



**“Moving Forward, Looking Back:  
Middlebrow Women Writers in Mid-Twentieth-Century  
Australia”**

By

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# Abstract

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## **“Moving Forward, Looking Back: Middlebrow Women Writers in Mid-Twentieth-Century Australia”**

This thesis focuses on the writing of four successful Australian women authors whose work falls into the period 1930s–1970s: Ernestine Hill (1899–1972), Henrietta Drake-Brockman (1901–1968), Mary Durack (1913–1994), and Patsy Adam-Smith (1924–2001). These women wrote prolifically across a range of genres and publishing mediums. They travelled widely throughout the remote regions of Australia and transcribed their experiences for an audience eager to learn more about their country. The four writers participated in the serious, nation-building pursuits which contributed to the development of a distinctive national culture in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia. Although their work was well-received and widely read at the time, they have largely fallen into obscurity. By drawing attention to these four women and their work, this dissertation contributes to scholarly calls for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the development of white Australia’s sense of itself during the early- to mid-twentieth century.

One key connection between these writers for the wider purposes of this study is that they all contributed to *Walkabout* magazine (1934–1974, 1978), a popular middlebrow periodical with an Australian focus. Middlebrow writing has a history of being derided, devalued and avoided in critical scholarship. The thesis argues that one of the key reasons for the critical neglect of these writers is their positioning within this category, which reached its initial peak in Australia during the time they were publishing. Middlebrow culture in Australia evolved during a period of rapid modernisation and had a nationalistic focus. One of the effects was to give women a more prominent place in society, particularly

as consumers. Increased opportunities for employment, albeit in limited areas, became available, giving women a public platform from which to speak. They made up a significant proportion of producers and consumers of middlebrow culture, which led to the perception of this category as a location of the feminine, further devaluing the arena of middlebrow culture overall.

While this thesis is interested in historical context, the focus is on representation and textuality. It reads across a variety of texts and genres including historical and romance novels, travel texts, articles for magazines, family histories, autobiography and memoir. It compares and contrasts the representations of self, country and others in these writers' work through a focus on four main themes: gender, nation, mobility and race. These interconnected themes are crucial sites for cultural representation and are closely tied to relationships of power in postcolonial society. As such, this thesis is concerned with the ways in which these writers negotiated a sense of belonging as white women in a predominantly masculine culture. Female writers were necessarily caught up in dominant patriarchal/colonial discourses but also stood outside these due to their gender. The ways in which these women constructed their authority is analysed in order to interrogate the public personas available to women in this period.

Identity formation in settler colonial societies is inextricably bound to complex relationships with the land and with Indigenous Australians. White settlers occupied an in-between space in a nation that was not wholly theirs, which expressed itself in internally contradictory texts. This thesis examines the assumptions, attitudes and arguments advanced by these writers' texts and the relationship of these rhetorical strategies with colonial and postcolonial discourses. The study considers how women writers used the positions available to them to speak to the nation as well as to critique it. Through its close

reading of the work of these neglected women writers, this thesis contributes to a broader critical consideration of the cultural work performed by middlebrow writing.

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# Introduction

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In 1940 Ernestine Hill, an author and journalist with a starry-eyed love for the outer reaches of Australia, wrote about her travels throughout the remote regions of the country:

Dreaming in a little ship down the crocodile-infested reaches of tropic rivers; out on the stark sandhills of the Centre, where the bones of the diprotodon and notatherium lie white in the sun; by miners' tents of the infinite mineral hills; or sitting on a petrol tin in the din and dust of corroboree, so I have learned a little of the amazing private life of this Australia, still a stranger to the world and to its own people. (*The Great Australian Loneliness* 10)

This excerpt encompasses some of the overarching themes of the following study: in the early- to mid-twentieth century, white Australians were still coming to terms with a country at the bottom of the world to which they were relatively recent occupants. The majority of people lived on the coastal fringes of a land whose environment and original inhabitants were still unfamiliar; national identity was a key cultural concern and many looked to locations such as the remote regions for distinctly Australian characteristics stemming from particular constructions of place. Inscriptions of place contribute to a sense of belonging and nationhood. Bill Ashcroft suggests that

[p]lace is never simply location, nor is it static, a cultural memory which colonization buries. For, like culture itself, place is in a continual and dynamic state of formation . . . [P]lace forms itself out of the densely woven web of language, memory and cultural practice. (156)

Hill was one of a number of Australian writers in the early- to mid-twentieth century whose concern was to produce a distinctly Australian literature built out of a strong connection to

place. Until recently the contributions of women writers such as Hill to formations of national identity have been erased or overlooked. This devaluing of a significant part of our historical record needs revising to produce a more comprehensive and inclusive picture of cultural development in Australia.

This thesis focuses on the writing of four successful Australian women authors whose work falls into the period 1930s–1970s: Ernestine Hill (1899–1972), Henrietta Drake-Brockman (1901–1968), Mary Durack (1913–1994), and Patsy Adam-Smith (1924–2001). These four women wrote prolifically across a range of genres and publishing mediums. Although their work was well-received and widely read at the time, it has largely fallen into obscurity. One key connection between these writers for the wider purposes of my research is that they all contributed to *Walkabout* magazine (1934–1974, 1978), a popular middlebrow periodical with an Australian focus. In their work for *Walkabout* and more broadly, they travelled extensively throughout Australia and shared an abiding interest in Australia's remote frontier spaces, regions from which foundational myths of the nation emerged. I examine the ways in which these writers negotiated a sense of belonging as white women in a predominantly masculine culture, and I argue that they made significant contributions to ideas of Australian cultural identity.

