of this unusual secret domestic coalition, Steve seeks to redefine the sister relationship in terms of conventional sibling discords and rivalries. For example, Blue is far more attractive than Steve, and therefore represents unwanted competition in male company:

Blue was very beautiful and I was so dashed ugly, I thought, and unimportant beside her that I felt quite crushed by her superior charm. The boys all rushed her and all I got out of it was the strong wind running at about 80 miles an hour as they passed me on their way to her side. (15)

Blue has unreasonable expectations of intimacy and is too dependent: “Why must I always be there to care for her and shelter her from the stormy blasts of adversity?” (337). The sisters have different values regarding work, domestic order and money that cause conflict: “she would have me to keep the hut clean and protested against my ways of living as compared to hers, and loved to work, but I didn’t” (338). Blue tries to bully Steve into conformity: I want to be free of interference from you, for you bully me so and dictate to
me. [...] You tell me I must make money and I don’t want money. I don’t even want love. I just want to lie in the hut and drowse and dream (297).

Despite the attempt to represent the family within more normal domestic parameters in “The Victorians” it still looks quite strange and dysfunctional, and remains without a stable history. They are able to keep secrets from each other and outsiders if they decide to, which results in domestic tensions, divided loyalties and deceptions. Steve vacillates over whether she and Blue are better off together or not and concludes yet again that separation is inevitable, but at the conclusion of the “novel” “Blue was unhappy [and] so was I” (392).

“Bancroft House”

“Bancroft House” is a transitional text between the past and the future: the past continues to be concealed, but the present is represented by a clearer narrative. The “novel” remains in the landscape of the family’s past—“Bancroft House” is in Metung where Steve resides, share farming. Blue, however, has broken with the past by moving to New Zealand after marrying an Englishman called “Mr W H,” a member of the pottery-making Wedgwood family. June’s husband has started up an oil business; they live in a hotel and mix with “English society” (190-92). Importantly, Blue has brought Mia, who represents “home,” to New Zealand to live with her and her husband. Both actions appear to have taken Steve by surprise.

With scant reference to Mia and no mention of the father, the parents have been written out of this new stage in the Langley family saga, and the focus in “Bancroft House” is almost exclusively on the sister relationship. Steve’s ability to tell a story is truncated by
the physical absence of sister, however, and she relies on "mini" narratives in letters as an important structural device in the "novel." In The Pea Pickers, the sisters are employed together, but in "Bancroft House" Steve is living in a completely masculine household. Bereft of female company, Steve is fascinated by the men, and yet obsessed by Blue. Transcripts from letters between the sisters, references to letters planned, received, or in the process of being written, queries about letters, the retelling of letters, and the waiting for letters are a repetitive subject, and consume enormous amounts of text. The narrative strategy of incorporating letters has not happened to this degree before and does not happen again to this extent.

Without Blue, Steve becomes increasingly self absorbed. Her thoughts revolve around Blue and the past and she has nothing new to write about: a whole chapter is devoted to her "pen" that she calls "Felicidad" or "happiness" (137).

Australia [...] without you, my literal humming-birds is a joyless land, bereft of the Vee-frawgs and their Priestly trainer, I swear by my beard and my lonely heart that February will see me ... ancora con te! I never allow myself to think. Bereft of everything, of the home that meant so much and was the end, the honeycomb finish to all adventuring, I toil painfully from day’s beginning to its end with a rebellious heart, sick for you and Mia and New Zealand. (199)

Blue is omnipresent in the text through reminiscence, letter writing, and anecdote, fanning the embers of Steve’s ambivalence. Whilst Blue remains “the only thing I really

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cared for in my life” (128), she continues to drag Steve back to the past by writing letters about the Wilde family, sending a portrait of Lady Wilde (128), and telling her husband and his friends all about her sister’s likeness to Lady Wilde’s son Oscar, a likeness first noticed in Forbes in 1912, that remains—according to Blue—to this day (130). Steve notes that the portrait of Lady Wilde “cast a pale dreamy sick sleep over me and I sat … stunned for a long time” (130):

I felt sick, sad and unhealthy and the great profound face of Lady Wilde disappeared into my mind [...] and murmured and boomed there. She oozed into me like a drug, as though determined to render me unconscious [...] for days after; I lay [...] pale in my bed [...] while she [...] looked down on me drugglingly [...] I see a photograph of myself, tall, languid, with that strange look of having my legs broken at the knees, my bobbed looking hair floating about my pale sad face, heavy with sorrow, as I looked up into hers. For aeons she looked down on me, murmuring [...] syllables of unconsciousness, lulling me to sleep, while I turned and twisted in my pale bed. (129)

Steve is involuntarily placed outside the new family constellation, and although devastated and alone—despite the presence of another love interest—she writes her grief in clear, direct and uncomplicated language:

My life became broken from the day I left Metung. My family broke up and left me. My sister, Blue, married an Englishman; a tall, cultured golden haired, golden moustached English Public School Boy; a tall ex-officer of the English army [...] But I feel I don’t want to say much about it, at all. For
the marriage of my sister grieved me, deeply. She and Mr W.H took my
mother away with them from Dandenong, from Australia, and went to reside
in New Zealand. I lost them. They went from me, and I was without home or
family forever in Australia [...] No more, Mira; no more, Blue, shall I come
home to you anymore, to the old home at 53, Walker Street [...] I feel so
lost and desolate that I don’t know what to do. What is going to become of
me, now? I am entirely homeless. Haven’t a roof to turn to, at all. Quite lost.
(75-78)

This situation represents a profound alteration in the balance of power within the
sororal relationship. At the conclusion of the “novel,” Blue is not fixated on Steve, begging
for her love and attention. Blue has seized the initiative and married an interesting,
seemingly wealthy Englishman with good connections, and snatched Mia as well. Now
Steve is sorry that she cannot be Blue’s “slave” (378-79). She imagines that “Macca, Jim
[their mate] and I, Steve” were “like three men” united in their adoration of the “faerie
loveliness of one woman, as beautiful as the sun as full of laughter and enchantment as life
itself” (378). Blue asks Steve to join them in New Zealand, which Steve promises to do if
she will pay for her passage: “Do you really want me to come over and forsake the
imaginary shores? Send an affirmative reply on the back of a bank note, and you shall see
me” (204). Blue does not comply, citing a lack of finances due to the cost of building a new
house and the purchase of a new car. This was not quite the conventional scenario
envisioned for Blue of *The Pea Pickers*, and serves as a reminder of how swiftly and
decisively relationships alter within this family.
Part Two

The New Zealand Fiction

The New Zealand fiction comprises a series of seven unpublished “novels” set in the period 1932-41, following Steve’s migration to join her mother and sister. Both the sisters’ names are now unambiguously feminine: the narrator adopts a new name—Eve—and Blue is told to “haul down the Blue Peter” and return to her original name from *The Pea Pickers*, June. These characters reminisce about an idyllic past called “Primavera” (springtime) in which they had the names “Steve” and “Blue,” but the migration of both to New Zealand signals the termination of their “wandering selves.” There is some overlap: June is sometimes referred to as “Blue” and Eve as “Steve” but I will refer to them as Eve and June. I am reading these unedited chronological “novels” as a single continuous narrative of the New Zealand life, for there is a distinct arbitrariness about their division into separate texts of about four hundred pages. The “novels” will be considered thematically, and referenced through titles: “Land of the Long White Cloud” (1959; LLWC); “Demeter of Dublin Street” (1960; DDS); “Last, Loneliest, Loveliest” (1959; LLL); “The Old Mill” (1959; OM); “Remote Apart” (1962; RA); “Portrait of the Artist” (1965; POA) and “The Saunterer” (1965; TS). Like the Australian fiction, these “novels” are about family: the Langley family, June’s family, and Eve’s family. This section discusses the representation of Arthur Langley and Mia and the sister relationship, and then the representation of the sisters’ marriages and their relationships with their children. The sources are used differently in this section, reflecting the fact that the families of June and Eve have a stable history that spans the New Zealand fiction.
There is a clear demarcation in the fiction between the representation of Eve’s family of origin and the representation of the family that Eve forms in 1937 with a young artist called Hilary Clark. Arthur Langley and Mia recede into the background, but continue to be mired in contradictions, and the sisters’ relationships with husbands and lovers provide a new context for Eve’s extreme expressions of ambivalence towards June. June’s husband and baby vanish without explanation in 1933. The “novel” that chronicles the courtship of Eve and Hilary, “The Old Mill,” is a bridging narrative in the sense that June is still central but the space is shared with another character (and the beginning of a new family) who will take over from her—Hilary. “The Old Mill” has characteristics of the earlier texts, and also anticipates the more clear-cut style and substance of subsequent texts.

In “Last, Loneliest, Loveliest,” “Remote Apart” and “Portrait of the Artist,” Eve’s straightforward narrative of her unhappy marriage to Hilary Clark is devoid of the obfuscation that characterises the representation of her parents and sister. Hilary’s ill temper, for example, is an enduring characteristic: there are no dramatic and unexpected reversals in temperament and action, and he is transparently self-centred. Eve is volatile and not consistent, but the inconsistencies are located in her personality, and are a consequence of her situation. This is quite different to the inconsistencies that are found in, for example, *The Pea Pickers*, where there are three versions of the marriage of Mia without any indication of which is the truth. The Clark family is dysfunctional, but the circumstances are identifiable. There is no uncertainty about the love Eve has for her children, even if her methods of childrearing appear harsh and inappropriate. The stable family history of the Clark family—though tragic—is quite unlike the Langley family history, which is contradictory, and subject to significant revision throughout the fiction.
This is a new approach to the representation of family; one that seeks to make clear the correlation between cause and effect.

The reason (or reasons) underpinning Steve/Eve’s fraught relationship with Arthur Langley are not explained. Nor is it clear why her representation of him remains profoundly contradictory. In the later Australian novels, Eve began the search for a father whose memory in *The Pea Pickers* was like an aberration in her consciousness. In the first of the New Zealand “novels,” “Land of the Long White Cloud,” she expresses a desire to come “face to face with the man himself […] whom I carry about with me as long as I live” (271). Steve’s search arrives only at contradictions. He is a “strange, grim, amused man, this erotic, evil man, this poor, pathetic, failing, broken, striving, kindly man” (LLWC 270). She tries to think of him not in relation to herself, but “as my mother remembers him” (LLWC 271), and Mia remembers him as someone whose ambition had neither “sweetness” nor “humility”; someone whose ambition “fed” upon him (LLWC 270). Men in positions of power remind Steve of Arthur: Harry Tombs, who operated a bookshop in Auckland, looked “curiously like my father, Arthur Langley with short black moustache, a fine head and a splendid suit of clothes” (LLWC 48); and Mr. Webb-Jones, editor with the Wanganui *Herald* was “just like my father, Arthur Langley […] short and with a short grey moustache and an abrupt manner” (LLWC 243). Arthur Langley has been dead now for twenty years and “his dust coldened my blood” (LLWC 271), yet he remains a shadowy figure, it seems, not just for the reader, but for Eve herself. No direct explanation is forthcoming of the traumatic memories that have plagued her in the past. The family history—from the marriage of Mia and Arthur through to the pea picking days—is barely mentioned: his “poison” has been “translated” through Mia into “poetry” (LLWC 270).
This is insufficient as a causal explanation of the impact Arthur Langley had on the narrator’s life. The father’s cross-dressing has been interred in the family vault of secrets, but it has not been made to disappear.

Mia is a peripheral character in these “novels,” but like the third foot in a tripod, her presence is essential: she is the nexus between past and present, and between all the Langley family members. Increasingly erratic in behaviour (POA 187, 281), she wields none of the power that is evident in the unpublished Australian “novels.” The sisters “find Mia, big nosed, small and Jewish looking, crouched low on her bed, stroking the side of her face, reading the paper and secretly laughing and pretending that we were not there” (POA 281). And despite her role as family historian and storyteller she surrenders no coherent narrative of the family’s past leading up to the events described in The Pea Pickers. Nor is there any resolution to the strange gender equivocations, the Oscar Wilde tale, and the placing of Steve outside the family with stories of adoption. The relationships between Mia, Eve and June continue to fluctuate. Eve hovers about Mia while June works outside the home to support herself and her mother (DDS 167). When June returns home at night Eve feels “left out”: “She and Mia were one” (LLWC 19), and yet when Eve says to her mother: “I know you are not very happy […] with Blue and Jon and Lido” (LLWC 142), Mia seems to agree. Mundane domestic situations where Eve and Mia “drank tea and talked as only mother and daughter can talk together” (OM 337) contrast with perplexing sexual nuances that are insinuated in the mother-daughter relationship. Eve imagines arriving at her mother’s house with a moustache (LLWC 3) and greeting her as a suitor (LLWC 36). Eve “loved her as only Sappho could love her mother” (OM 379). Mia in turn, taunts Eve, saying that “I [Eve] had the organs of a man” (LLWC 155). Both Arthur Langley and Mia
are represented in an odd, ambiguous tone; I never feel I know either parent, or the true nature of the relationship between the parents and their children. The parents hover in the middle distance and background while Eve and June act out the family drama in the foreground.

The relationship between the narrator and her sister is contiguous regardless of whether they are together or apart. They are constantly on the move, and writing to each other. Sometimes they live in the same house, sometimes they live next door to each other then ricochet apart to take up residence in opposing directions. Together they monopolise each other: June is Eve’s “wild romantic mate” (DDS 61) and they wander “hand in hand” (LLWC 96). When they are apart, they write and relay their thoughts and feelings to “preserve our voices for each other to hear” (LLWC 275). Eve is husband J. M Murray, and June is his wife, Katherine Mansfield (DDS 188, 298). June “haunts me stupid so that I shall never feel comfortable and content until I take [her] by the hand” (LLWC 320).

In the New Zealand “novels,” Eve’s relationship with her sister replicates what has gone before: the template of ambivalence expressed as extremes of valorisation and repulsion. The sisters are represented as potential lovers: “We lay close together with bright crimson loin cloths binding out slim hips, our yellow hips, our hot hips, and touched each other with groping hands” (DDS 21-22). June’s body is an object of lust and loathing. She is alternately “Madonna (DDS 398) and “bearded Pharisee” (LLWC 90). Hers is a “smooth lovely face” (OM 332) and a “dark mature face which has a sort of dwarfed ugliness in it” (LLL 198). June’s hair is alternately beautiful and disgusting, in need of a good wash: first “swirling and fanning softly about her face” (LLWC 90) then “dry on top, but oily where it splits into curls” (RA 94). She runs like a goat, has “pale, grotesquely bowed legs” (LLWC
24) and loins, and a “round velvet posterior” (LLWC 85). Blue and yellow combine to make green, an “odious” colour observes Steve (OM 46). It is the colour of Hilary’s studio, and Mia’s wedding dress, and the colour of her father’s droving blanket which the sisters bed down under each night. Green is also the colour of the skirt the father wears in White Topee. It is a colour that leaves Eve feeling “melancholy” (OM 38). In The Pea Pickers Blue’s yellow hands are everywhere, and in New Zealand she has “marigold loveliness” (LLWC 42), and most of her clothes it seems are yellow: “There’s June standing in the yellow overall … with a yellow brooch […] folded arms across the yellow breast” (LLL 198); she has dyed her hair “blonde, for no reason at all and it was pale gold” (DDD 365); the “cold sad flat at City Road [was] full of June’s gay red and lion yellow frocks” (OM 86); she is “all handsome and glittering in lemon overall” (LLL 300); June meets her friends Harry Brennan and Barry Burns at the laundry where they press her “striped brown and gold and yellow” suits (they laughingly refer to her as “grazia” because she insists on thanking them in Italian OM [124-25]); her face is like a “buttery” Buddhist sculpture (LLWC 61); she has “the most wonderful sweater of mingled yellow, red, blue, green and orange” (OM 36); she has “yellow crosses” on her bonnet (RA 29); she lies on her husband David’s knee like a “big bottomed buttercup” (POA 98); she goes to work in her “yellow and daffodil uniforms” (OM 48); she is a “gilt Madonna” (LLWC 61). She even brings Eve yellow food, a “frail yellow omelette” (LLL 67). The mix of “Blue” and yellow expresses in a new, original format the ambivalence that was defined so starkly in The Pea Pickers. How can Eve unequivocally love a sister who embodies a past she wishes to forget?

June’s relationships (her “various inamorata” [OM 232]) are also observed with a watchful, ambivalent eye by Eve. June’s husband John comes home “just as we are going
to sleep” (LLWC 13); it was “very odd and strange to see any man enter her room” (LLWC 38). Eve encourages June to leave him. “I should have respected their marriage more and tried more strongly to keep their home together,” Eve observes retrospectively (POA 125). June’s behaviour in the company of men leaves Eve feeling alternately “happy […] content,” “fearing for my flesh and soul” (RA 94), or subsumed by the “fundamental futility and ludicrousness that follows June when she is admired by anyone” (RA 93). She picks over, cuts up (OM 329) and wears June’s clothing; she “tore out good suits of Victor’s” in “ecstasy” (OM 343) and wore them too. She borrows a dress that June has “dressed exotically in” for a boyfriend (or is that “erotically”? The key stumbles over the “x” so that “r” and “x” intermingle) (OM 47, 273). In “The Old Mill”—which relates the story of Eve and Hilary’s courtship—June does not speak at all, but her clothes are draped about the text like her messy bedroom. Her sweater is the catalyst for Hilary’s interest in the sisters: “She was the loveliest creature we had ever seen in that absolutely beautiful striped sweater of hers” (OM 37), and he is still thinking about it (and her) at the conclusion of the “novel”: it was “rainbow like fitting her firmly” (OM 393). There is tension between Hilary and Eve over June (who sleeps in Hilary’s bed), and Eve sides with her sister (RA 159, 375). Boundaries between the sisters and Eve’s husband Hilary are breached in ambiguous ways: “Hilary came down through the grass as we lay naked […] I gently kept covering June’s body as she exposed it with careless movements (RA 180). June meets Cameron Galbraith (RA 116) and her next husband “David” at about the same time: “Do I detest him?” (POA 115) Eve wonders.

The sister relationship continues to be a subject of intense interest for Eve, but the source of her extreme ambivalence is not linked with the father in the New Zealand novels,
as it was in *The Pea Pickers*, except rather tenuously through the green motif, and no alternative rationale is provided. Their relationship at all times is strange and complicated and contradictory.

Eve decides to join her family in New Zealand in February 1932 because she is out of work and out of money. She arrives just in time to see June depart for the maternity hospital, where a daughter is born whom Eve is asked to name. She suggests Lido Capenera. June wishes to cast off her responsibilities and wander with her sister. “Steve ... that we two could wander! But you’ve got a rivet in your neck, too” (DDS 275). Eve, meanwhile, is contradictory in her edicts to June: she alternately incites her to abandon the baby and instructs her to stay. “‘Leave him, chuck the baby to the tender Tiber and think Art ... Art ... Art’” (LLWC 43). It emerges in a later “novel” that both the baby and the husband “disappear.” This secret, like the “adoption” of Steve, the behaviour of the father, and the disappearance of the step-father, is an important family matter that is never revealed.

June’s husband John has an air of normalcy about him; the only husband in Eve’s fiction who does so and the relationship between husband and wife has verisimilitude. He spends a lot of time at work and provides for all members of the family, supporting June, Mia, Eve and Lido. He even takes his turn at the “midnight hour” looking after Lido. However he is a subject of ridicule for Eve, who mocks his conversation, his manner of speaking, and his appearance: he is “huge, elephantine in his blue dressing gown and striped pyjamas damnably tight legged [...] checked boot slippers that are only fit for a giant frog” (LLWC 37). Eve seems jealous and irritated by his intimacy with June. June’s husband is perceived by Eve as a rival. It was, Eve noted as though “someone big and
bulking […] came and took possession of your house” (LLWC 136). He is a “trespasser” (LLWC 38) in her sister’s bedroom, and she feels excluded from their discussions. “They’ve a stack of things to say to each other. About business, us, the baby, their future […] You feel you’re not wanted. They’ve become an indivisible one that you want to separate and you know you mustn’t” (LLWC 136).