My study is concerned with four overarching themes: nation, gender, mobility, and race in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia. Gender, race, and nation are key terms in any contemporary discussion of identity. They are bound up with positions of power within dominant discourses. As Susan Sheridan writes: "Powerful ideological signs such as sex, race and nation are intricately implicated in one another. Dense with meaning and unstable as signifiers, they are points at which multiple codes of difference intersect" (*Faultlines* ix). This is especially apparent in the writing of women in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia.

Female writers were necessarily caught up in dominant patriarchal/colonial discourses but also stood outside these (or were removed or erased from them) due to their gender. Mobility was crucial in Australia: it was closely tied to settlement and imaginings of place. Prior to modernisation vast distances had inhibited movement through the landscape. New modes of transport changed the way in which people experienced the landscape and were able to move through it, giving women amongst others, the opportunity to experience their homeland more fully. Examining the ways in which these women moved through the landscape and how this affected their perceptions of place and their sense of identity is inextricably bound to ideas of nation, gender and race. In this thesis I consider the interstitial place “along the faultlines,” as Sheridan astutely describes it, from which these women wrote, analysing their contributions to the national discourse from the margins: both in terms of the regions *about* which they wrote, and the positions *from* which they wrote as women. Taking up Maryanne Dever and Sheridan’s argument that women were active cultural producers—albeit constrained within a dominant hierarchy that gave them limited platforms from which to speak—I consider how women writers used the positions available to them to speak to the nation as well as to critique it.<sup>1</sup>

The period of my study correlates with the period of *Walkabout*’s run: 1930s to 1970s. This was a period of significant change in Australia as the nation moved from a settler culture to become a modern nation. This was also the period during which middlebrow culture emerged and reached its initial peak in Australia, and when these women published the majority of their work. Adam-Smith falls slightly later, beginning her publishing career in the 1950s. However, her writing adds a further layer to the study when considered alongside the other three women. Like the interwar period, the 1950s marked a

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<sup>1</sup> See Dever *Wallflowers and Witches* (1994); Sheridan *Along the Faultlines* (1995) and *Nine Lives* (2011).

transition in Australia's history: a particular conservatism arose out of the turmoil and devastation of the Second World War. Yet while this was a restrictive time, especially for women, Australian society was also on the cusp of a new era of rapid change beginning in the 1960s. Straddling the two decades, Adam-Smith occupied an in-between space; how she negotiated that position is revelatory of conditions for many women during this time. Adam-Smith shared similar interests to the other women writers, particularly Hill, with whom she also shared an awkward position in society as a divorcee (and single mother) making a living from writing. Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith negotiated careers, a passion for Australia and their art alongside the many other concerns of modern women, such as marriage and motherhood. By drawing attention to these four women and their work, this dissertation contributes to scholarly calls for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the development of white Australia's sense of itself during the early- to mid-twentieth century.

My study examines various neglected texts to add to knowledge concerning how evolving ideas about Australia have been produced and circulated through time. I take up and extend the work of scholars such as Sheridan, Carole Ferrier and Drusilla Modjeska on neglected Australian women writers in order to appreciate more fully the development of Australian culture through a multiplicity of perspectives. Across her work, Sheridan has contributed to the recovery of writers and poets such as Judith Wright, Thea Astley, Christina Stead, Dorothy Hewett, Rosemary Dobson, Dorothy Green, Gwen Harwood, Jessica Anderson, Amy Witting and Elizabeth Jolley, among others.<sup>2</sup> In *Exiles at Home* (1981), Modjeska examines Australian women writers from the period 1925–1945, including Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark, Dymphna Cusack, Kylie Tennant,

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Sheridan *Nine Lives* (2011); *Along the Faultlines* (1995), amongst other works.

Marjorie Barnard and critic Nettie Palmer. So too Ferrier's work includes many of these writers along with Jean Devanny.<sup>3</sup> Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith, who fall within the same period, have received little attention. Likewise I build on recent work examining the contribution of mid-twentieth-century middlebrow publications such as *Walkabout* magazine to ideas of national identity.<sup>4</sup>

While there is a wealth of material on textual representations of Australian national identity, few studies examine writing that is positioned in the area of middlebrow culture. David Carter is the exception to this. In *Almost Always Modern: Australian Print Cultures and Modernity* (2013), he brings together his extensive work on the middlebrow in Australia. I argue that these four writers are situated in this literary sphere, in terms of where they published, and the themes and attributes of their writing. Middlebrow literature has a history of being regarded as inconsequential or of little value to the serious critic. Much attention has been paid to writing at opposing ends of the literary hierarchy but the murky, marginal middle has been avoided or derided. As Nicola Humble writes, "[m]iddlebrow' has always been a dirty word. Since its coinage in the late 1920s, it has been applied disparagingly to the sort of cultural products thought to be too easy, too insular, too smug" (*Feminine* 1). In early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia, with its relatively small publishing industry and few opportunities for writers, earning a living from writing meant participating in institutions of middlebrow culture, which, as Sheridan points out, "earned its practitioners little by way of cultural capital, although in many cases it earned them a living" (*"Sex and the City"* 2). Women were active in this area, yet even with the recovery of women's writing brought about by feminist and cultural studies, middlebrow female writers

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Ferrier's *Point of Departure* (1986); *As Good as a Yarn With You* (1992); *Gender, Politics and Fiction* (1992), amongst other works.

<sup>4</sup> See Rolls and Johnston *Travelling Home* (2016). Forthcoming.

are still largely neglected in many critical discussions. Until recently this was also true of middlebrow writing as a textual field. Increasingly, scholars such as Beth Driscoll, Humble, Janice Radway, Kate MacDonald, Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston, Victoria Kuttainen, Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith, amongst others, are turning their attention to middlebrow material across various cultural forms apart from fiction, recognising its value as a cultural artefact. My study builds on and enhances such research through its examination of the work of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith.