The conflicting energy that consumes Eve when confronted by her sister is transferred to the new baby. Lido, like Eve’s father, has no personality or stable identity. The birth of June’s daughter arouses strong emotions in Eve that are expressed in strange comments, and fantasies in which she imagines herself harming the infant. The child itself seems very small and vulnerable; she would be almost invisible if she were not such an inconvenience. Eve seeks to place Lido outside the family. She refers to the child as “IT”; her voice is “Galah-like” (LLWC 35) and she has a Maori “smell.” Lido is “underfoot” when the sisters try and dance together (DDS 397). Eve says to June: “She’s not what you might call one of the family … is she?” (DDS 28). Lido inspires in Eve strange fantasies that are reminiscent of earlier experiences of hallucinatory thought and dissociation. She feels “cruel” and “passionless and savage” at the thought of “the birth of a daughter to June […] I saw the yellow Yangtze and the millions of girl babies floating down it” (LLWC 16). She describes homicidal fantasies in which the shadow of Lido’s “monstrous” round skull “with hair curling off it like thin strips of string bark” is “coagulated blood” on a red shed door (LLWC 94). She wants to “run needles through its eyes, dash it on the ground and hear the thin crack of its skull.” What would “gush” out, she wonders: water, blood, brains. The “devilish sinews” in her arms threaten to “relax and let her fall” to satisfy this “scratching desire” to know (LLWC 35). She has become a “fantastic fiend thing” (LLWC
35) like the creature described in “Wild Australia,” approaching the baby in the guise of a male, “‘I am wild to see the baby [...] come to Uncle now,’ strokes whiskers ponderously and looks down into child’s face and back again at the mother’s” (DDS 345, emphasis added). These episodes of extreme revulsion and violence—like others that have preceded them—have no rationale or explanation, and are not evident in Eve’s representations of her own children.

June as a mother is a “silent” visitor to her child’s room (LLWC 189). She feeds the baby “milk” from the swill of her own porridge, cooked in “a syrup tin” (LLWC 187). The baby is “sickly faced” (LLWC 77) and “sallow” (LLWC 93); June calls her a “swine” (LLWC 24). “I could hear her at the midnight hour, swearing at the crying infant with brutal hands crushing its wailing cries into the pillow” (LLWC 24). June fantasises about escaping the “dullness” of her hated married life so that “we two could wander” (“DDS 275), and Eve advises her to “be silent and make a break away when all’s ready” (DDS 2). June imagines escaping from both her mother (LLWC 170) and her marriage, “swearing in misery at what to her was her low poverty stained circumstances” (LLWC 137) and abandoning her child (DDS 387): “I am free ... but for the blasted baby” (LLWC 113). Then John and Lido “vanish.” Eve pondered whether “I should have respected their marriage more” (POA 125), but offers no clues as to their fate.

With the disappearance of John and Lido, the three women are once again the “family” (OM 180). Over the next few years, Eve’s involvement in June’s love-life ensures that the dynamics of the sister relationship remain a crucial part of the narrative until Eve begins writing her novel The Pea Pickers, by which time she is married with a baby and a toddler. June’s boyfriends include Victor Schuter, the “singing boyfriend” (OM 71) who
makes Eve feel “out of it [...] Victor didn’t like me” (OM 80). A sailor June calls Don Juan “asked me if I thought June loved him [...] I responded [...] that she did [but] June’s love sounded false [...] when she told me” (OM 232). There is a “loathsome” (RA 108) episode with Frank Cooper, and an ongoing flirtation with Hilary (RA 308). Cameron Galbraith (RA 116), and then David—whom Blue marries (POA 187)—appear at about the same time, in 1940. June is “not satisfied” with her second marriage (POA 282). Just at the point when June’s presence might have offered a purposeful and practical focus for the sister relationship, she disappears, and the difficulties of trying to both write and rear offspring overtake Eve.

There is no mystery about what has transpired in the Clark household, for their story is told in a straightforward manner with an appearance of full disclosure. The relationship between Hilary and Eve is problematic and untenable from the start. Neither parent has the energy or the resources to sustain one another or their very young children. Eve’s desire for a nuclear family in which both parents find creative satisfaction is not realised, despite the success of her prize-winning manuscript The Pea Pickers; it seems inevitable that Hilary will leave, and Eve—like Mia—will raise children on her own. The family is still together when the “novels” come to an abrupt end, but there is another baby on the way, and nothing has changed in the relationship between Hilary and Eve to give rise to a sense of optimism about their future together. Neither is there any indication that Eve will abandon or be forced to abandon her children. The issues surrounding family oscillate at the conclusion of the New Zealand fiction, but in common with The Pea Pickers and “Wild Australia,” there are strong, positive statements about Eve’s evolving sense of identity. She releases herself from the magnetic energy exerted upon her by Hilary, and envisages a life without him.
Hilary is misogynistic and intolerant during the courtship that is described in “The Old Mill,” and an unwilling, sometimes violent partner and father in the subsequent “novels.” When the couple first become lovers “we quarrelled a lot … he resented every moment that took him away from his art […] he imagined me to be a terrible being and as such ought to be terribly treated” (OM 88). In “Last Loneliest Loveliest,” “Portrait of the Artist” and “Remote Apart,” the relationship between the couple does not deteriorate; rather it fails to improve. “I would rather have the sluts off the street than you” says Hilary to Eve during the initial courtship (OM 168); several years later he is reiterating the same sentiments: “he pulled down […] cobwebs […] ‘this is you […] you are nothing’” (RA 5), so that Eve wishes to set him free “and make him happy” (RA 365). At the conclusion of “Portrait of an Artist” Eve is “tired, unhappy, distraught, pregnant. […] He’s knocked me once under the table and Langley [their toddler son] rushed toward me with a helpless fluttering cry. He pushed me out of the house, with my arm up my back; that was the night I went up for the police … He’s taken some of the money I was keeping for the house” (POA 356); “each day was made the end of our marriage by his intention to get rid of me and those children. He swore they were not his” (POA 398). Hilary’s behaviour remains constant, and his motivations clear: he does not wish to be a husband to Eve, or a father to her children. Eve does not answer the questions that arise from her pursuit of a man so clearly uninterested in her.

As a father, Hilary’s relationship with his children is disquieting. He calls Bisi his “Darling” or his “Bitch” (LLL 21), and Eve thinks he might be jealous of “the first born son” (LLL 391). He beats the toddler with a rake (POA 361) and a music case: Langley has to “lie down on the floor, while he was punished” (POA 328); it results in “a nasty
accidental cut on one hip” (POA 329). Structures are built in the yard to keep the children quiet while Eve and Hilary work. When Bisi is two they build a shelter in the grass, “solid square, small and strong,” so that “in the morning I can put her there” (LLL 274A); and at night, as well: “looking out [I] saw her shed, looking so flat, grey and secret at dawn” (LLL 234); later “the children have their own shed with playpen attached” (RA 151). This is an unusual solution to the dilemma of working parents, but one that Eve makes no secret of.

More perplexing is her agreement—at Hilary’s insistence—to leave the children alone while she and Hilary spend the day in town (LLL 216, 313). The response of the children is predictable. At the conclusion of one such trip “Bisi lay asleep untidily in her cot, while Langley, sitting in his rocking horse, lolled, lonely and abandoned looking. On seeing me he cried in a trembling voice “marma-aah” […] Langley’s clothes were all soiled” (POA 142). Eve blames Hilary: “Hilary insisted that we leave those poor children behind. No one would believe that he just resolutely refused time and again to take those children out with us into the city. And I loved them so and was so proud of them” (POA 142). The sad little voices of Bisi and Langley reveal the absences—emotional and physical—that characterise their lives. Bisi mimics her mother: ‘Poor ta-ta Bis … all alone,’ she cried” as Hilary tried to restrain her in a pen (POA 130); “Mumma Bisi … Mumma Bisi, dear?” (POA 180); and Langley (aged one and a half) lying in bed, crying out “hoarsely” “Mumma … Hullo … hullo” (POA 190). Eve observes that

every now and again we discuss putting Bisi in some home or other. She’s inoffensive and good, but she’s a child […] with Bisi, who focuses on me, the mother, we have to make a strong stand, for it is the policy of the child to
break the parent down to its own infantile state [...] we have elaborate
methods of keeping [her] out of sight. (LLL 305)

Eve’s life revolves completely around the children, and is unrelentingly difficult. In
these circumstances, motherhood represents both ecstasy and torment: Bisi is her “beautiful
burden” (LLL 98); at the birth of Langley “I lay in bed happy beyond all happiness” (LLL
389), but she also “hates children” and “everything pertaining to them” (LLL 305). She has
very little control over her life as she has no money. In the early years of their marriage,
Hilary visits only on weekends (LLL 114), and fails to provide appropriate housing or
sustenance for his dependents. The purchase of a deceased estate in May 1940 places the
family under enormous financial pressure (POA 49-50), but for the first time Hilary
actually lives with the family. Until then, he had had a separate life, often in the company
of his homosexual friend Franze, on whom he lavished money: “‘You are good to some,
Hilary,’ I said” (LLL 232). Eve meanwhile is starving, living on meat bought for a friend’s
dog, while breast feeding (LLL 39, 316). Later, she and the children live for days on rice
(LL 316); the children “half naked and purple with cold sat crying in their beds” (RA
390), and the electricity is disconnected (POA 190-91, 227). Eve says they were “broken
and poor yet young and happy enough” (LLL 115), but this is a judgment for which there is
no evidence. Nevertheless, Eve maintains a desire for a nuclear family in spite of Hilary’s
lack of interest, the questions over his sexuality (LLL 100), and the obvious lack of
nurturing for his children: she stubbornly refuses to give up. “Portrait of an Artist”
concludes with uncertainty. Eve is reconciled to the fact that her husband does not love her,
but the fact remains that they are the parents of two (soon to be three) children. She says to
June:
I am changing towards Hilary. I find this time, that he has gone, and I am not lonely. I don’t care. Why is that? Is it a stage in my development? I am not venomous, I feel no anger, at first, yes, I was hurt, but now that is gone. I want to free him and make him happy too. (RA 365)

While there is a notable absence of information about the childhood of Steve and Blue and their parents, the same cannot be said for the relationship between Hilary and Eve Clark and the parenting of their children.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of the fiction through the lens of family, I have explored Eve’s representations of strange parents, a sister with whom she was emotionally entangled, a cruelly manipulative husband, and children who she clearly loved and yet at times seriously neglected. Approaching the fiction as a “detective” with no preconceptions about who each of the characters “were” in real life, led to connections and observations that were not contaminated by assumed knowledge of the past.

Eve’s representation of her family is characterised by contradiction and ambiguity, and the effect of this is to enshroud her parents and the sister relationship in mystery. In my reading of the fiction, this strategy of contradiction and ambiguity provides textual evidence of the existence of family secrets (I return to why this strategy was so crucial in my final, speculative chapter). I needed to be a sleuth to successfully track and make sense of Eve’s representation of the family that shaped her life. Despite Eve’s prolixity about her sister and to a lesser extent their parents, their representation is so cloaked in equivocations
and so far outside the borders of normal family life that, initially, it was difficult to know what to do with it. All members of the immediate family are subject to extreme fluctuations in identity. The father is "erotic and evil, striving and kindly" ("Land of the Long White Cloud" 270); he is quintessentially masculine, but wears a skirt. The two sisters dress both as men and women, and their relations with each other vacillate between lust and loathing. Their mother is alternately matey and maternal, powerful and frail. These contradictions do not make sense in isolation, but when linked in a continuous narrative about family, a secret emerges: the father is a cross-dresser. I argue in my reading of the fiction that the imperative to conceal family secrets distinguishes Eve's representation of the Langley family from that of the Clark family.

Eve's representation of the family that she established with Hilary Clark in New Zealand in 1937 is more straightforward. Characters and relationships have a stable identity, and the representation of this—albeit dysfunctional—family demonstrates a precise correlation between cause and effect. The fact that Eve and Hilary are ill-suited and miserable and incapable of supporting a family results in depression, starvation and abuse. Eve plays a central role in her children's lives, but experiences the ambivalence that inevitably arises when the life of a creative woman is subsumed by the demands of motherhood. She deals with this conflict in an unusual way, but no secret is made of her solution. Eve seems determined to write this family out of the code of secrecy that characterized the Langley family.

In The Pea Pickers the family has emerged from a landscape in New South Wales that is quintessentially turn-of-the-century Australian: bush and harsh plains, lonely women and children and men toughened by isolation and hardship. The father of Steve is an un-
named drover who, with gun, horse and dog exemplifies the hard, silent masculine archetype wandering the outback. Even the mother first appears as a “whiskery” incarnation of a bushman. That the sisters choose to wander as itinerant farm workers and seek out an Australian bush experience seems a natural progression. Indeed the family itself appeared to me as a landscape: the father in the background, the mother in the middle ground, and the sisters in the foreground. It was only when I focussed in on each member of the family in an effort to construct a family portrait through close analysis of the text of *The Pea Pickers* that the problematic nature of the interactions between Steve and her family became apparent. Analysis of the remaining texts convinced me that the family of Steve and Blue is a family of contradictions. My sleuthing skills, honed by the challenges intrinsic to the biographical chapter of the dissertation, were also required in the fiction to successfully track these contradictions and make sense of the clues that pointed to a multitude of family secrets, some significant, others less so. All but one significant secret remained hidden, and this secret (typical of most family secrets) is associated with the body and sex and illness. Steve’s secret is the astonishing revelation about the father: contradicting his obviously masculine representation in *The Pea Pickers*, he is imaged in *White Topee* as a cross-dresser.

Initially, it was Steve’s representation of her sister, June/Blue, in *The Pea Pickers* that made me curious about the family in which they grew up. The representation was so bizarre I was amazed that no one had raised the obvious question: under what circumstances do sisters “exhibit” alloeroticism? In no work of fiction anywhere could I find another example of an author who had named and explicitly written about a real life sister in erotic terms for a public audience. Incest literature does not deal with lesbian
incest; the literature on sisters mentioned but did not analyse the mutual attraction between sisters, and the psychiatric literature search threw up just one example, involving multigenerational incest (Fortenberry and Hill). This aspect of the representation of Blue in *The Pea Pickers* and subsequent texts therefore seemed to break new ground in terms of the representation of family in fiction. However, there was also a contradictory side to this sister relationship. In addition to her representation as an object of lust for the narrator of *The Pea Pickers*, Blue is also represented as physically repulsive. An explanation for Steve’s extreme ambivalence towards her sister is put forward in *The Pea Pickers*: Blue looked just like their father. The father of Steve in *The Pea Pickers* is clearly a subject of intrigue. His role in the narrator’s childhood was explicitly negative—she sought unsuccessfully to suppress his image—but in what way he had influenced his daughter was not clear until *White Topee* appeared more than a decade later. In this novel, the father appears in a tale as a “Princess” in a green skirt.

In the sequel, “Wild Australia” (which was rejected by her publisher in part because of the evidence of gender equivocation), Steve refers to a “wild thing” that roamed the streets of London in crinolines demanding an answer to the question: “Am I a man?” Steve pondered surgery turning men into women, and indicated that she had two mothers that were now dead: the family secret could therefore be revealed—a tantalizing promise that she reneges on. “Wild Australia” caused a significant breach in the relationship Eve had with her publisher, and she determined to be more circumspect in subsequent texts. There are no more direct references to gender reassignment in relation to men, nor does Steve become any more specific in relation to her father. Indeed in the first major reversal in the representation of family, the father (previously unnamed) becomes her “Dad,” Arthur
Langley, in "Wild Australia." Subsequent texts represent him as a masculine figure in the 
Lawson tradition, but as a parent he is unknown and unknowable, awash with 
contradictions: he is at once an "erotic, evil man" and a "striving kindly man" ("LLWC" 
270). Steve desires to confront her father, to meet him "face to face" but must submit to the 
knowledge that she will never know him.

The character Mia also undergoes significant alteration. In The Pea Pickers she is 
the subject of multiple irreconcilable stories relating to her past. In addition, she is 
represented first as a physically and psychologically robust individual encouraging her 
daughters to "wander," then as a frail insubstantial creature, and finally as a warning voice 
against the perils of adventure. In White Topee she appears in a tale briefly as Mrs Wilde, 
Oscar Wilde’s mother, next to the father in a buggy in the bush in “Minildra” near Forbes 
in New South Wales. In subsequent texts she is a more sinister figure, insisting that Steve 
has arrived in the family as Oscar Wilde, and "should have been a man." Mia seems to be 
the keeper of family secrets. In The Pea Pickers, this secret relates to the dressing of the 
sisters as both boys and girls. In “The Victorians” Mia and Steve keep from Blue an 
important secret about her boyfriend, and Blue never suspects the collusion. Mia is not 
forthcoming with information about Arthur Langley, nor the family’s history: her 
storytelling is restricted to her premarital past.

The representation of both parents of Steve and Blue undergoes profound revision 
in the course of the texts: there is no stable representation of the parents, and no coherent 
family history leading up to the experiences that are described in The Pea Pickers, when the 
sisters are eighteen and nineteen years of age. The proposition that the father is a cross-
dresser vanishes after “Wild Australia,” although the association between Mia and Mrs
Wilde continues to reverberate in Steve’s consciousness, reprising the past as a place and a time of trauma and “black oblivion.” The extreme ambivalence towards Blue and June continues, however.

The relationship between Steve and Blue remains an obsessive preoccupation in eight of the ten published and unpublished texts, regardless of whether the sisters are living intimately together or far apart, separated by mountain ranges and oceans. Steve and Blue are reinvented as “new” characters called Eve and June in the “novels” that are written about their time in New Zealand, and their relationship is foregrounded until “Portrait of an Artist,” which, along with “Remote Apart,” describes Eve’s tortuous marriage to Hilary Clark and the birth of her children Bisi and Langley. These last two “novels” are markedly different to the fiction that describes Eve’s family of origin: the representation of Arthur Langley and Mia, and Blue is notable for its obfuscation and mystery, the narrative of June’s family and the Clark family is written in a most straightforward manner.

The importance of secrecy in relation to Steve’s own parents and sister is not diminished so that at the conclusion of the fiction many matters remain unresolved. There is no explanation for the disappearance of Mia’s second husband Patrick Cullen, or June’s husband “John” and her baby Lido Capenera. Arthur Langley’s secret is whispered just once, and is easy to miss; but perhaps it was obvious from the start, if only one knew what to look for. Steve Hart—the bushranger from Ned Kelly’s gang after whom the character Steve is named—habitually dressed as a woman. What is not so easily avoided is the conundrum that surrounds the behaviour of the sisters who dress as boys, girls, men and women and a combination of extreme masculinity and femininity that is confusing and suspiciously contradictory: this hybrid presentation defies any label. Blue seems to be
corralled by Steve into adopting masculine attire in *The Pea Pickers*, but actually, it is she who has already "fled" the attentions of female admirers who threatened her "manhood." In *The Pea Pickers*, the only explanation offered by Steve for their cross-dressing is that their mother and an unspecified "sister" dressed them this way. That the Langley family comprises two female figures in addition to Steve and June is actually made clear from the outset. The presence of a cross-dressing father adds a bizarre twist to the Langley family saga, but it does help explain why the representation of family is so veiled in mystery.
June Langley's Representation of Family

June Langley was the younger sister of a woman who, in their middle age, suddenly became very famous, having written a novel about the shared experiences of their youth. June, by her own assessment, lacked both talent and opportunity to be famous herself, but as one of "the pea pickers," she achieved a place in Australian literature as the beautiful Blue, the ideal feminine anima of the "masculine" Steve (Walton 228). She was integral to the professional success of her sister, operating as muse, subject and audience for Eve's writing. Contemporary reviewers referred to Blue as "an adorable abstraction" (Davison 2); the other half of the vibrant intellectual Steve who was "one woman [split] into two" (Lindsay 2). Douglas Stewart, who knew Eve and June and was the editor of the Bulletin Red Page that published both reviews, did not identify June as Eve's sister in his 1948 essay "A Letter to Shakespeare." This relegation to anonymous "other half" changed in 1950 when Eve's editor made a precise connection between Blue and June, so that to her June was the character "Blue," and this is how Beatrice Davis addressed her in their correspondence, much to June's delight. Later critics and reviewers did not probe the authenticity or ethical issues implicit in the representation of Eve's sister as a character in the fiction. However, questions were raised about the status of the sororal relationship that arose from readings of the fiction—whether Eve and June were lesbian lovers (Colwill 213), "more than best mates," as Joy Thwaite delicately put it; defacto conjugal partners where "only gender prevented the relationship functioning as a marriage" (Thwaite 57). Joanne Winning referred to a "lesbian subtext" (303) as a dominant theme in the fiction. Despite the speculation surrounding the Eve/June relationship, the character Blue has
continued to be represented in critical work as the abstracted “other,” the positive role
model Steve was seeking and would have recognised had she been “healthier” (Arkin 114).