While I contend these women writers made a significant contribution to Australian national identity that is worth acknowledging, my aim is not to produce a hagiographic study which inflates their writing above its literary worth. Neither do I seek to establish a unique female position or type of writing; I share Sheridan's interest in the relationship between women writers "as makers of cultural meaning and the question of national identity" (*Faultlines* 166). I seek to (re)locate the work of these women within a history of discourse about Australia. To this end I examine how these writers interact with and write within masculinist traditions, which in some instances, as Sheridan argues, "may be enabling, rather than exclusively restrictive or distorting" ("Generations Lost" 49). These women used the public platforms available to them within modern Australia to have a voice in the development of the nation. The thesis critically engages with the work of these writers in order to examine the ways in which they constructed a sense of self and belonging in early-to mid-twentieth-century Australia. I compare and contrast the major themes in their writing to reveal how they engaged with contemporary debates and concerns and acted as producers of culture during a period of transition in Australia as the nation moved from reliance on Britain to become a distinct modern entity.

All four women were active in fostering a distinctive Australian literature through their writing, public profiles, and active membership in organisations such as the Fellowship of Australian Writers. They reflected the mood of contemporary society and helped to shape it through their lives and writing. They wrote across a range of genres and contributed to a range of cultural forms such as newspapers, magazines, books of fiction and non-fiction, plays, and radio programs. Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith were able to take advantage of technologies of modernity which enabled greater opportunities to write and publish in a burgeoning media and consumer market. Women played a significant role in this expanding market as producers and consumers. The raised profile of women in this area of cultural production, however, saw a devaluing of the field due to its feminised nature, which I discuss later in this introduction. This was a period of great change and anxiety in Australia as the reverberations of two World Wars and the Great Depression were fresh. Rapid modernisation changed conditions, enabling greater access to goods and information. This in turn allowed the working and middle classes increased mobility both socially and physically: by access to formal and informal education and access to cheaper forms of transport such as rail travel. These women writers engaged directly with the changing world in which they found themselves, exploring major concerns in texts that were distributed to a wide audience. “[I]dentities as gendered, racial subjects are produced in opposition and in confusion”, as Gillian Whitlock points out, and this is certainly played out in the internally contradictory texts of these women writers (41). Their texts reflect the anxieties and tensions of the period, which are evident in the ambivalences and vacillations they contain.

I argue that one of the reasons for the neglect of these writers is their position within the category of the middlebrow. The term “middlebrow” has been contentious since

it first came into usage, and it remains so. The history of the term from the 1920s onwards has been exhaustively traced in a variety of important sources such as Rosa Marie Bracco, Driscoll, Hammill and Smith, Humble, Alison Light, MacDonald, Radway, and Joan Shelley Rubin. Carter examines its manifestation in Australia. These studies are predominantly concerned with analysing the category in terms of its readership. Driscoll and Humble's focus is on women's fiction. In Humble's study of middlebrow fiction in the UK from the 1920s to 1950s, she argues that the critical neglect of "the major part of the fiction published in Britain in these years is that it was largely written and consumed by women" (*Feminine* 2). Humble proposes to "rehabilitate" (1) the term and argue for its cultural, social and political significance "by taking into account the issue of textual pleasure, and by establishing a history of its readership" (5). She draws attention to the fluidity of the category, demonstrating how perceptions about the status of a literary work change over time. Sheridan examines the feminine middlebrow in Australia arguing for its significance as a public platform from which women could address the nation. Radway's concept of "middlebrow personalism" in her examination of middlebrow institutions in the US is useful for describing the emotive engagement sought and invoked by middlebrow culture and reading practices (283). Hammill and Smith focus on print culture, periodicals, magazines, and travel in Canada, seeking to explain how "the mainstream magazine functioned as a cultural and commercial force in twentieth-century Canada" (3). Their work is helpful for thinking about how *Walkabout* magazine functioned in Australia. Rolls and Johnston's extensive research on *Walkabout* demonstrates how the magazine contributed to Australians' sense of belonging and identity. Driscoll focuses on female texts in the twenty-first century, bringing the middlebrow into the present. She identifies key characteristics of the category, arguing that understanding these attributes is important because "[t]his



middle space—the middlebrow—is not simply ‘in-between’ but a complex phenomenon that challenges hierarchies as much as it reinforces them” (*New Literary* 17). I draw on these sources to position Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith in the category of the middlebrow as it appeared in Australia in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

Studies of periodical and book history in Australia provide a framework for discussions about middlebrow culture and its Australian context. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold’s *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945* demonstrates the continuing influence of national myths which emerged from the decade of the 1890s on attempts to shape a national literary culture, the difficulties of making a living from writing in a country with a small publishing industry, the popularity of historical travel books during this period, and the rise of the bestseller with its questionable status as “literature”. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright’s *Paper Empires*, covering 1945–2005, further contextualises the period in terms of the publishing industry in Australia, with its account of key publishing houses and various genres from travel books to journals and magazines. Richard Nile and David Walker argue for the significance of magazines for both writers and consumers in the context of the small Australian publishing industry in “Marketing the Literary Imagination: Production of Australian Literature, 1915–1965”. In a slightly different vein, Sean Latham and Robert Scholes’ influential article, “The Rise of Periodical Studies”, argues for the significance of magazines as key cultural artefacts. Recent periodical studies such as Rolls and Johnston, Kuttainen on mid-century magazines such as *B.P. Magazine*, Richard White on *Man* magazine, and Sheridan on female writers and middlebrow culture, provide guiding principles for my analysis. Middlebrow writing shares many features of popular fiction. Ken Gelder’s *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (2004) demonstrates the similarities and slippages between categories as well as distinguishing features.