No one mattered more in June’s life than Eve. Her husbands vanished from sight,
her daughter mysteriously disappeared, and through it all, her intense and conflicted
relationship to her sister survived. This chapter probes the circumstances surrounding June
Langley’s interviews and letters, and the impact of June’s commentary on her sister’s life
and professional career. The central questions are: who was June Langley, what was
contained in her public statements about her sister, Eve, and what lay behind her often
confusing observations and anecdotes about herself and her family? As a detective I was
suspicious of the duplicity that was apparent in June’s denial of a central fact of her life: the
birth of a daughter in the early 1930s. What kind of a witness was she to her sister’s life?
This chapter seeks to separate the facts from the “fiction” in June’s statements.

When June produced a biographical statement about her sister for Angus &
Robertson in 1950, she did not appear to share her sister’s reticence about divulging the
past, so that readers of that statement and subsequent correspondence were left with the
impression that they knew a lot more about the Langley sisters, and Eve in particular, than
was actually the case. June’s statements about herself and Eve—read in tandem with Eve’s
“autobiographical” novels—seemed to encapsulate the sisters’ lives, and these formed the
essential core of Joy Thwaite’s biography *The Importance of Being Eve Langley* (444), and
underpinned all subsequent critical work.
In 1942, almost nothing was known in Australia amongst the literary coterie about Eve Langley. This “mature woman,” as Miles Franklin described her, was a first-time novelist, an unknown who had arrived from nowhere to scoop the prestigious S.H. Prior Prize of 1940 (and a publishing deal with Angus & Robertson), in the company of established author Kylie Tennant and Sydney journalist Malcolm Ellis. But so quickly after the publication of The Pea Pickers did Eve “disappear” that there was no opportunity throughout the 1940s to satisfy the curiosity of her readers as to who the author was. Mary Gilmore wondered if Eve Langley “was a pseudonym for Miles Franklin—or even a combination of Miles Franklin and Mary Fullerton.” Over time it became clear that Eve had no intention of ever establishing a precise demarcation between author and narrator: “I am unknown to you; you are unknown to me, and between those two points lies literature” (POA 260). In the decade following Eve’s incarceration in Carrington Hospital, June’s role in her sister’s life expanded from fictional subject to biographer—and autobiographer. For the first time, June had an opportunity to “write back,” a task she took to with alacrity.

As a literary “detective” sifting through the evidence, I wanted to know whether June knew about the secret (or secrets) shared by Eve and Mia, what secrets she may have harboured of her own, and what kind of a witness she was to her sister’s life. In the discovery process, I became aware of her penchant for secrecy, omission and denial in

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321 Stella Miles Franklin. Letter to Katharine Susannah Prichard. June 1942. (Ferrier 85)

322 “Of particular importance for novelists was the Bulletin prize run by its editor S. H. Prior 1928-29, and resumed from 1935-46 as a commemorative award in his name. Even more attractive than its monetary value (one hundred pounds) was the likelihood of subsequent publication” (Bennett and Strauss 116).

323 Mary Gilmore. Letter to Stella Miles Franklin. 26 Apr. 1942 (Wilde and Moore 179-80). Mary Gilmore wrote that she “felt Stella Miles Franklin’s mind all through it.”
relation to the past. The evidence itself is haphazard: a strange sequence of personal letters
from a woman to her sister’s publisher; a film made by the daughter of one of her sister’s
best friends; interviews with her sister’s biographers, and June’s archives which the
Mitchell Library would not have been interested in except for her sister. June was
inextricably entwined with her sister—and indeed trapped by her.

The relationship between Eve and June Langley was so particularised by their
circumstances and the records they left behind, that the literature on sibling relations and
the sister relationship were useful only in the broadest sense. However, numerous books
and articles informed my understanding of sibling relations in general (including Adams,
Kiell, Cicarelli, Bank and Kahn, Arnstein, Milgram) and the sister relationship in particular
(including Atkins, Downing, Fishel, McNaron, Orlano, Millman, O’Keefe, Ward and Mink,
Whitton, Orlano, Rueschmann, Gwathmey, Levin, Modjeska).

The variety of variables and an absence of “control” groups act as a barrier to
research (Fishel 277, McNaron 3), resulting in an “absence of a systematic psychoanalytic
or feminist theory of sisterhood,” (Reuschmann 244-45). Qualitative research involving
interviews, questionnaires and anecdotes (Fishel, Gwathmey, McNaron); critical essays
focusing on representations of sisterhood in the arts, particularly film and literature
(Reuschmann, Fishel 9), and commissioned literary essays on the topic of sisterhood
(Modjeska), frequently collapse into anecdote.

Sibling research indicates that the relationships between sisters are usually quite
different to those of brothers, and the relationship between siblings of opposite gender.
There are commonalities shared across many sister relationships, such as rivalry, and the
modeling effect of older sisters on their younger counterparts, but the ways in which these
are manifest are usually unique to each bond, and depend on such variables as parenting
and life experiences, for example. Older sisters are observed to be very important models in
the development of identity generally and sexual identity in particular, of their younger
sisters and play an important role in mentoring their interaction and friendship forming
habits with other females (Fishel 17). Studies suggest that the mutual influence sisters have
on each other usually spans a lifetime—even if one dies, or they are separated
geoographically (Adams 32). Fishel’s research indicates a “general improvement,
mellowing, easing of tension between sisters that comes with age and time” (78). Tension is
an underlying theme in writing about the sister relationship. When Drusilla Modjeska
compiled a book about sisters, she asked that her writers consider “the vexed relationship
between sisters” (ix, emphasis added). Modjeska does not explain her selection of the word
“vexed,” with its connotations of conflict and subversion, implying an inherent underlying
level of difficulty in the relationship itself. Toni McNaron writes of “the tangle of
sisterhood” (3), again emphasising the often intense and fraught nature of the sister
relationship. On this matter there is general agreement.

This chapter on June is divided into sections that reflect the various modes of
representation available to her: letters to her family (1925); letters to Beatrice Davis (1950-
52); the film entitled She’s My Sister (1975); interviews with Helen Hasthorpe and Joy
Thwaite (1979-1981). Each section posed specific methodological challenges, and these
will be described progressively. In these various texts I am looking for June’s
representation of family—the Langley family and the Holmes and Clark families. Most
particularly, I am interested in the sister relationship, because June was the primary source
for much of Eve’s biography.
June’s letters to her family (1925)

June’s voice is the first to be heard in the dialogue among the three women and it is notable for her preoccupation with masculine/feminine divides, her representation of herself as male itinerant farm worker (like her father), and the peculiarities of her epistolatory style, which is similar to that of Eve in her fiction. The content and methodological challenges of June’s 1925 letters that describe her foray into the Goulburn countryside dressed as a boy have been described in some detail in the first section of the dissertation. Of particular interest in this section is the manner in which June, at the age of twenty, represents herself as head of the Langley family in the earliest contemporary documents, adopting the role of the absent father. She describes in detail the strenuous work that was expected of her and which she performed: cutting and carting wood; harnessing and hitching the horse to the dray; rising at four in the morning to stook and cart hay, then milking the cows. “My feet are blistered and sore with tramping the hay down and all my clothes were covered like a hedgehog’s coat.” June represents herself as an entertainer at the farmhouse, a violinist, and raconteur, in a way that recalls Eve’s descriptions of their father in “The Victorians.” The image is reinforced by the presence of two little girls (much like the Langley sisters perhaps), who complete the small idealized domestic unit of parents and children singing and playing together in the evening. Mia (or Madame, as June sometimes called her) and Darce (Eve) are two “lads,” or “boys,” waiting at home for news from the wanderer, who imagines herself “true, brave and

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unforgettable in your heart.” Mia is described as “little” and helpless. Darce, despite her unequivocally masculine name, is also clearly represented as a girl, who has indicated pragmatically that her sister cannot “go on indefinitely as a boy.”

The contradictory language that June applies to gender roles—she represents herself as both masculine and feminine—and the ambiguity surrounding the three women’s relationships are not explained. June perceives herself unwelcome at home, but yearns passionately to be with her family, whom she “hungered” for: “I lie in my little bunk bed (with frilled coverlet) at night thinking of my dear Mad [Madame] and Darc and the little house in the trees which one longs to get away from and longs longs longs to get back to.”

June’s literary style is remarkably similar to Eve’s in these letters. In the following anecdote June retells an incident in which her employer, the wealthy landowner Mr. Tankard, demonstrates his determination to establish the true gender of his labourer “Jimmy”:

This week up the back paddock when we were wood carting and I was speaking of what I would do about going away, Mr. Tankard suddenly said “Jimmy I am going to ask a fair question which demands a fair answer ‘are you a girl or a boy?’” I laughed. “Where’s the resemblance?” says I—“You look like a girl in the face, walk like a girl and many people tell me I have a girl dressed as a boy working for me.” “Let ’em talk,” says I. “That’s all right,” says he, “but are you a normal ordinary boy?” “Yes!” says I—“Well,” says he—“Not that I have ever thought otherwise, but I just asked

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you.” I am so used to myself that I can hardly realise I am what I am, never mind a brave heart, boys. He told me if I went up in the station the chaps would soon rough handle me to find out for certain my sex. “All you want to do,” says he, “is pull down your pants.” “Help! Murder!” says I tenderly to m’self. “Ah, yes,” says I. “That oughter fix em.” Take it from me, boys, he a fairly lurid old man—and says to me tasty things sometimes—I had a bath last night which needs a certain amount of bravery. I keep the light low. I was just undressed when in bursts “yours ever.” ‘‘Not in yet, mate,” says he—“Bur, bur, bur,” says I, trousers draped carelessly over lower portions, sweater still on top portions. “Turn up the light,” says he. “Detest bright lights,” says I. “Shut the door when you go out. So cold,” says I.

He endeavours to pull me out of bed every morn before six when I am awake and need no pulling—feels well over my shoulders and creeps toward the “bust”—I protest pushing him far and wide—no flies on me! Don’t let this worry you, boys cos I am fairly capable and there’s plenty of scrub and lots of room on the roads.328

These tantalizing letter fragments from 1925 establish that from the earliest surviving records, the trio of women has odd and complicated relationships. June’s bond with her mother and sister is intense and fraught. In one letter she imagines them as the three witches from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*:

When shall we three—meet again

In thunder, lightening—or rain
When the hurley burley's done
When the battle's lost and won—^229

Many questions remain unanswered about the duration, nature and intent of June's escapades, but it is clear that she is a complex, resilient character, capable of maintaining a sophisticated deception. She has convinced the women of the district that she is a potential suitor (one of the women she kisses is over thirty), has ingratiated herself with a local incapacitated farmer who normally refuses visitors, and is dexterous in her handling of the mercurial Mr. Tankard whom she alternately reveres and loathes. The content and style of June's letters home suggest that she is role-playing as she travels about, employing an exaggerated literary style to document her adventures for the amusement of her family. None of the relationships she establishes with the people she meets and works with is transparent. Only within her family does she feel she can be herself: "I likes the home atmosphere best. Dare maybe we'll go to work together? I know what hard work is now and I am pretty handy. Any way, we'll see—I am a girl and my family is the only surrounding I am happy in."^230

June's letters to Beatrice Davis (1950-1952)

Beatrice Davis was the literary editor at Angus & Robertson, having joined the firm in 1937 (Bennett and Strauss 135). Described as "reserved" but "determined and a


perfectionist," she was on the panel of judges for the 1940 S. H. Prior Prize that had identified *The Pea Pickers* as a novel of outstanding originality. In her view, Eve Langley’s talent was comparable to that of Christina Stead and Patrick White. Davis edited *The Pea Pickers* (1940-41) and perhaps she heard from Douglas Stewart, who was also in Sydney, that Eve had been released from Carrington Hospital, for in 1949 she wrote to the Public Trustee in Auckland seeking to get in touch with Eve once again to tell her that the firm was considering reprinting her novel, and seeking biographical information. The letter was forwarded to June’s home in Parua Bay where Eve was now serving out her probationary release. The correspondence that ensued between June and Davis is archived at the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, in the Angus & Robertson Eve Langley files at ML MSS 3269/383, and in the June Langley Papers 1901-c.1979 at ML MSS 3898. June’s letters to Davis are typed on Eve’s typewriter.

By the time the initial letter from Davis arrived, Eve had suddenly and secretively left the farm without a word to June, who must have been furious at this cavalier behaviour, especially because it put added pressure on June’s increasingly precarious marriage to David Munro. Without explaining these circumstances, June undertook to reply to her sister’s editor herself. Her first contact with Davis on 8 May 1950 was restrained. She used the name Junior Langley, and gave the briefest outline of Eve’s past in a biographical statement, accompanied by a discreet covering letter.

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Eve “was in Auckland at present,” she wrote politely. Her brief, sanitized version of her sister’s life was a seven hundred-word “tale” told in the third person. Their mother was “a gentle spirit” from a wealthy established family, the father “restless” but “apparently of good birth, of English descent” although his origins were “shrouded in mystery.” Her sister was “delicate,” an “avid reader” “learned and studious beyond her years,” a Brontë-like figure who sat in a “small chair by the fire” to “weave strange tales.” When their father fell ill, “arrangements were made” for them to be “taken care of” by Mia’s family and afterwards, when the hotel that the mother operated was to be demolished, the mother and daughters wandered again until they found a house in Dandenong “where the novel The Pea Pickers takes up the tale.” “The sister” [June] came back from a trip to New Zealand in 1930 and subsequently returned there with their mother, believing the climate to be “more suitable” for her health. “Eve was upset at the decision” but eventually “felt such an urge to see her family” that she gave up everything in Australia to be with them, arriving “unheralded” in February 1932. In New Zealand, in an environment she “loved,” her poems and short stories were published; she won prizes, and was feted by many writers including Robin Hyde. June concluded smoothly: “If I can be of further help I am at your service.”

Davis replied on 24 June 1950 to “Miss Langley,” perplexed but courteous. “There is a gap between the information you have given me about Eve and the publication of the Peapickers.”334 Was there anything else June could tell her? Crucially, Davis asked June’s opinion on whether it would “do any harm” to make contact with Eve: “I do not wish to upset her or to impose any strain. I should merely write in a casual vein telling her I was

sorry she had been ill and speaking of the wide appreciation the Peapickers has received. It might please her, too, to know that we intend to republish it.” And then Davis paid homage to June’s role in this significant book: “I feel I know you quite well from the picture of ‘Blue’ in the Peapickers. Do you play the violin?”

This personal appeal to June as “Blue” appears to have completely unravelled her. Her initial letter had concealed the turmoil that she was experiencing in relation to her sister. In her reply to Davis on 12 July 1950, June revealed that the previous month, Eve had “disappeared” while June was at the doctor being treated for a nervous breakdown brought on, she wrote, by the stress of having her sister in her care. Despite her reservations, June “thought it better to give her a chance,” and did not inform the authorities of the breach of Eve’s probation. June then launched a vitriolic four thousand-word attack on her ungrateful, absconding sister: “As you say there is much I did not mention in relation to my sister’s work. Apparently you have been more in touch with those matters, than I have.” “My sister” wrote June to Davis, “has lived a life of self-indulgence, a selfish life, and has paid dearly for it.” June then castigated her sister as a wife and mother:

I was able in turns with Little Mia to pay visits to indolent Eve, who was usually found in a semi-naked state, lying like a brown snake in the deep grass under a summer sun. How we both envied her. To be outside, forever, never to live again like a blow fly in a bottle. Someday ... We would take with us food and if we could spare it money. Mia and I never thought to

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criticize her, always ... Poor Eve ... There was no one to blame but herself, everything that ever happened to her had been of her own making.

Then she explained that, in fact, it was she, June, who had “paid,” financially, emotionally, physically. No, said June, do not contact Eve about reprinting *The Pea Pickers*, “it may affect her as before, unbalance her I mean, better to let well alone.” She said Eve’s case had been “diagnosed as schizophrenia.” And, she added “no mention” of Hilary and the children to Eve either. “I know you will understand Miss Davis.” June did not want Eve to know she had written to her editor, and she did not want Eve to know about Davis’s continued interest in her professional career. June enclosed a letter from Hilary (which included the observation “am interested in your report of Eve’s recovery,” thus contradicting June’s assertion to Davis that she was still not well), and also a letter from Eve in Auckland in which she wrote coherently about her work and living arrangements. June referred to her contact with the brain surgeon Sir Hugh Cairns, but did not mention the reply exploring the option of a frontal lobotomy for her sister. This long missive to Davis, while beginning with great bitterness and anger, increasingly reflected the misery and despair of June. She wrote of a sister she perceived to be sadly altered since their days with Mia. Her rescue of Eve from the asylum had raised the possibility that they would once more be a happy unit: “No one could share the joy we were the only PEAPICKERS and there was no one that could understand us, except our beloved Little Mia.”

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This and subsequent missives to Davis document June’s dissatisfaction with her sister’s conduct, and indicate that the relationship had been strained for years prior to Eve’s incarceration. Although June wrote herself as the “father figure,” supporting and organising all members of the family and trying to keep them together, she was deeply resentful of the losses she had suffered, the energy expended to support her sister in the hospital, and the sacrifices made. She was sick, staggering around “unable to control my limbs” and miserable and depressed, having experienced “ten months of weekly injections for nervous breakdown.” June’s relationship with her husband, David Munro, was severely damaged “after all the trouble we had had getting her out of Hospital”; Hilary Clark, who wanted a divorce, was also angry with June for getting Eve out of the asylum, but Eve was re-establishing her life in Auckland and unapologetic: “No letter from you so far. I hope you are well, and everything is going well for you” Eve wrote to June, chirpily, from the staff room at Auckland Public Library in the autumn of 1950. June retained an overriding desire to resume life with her sister, but her anger and frustration permeated her letters to Davis, and this complicated scenario was the context within which significant portions of Eve’s “biography” were established. As June observed in a later letter, at the time of writing this first long missive:

I felt so bitter, prodded and tortured, by David who does not, cannot feel the sad deep love I feel, for such a genius, as Eve. I know someday her work will be appreciated more so than today. I am quite convinced that Eve


340 “All subsequent references concerning Langley’s post-hospital period derive from this letter unless otherwise stated” (Thwaite 444 fn 40).
Langley will be remembered as the greatest of Australian writers, I will not be remembered because through misfortune I have not achieved anything in Art but that is not the only reason. I never had the talent nor ability.\textsuperscript{341}

The reliability of the biographical information supplied by June is further complicated by the fact that certain sections relating to Eve’s life with her husband and children are strongly reminiscent of Eve’s unpublished “novels.” Eve had entrusted her manuscripts and journals to June on her admission to Carrington Hospital, and June had respected her privacy until now, when she decided to read the material that was “mostly a daily chronicle of her life for the past nine years.” Certain parts of the “biography” written by June may have been based on Eve’s own fiction.

Davis was not discouraged by June’s advice to refrain from contacting Eve. “Dear Junior Langley,” returned Davis three months later, on 26 October 1950. “I feel ashamed not to have written before this to tell you how deeply I appreciated the fascinating but very sad account you gave me of your sister’s life in New Zealand. Admiring her book and the Blue I met in it, so sincerely, it was of special interest to me to learn what you told me.”\textsuperscript{342} In this way, Davis flagged her acceptance of the portrayal of Blue in \textit{The Pea Pickers} as the “real” June despite never having met her. June, pleased, signed her next letter by her pea-picker moniker “Blue.” Davis agreed that they should not tell Eve “that I had enquired of her from you and that you had written telling me so much.” Although Davis was politely insistent that she wished to communicate with Eve directly (and included a letter for June to

\textsuperscript{341} June Langley. Letter to Beatrice Davis. 7 Nov. 1950. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/133. Quotations which follow are from this letter.

forward to her sister), June still vacillated, writing once again to Davis on 7 November 1950 confessing that she was “ashamed to have as you truly say ‘told you so much,’ about one who is dear to me.”

June was more discreet in the letters that followed, but in the absence of a confidant, the relationship with “My dear Beatrice” (emphasis added) became increasingly intimate. She included feathers and newspaper clippings and other memorabilia in her letters, a long-standing practice shared by the Langley women. She wanted Davis, who she described as “a very remarkable woman,” to keep her informed about her sister’s activities and whereabouts: “Thank you for your news of Eve, anything further will be gratefully received.” June conveyed the details of her own various ailments, diagnoses and treatments, in addition to intimate details about her personal past. For


This was the letter Davis wished June to forward to Eve:

Dear Eve Langley,

How many years since we have heard from you! But we do think of you and continue to find The Pea-Pickers an enchanting book. In fact, we hope next year—or it may have to be 1952—to republish it, and to give many more people the pleasure of having copies of their own. I am writing now because H. M. Green wishes to include in his anthology, Modern Australian Poetry, your poem “Celtic Guest.” Will you give him permission? He also wants to know whether it was written when you were in Australia, or after you had gone to New Zealand. Will you please let me know? Life and publishing go on—and I should love to hear from you.

Sincerely, Beatrice Davis.


example, she confessed to being “afraid of sex [...] love and sex I know little of, and have no wish to further my experiences, so my body is my own.” She asked Davis to obtain the addresses of old friends and acquaintances in Melbourne and to contact the Greek consulate to track Nicholas Peppino from *The Pea Pickers*. She shrewdly reflected on her own role as subject in Eve’s fiction: “everything she has written is brilliant, devilish too. I should know, so often the victim, not that it worries me, but some view it differently.” June’s perplexity over the difficulties she was experiencing in the sororal relationship surfaced repeatedly:

I thought we would have happy times together, but sometimes I think she hates me, still sees beauty in me, God knows where, I wish I could grow a beard, so that she would not envy me. It has always come between us, the hair, the teeth, the face. I have never sought men, in fact I don’t greatly care for anyone except my family.  

Despite June’s representations to Davis about her sister’s fragile mental state, once direct communication had been established with Eve a strong professional relationship ensued. Eve wrote to Davis on 25 June 1951 saying that June had only just forwarded her letter, her typewriter and manuscript. “Profound apologies for not answering your letter of OC. 1950 [...]. I hope you will forgive the wide hiatus.” This, from Eve’s point of view, signalled that in terms of her literary endeavours, the break of more than a decade was over. She felt no need to explain further and did not mention that she had been unwell. She almost certainly had no knowledge of the nature of the disclosures her sister had made to

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the editor with whom she intended resuming her professional life. On 23 August 1951, after Eve had written her letter, Davis responded separately to both Eve\textsuperscript{348} and “Blue,” with apologies to June: “Please forgive me if you can for neglecting to reply to your very nice letter.”\textsuperscript{349} She encouraged Eve to send the manuscript of *White Topee* that Eve had mentioned in her letter. June wrote back to Davis almost immediately, depressed by Eve’s lack of interest in her: “quite obvious that Steve Hart has done with BertBeesKnees for the time being. I had hoped to exchange news with my Beatrice, but no answer to my last letter [to Eve], the second one both unanswered.”\textsuperscript{350}

Now that Davis was in direct communication with Eve there was no obvious professional purpose in continuing the relationship with June, the focus of which, from June’s viewpoint, had shifted from Eve to June herself. June wrote in a familiar tone about her past and affected a “literary” style to evoke the landscape in which she lived, concluding “Ever Yours, Blue.” June’s role as adjudicator and mediator between her sister and Davis had become irrelevant. Davis was now in contact with Eve, and June was not. June wished the editor to act as intermediary between herself and her sister. “I had hoped to exchange news with my Beatrice (emphasis added). [...] Thank you for your news of Eve, anything further will be gratefully received.” And later: “I would like to hear something of White Topees [sic], Beatrice, it would seem that the setting is Metung [...] after I had


gone. This is reminiscent of the facilitating role Mia undertook when she was alive. In addition, June’s unusually intimate revelations about herself to her sister’s editor suggest she may have transferred the dependent relationship she desired from her sister, to her sister’s editor. At one point she even calls her “Beatrice Mia,” with overtones of her own mother, whom the sisters called Mia. Wrote June: “The last I heard of her was a letter from a solicitor, asking that her manuscript and typewriter be railed [sic] to him, but I disregarded that and returned everything through the Public Trust.” The involvement of a solicitor in communications between the sisters to secure the manuscripts and typewriter indicates a level of hostility not previously evident.

On 14 March 1952 June wrote yet another long missive to Beatrice, beginning “Oh Beatrice! Beatrice!” After “almost two sad and lonely years” she had met up with Eve again, and suddenly it was as if nothing had changed between these two sisters, now in their late forties. June was still adoring, devoted, Eve still detached, seemingly uninterested. Two weeks earlier, on 4 March, June had flown unannounced to Auckland to visit her sister. Flying from Whangarei to Auckland just to see Eve was a dramatic gesture akin to Eve’s dash on horseback over the Alps in 1929 to be with her sister after a break of two years. Recognising that Davis’ interest now lay with Eve and not herself, she commented: “I know, I know, where is Eve?” June then described in detail what had transpired between Eve and herself. The reconciliation was initially very formal and stiff, June reported, and she recounted the reunion in great detail, appropriating Eve’s own literary style, including dialogue:

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I phoned, "Miss Eve Langley, please," "Oh, you mean Mrs Clark," would do I thought, but Langley is more in my line, defiant as ever, no man’s name is any substitute for such a famous one. Then ... stiffly, "Hello," which frightened me, but it was me ’ole mate ’o slept with me at Annie Willoughby’s, and ate her pufalloonsies, wasn’t it, faltering slightly I parried, wilting, "Blue speaking, Joon you know, Miss, long time not see you fella," "Oh ... you and David down?" “Nun ... no, by meself, cripes Priestly, can I cum and see yer, now?” “Of course June, you know I am working” (I think “you dirtiest picker ... in this paddock”). “I’ll come right away Eve.” To think in a half hour I would see again, the most important person in my life ... now that little Mia is no more. I struggled along ... those cramped feet ... wooden hips, stiff gait, but at least I was within sight of Steve Hart ... Eve emerges. “Joon! Joon” ... “Eve! Eve”...we hug each other, ours has been a wonderful, and terrible life, and we are all that is left, of “Peapickers.” [...] When I suggest selling Kauri Mountain so that we two can depart from this country, to spend the rest of our lives in Italy ... “But Joon my job” ... as of old, Blue is ready to follow the Gleam. Then there is Hilary, the children, the section, a boat, too many ties whereas with me I am ready to up anchor, as long as Eve will be my fellow traveller. My wonderful sister, the devil incarnate, but where could one find one to equal her. I am to see her that night.

On her return from Auckland after two days with her sister, a letter awaited her from Davis. June continued her letter: “April 20 Resume Davis Mia [...] ‘White Topees’ [sic] is in your
hands, how happy and proud I am of mia sorella [...] and better still to receive the news from her, Beatrice, you are one who knows how much she means to me, although I am still uncertain of my position with her.” June quoted to Davis from a letter that Langley had written to her that predicted their future together: “The older we grow the more we’ll come together [...] nothing will come of that I fear, but at least to be in contact once again gives me something to live for, I have nothing else … just some land … but nothing can ever take the place of my dear ones, but one must not make the embrace too suffocating.” Once again, June’s relationship with her sister gained ascendancy over her domestic commitments. David was now viewed as the “unwanted man,” a “wedge” trying to “lodge between inseparables.” “The man in the street could not be expected to understand the Langleys.” By 1955 the couple had separated, acrimoniously, coinciding with Eve’s own divorce. A letter written by June to her lover Cameron Galbraith (with whom she had been maintaining an affair since 1939, before her marriage) indicates that David was not as compliant as she had hoped.352

Davis did not reply. She had gone on holiday and never wrote again to June. However, June’s letters were on the file at Angus & Robertson, available for perusal. June’s revelations about her sister were damaging and influential as statements about her behaviour both before and after her committal. They became the key source of biographical information for Joy Thwaite, who was intent on establishing Eve’s madness. Davis was aware of the sensitivity of the information and observed that “it would be better for her [Eve] not to know that I had enquired of her from you and that you had written telling me

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so much." It seems unlikely that Eve ever realised that her sister had indeed told "so much."

She's My Sister (1975)

In 1974, the daughter of Eve's longstanding friend and supporter, Douglas Stewart, decided to make a film about the literary eccentric whose name she had probably heard from childhood. Meg Stewart was in her mid-twenties when she went to the Blue Mountains to introduce herself and her project to Eve, who was living alone in a house which was little more than a shack and had no telephone. It was—and remains—an isolated place in a bush land setting. Gillian Murdoch went in search of Eve's house and grave, publishing an article in Overland in 2000. She describes the isolation of Eve's home in the bush:

Follow the Great Western Highway east from Katoomba towards Leura along the flat topped gum tree country of the Blue Mountains plateau, and take Queens Road on the left just after the rest home. About a kilometre down take the right branch of a Y intersection into Dennison Road, and half a kilometre past this follow a sharp left-hand bend into Princes Road. Again continue to the end, where the road meets the un-sign-posted Clydebank Avenue at T-junction. Directly opposite this intersection stands a tall timber power-pole with the yellow numbers 1 5 5 4 nailed to it; behind this a faint path leads in to an abandoned and overgrown section […] [In 2000] the

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three-bedroom hut [...] still stands at the centre of her tall-treed plot [...] her once bright yellow and blue bus lies stranded one hundred metres from the shack on a pile of old bricks. (13)

Unbeknown to Meg (or her father), Eve had recently died. How Meg located June and who put her in touch with the police is not known, but she met June probably in August 1974, shortly after Eve’s burial on 29 July. Changing her plans, Meg decided to interview June on camera instead. She’s My Sister was completed by August 1975, when it was shown at the International Women’s Film Festival in Sydney. The film is held on a large roll in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, and is in relatively poor condition. The sound is poor and one cannot stop and start the film to rewind for fear of damaging this fragile archive. The equipment at the library is also antiquated and unreliable. Repeated viewings were required to painstakingly transcribe the dialogue. Meg donated various items relating to the making and public reception of the film to the library, and these are located at ML MSS 5147. The collection includes publicity material, reviews, notebooks, correspondence and film catalogues. The film was to be “a statement [...] about a woman forgotten and perhaps shunned because she was eccentric,” Meg commented to Sydney Morning Herald journalist Helen Frizell in 1975. Meg’s intention was to splice together external shots of Eve’s home and internal shots of June’s home to create an appearance that June was being interviewed in her dead sister’s house. Over a cup of tea, June contrives to tell almost nothing about herself or her sister. It is a strange film, influenced by an anti-establishment ideology. This is the second time June has been informant on the record regarding her sister though in this case June has much less control of the situation because she is not in control of the medium, she nevertheless controls the story.
She’s My Sister is thirty-five minutes long: the first ten minutes is a montage of shots taken outside a dwelling (Eve’s) that conveys its isolation and decrepit state, with torn netting and bags over windows. Hand-held camera work reveals tall trees, using slow ground to canopy tracking. The background hum of insects acts as a (perhaps inadvertent) reminder that a body has been found nearby. Long slow tracking towards the shack supplies a slightly sinister ambiance. The subject of the film is not disclosed, but eventually a woman (June) is heard in a voice-over saying “She was a genius. I was a genius too. Always had a great gift of writing.” (On the original sound roll it is clear that June actually said “She thought I was a genius too.”) Eventually June (unidentified) appears on screen, seated at a cluttered kitchen table in her own house, glossy dark hair tied back with a ribbon; a green and red choker around her neck and dangly earrings. She speaks with her teeth tightly clenched together, and occasionally uses Italian words (“finito”) and phrases (“non ricordo”); significant silences punctuate her monologue and periodically she expresses anxiety or anger about being filmed: “Turn it off!!” Meg Stewart and David the camera-man are off screen. The action of the film centres on June making a cup of tea with dialogue among all three as June establishes who has what in their tea, interspersed with snippets of information about herself and Eve and their past:

Both Eve and June appear to have frequently used Italian phrases in everyday conversation. Warwick Lawrence who knew Eve in the mid to late 1930s made the following remark: “I always believed that there was some Italian ancestry. She often lapsed into Italian phrases or dropped an Italian word or two in conversation. She always addressed me as “Lorenzo.” In “The Old Mill,” Eve referred to a nick-name given to June in Auckland by their mutual friends the poet Henry Brennan and critic Barry Burns. “She had been Harry and Barry’s “Grazia” for the way she had of thanking them in Italian for all they had done for her in the way of pressing exquisitely her striped brown and gold and yellow and tango Persian and Jewish suits ... Grazia, in her tango felt hat and tango suits ... she had been to them such a rich new novel figure, the Australian with the grace of the Latin, lithe and polished and suave, uttering her eternal thanks in the brief word, “Grazia” (124-45).
Sugar. Cigar. Don’t you say you don’t take milk when I’ve put it in. You don’t take milk. Oh. You do. Someone does not take sugar. You don’t? That’s yours over there. I believe you can get raw sugar. Typical. I’ll never remember. [Laughs] I’ve been laughing all my life. My mother was the same. I remember how my sister used to go to school and I used to follow and be sent back. GO HOME. Fifield. We were living in Molong which is where I was born. I couldn’t have been very big when my father. He went first [silence] I think and [silence] I better do something about the tea.

This film was “not a straightforward documentary,” Meg observed in 1975; “I [...] participate in a bourgeois culture in which a film is made by an artist.” However, She’s My Sister does convey a sense of the personality of June as she manipulates the film-making process, suppresses her desire to tell, and offers up disjointed statements about various subjects of interest to the interviewer which are spliced together in an attempt to create a semblance of purposeful narrative. About half way through the film June’s friend Harry Glover appears unannounced and unidentified in a neat cardigan from behind his desk in what is presumably his own home to pontificate on the relationship between the sisters and to express his outrage at June’s refusal to attend Eve’s funeral. The film cuts back to June and concludes with a reference to her sister’s schizophrenia (she is called Steve or referred to by a pronoun throughout the film, never Eve). The closing credits state this was “A film by Meg Stewart with Eve and June Langley.” This was later clarified by Meg Stewart who was quoted in the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative “Catalogue of

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355 Meg Stewart. Notes for an unspecified conference, probably connected with the International Women’s Film Festival in Sydney which ran from 9-17 Aug. 1975. The notes are held in the Stewart Papers at Sydney: ML MSS 5147 add-on 2077/19.
Independent Films” 1975/6: “We met Eve through the bush, the remnants of her shack and through her sister.”

While *She’s My Sister* was quoted extensively by Eve’s biographers, the eight sound rolls for the film have not been used before for the purposes of research on Eve. They are kept at the oral history section of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, located at ML OH 249/1-13, and have not been transcribed or copied. They can only be listened to under supervision on an old fashioned tape recorder, and with large head phones, and it can be quite difficult to hear what is being said. One cannot stop the tape to recap on a missed quote; one has to listen through, rewind, and start again from the beginning. The sound rolls contain the full length of the interview and run to several hours. The actual date of the interview with June is not specified, although there are indications are that it was done in August 1974. The sound rolls also include an interview with writer Hal Porter who had met Eve just the once in 1957. Porter used the material in the interview for his very creative chapter on Eve in his autobiography *The Extra* (1975), thereby establishing himself as an (oft-quoted) authority on her.

Listening to the sound rolls, it is immediately obvious that several factors conspired to ensure that this interview with June is only marginally useful from the point of view of constructing a biographical narrative about either sister. Firstly, Meg Stewart was an inexperienced film maker—this was the first film she had directed and edited. Hampered by her inexperience, naïveté and ideological imperatives, she also knew little about Eve or

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357 Meg refers to the filming having taken place over a weekend. She was now in the process of putting the film together (Meg Stewart. Letter to June Langley. 18 Nov. 1974. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898).
June, apart from what her father and Hal Porter and Beatrice Davis had told her. Like Davis, she had read and marked passages from *The Pea Pickers* by way of background research. She found it difficult to frame specific questions to put to June, and could only react to what she was told. Meg’s solution to this problem was just to keep the camera rolling as the afternoon passed in June’s kitchen, to see what would turn up. Meg was mainly interested in the sisters’ early life together dressing up as boys, and persistently probed June about this, initially with very little success. It is apparent that the lack of background knowledge about her subject put Meg Stewart at a serious disadvantage. The accumulation of knowledge about Eve Langley over the years has been largely dependent on the gradual location, donation and purchase of documents and letters relating to the sisters—and a willingness to undertake the painstakingly laborious and slow process of collating and deciphering the archival evidence.

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358 Meg Stewart interviewed her father and Beatrice Davis in 1974 for an ABC radio play about Eve entitled *The Shadows are Different* (Sydney: ML OH 249/1-13 Sound roll 6). In this interview, Davis provided excellent background material on her own role in the selection and publication of *The Pea Pickers*, although she confused the editorial process relating to *White Topee* and Eve’s distress over the rejection of “Wild Australia” in April 1954 with the production of *The Pea Pickers*. This confusion fostered the notion that the main reason Eve’s other books were not published was because she was too resistant to editorial intervention. Davis stated categorically in 1977 that the reason Eve’s later work was not published was because of a lack of resources at Angus & Robertson (Beatrice Davis. Letter to Helen Hasthorpe. 4 Nov. 1977. Beatrice Davis Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 7638/5/23).

359 Meg Stewart. Notes for an unspecified conference, probably connected with the International Women’s Film Festival in Sydney which ran from 9-17 Aug. 1975. The notes are held in the Stewart Papers at Sydney: ML MSS 5147 add-on 2077/19. The film was also listed in a catalogue of “Independent Women’s Films,” with a photo of “Steve” and “Blue” included (54). Sydney Film Makers’ Co-operative. Meg Stewart Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 5147 add-on 2077/19.
June proved to be an extraordinarily difficult subject to interview, contriving to say little that was analytical or factual about herself, Eve, their childhood, adolescence and adult life, or the writing of *The Pea Pickers*. There is a complete absence of plot in her narration of events. While June does not indulge in “flights of fantasy” in her speech or ideas (characteristics of Eve’s narration about the past), she often talks in riddles, alluding to matters she will not discuss, and steering the discussion away from potentially interesting and revealing subjects. As biographers Helen Hasthorpe and Joy Thwaite were soon to discover, June Langley was verbose yet secretive, and resistant to interrogation, although not to participation. Several times she inquired anxiously about whether the film makers were about to leave. The result is a rambling, frustratingly obtuse monologue.

June’s refusal to answer questions put to her and her subversion of the film-making process demonstrate her imperative to contain Langley family secrets in a manner reminiscent of Eve. For example, she insists she has already told Meg the story of when she dressed up as a boy in her youth and makes no pretence that she is telling it for the first time (she actually repeats this story on a number of occasions). “What are you going to do with all this stuff?” she wonders. June periodically addresses her cat as a diversion. She refuses to answer direct questions:

Stewart: Were you married?

June: She had two sons and a daughter.

Stewart: Tell me about the time you got dressed up as boy.

June: Have a cup of tea.

June is frequently uncooperative and controlling:
Stewart (trying to encourage June to stop prevaricating): We don’t have much film.

June: Then stop the film.

She gives rambling, disconnected responses to questions. For example, regarding her painting, she observes:

I have imagination. I see things all the time. In my mind I see things […] not that I did an awful amount. It wasn’t something I felt I had to do. Only did it occasionally. If I’d met somebody. You put the words in my mind and I can paint them.

Unlike Eve, June extends the Langley pattern of secrecy about the past to her own family and the Clark family as well. Having voluntarily adopted the role of family chronicler, she faces Eve’s problem of how to suppress crucial information while holding her reader’s interest. The purpose of the interview is for June to tell something about her sister, but her anxiety about revealing the past is evident in her prevarications, lies, false trails and her failure to articulate a stable narrative of the family history. What June does commit to is a repetitive retelling of the gender story, suggesting that the ambivalence that was manifest in the letters of 1925 has continued to permeate her representation of herself to herself.