If these women have been marginalised by scholars, they were also marginal in other ways: as travelling women writing from within and about spaces that were traditionally arenas of masculine activity and in which women were scarce (that is, remote north-western Australia and, in Adam-Smith's case, living and working on board ships for extended periods). This facilitates discussion around travel, mobility, place and space, which forms the second part of my study. Modern means of transport altered the travelling experience. Sidonie Smith argues that "the desire to pursue defining mobility at modernity's edges renders the terms of mobility every bit as critical to the project as the destination" (31). Extending this idea, Robert Dixon sees the mode of transport as "a prosthesis, enabling the modern traveller-God to perform a symbolic transcoding between space and time" (*Prosthetic* 18), a means by which space is transformed into (white settler) place in the postcolonial context. Alexandra Ganser's *Roads of her Own* (2009) examines women's road narratives in the US, discussing the effects of movement on the female traveller in terms of crossing boundaries from private to public space. Using these arguments, I examine the ways in which these writers moved across vast distances into remote areas, and how the means of transport affected their rendering of themselves and the regions through which they moved.

As white women, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith occupied a privileged position in relation to Indigenous Australians and non-European immigrants yet they were also marginalised due to their gender as they moved largely among men, dependent on male acceptance and help in the remote regions. I show that these women's texts can be re-read in light of arguments such as Doreen Massey's, which contend that representation should not be seen as "a process of fixing [in time and space], but an element in a continuous production; a part of it all, and itself constantly becoming . . . [in] an

open disseminatory network” of meanings (*For Space* 28). Massey argues for “[c]onceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming” (59). Representations of identity in marginal spaces reveal, in her words, “inevitable elements of indeterminacy” (59). Writers such as Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith brought to readers the notion of contested space, as well as difficult issues of cultural identity (including difference). Furthermore, by inserting and asserting themselves into traditionally masculine space on the margins of the nation, these writers reproduced space for women and marginalised others in the modern nation. In writing about the remote north-west and its inhabitants, they helped de-mystify the region while also participating in the creation of new mythologies around it.

Theoretical work on travel and mobility considers the effects of travel on the perceptions of the traveller and their subjectivity in the spaces through which they move. Robert Dixon argues that “[t]he act of reading about travelling is at the same time a performance of the act of settling” (*Prosthetic* 21), which is useful for thinking about the inscriptions of place in these writers’ travel texts. Scholarship on women travelling in postcolonial contexts argues for the unique and “interstitial” place occupied by such travellers who were positioned both within and outside the dominant discourse. Brian Musgrove contends that the traveller in the postcolonial situation, who moved into what was considered available (and empty space), occupied a site of “indeterminacy” as they stepped beyond fixed and orthodox ways of being (39). Furthermore, Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund argue, postcolonial travel writing can lead to “ambivalence: an ambivalence that can be used to challenge terms like ‘the imperial’ and ‘the colonial’, ‘centre’ and ‘margin’, ‘male’ and ‘female’, ‘other’ and self” (12-13). The subject position of the female narrator reveals particular performances of an acceptable travelling persona in remote

regions with a predominantly male population. To this end I analyse the narrative persona each woman adopted in order to uncover how they used these voices to reinforce and/or disrupt dominant discourses.

The process of “settlement” in the remote regions inevitably involved first usurpation, then effacement, of original Indigenous inhabitants. This occurred physically and textually. Settler colonialism, as Lorenzo Veracini, and Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson argue respectively, is premised on concealment and/or disavowal of wrongs committed against Indigenous inhabitants: it “obscures the conditions of its own production” (Veracini 14). It is concerned with an act that is exercised exclusively over colonisation of land—not colonialism as power exercised over people—and so the settler imagines the land as empty, virgin, there for the taking. White settlers extended the boundaries of the nation, establishing new pockets of civilisation to support and sustain the growing economy. While Veracini suggests that settler colonialism is a global and genuinely transnational phenomenon, the focus of my study is on its manifestation in the Australian context and how these women writers reflected its characteristics. The concept of disavowal and concealment is useful for looking at what is revealed and elided in the texts of these writers and how this reflected the attitudes of contemporary society.

The historical period under examination was a time of significant change in Australia’s history as the nation moved from a settler colony to a modern society. Settler identity formation was closely tied to relationships with the land and with its others. Colonial and postcolonial theory, such as the work of Homi Bhabha, and Johnston and Lawson on settler colonialism, is crucial to unpacking the complexities of identity formation played out in these writer’s texts. Penelope Ingram’s discussion about who can speak for whom in the postcolonial situation is helpful for thinking about the ways in which these

women wrote about themselves and others, in particular Aborigines; speaking position is “fundamentally tied to questions of power” (82). Ingram argues that “the debate about who speaks for whom has become subsumed under the larger problematic of cultural belonging: the question of who gets to control and *produce* the nation’s mythologies” (82; emphasis in orig.). The vision of national belonging expressed by these writers included Aborigines in complex and contradictory ways, not least because of the writing position of implicit authority from which they cast their vision in literature. The problematic nature of settler relationship to an already occupied land is explored by Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs in *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (1998). Their idea of the “uncanny” in Australia, where “one’s place is always already another’s place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled” (138), is pertinent to representations of belonging in the work of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith. Complicated discourses about race and belonging are worked out through inscriptions of place.