In June’s narrative there is a lack of disclosure about key events such as marriages, births and deaths, and incorrect dates for critical events such as the death of Mia which she moved from 1944 to 1950, and Eve’s incarceration which she moved from 1942 to 1961. She refuses to elaborate on matters of specific interest, such as the sisters’ early days at Fifield, saying only that she remembers a great deal. June makes unusual assertions about
Eve that she will not clarify, claiming, for instance, that men climbed in windows to visit her sister while Mia slept. June implies that Hilary Clark, Eve’s husband who “liked me a lot,” thought it was June who “came that night” to the Old Mill in New Zealand (it was, apparently, Eve, although June does not say this: one needed to have read Eve’s manuscript “The Old Mill” to know what June was talking about). When asked if Eve believed herself to be Oscar Wilde, she responds with a “Hmmm.” June revises the past, and in doing so contradicts evidence in letters. For example, she says that she “never said anything to anyone about her [Eve],” although she had written extensively about her sister in her letters to Beatrice Davis two decades earlier; she says “there was no canoodling or anything like that” with the girls in Goulburn in 1925, although back then she had boasted about making “violent love” to Ivy Pitts. She denies having had a nervous breakdown: “I was getting the fall-over business then. Not nervous breakdown. Wouldn’t be interested in a nervous breakdown.” Most oddly, there is a blatant lie about Lido Capenera Holmes. Nowhere in her highly confessional correspondence with Davis does June ever mention her daughter, but now she is actually denying the child’s existence. She states she had no children, and professes to loathing both children and domesticity:


Stewart: You don’t like children?

June: No. Don’t like them at all. Yowl yowl. Scream scream. […] I don’t like anything about domesticity.”

Any discussion about topics that might be considered “feminine” is taboo. She is shocked at the word “breast” (used by Stewart), when June describes how she had an “old bone thing children used to wear on to press me down clamp me well down” when she was
pretending to be a man. She wants to avoid other women at all costs, hating their habits of questioning and prying: she wants to hide so she does not have to confront them.

June's contradictory commentary on her gender alignment in this interview indicates that even at this late stage in her life—she is seventy years old—the gender story remains central to her sense of self. She initially refused to be drawn on the incident of her youth when she masqueraded as a boy to get a job in an artist studio. But as the afternoon wore on, and with Meg's persistence, the sequence of events emerged:

I went down to the hairdressers and asked him to cut my hair off like a boy. I don't know. I saw a job in the paper, a boy wanted in an artist studio—Giles and Richards. Lived in Melbourne. My sister and I went down. I had to get a boy's suit ... can't remember what I wore, went into the toilet, old lady there who looks after toilet ... put long leather coat on, trousers, garters, I held the pants over my knees with a garter. Took long time, woman calls out: "What you doing in there?" [she's?] thinking "I'm a man, sister a woman" ... along street, down came the trousers, went to Giles and Richards' studio. I couldn't make up my mind to go over and say "I'm a boy." She [Eve] waited over the other side. Presented myself. Had to go up the stairs, said, "Job in the paper." He asked me what I could do. I said the drawing. "You can start tomorrow." Said: "You'll have to do messages." I had to go around the streets, boy did I feel awful. Never been round as a boy before. Course I was a woman not a man at all. I can be oblivious of anyone. I can walk through a crowd and see no one ... I can go unseeing through life, see no one.
And boy it was embarrassing. I went straight ahead. I’m a boy and that’s all about it. I don’t care what anyone says. I know what I am. I was there … too long. My sister’s birthday came. Beautiful day. My sister said “Wouldn’t it be lovely to go out to the old house.” Can’t remember. She used to call it this something. Old deserted house, outside Dandenong. Such a lovely day that I never went to work. Next day I was sacked. “You take a week’s notice.” I never said anything. Walked straight into studio, took my coat and case and walked out the door and never came back. When I got over the bridge going towards South Yarra in the gardens I rolled up the pants and put my coat on and when I came down the steps I met one of the chaps from up there […] they looked at me and they looked at my stockings. I just looked at them, couldn’t care less. Got to the station … got to do wee wee … got to go to the men’s place, so … decided I’d go to the toilet, (same as Giles) always went into toilet (not anywhere else). Very embarrassed. Had to roll up the pants. I knew everyone knew me. Hadn’t left school long. Left school at 14. Age between 15-16.

Stewart: Were you nervous?

June: [long pause]: Stop the music. There was a notice in the letter box. Junior (because I was the youngest) and Darcy dressed as boys gone to Rutherglen. They didn’t want house work or anything like that. Wanted to work as boys. I haven’t swept this house for how long. I don’t like people looking around … Puts me off women … do this, do that … go to hell …
one of these days I'll do something. I put it off. Don't know when I cleaned
the place up.

Later, she returned to the “story”:

Where did I get to? Suit for my brother ... “Two of you going in the toilet
together? Don’t be long. Hurry up, other people waiting.” Get changed as
quick as I can ... had leather coat. Pulled up the pants ... garters ... [long
repeat of this story] She [Eve] stepped in front when pants fell down ... I
was a man ... Felt marvellous ... see how I get on ... tried to use a deeper
voice ... he had a good idea I was a woman. Had old bone thing children
used to wear on to press me down clamp me well down.

Stewart: Oh, to keep your breasts down?

June: Excuse me. Don’t mention that my dear. “Start tomorrow.” Don’t
know how long I was there.

Meg: Did you enjoy it? Did everyone think you a boy?

June: I thought I was. Everyone thought I was. I convinced myself I was as I
was.

Historically, there is no indication that June was anything other than a
conventionally heterosexual person throughout her life; indeed she preserved graphic
documentation of sexual trysts in her papers in the form of letters from lovers, lovers’
lovers and her own diarizing of specific interactions. Her clothing in this interview has the
appearance of exaggerated femininity: an excess of bows and ribbons that are not evident in
other images of either sister—although June’s appearance in She’s My Sister replicates the
excessive femininity of her representation in Eve’s fiction. June demonstrates no insight into her “dressing up” as a youth, or her feelings about masquerading as the opposite sex, despite her confession that it felt “marvellous” to be a man. She articulates the desire to dress up as boys as “instinctive,” and makes no distinction between her and Eve’s behaviour: “[We were] both the same. Always wanted to be boys. Just natural instinct. I know my sister is more mannish than womanish although she—unlike me—she’s very fond of women.” In her discussion of male/female roles and relations however, the narrative becomes unstable. June aligns herself with men, but unlike Eve she “didn’t love them that way.” This is an issue that is clearly central to June’s sense of identity. “Women are for men. I am a woman and I don’t care for women at all. [...] Women are like tiger snakes. They’re awful.” “Nils Desparandum told me I was a woman’s man. Could feel something amorous about certain bumps in my head.” “Blokes are lucky to know you [Meg], because you are such a little sweetie.” “I love men. I love everything about them. Their clothes, smell of men, cigarettes, essence of men.” “I wanted to go back to her [Eve] but she wanted men.” The interview dates June’s experimentations with cross-dressing from the age of fifteen, and implies that Blue still saw herself as the masculine arm of the sister partnership—just as she did in 1925.

In her interview with Stewart, June represents herself as the caregiver and head of the household, responsible for both her mother and her sister, associating herself with her father as a male and as a leader: “I was trying to be everyone; do all the work.” She asserts: “I was always a leader and I was the first to go out in the world as far as picking [went]”; she was the first to dress as a boy; “the first to out on a holiday by myself.” Like Hilary Clark, who claimed he didn’t know why Eve had been committed, June’s role in Eve’s
incarceration is vague. She says she sought help from Hilary after Eve was found with “her eyes [...] staring. You could see she was gone, mental. She had offered herself to the soldiers. [...] I went down and rang the doctor and he came and took her away. [...] She went there [to the hospital] in ’61” but “Hilary had her committed.” June visited Eve in hospital and convinced the Superintendent of Carrington Hospital to release her sister into her care with the promise of good food: “I had eggs [...] cream and butter [...] and that’s how I got her out.” “Never for one moment have I stopped thinking of her [...] she’s my sister.” “She always said: ‘Oh, you needn’t have got me out.’ That hurt.” June says she felt partly responsible for Eve’s death because she had ignored a dream that told her Eve was unwell: “If I’d gone, she could have been saved, put in hospital.” June perceives that at these critical junctures in her sister’s life, she had a pivotal role to play; that the course of Eve’s life is determined by June’s presence and absence.

In She’s My Sister there is minimal information about Eve and June’s parents. June identifies herself with her unnamed father of whom she has the barest memory, but despite this, he is acutely present in her life. Her recollection of walking with him and another man “down an avenue of trees” in Molong is memorable because his companion’s teeth fell out, but Mia has explicitly made the connection between June and Arthur Langley, her father:

My mother said: “[Your] father will never be dead while you [are] alive,” so it must be something about me that’s like my father, either my attitude, things I do or things I say. [...] But I know my laughter—I laugh all the time—is like my mother. She was a great laughier. But she could see something in me that was like my father. She said my father will never be dead while you are alive.
This is a view that is promulgated by Eve in *The Pea Pickers*: June looks like their father and this is the source of their isolation from one another. June perceives that her shyness and desire to be left alone are a legacy of her father’s temperament, but she does not make any connection with the gender ambiguity that they both appear to share:

I’m indifferent to company [...] My father was like that. Never had any friends. [...] My father was a loner. [...] You want to hide yourself. Aloneness. I hide myself all the time. Never go in the garden in case someone goes past. Not wanting to have to recognise someone. Something you’re born with. Do you like all people? I don’t. I don’t take a fancy to anyone. I like you. [...] [I am] inclined to be very shy with people [...] Don’t want to see people, be drawn into conversations with someone I am not interested in. I suppose that’s why I’ve never been liked.

Snippets of information about the father are scattered throughout the interview: he was an only child, the son of Alexander Langley, an hotelier from Sale in Gippsland. June’s comments about her father are uttered in a puzzled manner, as if the matter of her father remains an ongoing source of mystery. June genuinely appears to have nothing to disclose about the man, and this is consistent with Eve’s accounts in her later fiction. June was eight or nine years old when she last saw her father, and she has repressed her memories of him, although she is left with a disconcerting sense of being the father’s daughter.

June’s mother is also largely absent, and this is surprising, because the two women rarely lived apart. Mia’s memory was acute, June observes, and she was “very fond of my sister. I was an outsider.” This assertion of favouritism is repeated several times in the interview. Moles that Mia had burnt out of Eve’s arm in childhood assisted in the
identification of her body, June says, indicating that she had played a role in the formal judicial process associated with Eve’s death. There is no explanation for the absence of the mother in June’s story of the past: June’s commitment to Mia’s care is represented in the letters to Beatrice Davis as a labour of love, but in 1974, Mia is cast as an object of competitive interest for the sisters. June perceives that the family was split into two factions, and that she and her father are aligned, and Eve had a special relationship with their mother.

In this interview, as in the letters to Beatrice Davis, the sister relationship—not Eve herself—is the focus of June’s monologue. June is unable to account for her sister’s behaviour with a stable narrative, and it is the inability to define the terms of the fraught sororal relationship that underpins the ferocity of her “emotionalism” and her ongoing frustration. Why did Eve prefer men to her? Was it because she was a genius or a tart, a nut-case or all three? “She was a genius, my sister. I got a bit sick of her,” is June’s opening line, before revealing intimate details about her sister’s body and personal habits, much as Eve had done about her in the fiction. Each of June’s assertions about her sister is linked to her downfall. According to June, Eve lacked moral judgment: “she used to drink quite a lot”; “she […] had the trouble with the men business”; Eve “would have lived a long time if she hadn’t involved herself with men”; she had men visiting and climbing in through the window and “ruined her own life […] I don’t even like talking about that.” She was in poor physical health: “she had every venereal disease you can get, including syphilis. It was quite obvious that that was the cause of her death”; and poor mental health: “she was obviously mental. […] She thought herself God at times.” Eve was over-weight:
I am shocked to think that my sister leant forward and was dead. The doctor said she had too much weight on. Must have bent forward and fallen over dead. Shocking. I am so shocked. I think of it at night when the cat and I are in bed and I think to myself: "Damn."

Petty arguments are revisited, inviting comparison between the two sisters, and an opportunity to judge. They are polarized in character and temperament—replicating Eve’s representation of the sister relationship in her fiction. When June was at Eve’s house the grocer arrived and Eve wanted to introduce them and June refused because she didn’t want to meet anyone “as usual. She says, ‘come on come on out and meet him.’ That was the finish. She said ‘get out of here.’ That was my sister. Jealousy, hate.” Eve’s “not generous like me.” Eve “never had any food in the house,” and tried to serve June a cup of tea from a brew made the day before. She was, says June, a “louse,” “real lousy.” June, on the other hand, was always parcelling up the best food for Eve when she was in the asylum. Eve was always trying to get rid of June: “I used to write lovingly ‘Couldn’t I come?’ She said ‘no’ she liked being alone. She was never alone. A big mistake.” “She tried to get rid of me all the time.” However, when Eve wanted June to go travelling with her in later years, June refused. “She said: ‘I’ll help you.’ But I know damn well she wouldn’t […] she’d be sick of me in a day. [snaps to Stewart] Switch it off!”

While June and Eve demonstrate mutual contempt in their respective texts, there are obvious differences in the representation of the sister relationship. In She’s My Sister June does not talk about her sister (or any other relatives) in a sexual way; there is a complete absence of alloeroticism. June is not ambivalent about Eve; there is no affectionate recall at all. June says she was not close to her sister “but my mother was.” Only in their youth did
they have things in common, before men came between them. Eve was “mean. […] She hated me in such a way, always disliked me so much, there was always that between us, all the time. Hatred.” Eve was a “genius,” a “wonderful genius,” with a “great gift of writing,” but June does not say she loved her sister, or even liked her. June was now seventy years old and completely alone in the world. Eve had died “one month and thirteen days” ago (this was the date of a premonition in a dream that June described, which she had marked in her diary as 19 May), and June had recently viewed photographs of Eve’s decomposing body, but for the duration of the interview she is emotionally disconnected from the reality of Eve’s death:

What a sad day it is for me to think never any more oh dear, makes me feel so sad I could cry. Got to pull myself up every now and again, and say no, you’ve got to be sensible. It’s got to happen to us all. […] Tip it out and rinse it my love, with hot water [to Stewart about her tea cup].

In the film June appears in control, but the questioning went on for a long time. Even though she initially resisted talking about dressing up as a boy, June returned to the subject several times. June had a nervous breakdown when her sister left in 1950, and within a few months of the interview for She’s My Sister, she was admitted—or committed—to the Parramatta Psychiatric Clinic. According to her friend Harry Glover “June was taken bad in the night and screamed out for HELP. The police came and took her away.”

Having allowed herself to be put in a situation where she must talk about her sister, and their life together, she now follows in her sister’s footsteps, and for the first time

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360 Harry Glover. Letter to Meg Stewart. 20 July 1975. Meg Stewart Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 5147. Glover also wrote about his efforts to have her put in a nursing home and her determination not to go.
June is incarcerated herself. The restrictions imposed on patients in this hospital were
different to those in Carrington Hospital in Auckland, however. Stewart took the finished
film to the clinic and showed it to June in a semi-public screening, but the patients kept
wandering in and out.

The film *She's My Sister* masks the strangeness of June Langley. Meg considered
editing “as a sort of intellectual jigsaw”: this was her “personal” film about two women
about whom she knew almost nothing, and the film itself is odd in its construction. Despite
this, June could pass as a bereaved older lady who’d had a bit of a lark dressing up when
she was a girl, but was now making tea for visitors who had come to interview her about
her sister. From the perspective of a sympathetic viewer, June finds the experience of being
filmed new and a bit confronting. The focus on the extended tea-making ceremony and the
splicing together of June’s commentary makes her gender ambivalence all but invisible.
June, after all, was adept at deception; she was a woman whose relations with others were
never transparent, and her “relationship” with the camera was no different. The sound rolls
reveal the silences and gaps in the monologue, the spaces that June refuses to fill, and the
spaces that she does, despite herself, just like her sister, Eve. It seems certain that she did
not intend to “tell so much.”

**June and her Sister’s Biographers: Helen Hasthorpe (1977) and Joy Thwaite (1981)**

Three years after the Meg Stewart interviews, a La Trobe University student, Helen
Hasthorpe, visited June seeking information about Eve for her history honours thesis: “Eve
Langley: A Biographical Study.” Hasthorpe was the second person to attempt a biography
who had no connection with Eve, her interest arising through her reading of *The Pea*
If Stewart was young, Hasthorpe was probably younger still, and both were about the age of the Langley sisters during their romanticized “Primavera” period. Having read Eve’s novel, Hasthorpe became intrigued by the person behind the story. Her thesis was a very ambitious project. There was no printed biography and Hasthorpe was required to undertake significant original research for which she had no training. Under the circumstances, she did a remarkable job. Hasthorpe travelled to Sydney at least twice, and interviewed June on three occasions—3 June 1977, 27 August 1977, and 28 August 1977—using forty-five-minute tapes (which are not publicly available). She had access to Eve’s manuscripts in the Mitchell Library and read them as transparent autobiography, so she knew (or rather, presumed) that June had had a child (she cited “Land of the Long White Cloud”). Hasthorpe obtained some official birth and death certificates, and drew on She’s My Sister and Stewart’s interviews with Beatrice Davis and Douglas Stewart for the ABC radio play “The Shadows are Different.” She had access to some of Eve’s letters, her published poems, and newspaper reportage. She initiated and conducted interviews and correspondence with Langley relatives, neighbours and characters from The Pea Pickers. Her thesis included photographs of Eve, mainly from the late 1950s, and a picture of Mia. The thesis was written as a straightforward chronological narrative—events were retold without the attention to different sources that a more experienced researcher would be alert to. Her interviews represented a significant resource, but she did not know how to use them effectively. All of these original and secondary sources were integrated and often paraphrased to provide a narrative of the sisters’ lives.

361 The first was an honours thesis by Wendy Anderson in 1974 referred to by Thwaite in her bibliography, but not publicly available.
Hasthorpe’s interviews with June, long term Metung residents, and Davidson relatives confirm that the sisters were very close during their childhood and youth, and that their bond set them apart from others. Hasthorpe obtained a glimpse into the early years of the sisters through Jean Davidson, a cousin of Eve and June, who had some vivid memories of “being trailed along bush tracks with them (Dolly and May) in search of the mysterious ‘goat woman’ who lived in the bush and kept goats. They used to weave all sorts of stories about this ‘goat woman’ and took Jean to go and see her although they would never approach her” (19). The sisters had a name for their mother that “used to shock me” but which Davidson could no longer remember (18). Davidson recalled that “the two girls were inseparable companions until they reached adulthood and people often remarked that they were never seen apart” (f/n 16), and that they were known as Dolly and May, which was also confirmed by June in her interview (15). June repeated to Hasthorpe her assertion that “Dolly […] was her mother’s favourite while May herself was an outsider” (f/n 20), and Hasthorpe added her reading of the sister relationship based on June’s comments:

Despite this the two girls were very close and although they fought at times they still loved and understood one another. May had a fearless and adventurous nature and she recalled the first time she went away to the country to work Dolly made up a lot of little presents and parcels for her before she went. (30)

Claude Harrison, who had known the sisters in Metung, told Hasthorpe that “although they [the sisters] ‘made out’ at first that they were boys [at Metung], they soon admitted that they were girls and they made a few friends who were willing to accept them as girls in boys’ clothes” (32).
Hasthorpe later wrote to Meg Stewart and told her that June was “very frail, weak and ill, but willing to talk. She didn’t answer the door at first.” Neighbours confirmed that June was inside the “ramshackle” house with the curtains drawn; “long grass grew all around” (f/n 2). Hasthorpe found her a “difficult person to interview as she would drift from topic to topic in conversation but she often refused to answer direct questions” (Notes on Sources). She tended to “free association” in her responses, and refused to be drawn on her assertions and claims. Hasthorpe reported that June was not truthful about her past, and had virtually nothing to say about Eve’s literary achievements. She revealed little about the sisters’ life together, and did not add to what she had already told Stewart, so that once again her control over the sister story is emphatically asserted.

In the interviews with Hasthorpe, June maintained her silence about her parents. She told Hasthorpe that Arthur Alexander Langley “worked his way around the countryside in various jobs as a drover, station hand and timber worker. In the mid 1890s he went to work as a blacksmith for Mia’s father Thomas Davidson at Tambo Crossing” (15), and that Mia “packed a few belongings into saddle bags and rode out at midnight from Tambo Crossing” (f/n 26). Skipping forward to their adolescence, with no mention at all of the loss of her father, June said that Mia “had a number of male suitors who were under the impression that she owned the hotel” at Crossover (21). June said she did not know why the family moved to Dandenong in 1918 (27), and in haste once she lost the “security” of Keith Wilson (the beau, “Kay” from The Pea Pickers) who married someone else (36). June refused to tell Hasthorpe who her husband was (f/n 8), but said she moved to New Zealand with her mother and husband in 1930 (36). When Hasthorpe asked about Eve’s horseback

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trip over the Victorian Alps (which formed the first half of “Wild Australia”), June dismissed this extraordinary achievement as an expression of “egoism” (f/n 41), without clarifying what she meant. June repeated her assertion made already to Stewart that Eve was their mother’s “favourite,” while she, June, was an “outsider” (30). On a personal level bordering on prurience, June claimed that the illness about which Eve wrote in “The Old Mill” (158) was venereal disease (47). June continued her silence about all family events by refusing to comment on Eve’s children (f/n 4) or her own: June said she “hated” children (42) and “never had any children” herself (44). She did not like Hilary Clark: “He was a very critical type of person. He’d pull people down” (48). June spoke only vaguely of Eve’s incarceration, although she once again placed herself at the centre of this story, showing Hasthorpe a photograph of her poultry farm, and telling her that she had taken Eve home sometimes on the weekend: “I took my sister from the asylum and took her there—she got freedom and she got everything of the best [on the farm]—milk, eggs, cream, fruit” (55). In her discussion with Hasthorpe June again made misleading statements about crucial events, saying her mother had died not in 1944, but sometime around 1950 (60). Hasthorpe reported that June referred to Eve returning to Sydney in 1957 in a “caricature of youth” (59). June’s version of events following Eve’s return to Australia confirmed what was evident in the letters of 1960: the sisters corresponded and June followed in 1961 because she wanted to be close to Eve. She said that although her sister met her at the boat they soon quarrelled, and thereafter rarely saw one another, arguing when they did (60). June observed that her sister could be “an old bastard […] but you forgave her everything because she was a genius” (60). In her view, Eve as an old woman was healthy and free of illness and capable of living independently (62).
Hasthorpe knew the story of *The Pea Pickers*, and asked June questions arising from her reading of the text. She was particularly interested in June’s encounters with the lonely farm girls at Goulburn. June gave a slightly different account of the experience of being quizzed about being a boy, this time implicating her mother in the charade. Hasthorpe paraphrased June’s explanation:

She had cut star thistle and fed pigs on the farm and the farmer suspecting that she was a girl came fumbling around her room one night supposedly looking for something. Touching her chest he felt the boned corset she was wearing and said ‘What’s that. Why are you wearing that?’ and she told him in a “whining” voice: ‘My mother makes me wear it to make my back grow straight’ (30). He apparently accepted that she was just an effeminate boy and left her alone after that. (24)

June told again the story of her first job in the city as a printer’s copy boy repeating some parts of the story she had told Stewart, and adding other information, not including some details. This appears to be a “set piece” in June’s repertoire, and once again, she focuses not so much on the experience of actually working as a boy, but on the fear of discovery that comes with dressing and undressing; pulling up and pulling down her pants. There is a sense that when she tries to retell this familiar story it becomes unstable in the narration. June described how she and her sister bought “a suit for my brother please. Just the same height and build as me” from a big store, a navy blue suit with coat, pants and waist coat. The sisters then went in search of somewhere for June to put it all on:

We found a Ladies’ toilet and we were going in together when the woman said “you’re not going into that toilet together?” We told her that we just had
some dresses we’d just bought and wanted to try them on to see if they would fit. “Well, don’t be too long! Hurry! Hurry up! Other people are coming in here.” So we get in there and I get on these pants as quick as I can. I pulled them up as far as they’d go and rolled them up above my knees and kept them up with garters. I put my coat back on top and the woman was saying “What are you doing in there” etc etc. So we went out both apparently girls and said “Thank you very much,” and we went out into the street. Damn it all if the pants didn’t start to fall down. My sister hissed at me “Pants are falling,” so she stepped in front of me and I rescued the pants and pulled them back up again. So as soon as we got up round the corner away from the old girl I let the pants down and took off the coat and I was a man. (29)

For June, clothing and its critical role in defining gender is the recurring story of the sisters in their youth. It mirrors Eve’s obsessive preoccupation with garments in The Pea Pickers, and subsequent texts, where June is frequently represented as dressing and undressing; her clothes lie about the house and the fiction. Eve’s ambivalence—even animosity—towards garments, and the mutilation of clothing (including June’s—Eve’s slashing of a dress to make pants is a pertinent example), indicates that from Eve’s perspective, the sister story too is at least in part about cloth and clothing. When they fight, this is always the focus of their disagreement. It is notable that in the retelling of the story for both Stewart and Hasthorpe, the key element for June is always the hurried removal or inadvertent “falling down” of the pants, or their deliberate removal in the Men’s toilet (in the She’s My Sister version), and the fear of being “caught out” by a woman, who is curious and quizzing. The
illicitness of the experience is what June remembers most acutely, accompanied by a sense of haste, and perhaps panic: the experience takes place in a small confined space (the toilet) and she struggles to control what is happening. Eve's role is to conceal the deception, not to actively participate in it. But the story is also confusing and jumbled: why does the removal of the pants and the coat (that she has just bought for her "brother") result in her becoming a "man"? This is an unstable story that June does not appear to have mastered. The only time when the removal of masculine garments results in a "man" is when a man takes off his garments, not a woman, but June seems unable—or unwilling—to deconstruct her own tale. The man, surely, is her father, not herself, and here, I suspect, lay another family secret that is both told and not told in the sisters' texts: June's cross-dressing story has its origins in the father's cross-dressing practices.

Although June was cagey and sometimes dishonest in the statements she made to Helen Hasthorpe, and revealed so little about the family, she once again responded positively to approaches by Eve's next biographer, a PhD candidate, Joy Thwaite, whom she met in 1981, and then again the following year. Although June's stories of the past create anxiety, like Eve, she demonstrates a compulsive need to find an audience, coupled with a mind set of repressive, imprisoning secrecy. Joy Thwaite's PhD on Eve undertaken at the University of New South Wales in the 1980s was published in 1989 as a biography: *The Importance of Being Eve Langley*. Thwaite, who began the project when she was in her early twenties, was a far more experienced researcher than either Stewart or Hasthorpe. She too read the fiction and conducted extensive interviews, this time travelling to New Zealand to include the commentary of Eve's relatives and friends there. The biography took nearly a decade to complete, and the blurb advertises that she "chronicles Eve Langley's
disintegration as sensitively and thoroughly as she does Langley's early achievements and triumphs.” She opens *The Importance of Being Eve Langley* with an edited passage from one of Eve’s letters. This extract, in Thwaite’s view, validated her thesis that her subject was mad, and had adopted the persona of Oscar Wilde. Eve’s writing, from this point on, was “intensely autobiographical,” and she was “pursuing a doomed quest for artistic recognition” (3). Critics including Frost and Colwill, have expressed concern about the methodology Thwaite employed to write her biography—treating the fiction as transparent autobiography—but in the absence of an alternative, her work has underpinned all critical writing since.

Joy Thwaite was in an unenviable position. She was approaching the fiction as a biographical project and struggled to make sense of what she was reading, but she did gather together many of the essential clues, even if she was at a loss as to how to interpret them. And in this she was certainly not alone: Meg Stewart used a jigsaw metaphor in her construction of *She’s My Sister*, and Thwaite attempted something similar. The problem was, however, that the pieces that she chose to work with did not fit together. With her characteristic brilliance Eve had inverted and contradicted the autobiographical “facts” that underpinned the texts, and suppressed many others. Eve had been labelled schizophrenic by June in her letters to Beatrice Davis, had spent a long time in a mental institution, and appeared to demonstrate that her “madness” had not abated by producing extraordinary texts and by changing her name to Oscar Wilde in 1954. However, Thwaite’s argument was not—and could not be—sustained by the evidence. Eve’s letters to Angus & Robertson staff in particular contradicted the madness theory. In order to pursue this line of inquiry, Thwaite produced what was arguably an even more complicated scenario than Eve had
produced herself. Even the length of time Thwaite spent on the task is a testament to its difficulty and the biography does not reflect the effort that was expended. It alienated Eve’s family and friends, according to a librarian at the Mitchell Library, and laid the foundation for more than a decade of the literary equivalent of red herrings.

In addition to her reading of Eve’s texts as straight autobiography, particularly from “Wild Australia” onwards, Thwaite wrote and spoke to everyone she could find who was even remotely connected to Eve and June. Between 1976 and 1983, she interviewed twenty-five relatives, friends and acquaintances who had been associated with the author over the years (507), including Hilary Clark, their children, and June, and she corresponded with many others including “characters” from The Pea Pickers. The “witnesses” to Eve’s life offered a range of anecdotes which were generally not contested by Thwaite, even though some interviewees were “hostile” (most notably Hilary); some were recalling events from the early 1900s, some were quoted as authoritative arguably without any basis, and still others were clearly under the influence of The Pea Pickers. Interviewees who were

363 For example, Eve’s eighty-year-old cousin Jean McAlpine, who was six when the sisters were at Crossover, was presented as “one of the most reliable accounts of her [Langley’s] childhood personality” (Thwaite 20-21).

364 Henry Brennan’s comments about the sisters’ appearance and Eve’s gynaecological problems are an obvious example. His views on the family were quoted at length: “With no male Langley, it meant June had to be the family centre. Whenever the family divided June and Mrs Langley were always paired. Mrs Langley was a most unnoticeable woman. A puzzle you couldn’t solve, how she could be the mother of two such rememberable daughters. Dumpy—shapeless—uninspiring—she certainly had you speculating a great deal more on just what type of man the missing, never mentioned, Mr Langley might or must have been. […] [June] had more of a presence than Eve. She had quite a good figure and enough personal poise to make the most of it. She had a crop of shining black hair and a well-handled voice, adequate enough to cover quite a few social layers. It had traces of richness showing up every now and then […] and very much better looking women would gladly have exchanged eyes with her. She had a talent for sketching the vaguely oriental style of subjects now seen […] on UNESCO […] Christmas cards” (257-8).
recalling the 1920s, for example, focused on the striking physical differences between the girls (260), echoing the concepts and even the words of *The Pea Pickers*: “Definitely she [Eve] was aware of June’s beauty. She felt […] as though she had to take second place. But really she didn’t have to because she had talent and wanted to be famous” (135). Hilary Clark expressed ambivalent feelings towards June and there are inconsistencies in June’s and Hilary’s accounts of the 1940s and the events leading up to Eve’s incarceration. Hilary said he considered June “a very calculating person” (422). Thwaite’s construction of a narrative about the progress of the sibling relationship over a lifetime based on these many varying anecdotal and contradictory sources in addition to the works of fiction resulted in a confusing portrait of both sisters.

Although June was among the first of many interviewees for the biography, her role in the final text is marginalized. Apart from early interviews with Douglas Stewart (in 1976) and Meg Stewart (in 1977), June was Thwaite’s first subject, and she was interviewed twice: on 19 May 1981 and 29 November 1982. The biography was not published until 1989 and June was not re-interviewed. Thwaite was uneasy about June as a source of information about Eve, noting that she “vacillates between intense admiration and vitriolic jealousy” (7). Several disclaimers warn the reader of her concern: for example, June was “certainly in full possession of her faculties and had no reason to falsify or distort Langley’s educational history” (6); her memories were “no doubt highly selective […] coloured by her own envy and resentment” (296). Nearly a decade after the death of Eve, June—now aged seventy-seven—expressed more anger towards her sister than at any other time in her life, which, I suspect, is the reason Thwaite included just a few direct contemporary quotes from June about Eve in her lengthy biography. For example: “I loved
her when we were young. But she altered. She became a great fat thing—a green-eyed guts who ate constantly. She was a mongrel. Man mad. She never helped Mira; it was all left to me” (138), and:

Eve was involved with men, educated men, and she didn’t pick up any low rubbish. But there was this dreadful smell about her, she threw herself at Hilary and was intimate with him. She wouldn’t compromise with men and she used him for her own purposes. I believe he liked me well enough, but I didn’t particularly return the compliment. (258)

Thwaite paraphrased comments made by June; cousins of the sisters; friends, acquaintances and, most often, relied on Eve’s texts, to reconstruct the sister relationship, which she referred to as a “honeymoon” in the 1920s and “doomed” and “mutually destructive” (32) in later years. She argued that in their “Primavera” period, “Blue had been her surrogate wife or lover” (235). Almost all of June’s quoted testimony comes from her letters to Davis in the early 1950s, and this evidence also constituted the primary source for most of Thwaite’s commentary about Eve following her release from the asylum (444).

The biography added very little information that was new in terms of the sisters’ lives, but as one of only three people to formally interview June, Thwaite was able to verify that June retained a powerful, often polarized emotional response to her sister’s memory: “she is now an old woman, tied to a nursing home in Katoomba, and her hatred for and disapproval of her sister is boundless. Her admiration for her achievements, however, is equally deep” (426). She observed that Eve’s sexual relationships were repugnant to June and perceived as provocative: it came across “quite strongly […] in my interviews with her in the seventies, that she considered Langley selfish, oversexed” (310); that June resented
the role of carer for their mother, and was also unwilling to identify herself as a mother. June persisted with the assertion that she herself was “childless,” but this time, she also insisted that she had never married. She was quite vehement on the subject. Later, however, she talked of an Englishman who “got her pregnant” and found a house for her. She stated that she didn’t have the child. “There was this encumbrance in my belly and then the blood came.” (206 f/n 8)

This is very graphic and unusual language that June uses to describe her pregnancy and the birth of her baby, and is reminiscent of Eve’s evil fantasies in “Land of the Long White Cloud” where Lido’s “monstrous” round skull “with hair curling off it like thin strips of string bark” is “coagulated blood” on a red shed door (94). Might June have killed her daughter, perhaps dropped her accidentally as Eve fantasies doing herself in the text? This could explain why Lido has vanished without trace, and why June consistently denied that she had had children.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an analysis of the letters and public statements of June Langley in relation to herself and her family, particularly her sister Eve. My “detective’s” hunch that June Langley was not a particularly reliable witness to Eve’s life was borne out by the evidence. As a biographer—and in her own autobiographical statements—her commentary was incomplete, inaccurate, biased, and sometimes overtly malicious. June was an extremely complex individual whose life revolved around her sister, privileging that
relationship above all others. June sought to explain Eve's behaviour towards herself in terms of Eve's "genius," but was clearly perplexed and frustrated by the failure of the sister relationship to sustain them as individuals or a couple. From the earliest dated evidence—June's letters home in 1922—the Langley family exhibited odd behaviours toward each other and the outside world. These behaviours frequently hinged on issues of gender ambivalence for which there is no explanation. June demonstrated no special insight into the family situation nor did she reveal any new information about the representation of family in Eve's fiction. This chapter has demonstrated that like Eve, June's life was blighted and distorted by the imperative to conceal family secrets.

While Eve was alive, June was in a constant state of uncertainty about the nature and stability of their relationship. Most sibling relations mellow as time passes (Cicarelli 56), but June became increasingly bitter and angry towards her sister, particularly once she had died. The ferocity of her "emotionalism" (to use a Truman Capote word) escalated rather than diminished. The secrecy that permeated the family isolated the sisters from each other, and they were estranged at the time of Eve's death. After evaluating all the available evidence, I have come to the conclusion that June was aware that a particular secret existed regarding Eve that had to do with men and sex. However, June's uncertainty about the precise nature of the secret is apparent in the various explanations she proffered over the years to explain her sister's behaviour generally and in relation to herself particularly.

Although the sisters grew up in the same household, such ignorance of critical childhood events is not unusual in families where incest occurs. June too suffered psychologically. She was destabilized by a contradictory sense of self as both female and male: "I am so
used to myself that I can hardly realise I am what I am,” she wrote in 1925, and unable to attach herself permanently to anyone other than her immediate family. Herbert Bower, Senior Associate in Psychiatry at the University of Melbourne, wrote in 1995 of the psychosocial role of gender identity:

The child-rearing process exerts a powerful influence on the future gender identity and children deliberately reared in the opposite sex show gender confusion or cross gender identity which invariably normalises if the process stops or when puberty is reached. (8)

In June’s case, this process of creating a cross-gender identity did not stop with puberty, and never “normalized.” June defined herself exclusively within the framework of her family of birth: she and her sister were “the pea pickers, no one could understand us except Mia.” June shared the family’s penchant for secrecy, and harboured important secrets of her own; indeed I did wonder whether there was not something she might have told about the circumstances of Eve’s death. June’s representation of her parents and the family history is congruent in some respects with that produced by Eve in her fiction, but her representation of the sister relationship diverges markedly. June’s representation of her “self” as provider and father figure to the other two women adds yet another bizarre twist to the Langley family saga.

This chapter separates the “fiction” in June’s public statements from the facts, unravelling in the process the strategy of secrecy and denial that characterized the Langley


sisters' lives. Nearly a decade after Eve's death, June was clearly still unable to reflect on her sister and her work with any objectivity. However, as Elizabeth Fishel has observed, when rivalry persists into old age "it appears with a testiness, a pettiness, that is almost a caricature of childhood spats" (129). Thus, Eve is a "green-eyed guts"; she's "fat"; she "never helped" she was "man mad"; she smelled; she "used" Hilary and "threw herself" at him. The sisters' enmeshed relationship and subsequent estrangement was psychologically damaging for June. Her attitude towards Eve changed profoundly over the years from intense love and attachment to equally intense hatred and negation. She never appears to have understood her sister's behaviour and motivation despite a lifetime of geographical proximity and emotional entanglement. Throughout her life June demonstrated a willingness to subsume her own needs to those of her sister, sacrificing in the process all other relationships. June's identification with her father (despite knowing virtually nothing about him) and her representation of herself as head of the family is evident throughout her texts. She had little to say about her mother although they appear to have lived together for the duration of Mia's life. From the time June left school at the age of fourteen she initiated the cross-dressing that was a feature of the sisters' youth. No explanation was forthcoming regarding June's cross-dressing or her articulation of herself as both male and female.367 This period of their lives was idealised by June, who perceived that men had come between herself and her sister: had they stayed together as a couple Eve's desire to be loved and famous would have been realised. There is no suggestion on June's part that theirs was a lesbian relationship, although she too refers to the night they slept together at Annie

367 In 1950 June had a terrier she called "Femme, or in contradiction Diddle Boy" (June Langley. Letter to Beatrice Davis. 9 Jan. 1951. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/149).
Willoughby's as a significant event (described as an erotic encounter by Eve in *The Pea Pickers* (297-98) and "Demeter of Dublin Street" (21-22). June, like Eve, demonstrates in her texts a readiness to construct and confabulate and make her written "stories" (her letters and biographical pieces) interesting. She has the same tendencies towards obfuscation and secrecy and reveals almost nothing about their parents, childhood, and adolescence and significant, life-changing events. June refused to discuss matters relating to either her own or Eve's children; nor did she provide any significant insights into the circumstances surrounding Eve's incarceration. She insisted her sister was "mental" and suffered from schizophrenia, but a genius who would achieve greatness at a future time. June's texts indicate that as a witness to Eve's life she was unreliable, but as a character in her own right she is fascinating.

Chapter Four

Speculating on the Eve Langley Story

The blurring of the borders between the life and writing of Eve Langley has been an issue of concern, recognised by all critics for decades, and I decided it was important to know if the “inextricable link” was truly an insurmountable problem. If I could separate the two, what would the fictional and the “real” families of Eve Langley look like? My solution was to meticulously prise apart the life and the texts as a first step towards an original family biography and a new critical reading of the fiction, and the results were fascinating. Having resolved certain issues about defining the borders between the life and the fiction, the imperative to maintain this separation diminished. I have satisfied my detective “self” that the questions about family that arose as the project developed have been resolved as far as is possible at this point in time, drawing on all the available evidence, and now I find myself asking new questions. Does this new information about family change what I and others believe about the writer and the writing? What happens if I attempt to fit the pieces of the puzzle—that is the enigmatic Eve Langley and her obtuse texts—back together again? What does this Eve Langley look like? As Eve set about creating a version of her life using the muse of fiction, did she indeed leave sufficient clues to answer the question: “who was Eve Langley?” In this final chapter I consider all the information available to me and provide what I believe is a plausible, but avowedly speculative, explanation for the unusual life and writing of Eve Langley.