Separating my study into three parts, I compare and contrast the ways in which the themes of nation, gender, mobility and race are addressed in each author’s work across varying textual forms. Each part is approached using pertinent scholarship in the areas of middlebrow writing, travel writing and postcolonial theory. Due to the large amount of published material by these four women, I have not included an examination of all their works nor have I chosen to address archival material. This leaves the way open for further work on these women to add to what I have started here. Their lives, writing and associations within Australian literature provide rich material for further study. My thesis is situated within literary studies and as such is chiefly concerned with close textual analysis. Theoretical work from other areas contextualises the study within its historical period and provides tools to draw out implications of the treatment of the themes in each author’s

work. Because middlebrow culture and writing is a key concern of my study I offer some context and definitions here. First, I turn to an example of current debates and perceptions to help position the term “middlebrow” for the purposes of this thesis and demonstrate its resistance to clear boundaries. Next, I outline the characteristics of middlebrow writing, the way in which it manifested in Australia, and its feminised nature. Then I return to discussion of its continued application in the present, illustrated through a recent debate in the *Sydney Review of Books*.

### **The persistent, pervasive, mutable “cult of the middlebrow”**

As recently as September 2015, Australian academic and publisher Ivor Indyk wrote in the *Sydney Review of Books* about the pervasive influence of the “cult of the middlebrow” in the field of literature (“The Cult” n.pag.). His article became part of a further discussion the following month between a (female) academic and reviewer and three Australian women authors. The ensuing discussion draws attention to the ways in which the label is often derogatory and frequently gendered. Indyk laments recent trends in literary prizes, that in his opinion “more and more frequently . . . go to authors who are neither challenging or innovative. What they do have, often in abundance, is ‘appeal’” (“The Cult” n. pag.). The word “appeal” is interesting here. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as an “attractive influence or power”. An appeal can also be “language specifically addressed *to*, or adapted to exert influence *upon*, some particular principle of conduct, mental faculty, or class of persons” (*OED*; emphasis in orig.). Appeal can also mean a call to account. I draw attention to Indyk’s use of the word here as a way of introducing the relevance of its various meanings to the broad phenomenon Indyk refers to as the “cult of the middlebrow”. One of the key characteristics of middlebrow culture is its value for readers with aspirations to upward

mobility and the acquisition of good taste. It is a term critics employ with some reluctance, often using it interchangeably with “popular” fiction, as Humble points out (*Feminine* 1-2).

The term middlebrow, therefore, exists in tension; it occupies a somewhat fluid space between a scale of values ranked from high (intellectual) to low (mass) culture. It has variously been aligned with both sides of the scale. The term has considerable “malleability and . . . capacity to serve different agendas”, as Driscoll points out in her study of twenty-first-century middlebrow literature (*New Literary* 7). Driscoll argues that the term’s instability is a result of the contested and precarious assertions of cultural authority that surround it. Similarly, in his study of middlebrow culture in Australia, Carter argues that the middlebrow is not “a fixed, objective historical category . . . it is an artefact of a specific historical period and a product of cultural transformation” (“Mystery” 176). Middlebrow culture manifested differently in different contexts, as I discuss below. Due to its contested nature and often pejorative associations, middlebrow writing has historically been overlooked in literary scholarship. Its interstitial position and shifting boundaries “expose the instability and mobility at work in the cultural hierarchy”, as Driscoll points out (*New Literary* 17). Driscoll remarks: “if the word middlebrow has such power then it should be used with care. The middlebrow should be more than a quick, lazy label” (1). To this end, Driscoll identifies eight key features of middlebrow culture and writing in an attempt to clarify the term. Its shifting nature and the movement of texts in and out of the category over time persists despite attempts to provide definitive boundaries.

Bracco’s conclusion in her study of middlebrow fiction and English society in the 1920s and 1930s was that “the term middlebrow is now an obsolete and vague literary word”, while also considering that debates around it remain among “the most lively and influential of this century” (81). Contemporary critics still reference her 1990 study which

further demonstrates the (hitherto) dearth of analysis relating to this hard-to-pin-down cultural and literary phenomenon. In contrast to Bracco, Driscoll argues that the middlebrow is “increasingly visible” in the twenty-first century, “with more economic and cultural influence than either elite works or mass-market fiction” (*New Literary* 5); Indyk’s article reflects this influence. For Driscoll the middlebrow is a “deep-rooted, widespread cultural formation, with an influence that extends to the present” (8). The continued interest in this category as a significant arena of cultural production and dissemination suggests its ongoing relevance to literary and cultural studies.

Bracco argues that by the time the term came into general usage “the genre had already produced the greatest best-sellers of the twenties” (4). Bracco examines best-selling novels in her study, and indeed many studies of middlebrow writing focus on fiction. It is worth noting here that “bestseller” is an ambiguous term and does not necessarily indicate middlebrow literature, as Ken Gelder argues in his 2004 study of popular fiction (*Popular Fiction* 3). A literary work can be a bestseller, as can a work of popular fiction. In Toni Johnson-Woods and Amit Sarwal’s examination of works of popular genre fiction, *Sold by the Millions: Australia’s Bestsellers* (2012), they note the discrepancies in categorising bestsellers: “Popular fiction can be literary . . . and not all best-selling fiction is genre fiction” (14). The complexity and difficulty associated with literary novels mean often they do not appeal to a large audience but this is not always the case; perceptions also change across time. A work that was “popular” and a “bestseller” at the time it was published can later be canonised as literature, such as the fiction of Charles Dickens. The women writers featured in this thesis wrote across a range of genres. They were popular at the time they were writing and occasionally a work was a bestseller but this is not necessarily indicative of their status as middlebrow writers whose work had “appeal” for readers. Likewise, “middlebrow”



does not denote a new form of literature (like modernism) but is connected with the social positioning of this category: its production, consumption and reception, along with certain stylistic features referred to by Radway as “middlebrow personalism” (283). Middlebrow writing shares many of the features of popular fiction. It reaches a wide audience, being located in the field of large-scale production with a broad-based distribution and one of its purposes is to entertain.<sup>5</sup> Driscoll’s eight attributes of middlebrow culture and writing are relevant to the works examined in this thesis: “the middlebrow is middle class, reverential and commercial, feminized, mediated, recreational, emotional and earnest” (*New Literary* 3). The relevance and application of these attributes are traced below.