As a detective sifting carefully through Eve’s and June’s papers, Eve’s fiction, and historical documents, I found the evidence regarding Eve’s traumatic childhood experiences to be compelling. I have concluded that on the balance of probabilities, Eve’s
father was responsible for a number of important family secrets, but the evidence does not prove beyond reasonable doubt what those secrets were. Documentary and anecdotal evidence suggest that Eve’s childhood trauma predisposed her to mental illness (Gelinas 314), and that the original cause was an incestuous encounter (or encounters) with her father, who may himself have exhibited signs of gender ambivalence. “The truth,” Hal Porter observed cryptically in relation to Eve, is “often more beautiful than the facts and more grisly” (Thwaite 498). At this point in time the truth is unknowable—I can only speculate—but is it possible that the facts regarding Eve’s life and family may be even more fantastic than their fictional representation?

For Eve, the significant life events that suggest the ongoing negative effects of childhood incest are: the early onset of mental illness that resulted in institutionalisation as an adult; her attachment and marriage to an abusive partner; her emotional estrangement from her children, and her hysteria at the rejection of “Wild Australia.” A 1979 study by Rosenfeld has suggested that the “repercussions of incest […] may manifest themselves ‘immediately after the event or considerably later in life’” (cited in Gelinas 314). The details of Eve’s childhood fit the profile of incest victim, and Eve appears to have suffered a significant psychological illness at the onset of puberty. The trajectory of her adult life points to a characteristically “disguised presentation” (Gelinas 314) masking and reflecting an underlying trauma. When she was thirty-two Eve married an abusive man ten years her junior who she knew was not in a position to support her and their subsequent children; nor was he especially interested in doing so. Hilary Clark agreed with her assessment of their relationship, and made the following comments in an interview in 1983: “My ideal of a woman was always tall, slim and fair and golden. The Tennysonian ideal, you know? She
was the exact opposite and she didn't appeal to me one bit. She was the antithesis of my ideas of female beauty. But the point was [...] I had an attraction for her mainly, I think, because of my way of life” (Thwaite 252). 369 Both Eve and Hilary made their creative work a high priority, in spite of their impoverished circumstances and responsibility for three very young children who were close in age. Eve wrote a highly successful book in which the narrator’s father is described as perverted and evil, and shortly after its publication was committed to a mental asylum where she remained for seven years. Gélinas notes in “The Persisting Negative Effects of Incest” that “incest victims appear to be well represented among female psychiatric patients” (313), and cites a study conducted in 1940—shortly before Eve was committed. Eve was separated from her children, and her efforts to reconnect with her sons in particular met with limited success. In 1954 she wrote: “I don’t want to know anything about the children.” Eve was traumatized by the rejection of a text—“Wild Australia”—in which she seeks reconciliation with her past, the circumstances of the rejection impelling her to change her name by deed poll to Oscar Wilde. For the remainder of her life, Eve lived a lonely isolated existence, albeit frenetically busy, often writing repetitively and without obvious purpose, the sheer volume of her output erecting barriers around her “self”: “There’s nothing to write about. I seem to be wasting paper, but, not having anyone to talk to, as of old I like to write.” 371 When asked about her past in interviews, she obfuscated. Eve died alone, intestate and anonymous in the Blue Mountains in 1974, estranged from the one person who had shown unwavering interest in her over the


course of her life, her sister, June, who lived not far away but now hated her. The argument that Eve’s main conflict and difficulty lay in the demands of motherhood and creativity seems undermined by the fact that she wrote *The Pea Pickers* and another manuscript whilst pregnant and with two toddlers underfoot: she locked them up. This practice (referred to in both Eve’s fiction and by Hilary in interviews) represented an unusual solution to a common problem. Most women—creative or otherwise—placed in such extreme circumstances, would put their work aside and nurture their children. Eve dealt with the conflict between creativity and domesticity therefore in a way that confronts normal expectations, and suggests that she was able to emotionally disconnect from her children, adding to the perception that her acts of self narration operated outside normal boundaries. With no access to the records of Eve’s medical treatment during her years of incarceration from the time she was thirty-eight until she was forty-five, I cannot know whether the origins of her psychological state were ever explored. As far as I can tell, they were not, but Eve’s drawing, done in March 1974, of a young child bearing her childhood name being pulled along by an almost completely unclothed man beneath “the name of the father” Apollo, is stark evidence that the persistent effects of the underlying trauma of her childhood was never resolved.

This highly detailed picture was drawn in pencil just months before Eve’s death. “Apollo” is written over the figure of a man unclothed but for his underpants, and “Dolly” is written over the head of a clothed child, who appears to be resisting the tug of the man’s hand, which holds her own tightly. That it refers to herself and her father seems clear. Eve

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372 Joy Thwaite pointed out Eve’s propensity in her fiction to use the name Apollo for men like “Dr Dudding” and her lover Roger Mellsop who exercised power over her and yet embodied “an unobtainable male power consciously rejecting her” (145).
refers to "Apollo, my father on Mars" in another booklet dated 1959. "Dolly" was the name by which Eve’s cousins said she was known in Crossover and it seems likely from the drawing that the name originated much earlier. The name of the New South Wales town where Eve lived—"Forbes"—and the year "1913" are written at the top of the page. This location and year fits with the documentary evidence we have from Eve’s school records. To the right of the child lie a doll and a book. There is no benign explanation for what this picture suggests: it seems that as death approached, and the "lord of language" ("Wild Australia" 354) had failed her, Eve decided to express her "secret" in a visual medium; the medium of her sister, the artist who had herself supplied a strange and ambiguous image of a naked old man for *The Pea Pickers*. On nearby pages of the 1974 booklet there are drawings and references to Apollo: "Apollo god of the planet Mars. Crooner his girl"; "Dear God of the planet Mars, how we wonder how you are! Your girl weeps but I feel sleepy and soon will sleep. March 4 1974"; and "Hello Dolly. 1913 when the young god was always near me."

As a literary critic I have "read" the fiction and interpreted this drawing. However, my readings are pushing me into realms of knowledge where I have no expertise. Have I misread the drawing? I turned to an "expert witness," and asked a clinical adolescent psychologist to look at the drawing. In the course of her practice she had seen many children from difficult backgrounds, and she told me that the picture was typical of that of

373 “Always her drawings troubled me. ‘To where,’ I asked her, as I stood before the naked figure of an old man who stood alone in a desert, bearing a veiled woman in his arms, ‘does that sad withered hermit bear the veiled woman … she, who is veiled like those insects that set their tents in the tea-tree in springtime? I should like such a man to carry our youth, so veiled, into the ovens of the desert, and there burn it, that the escaping flame, our true selves, might vanish into heaven.” (*The Pea Pickers* 5)
an individual who had been abused. In addition to the explicit iconography of the two figures, she noted the presence of the doll and the book. In her experience, the doll represents comfort, and the book a form of control over the experience of abuse. Abused children often include in their drawing something that has a beginning, a middle and an end, thus allowing them to find some moment of psychological closure—albeit temporary—in an ongoing saga of despair over which the child, in reality, has no control. As an adult released from the asylum, Eve had persisted in carrying around with her a collection of dolls, even taking them with her on her travels to Greece in 1965. In later years, Eve photographed her dolls all lined up as if in a little bush burial. Some survivors of abuse collect large numbers of dolls, each reflecting a particular experience, noted my witness. The psychologist then made another rather startling observation: the fact that the male figure was wearing clothes which obscured his gender, suggested to her that he may be a cross-dresser. All of the outstanding issues that I am aware of in the secret life of the Langley family—about books, gender identity and incest, come together in this one extraordinary drawing.

In Eve’s fiction there are two sources of intense anxiety and shame. The first has to do with incest, and the second to do with gender. In this picture, and in Eve’s fiction, what I see as the two biographical origins of Eve’s psychology are revealed: “textual” Eve and “material” Eve support one another. In my own exploration as a literary detective who has

374 Eve Langley. “Diary Account of trip to Greece 25 Oct. 1965-13 Nov. 1965” (watercolours dated 1972). Eve Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 4188. She writes repeatedly of her experiences with the dolls, their placement in her room, and her distress at the loss of several during her trip to Greece. In 1968 Eve wrote to Bisi about coming to New Zealand with her dolls “Wonga” and “Miss Min Mog” (Thwaite 480). Karen Stenbo (Bisi’s daughter) recalled her grandmother taking the dolls to the dolls’ hospital for repair (Thwaite 481).
no training as a psychiatrist, I have focused my attention in this dissertation upon the texts generated not only by Eve, but by other members of her family as well, particularly her sister June. Eve's own representations of family, however, are at the core of my argument. My interest in Eve was sparked by *The Pea Pickers*, and its intimate insights into an unusual family. In subsequent texts, the narrator claimed this family as her own, and in the absence of any significant non-fictional accounts by Eve, her fiction—the two published novels and some four thousand closely typed pages on pink paper—represents all that Eve had to say about her parents, her sister, her husband and her children. I have established that Eve's writing about her family of origin is fundamentally different in style and substance from her writing about the family she had with Hilary Clark. Although both families are represented as dysfunctional, the Langley family is characterized by secrecy and obfuscation, while Eve is notably frank in her observations regarding the Clark family, so much so that Angus & Robertson reader Eric Russell was frustrated and offended by her "insensitive lack of reticence in her most private affairs [...] the sort of material people keep to themselves," and found it impossible to objectively evaluate the literary merits of her later New Zealand fiction. The effect of Eve's overt "truthfulness" with regard to her husband and children throws into sharp relief the denial and repression that characterizes her representation of the Langley family. Paradoxically, although the family was obsessed with secrecy, Mia and June made a point of preserving the family's letters with the explicit purpose of providing material for Eve's writing, and supporting her role as family historian.

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375 Eric Russell. Reader's Report. "Last Loneliest Loveliest." Submitted 12 Nov. 1959. Angus & Robertson Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3269/383/449. It must be noted that he is the only one to react to Eve's fiction in this manner. It is not true, as Robyn Colwill has claimed ("Corridors of Memory") that *all* the editors at Angus & Robertson were constrained in their opinions of Eve's texts by a conservative mind set.
These were parallel enterprises. This fundamental contradiction between intent and content was central to my understanding of the family: how was Eve to both expose and repress the past, particularly when the past contained so many secrets, not all of which were shared even within the family? In “The Victorians,” Eve demonstrates that it is possible to keep a significant secret between two members of an intimate triad: Eve and Mia withhold from June their knowledge of Keith Wilson’s defection. In “Land of the Long White Cloud,” Eve demonstrates that she is willing to confide in her audience an important family secret, that is, the birth of her sister’s child, which June never publicly acknowledged.

Eve’s fiction provides evidence of a characteristic “denial that tends to persist, but with repetitive intrusions of certain elements of the traumatic experience” (Gelinas 316). The representation of Steve’s father in The Pea Pickers demonstrates these elements of denial and repression, and “repetitive intrusions” that I have previously referred to as “frozen moments.” At a critical moment in Steve’s relationship with her lover Macca, when they speak of marriage she says:

“Tonight, Macca, I think of my father, that twisted, moody failure who despised me and set in me the seeds of destruction.” A terrible picture came into my mind. I set it aside hastily out of consideration of the dead, and began to talk of his love for the bush and the heavens. A rooster crowed far away. (The Pea Pickers 188)

The presence of the rooster recalls the denial of Jesus by Peter in the New Testament: “Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Matthew 26:34). This important passage in The Pea Pickers incorporates denial as Steve puts aside out of consideration for the dead the terrible picture of the father,
an act which post-Freudian readers would recognise as a classic expression of repressed memory. The significance of this passage has been highlighted also by Harry Heseltine, who referred in 1986 to “one fugitive clue to the psychological basis for her behaviour—in a passing remark to Macca in *The Pea Pickers*” (118). However, in between *The Pea Pickers* of 1940 and Eve’s extraordinary drawing of “Apollo and Dolly” in March 1974 lie millions of words, and it is not correct to describe this clue regarding the father as isolated or “fugitive.” The effects of the narrator, Steve’s, childhood experiences in Eve’s texts point to extremes of self-loathing and disgust of her own body which she describes in “Wild Australia” as the “ugliest chunk of meat I ever saw” (“Wild Australia” 368). Steve searches for pure idealized love “untainted” by sex (“the severe gods […] have ordered me, on pain of death to remain virgin […] all my days in the flesh shall remain pure” [*The Pea Pickers* 186]); and there is the eternal fear of the subjugating father figure who “stared powerfully on me; and he looked upon me with brief and terrible eyes … Behind all this, stood, the depth and dark of the eternal pit. Strange!” (“Bancroft House” 99). Steve’s memories of childhood are infused with a paralysing oblivion “that seized me and held me at its will” (*The Pea Pickers* 48). All are recurring themes, impossible to ignore, but submitted without explanation by the narrator. All members of Steve’s family are subject to extreme fluctuations of identity, but attention is drawn to startling and idiosyncratic features of their behaviour. The father—whom Eve has named Arthur Langley—is described as “erotic and evil” in “Land of the Long White Cloud” (270). The “absent,” “little” mother (*The Pea Pickers* 1) is a characteristic of both Eve’s and June’s texts—and an enduring characteristic of families in which incest occurs (Ward 175). In 1971 on the anniversary of Mia’s death on 12 November, Eve wrote: “you who were his wife and you
died, you will only deny it all and punish me [...] You have always punished me." The overt alloeroticism between the sisters Steve and Blue in The Pea Pickers and "Wild Australia" in particular is a unique and unusual feature of Eve’s texts, and points to "the increased intergenerational risk" of perpetuating the original experience of incest (Gelinas 315). The most striking example is that describing the sisters’ nocturnal encounter at the Willoughbys’ farm, which initially appeared in The Pea Pickers (297-98) and was repeated in perhaps its original form in the 1960 "Demeter of Dublin Street":

We lay close together with bright crimson loin cloths binding our slim hips, our yellow hips, our hot hips, and touched each other with groping hands when far, far out in the dripping red ranges, in the black and terrible ranges, in the lonely and steep ranges, the fox ran yelping and bounding over slippery logs in the night ... I hate, I think I hate those words that do not bring back the night and the sister flesh beside me. (21-22)

And again in "Wild Australia":

I lay with my head on the pillow, a dark hermaphrodite, with a blaze of red running through my hair ... and stared at the young and beautiful creature. On some mornings she was so astonishingly like Victor Hugo’s exquisite mistress that I had to tell her. (275-76)

Oh that the hours there might have been prolonged forever, for I was in bliss with my sister. I was happy with her. Man, seen at a distance, appeared impure, and woman only was pure. (279)

Alvin Rosenfeld notes in "Endogamic Incest and the Victim-perpetrator Model" that "people with a history of incest [...] have a tendency to sexualise relationships" (409). Sexual nuances permeate Eve’s representation of her father, mother and sister.

The effect of the incest on Eve culminates in two layers of intense anxiety that signal the psychological conflict between aversion and control. Sometimes the manifestation of this continuing psychological damage is external and material in Eve’s life—the family of dolls is an obvious example. Sometimes the evidence of psychological damage manifests in peculiar attitudes towards the novels themselves as material objects.

Each of the post White Topee texts is four hundred pages in length, with fifty pages to each chapter, typed on thin sheets of pink paper known as "onion skin" (Frost, "Who Speaks" 6). Regardless of where the narrative was at in the chronology, the book had to stop. Any additional pages were not allowed to alter the 400 page total and appear, for example, as 318A. Eve was resistant to altering her novels, "copying out" rather than revising, thereby ensuring her control over the final length of the text.

In addition, there is blurring between the writing within the text and writing outside the text. On the bottom of page 318 of "Wild Australia" she places an instruction: "READ THE NEXT PAGE." On the following page, designated 318A, she writes: "Speak clearly, otherwise people will think you have something to conceal." She did have something to conceal and that was a secret about "two mothers" ("Wild Australia" 354) who were now dead, and which she no longer feels obliged to repress. The text is peppered with references to men becoming women and questioning their gender identity. Eve waited until her birthday—1 September—to send off this "novel," although she had finished it some months
earlier. "Wild Australia" was a cathartic text that concluded with imagery of rebirth. Eve did not send a covering letter (which was unusual for her) and she waited anxiously for news of its reception. Her devastation at Nan McDonald’s rejection triggered the letters that led to her being labelled as a mad woman by Joy Thwaite, and this interpretation has not been contested until now. However Eve’s initial response focused on her horror of the material object being returned to her, not on the rejection of the text as such (which came later). Over and over Eve wrote “don’t send that book back”:

My brain is whirling in horrid chaos. [...] don’t send that book. O, I know what death is now [...] I thought I knew at Minildra what it was.

I groan in agony when I think that you’re going to send that book back.

Nan, don’t send that book back. Don’t send it back.

In fact she didn’t want any of her books sent back to her; she asked Angus & Robertson to “just store” them all away even though she knew they would not be

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379 Steve describes herself as “forty years of age when I landed on this girl and her parents at Killeens at Minildra” (“Wild Australia” 252). This letter to Nan is written in 1954; forty years earlier she would have been eight years old.


published. To have her material returned meant that it (and, by implication, she) would be forever "entombed without promise of resurrection" ("Bancroft House" 136).

The blurring between the external and internal is most startlingly dramatized in the manuscript of "Demeter of Dublin Street" in which the narrator and an unnamed lover "moved soundlessly and evilly [...]. There was penitence and some slender veins of enjoyment, but, always, the dread of discovery [...] and always after the music begins." The narrator is trapped eternally in the "hellish moonlight" that is "permitted to adulterers and harlots." There is an "orifice through which might pass a tiny statuette of Venus [...] but nothing of larger build" (7-8). As this dream sequence spills over onto page eight it is alarming for the reader to discover two typed words next to the numeral "8" (designating page sequence) where Eve has added "year old": meaning "eight year old." Eve turned eight on the first day of Spring in 1912 which of course meant she was eight for most of 1913—the date on her drawing. The year 1912 is referred to by Eve in cataclysmic terms. In "Wild Australia" there was a "drought of eight years breaking over the roof of every house in Forbes, at once. We had one such in 1912" (357). The words "year old" represents an extra-textual addition that is nevertheless integral to the text—and there are other examples in which the narrator ("textual" Eve) and the author ("material" Eve) struggle for control of the writing. Her effort to create meaning fits with a general pattern—evidence that Eve never escaped the psychological damage of childhood no matter how hard she tried writing her life into her fiction. Eve's texts contained "material" she had to "get rid of"; 382 "If I can only get my writings out of me and out of my soul and into sympathetic

hands, I am well, and feel marvellous,” she wrote to Nan McDonald in 1954. Eve’s writing was not just about mastering the past; it also represented a form of resurrection. At the conclusion of “Wild Australia” she writes:

That was the end of hop picking, 1929 ... I left Blue in the room and going over to the wild rose bush, twisted and screwed a thin thorny branch of wild roses off and sticking them in my button hole strolled back to the room and Blue again. “What have you got there, Steve?” asked Blue. “Wild rose” I said. Wilde rose ... from the dead. I wear it as a sign that I, Oscar Wilde have risen from the dead as I said I would. De profundis, Deus, resurgam!”

The end. (“Wild Australia” 409)

This, I propose, is why she responded with such hysteria at Nan McDonald’s threat to return “Wild Australia.”