Middlebrow writing, then, with its “in-betweenness”, is harder to distinguish or pin down than highbrow or lowbrow writing. Unlike lowbrow fiction, which Bracco argues “owed its appeal more to conventionalized formulas”, middlebrow writing offered “an interpretation or idealization of contemporary reality” (5) that engaged more deeply with contemporary debates and concerns than lowbrow fiction. Whereas generic characteristics in popular fiction are immediately apparent and unambiguous (certain features of romance or crime fiction are obvious and expected, for example), if they exist in literature they are harder to find. This is a point of difference for middlebrow writers as well, since their use of genre fiction has a serious purpose beyond commerce (industry and entertainment): they use genre fiction to explore deeper themes such as gender and race relations. They do this in an entertaining and engaging way; their texts, while having an educational intent, are accessible to the general reader with aspirations to reading with a higher purpose tied to the acquisition of good taste rather than simply for escapism and entertainment. Gelder is careful to outline the permeable boundaries of the field of popular fiction, which can

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<sup>5</sup> See Gelder *Popular Fiction*, 13.

usefully be brought to bear on middlebrow culture: “The ‘popular’ is itself a relatively open category, and the various cultural forms produced under its umbrella by no means perform or circulate in exactly the same way” (158). These categories have particular identifying features, even if they do not always fit (or adhere to) them neatly.

Middlebrow writing is vibrant, engaging, and personal, inviting an intimacy between writer and reader that involves readers identifying with and trusting the voice of the narrator. Studies of middlebrow culture, such as Radway’s *A Feeling for Books* (1997) and Macdonald’s *The Masculine Middlebrow* (2011), have overwhelmingly analysed the phenomenon in terms of its readership. In her study of the Book-of-the-Month Club in the US, which she refers to as a “characteristically modern cultural institution” (15), Radway writes that

reading was considered . . . as an event for identification, connection and response . . . [W]hat made the experience most profoundly transformative was the act of experiencing something with greater force and fervor than one might be permitted in ordinary daily life. (283-84)

An important aspect of middlebrow culture, then, is the ability of a book to produce an emotional response in a reader (one of Driscoll’s eight characteristics).<sup>6</sup> Carter agrees: “Perhaps the key point is that in all its literary functions middlebrow culture was *reader-oriented*. It shifted the point of culture from the intrinsic values of the text to the pleasures and utility of reading” (“Mystery” 179; emphasis in orig.). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith, along with their fellow contributors to *Walkabout*, were writers like those recommended in the Book-of-the-Month Club, who “could capture the attentions of their readers and prompt them to respond intensely to the peculiarities of the author’s vision”

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<sup>6</sup> See Radway *A Feeling For Books* 280-294.

(Radway 284).<sup>7</sup> Radway calls the emotive engagement sought and invoked by such textual and reading practices “middlebrow personalism” (283). It is seen to act as a foil to the “isolation fostered by a modern, rationalized world carved up into discrete and different domains”; an urbanized, industrialised, consumer society (284). Middlebrow writing, therefore, is characterised as sentimental, educative and entertaining, often combining romance with realism and having an aesthetic of intimacy and engagement. Readers engage with narrators whom they trust as they participate in the story and learn about different ways of living and being.

The communal nature of middlebrow reading practices (book clubs, literary festivals) facilitates a broad engagement with the representations and ideas contained within the texts. As Driscoll argues, the middlebrow is a “distinctive cultural phenomenon” (*New Literary* 10) and an illuminating area of cultural production that adds to the dynamic networks of writing that inform present society and ideas of place, identity and belonging. Middlebrow writing represents a “horizontal proliferation of literary value rather than its vertical restriction” (Carter “Mystery” 177). Its diversity of cultural forms and popularity across a broad section of the populace points to a significant influence on readers’ sense of place and identity, making it a rich and valuable category of analysis.

While early studies of middlebrow literature focused on fiction, increasingly other forms of middlebrow writing are being held up or exposed as just as significant for looking at developing notions of culture and identity such as: letters, diaries, periodicals, travel narratives and newspaper articles. Critics in Australia have recently examined a variety of mid-twentieth-century middlebrow periodicals. Using *B.P. Magazine* as a case study,

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<sup>7</sup> The following *Walkabout* contributors appeared in the US *Book-of-the-Month Club News*: M. Barnard Eldershaw, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Frank Dalby Davison, Eleanor Dark, E. L. Grant Watson, Ernestine Hill, Henry G. Lamond, Helen Simpson and Omar White (Osborne “Appendix A” 601- 02).

Kuttainen argues for the importance of scholarly attention to mid-range writing in mainstream magazines to “restore mid-range texts to literary history and to understand them within socio-economic models of taste, reading, and consumption”(88). *B.P.*, with its eclectic mix of material, exposed “tensions between literary aspiration and commodity culture, sophistication and escapism, edification and entertainment, and modernity and primitiveness” (85). Similarly White finds that conflicting images in *Man* magazine represented attempts to reassess certain attitudes, (mostly toward sex), making it a valuable social document (“The Importance of Being *Man*” 153). Further, Chelsea Barnett contends that *Man* revealed tensions in Australian society in the ways it imagined the social and cultural world of the 1950s (“*Man’s Man*” 153). In contrast to *Man*, which targeted male readers, Sheridan argues that the *Australian Women’s Weekly* “gave itself a role as a national cultural institution and, more significantly, it gave Australian women a redefinition of Australianness that included them in it, unlike the very masculine Australian legend that was revived in the 1950s” (*Who Was that Woman?* 4). *Walkabout*, as Rolls and Johnston show, attracted a broad range of readers “in keeping with its middlebrow status” (4). The range of contributors reflected diverse careers, experiences, and opinions, appealing to a wide audience. *Walkabout* “actively fostered a common engagement with Australian history, landscapes and people in a distinctly modern national imagining” (6). These periodical studies enrich an understanding of the cultural value of a range of texts whose creation and production arose as a direct result of the conditions of modernity that brought about the emergence of middlebrow culture in Australia.

Middlebrow culture originated in the burgeoning consumer culture of the 1920s which arose out of processes of modernisation such as the emergence of mass media, newspapers, periodicals, mass production and consumption of books, book-of-the-month

clubs, public lending libraries, radio, and cinema. Its existence depended on the existing hierarchy between high- and lowbrow institutions, literary and popular fiction, and the emergence of intellectual modernism in art, alongside technologies of modernisation which fostered the production of mass culture. The shifts in class relations and education occurring during this period saw the emergence of a new type of reader with greater access to books and information. Reviews of books moved out of the exclusive realm of highbrow institutions like universities, and into new media such as radio programs and book clubs, making reading accessible in more ways than simply a consumer's ability to purchase a magazine or paperback novel. The types of material deemed middlebrow are varied: "a range of very different, sometimes overlapping, sometimes incommensurate tastes, styles, attitudes and aspirations could function as 'middlebrow' in particular cultural contexts", according to Carter ("Modernity" 138). These should all be accessible to the general reader; that is, in terms of readability and availability. Indeed, a key feature of middlebrow culture and writing is that it should neither be restricted to a small group of elite specialists nor fall into the realm of mere entertainment.

Middlebrow writing manifested differently in different locations. Bracco argues that middlebrow novels in the UK in the 1920s "helped readers to absorb the traumas of the decade [and] the best-sellers of the thirties provided reassuring statements of traditional values" (75). Their popularity established middlebrow writing and boosted book sales. In the US, a desire for self-education and improvement saw middlebrow culture characterised by an individualistic focus as the US moved from being a producer to a consumer society, according to Rubin (1-33), as members of the middle class sought cultural credibility. Bracco and Rubin suggest that the tensions and contradictions inherent in middlebrow culture reflected periods of flux in these nations; the same can be said for its manifestation in

Australia. Due to its geographic isolation and relatively new and small publishing industry, Australia was naturally influenced by the UK and the US; however, the institutions typical of middlebrow culture did not appear until later here. Carter identifies the 1930s–1950s as the peak period for the first wave of the middlebrow in Australia. Carter argues for “an Australian cultural history written around middlebrow nationalism” (“Mystery” 184). Middlebrow nationalism “complicated” the reading culture in Australia by the shared “belief that an authentic tradition had been founded in outback or pastoral Australia and that this remained the truest source of nation-building values” (“Modernity” 139). This “‘nationed’ modernity” (“Mystery” 184), which praised and promoted development as essential to future prosperity while invoking the past upon which national identity was built, is reflected in the writing of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith.

As a colony, Australia had a heterogeneous book culture from the beginning. Due to the dearth of a thriving local publishing industry, even to “the end of the Second World War, little more than 15 per cent of the books sold in Australia were of Australian origin” (Martyn and Lyons xviii). As Carter remarks, “Australian book culture was not simply dominated but *constituted* by imported cultural products” (“Modernity” 135; emphasis in orig.). In the midst of this transnational reading culture, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith promoted Australian culture, history and literature and were active producers of all three. At a time when most readers would have had little choice but to read imported books, Australian authors offered new material relevant to readers’ experiences in their own nation. Carter includes outback tales, South Sea adventures and pioneering sagas in his assessment of local middlebrow writing (“Modernity” 140). Clearly such eclectic forms can only be considered middlebrow if they attempted to engage with more serious themes apart from being generic tales of high drama and adventure. Similar themes—narratives of

the frontier in Australia and the Pacific and of pioneering families—were considered in depth in the writing of Hill, Drake-Brockman and Durack. Their educative and entertaining treatment of such issues is classic middlebrow territory. They reinforced and challenged ideas about Australia through their writing, directly engaging with the development of the nation as a modern entity separate from and no longer reliant upon imperial England. Writing from the 1950s onwards, Adam-Smith too engaged with the outback and isolated areas in revealing ways, promoting a sense of a modern Australia formed from a unique blend of conditions.

Due to the small cultural and publishing industries, writers in Australia had little choice but to participate in the arena of the middlebrow in order to make a living, as Carter notes: “Given the relative thinness of highbrow literary institutions, writing careers were inevitably pursued in the middlebrow, commercial domain” (“Modernity” 143). This domain had feminine associations in Australia, as elsewhere. Women made up a large section of the modern consumers, and, naturally, readers. As Carter argues, discussion of books “was directed *into* the domestic sphere but also invited participation in a public culture, creating a form of sociability around books” (141; emphasis in orig.), which was largely driven by women. This is closely related to the limited professions that were open to women—in areas such as journalism, education, librarianship and secretarial work—which were devalued and trivialised, and which Sheridan links to the metaphorical feminisation of middlebrow literary culture (“Sex and the City” 2). Feminisation occurred in a literal sense due to the number of women publishing in the typical sites of the middlebrow, such as children’s books, radio and television programs, and public education and publishing houses. Hill’s career provides an interesting example of this. As Sheridan points out, “[o]ur picture of the Australian literary scene from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s as strongly male

dominated is far from accurate. It is a picture that needs to be reconfigured by including the women in it" (*Nine Lives 2*). Examination of the work of women writers who were active in this area of cultural production is vital if we are to have a more complete picture of how writers forged a sense of identity and belonging in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