In her sequence of letters to Nan McDonald in April 1954 it becomes clear that Eve’s motivation for writing the experiences out was because she was trying to get rid of secrets. It was important to Eve that Nan believed that the “whole story [of “Wild Australia”] is true. TRUE. I am ill tonight. God, if you only knew the whole story. And when I get this book back, I’ll be doomed again.” Eve referred to “a hideous secret that lay between us and poor Hilary Clark.” Nan McDonald had no idea what she was talking

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about, and sent a soothing response, but Eve had already changed her name by deed poll to Oscar Wilde, observing "I slew Eve Langley before she could slay me." Eve Langley is not my name either," she added, highlighting in her correspondence with her editors the instability that comes through in "Wild Australia," where the voices of Eve and Steve compete: "If I had my own way, I should just calmly blot out the Oscar Wilde part of myself and continue writing as Eve Langley, and about Eve Langley forever" ("Wild Australia" 340). Each time Eve tries to write out the secrets of her past the writing becomes unstable. A compulsive psychological process is underpinning the repetitive reworking of old "material"; thus she imagines writing twenty books within the year, sometimes writing "three hellish books," four—or, as was the case in 1954, having "five books on the go." "If you had the energy and the time, you could write one a month—12 a year," she commented in a newspaper interview in 1954. She felt "cold, sad, depressed and sick" when she was not writing. This is to be expected, according to Gelinas, who writes of "an

involuntary compulsive tendency toward repetition of some aspects of the traumatic experiences despite pronounced conscious efforts at avoidance and suppression” (317). He cites Horowitz who has included artistic production as one manifestation of such repetitious behaviour (317); without treatment or reconciliation with the trauma, he writes, the “traumatic neurosis tends to persist” (316). Eve periodically suggests she has got beyond the trauma (later texts represent her father as more human and loveable), but in fact she never does. Her publicity shots for White Topee show her holding her book opened at the last page suggesting that one book segues neatly into the next, as if her texts truly are her “continuity of being” (Plate 19). It is an odd piece of self-dramatization, but reflects her inability to find closure in her work as a writer and in her life.

June Langley would not have a part to play in Australian literature without Eve, but she is essential to our understanding of the life and fiction of Eve. Throughout all Eve’s texts there are allusions to gender slippage, but what I have learned about June is that while Eve has her cross-dressing under control, June does not, and neither did their father. June shows clear signs of gender ambivalence, and her behaviour appears to unconsciously replicate that of the father who is named in White Topee as a cross-dresser. The father has damaged them both—the real damage to Eve is the incest which June probably did not know about, and the damage to June is her ambivalence about her gender identity. She was seven or eight when the father left—old enough to be disturbed—and it is possible that the identification with the father by Eve and Mia and June is a way of signalling that she is like him in gender ambivalence.

Many critics have specifically dwelt on the transvestic concerns of Eve’s texts, but the presumption has been that this theme in the fiction was indicative of Eve’s own
ambivalence—Marian Arkin’s “Literary Transvestism in Eve Langley’s *The Pea Pickers*, in which she refers to Eve as a “picara-transvestite” (113) is an obvious example. In this article Arkin describes

Langley’s ongoing examination of Eve’s troubled sex-role identity that is the novel’s central focus. Although it would certainly be an exaggeration to call Eve a clinical transvestite [...] Eve’s attitude toward sexual identity is, like the transvestite’s, warped. (110)

The gender ambiguity in Eve’s texts sometimes does seem to relate specifically to the narrator; the most oft quoted is Steve’s declaration early in *The Pea Pickers*: “I knew that I was a woman, but I thought I should have been a man” (4). But there is a conundrum in that both sisters dress as hybrids, wearing clothes of both sexes that accentuate their femininity, whilst pretending to be both boys and girls, a proclivity that is put down to “Our mother and our sister [...] they like us dress like this [...] they bring us up, dress sometime like boy, sometime like girl” (*The Pea Pickers* 89). The name “Steve” incorporates the name “Eve,” which is the most unequivocally feminine of names. Oscar Wilde, whose name she adopts in 1954, was a married bi-sexual man. As is the case in the 1925 letters written by June, the dressing up in *The Pea Pickers* is represented as role playing: neither sister subscribes to the view that they are boys, and they pursue heterosexual relationships. There is clearly “a lesbian subtext,” as Joanne Winning and Lucy Frost have observed.393

However, there is no indication that Steve represents a case of gender ambivalence.

393 Warwick Lawrence, who knew Eve from 1935 to 1939 in his capacity as sub-editor on *The Mirror* in Auckland, wrote a detailed critique of Joy Thwaite’s biography of Eve and took particular issue with the assertions by Joy Thwaite and Hilary that Robin Hyde and Eve were both lesbians, and perhaps lesbian lovers: “I never once heard even a whisper of such an allegation,” he wrote on 19 May 1999 (4). Joy Thwaite
What we do find in Eve's texts are numerous references to men dressing as women and, more specifically, seeking gender realignment as women. The naming of the narrator of *The Pea Pickers* as Steve Hart is the most obvious reference to male to female gender ambiguity. In the first three texts submitted by Eve after her release from the asylum male to female gender issues surface often enough to be labelled a thematic concern. Although there is absolutely no evidence that Eve was a transvestite, the same cannot be said for the narrator’s father in *White Topee*, or of June in her texts. Clothing and costume feature prominently and in a plethora of peculiar configurations in all of Eve’s texts, particularly in *The Pea Pickers*, and yet there is no reference to Steve’s father’s clothing at all, even though as a masculine drover, there were stereotypical “manly” accoutrements—catalogued by Steve throughout the book—that she might have described. The absence of clothes is notable, even more so as the father is represented as a body without a face. The only time he is dressed, he is wearing a green driving skirt, in his role as a Princess in the “continuity of being” fable in *White Topee*:

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394 I contacted the Gender Clinic at Monash University in Melbourne to establish a clearer picture of the impact of the relationship between transvestites and children, and the role and significance of garments. The clinic sent me, in a white, anonymous envelope, the information that is distributed to transvestites who wish to proceed with gender reassignment. It included a paper by Herbert Bower, Senior Associate in Psychiatry at the University of Melbourne called “Transexualism.” Bower notes that the “transvestite […] is always a male, [who] may be defined as a person who obtains sexual gratification from cross-dressing which is thus fetishistic in its dimensions” (18).
I became conscious then, of sitting in this buggy between a man and a woman. At the same time I had a sense of being out driving with my mother, Lady Wilde, and some Princess. I saw the green linen driving skirt of the Princess quite plainly [...] But this picture melted as I stared at the face of the man driving the buggy [...] he was a short man with a large head [...] I felt that he was to be my father. (White Topee 242, emphasis added)

Eve requested that this passage be included in White Topee very late in the editorial process, and her instructions were accompanied by a letter stating that this was the book’s most important part [...] which I have kept secret for years [...] this great picture of the continuity of my being has played such an important part in my life that I should like to see it printed on a large canvass [...] But to tell you the truth it makes me feel so ill [...] that I cannot bear to think on it for too long.395

She signed the letter “Eve Langley, or ‘EVIL ANGEL,’” which is almost an anagram. “The only other new thing under the sun is that the father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary broke down in 1971 and confessed to me that He was a she” Eve wrote in an exercise book years later.396 Eve’s drawing in 1974 encapsulates all aspects of her experience of her father, bringing together the clues that she could not articulate despite writing literally millions of words—the novels themselves come to around five million, and


then there are her notebooks in the Mitchell Library, so many of them, most illegible and impenetrable, repetitive but no doubt also awash with "clues."

One of the remarkable discoveries I made while pursuing Eve through her own writing was the existence of a highly complex counter voice coming from her sister June. June aligns herself with her father, and the evidence from her texts is that she unconsciously replicates his gender ambivalence. The sister relationship provides a different perspective on the origin of Eve's oddness in life and her writing: across the broad spectrum of "sister" writing and sibling research, there is nothing that quite fits the aetiology of this filial relationship. The rejection of "Wild Australia" prompted Eve to write that "my sister, June, who knows the story, told me or advised me [...] to tell you the truth."³⁹⁷ Throughout the Australian novels Steve repeatedly refers to Mia and June saying she had been born as Oscar Wilde, and was therefore not of their kin. But none of this is ever explained, and nor does it make any sense. This particular secret between the women over names and kinship is impenetrable, and at no point did the clues to the Oscar Wilde trope ever come together in a coherent narrative.³⁹⁸

Eve's desire for "sister flesh" ("Demeter of Dublin Street" 21-22) and the eroticization of relationships among the three women³⁹⁹ on the part of Eve (but not June)


³⁹⁸ Robin Colwill who conducted extensive research into the Oscar Wilde trope also concluded that she had found no answer to this conundrum ("Corridors of Memory").

³⁹⁹ Eve wrote: "I had never idealized my mother. She, to whom I came home every autumn, was not the delicate writing on light scraps of paper which had hypnotised me during my absence [...] she flung graceful arms around my awkwardness and made for my mouth with the ardour of a woman in love. No, no. I would push her away a little, afraid that there was more between us than ordinary relationships. In youth I had read
falls into an awkward space in the literature on incest, lesbianism and sister relations. The possibility and consequences of lesbian incest are not addressed in the literature on incest or rape, possibly because an erotic relationship between sisters or mother and daughter is outside the "rape ideology" in that socially, the patriarchy is not challenged (see Ward, who also observes that "the homosexual strand of the incest taboo is literally implicit: it is never even mentioned" [188]); nor is there contravention of the biological imperative underpinning the incest taboo. Fortenberry and Hill (who were interested in the "transmission" of abuse [203]) also note that filial incest is underreported in the psychiatric literature (202). Robyn Colwill touched on the subject in her dissertation on Eve, but concluded that it is "beyond the scope of this project to pursue approaches informed by lesbian or queer literary theory, although these would offer potentially fruitful alternative endings" ("Corridors of Memory" 213). I have represented the alloeroticism expressed by Eve in her texts as an extreme of valorisation. However, in this speculative chapter it seems pertinent to reinforce that the writing also draws attention to the strikingly unusual relationships among the women and emphasises the two layers of anxiety that permeate the representation of family: that of the incest experience and gender ambiguity.

After taking my investigation of the sister relationship as far as it could go, I suddenly found myself returning to the daughters and their father. June the cross-dresser unconsciously mimics her cross-dressing father. June's identification of herself with her father, and Eve's identification of June with their father takes on a sinister light. June unconsciously all her life keeps the incest memory alive for Eve—just because of the such terrible things in old books which were like old men of the world to look at and to listen to" (Eve Langley. Note. June Langley Papers. Sydney: ML MSS 3898).
father/sister identification which means something comforting to June (in connection with a father she has lost and barely remembers) and something fundamentally destructive to Eve—the incest memory. In addition, and totally bizarrely, June’s gender ambivalence refigures her father’s. Why, I don’t know and I believe I can never know. In spite of my meticulous gathering of clues and my persistent investigative analysis, some of the Langley family secrets remain secure. I have uncovered family “dirt,” and yet in the end I am left not so much with scandal or deviance as with a haunting sense of vulnerability. All children in Eve’s texts are represented as vulnerable. Girl babies float down the Yangtze River, and they are without protectors, their mothers overworked and overwrought with the harshness of bush life. Only the Black Serpent in *The Pea Pickers* places a protective arm about her child, inspiring in Steve a feeling of jealousy—she is not coveting the mother as has been suggested, but the child’s position in relation to the mother: the bond is secure and complete. In “The Victorians,” a small girl

said suddenly, hauntingly, as though I had been all at once, that which I saw at once in my mind, a tall dark black bearded man standing with us in the silent grey bush, a wanderer awful in his silence and his deathly apartness from all things ... suddenly her voice came to me “Steve ... you would never hurt me would you?” (46)
Conclusion

The objective of this project was to investigate the often contradictory primary and secondary material available about the enigmatic writer Eve Langley in order to provide an alternative history of her life, and to deal with her texts from a new critical perspective. I adopted the role of detective, rifling through the files of this “cold case” in Australian literary history, looking for clues and connections that had been overlooked in previous readings of the life and work. Historically, Eve’s two published novels—one of which was hailed as a *tour de force* when first published—and ten unpublished “novels” have invited readings that blurred the borders between the life and the work. That this blurring was problematic was widely acknowledged, but it was deemed largely insurmountable; indeed some critics were of the view that it didn’t matter, but I thought it did. A study of the correspondence between Eve and her editors at Angus & Robertson throughout the 1950s demonstrated that as a professional writer she had a clear sense of audience and purpose, and thus it may be surmised that she maintained defined borders between her “author self” and her fiction. However she also strategically manipulated the family archives and the representation of family in her autobiographical fiction, and was overtly obtuse in interviews, so that ultimately, of course, it was Eve herself who was responsible for the subsequent blurring and misinformation that has occurred. What she could not control, was the voice of her sister, June, who played a critical role in the reception of Eve’s work both before and after her death. June’s private papers and public statements, like Eve’s fiction, raised many questions about the family in which the sisters had grown up. In my reading of the entire Langley family archive, it is the sisters’ representations of this family which holds the key to understanding Eve’s fiction. Once I understood this, the boundaries
between life and fiction became porous again, but in a new relationship distinctly different from the earlier blurring. Instead of reading the fiction straightforwardly as transparent autobiography, I can now suggest that hidden within the fiction is a tormenting family secret from which Eve never escaped.

Chapter one—a family biography that scrupulously adhered to historical documentation—was a necessary first step to a re-evaluation of the life and the fiction. Eve’s biography, *The Importance of Being Eve Langley*, which might have provided a framework for understanding Eve and her fiction, proved to be unreliable. It did not provide basic biographical data or a verifiable chronology, relying instead on the frequently contradictory statements of Eve in her autobiographical fiction. As a “detective” seeking to unravel the mysteries and uncertainties behind Eve’s story—and stories—the accurate sequencing of critical life events was crucial. This was a major task, made more challenging by the often elusive, fragmentary and contradictory primary materials left behind by Eve and her sister, which had been manipulated by the author to obscure underlying “truths.” While the destruction of primary source material by writers is not unusual, the silences, misrepresentations and obfuscations that is the legacy of Eve’s vast papers remains baffling. However it has been possible to construct an account of the author’s life from very slender and often confusing evidence. Some of this information was easily accessible—such as certificates of birth, death and marriage—and at other times, documents were buried in obscure locations: Eve’s 1964 diary, for instance, which had only recently been catalogued at the Mitchell Library in Douglas Stewart’s papers, and the 1914 school records of Crossover, dumped in the bottom of a tub in the shed of a nearby school in Gippsland. Information about June’s life, so carefully hidden, was revealed gradually,
over several years. Documents were read and reread for clues; family secrets eventually came to light, pointing to fraternal incest and cross-dressing, and Eve’s compulsive desire to both repress and express these secrets suggested the method for a new critical reading of her fiction.

Chapter two provided a reading of the published and unpublished fiction that makes no reference to the biography of the author, the circumstances of textual production or the historical context in which the fiction was written. My method represented a deliberate attempt to meticulously prise apart the life and the texts in order to produce a new critical perspective, and the results were fascinating. The chapter focuses exclusively on the representation of family, from the singular perspective of the narrator and central character/s, Steve/Eve, revealing the patterns in dysfunctional family relationships and the obsessive writing out of domestic secrets. Eve’s texts clearly fall within the Bildungsroman tradition, focussing on the characters Steve/Eve as she deals with her desire to be loved whilst locating herself in the world as an artist. However, it is an unusual development in a picaresque novel to infiltrate the sexual awakening of a youthful hero with images of the father and, most particularly, her attraction to her (admittedly real life) sister. The representation of the protagonist’s family, in all its configurations, is contradictory, complex and confronting. The fraught and unusual connections between family members only become clear as these relationships are tracked across the fiction. In The Pea Pickers, Steve’s recollections of an unnamed father are present as flashes of intense experience that appear at inappropriate times, images that she tries to repress. Her mother is strangely absent and her parents’ relationship is without a stable history. The sister June/Blue/June is represented as an object of both valorisation and loathing; weirdly, Steve/Eve finds her
sexually alluring. Strange unresolved stories of adoption and reincarnation form a backdrop to Steve/Eve’s history that point to the presence of family secrets that are approached only obliquely. The obsession with fabric and gender ambiguity is located within the family in *White Topee*, when the father is represented as a woman in a fable that Eve asked to be included as the editorial process came to a close. Oddly situated reveries on male to female metamorphosis punctuate already strange family relationships. The writing about the Langley family and the family Eve formed with Hilary Clark is contrasted: the former is an exercise in repression and secrecy, the latter is exposed in all its sordidness and misery—there are no secrets here, an offensive development in the fiction according to one Angus & Robertson reader. Two families, both dysfunctional, but treated very differently. Steve/Eve’s strange reveries over the baby of June and the disappearances of several male figures from the families of Eve and June raise issues of loss and abandonment that are never addressed in the fiction.

Chapter three dealt with the texts produced by June some of which were influential in the construction of Eve’s biography. Historically, there has been scant analysis of the different modes of representation and the different voices that came through in June’s texts over a sixty year period. Indeed there were numerous sources that had not been examined in detail before, and these threw into sharp relief the intense, problematic relationship between Eve and sister June. Commentary regarding significant portions of the author’s life could be traced back to June, but the differing purposes and audiences of her letters and interviews had not been scrutinised. This became yet another important area of investigation: to estimate June’s reliability as a witness to her sister’s life both before and after Eve’s death in 1974.
June had several opportunities to author a history of the family but like Eve, she declined to be transparent about many critical life events that remained inexplicable in the fiction and were clearly relevant to a biography of the author. June's letters to Eve's editor in the early nineteen fifties reflect the fraught relationship between the two middle-aged women, and the younger sister's desire to represent herself as the head of the family. Her identification with her father in the 1975 film *She's my Sister*, and her odd reflections on her cross-dressing draw comparisons with the representation of the father in Eve's fiction. While June has frequently been represented in the critical literature as the healthy "other" in the sister relationship, the overt secrecy and obfuscation about the past that is evident in her letters and interviews suggests she too was a victim of the destructive culture of secrecy that permeated the Langley family. Her status as family biographer diminished as I analysed the content and context of her texts: June was baffled by her sister's behaviour and vacillated between intense admiration for her professional achievements and equally intense anger on a personal level. The sisters appear to have been estranged when Eve died, and June's anger escalated as the years passed, so that when she was interviewed by biographer Joy Thwaite in 1982, she described her sister as a "green eyed guts" whose downfall she attributed to an unhealthy obsession with men. As Eve had been June's primary relationship over the course of her life, this represents a sad ending for the sparkling Blue of *The Pea Pickers*.

In chapter four I assessed all the available evidence and drew speculative conclusions about the family that shaped Eve's life and skewed their representation in her fiction. Drawing on a range of primary and secondary source material in addition to specific psychoanalytic theory that documented the long-term impact of incestuous
behaviour, I put forward a speculative but I believe convincing account of the Langley family history. The fiction became an integral part of the body of evidence that I could assemble to support a causal link to explain the complex family relationships of Eve Langley apparent in both the life and the fiction. As a detective, I had created clear clinical borders between the life and the fiction for much of the thesis, but now the imperative to keep them truly separate, diminished.

Unsurprisingly, there were patterns to be found in Eve’s obsessive writing about family that were replicated in the Langley family archives: obfuscation about the past, and a culture of secrecy that had long-term and destructive consequences for family members. The sexual innuendo that permeated the representation of all members of Eve’s immediate family in the fiction and in letters signalled clearly that all was not well within the family. That the father was inextricably bound up with important family secrets was clear: there was virtually no reference to him in family archives, and no photographs. The extent of his destructive influence on the family, however, was made explicit in The Pea Pickers. The proposition that he was, in addition, a cross-dresser, was a powerful suggestion in White Topee. In later works, Eve sought to reconfigure him as a more benign character, but the fact that she confined her commentary to his premarital past meant she did not need to reprise her relationship with him in her fiction. Eve’s drawings and writings just prior to her death in 1974 indicated she was a victim of fraternal incest, according to an analysis of the material by a clinical psychologist. His representation in her first novel as predatory and sinister may have triggered the onset of a mental illness at its publication in 1942. June’s representation of herself as both male and female in her letters and interviews from a very early age was bizarre and unexplained. She appeared to have little insight into her own
behaviour, although she identified with her father’s character. June maintained a powerful ambivalence towards her parents and sister throughout her life. Her inability to form lasting attachments outside her immediate family was most striking in the denial of her own baby, who disappeared without trace, along with her husband, in about 1933. Eve’s images of vulnerable children resonate throughout all her texts. While she remains an enigma, I argue that the keystone to understanding her representation of her “self” is an obsessive preoccupation with family secrets which are to do with fraternal incest and cross-dressing. This thesis provides a report of the findings of my detective work which has involved the meticulous analysis of all available sources. While my conclusions are speculative and not verifiable, my guise as a distanced investigator has facilitated a new interpretation of the life and an original reading of the fiction of Eve Langley.
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