This period in Australia saw commencement of the *Australian Women's Weekly* (1933 –), *Walkabout* (1934–74, 78), *Man* (1936–74) and *Australia: National Journal* (1939–47). These magazines sought to appeal to a middlebrow audience seeking education through reading on a diverse range of topics not necessarily aimed at one particular gender. In their examination of "the interrelationships between form and content" in mainstream middlebrow Canadian periodicals from 1925–1960, Hammill and Smith recognise that magazines, with their "multi-authored, multi-genre collage", attracted reading audiences which "overlapped, but were not identical" and included men and women across class (4). Hammill and Smith note middlebrow magazines central philosophy of addressing an "aspirational . . . upwardly mobile readership" eager for self-improvement (12). The magazines targeted this type of reader with their eclectic mix of accessible, educational and entertaining content. Contributors to the magazines were male and female authors who wrote about a range of topics. The varied content in magazines moves across categories and often contains contradictory ideological messages, an aspect which Rolls and Johnston discuss in relation to the mixed material presented in *Walkabout* (131-56). The contradictions within the magazine in relation to issues of conservation and tourism, for example (which was noted by readers in letters to the editor), "explicitly confronted Australia's ambivalent relationship with the natural environment and its native wildlife", as Rolls and Johnston point out (150). This ambivalence is apparent in the articles of the



women writers examined here, as later chapters of this thesis discuss, demonstrating the ways in which difficult issues are explored in middlebrow writing.

In the British context, Humble describes a “feminine middlebrow” that was “a powerful force in establishing and consolidating, but also in resisting, new class and gender identities”, reflecting and inspiring shifts in middleclass opinion and ideology. For Humble, “its paradoxical allegiance to both domesticity and a radical sophistication . . . makes this literary form so ideologically flexible” (*Feminine* 3). Humble’s focus is on women’s writing in the interwar period in Britain, which, she argues, showed “an intense interest in domestic details . . . combining a fascination with the life of the bohemian artist with a faint suspicion of intellectuality” (8). This differed in the Australian context with its more outward-looking, nation-building focus. This is reflected in the concerns of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and (to a lesser extent) Adam-Smith, whose writing collectively fits Carter’s definition of a populist form of middlebrow nationalism. Their focus was not the domestic and urban spaces; rather, their attention was on remote Australia and a landscape that was “gendered as an arena for masculine activity” (“Modernity” 140). Adam-Smith was overtly interested in the life of the artist and expressed a sense of separation from the intellectual world due to her working-class background and self-education through middlebrow institutions. All four women colluded with and resisted established notions of gender, class, and race in Australia through their writing.

### **Middlebrow writing and culture in the twenty-first century: *Sydney Review of Books* debate**

In October 2015 three prominent female Australian authors wrote to the editor of the *Sydney Review of Books* rejecting the label “middlebrow” being applied to their work. They were responding to a review of their recent novels by Driscoll (““Could not Put it Down”).

The works under discussion were the most recent books by Susan Johnson, Antonia Hayes and Stephanie Bishop. Driscoll positioned each book as possessing middlebrow *and* literary qualities—able to move across both spheres of reception. Each book is appealing, entertaining, and invites emotional investment while at the same time engaging with broader themes such as questions of race and belonging. Driscoll opened her article by remarking on the marketing strategies of publishers that are aimed at women readers who “are (and always have been) more likely than men to read novels, attend writers’ festivals and to join book clubs” (“ ‘Could not Put it Down’ ” n. pag.). The ensuing debate generated by the review was closely tied to gender. Each author objected to the gendered bias of Driscoll’s piece. Hayes asked, “Why not include a book written by a man?”; while Bishop wrote: “I am deeply troubled by the gender bias of this piece” (“As One” n. pag.). In her response to Driscoll’s review, Bishop raises the point that “women read books written by both men and women, and that middlebrow practices cannot possibly be gender specific”, which is true (n. pag.). Despite its feminised nature, middlebrow writing appeals across gender.

The debate also highlights the contentious issue of popularity as an indicator of literary status. Bishop objected to the implication that “a large readership mean[s] a lack of prestige” (“As One” n. pag.). There is little evidence that Driscoll implies this in her review. A book can be a bestseller and also literary, as discussed, and texts can be positioned as having both highbrow and middlebrow features. In his account of popular fiction as a distinctive literary field, Gelder describes “industry” and “entertainment” as two key words for understanding popular fiction. Middlebrow writing is also engaging and tied to commerce and a large cultural industry, but what distinguishes it from the purely popular is that it uses the pleasures of entertainment for a more serious purpose (Driscoll’s term is

earnest). Bishop and Hayes object to Driscoll linking industry—in the form of marketing and promotion—to content, form and artistic intent in her analysis of middlebrow writing. They argue that certain styles of cover image, or promotion on Oprah’s Book Club or in the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, have no intrinsic relation to the textual content of a novel.

Hayes contends that the three novels were

strategically chosen for this piece—to be analysed through the middlebrow viewpoint—because of their packaging, promotion, marketing and sales points. This makes for a blinkered argument that works towards correlating these novels with a middlebrow readership based on promotional elements exterior to the text. (“As One” n. pag.)

Driscoll does discuss these aspects of commerce and industry in order to argue for the positioning of the novels within middlebrow culture, but she includes textual content and formal features of the books too in her examination. This is indeed where the area of middlebrow culture operates: in cultural institutions, modes of production, reception and reading practices, as well as displaying certain stylistic attributes.

The commercial and mediated attributes of middlebrow writing are relevant here. Hammill and Smith argue for the middlebrow “as a mode of circulation, reception, and consumption of cultural products, and also as a space where high and popular culture meet, and where art encounters consumerism” (10). They describe middlebrow cultural products having a shared “aim of combining education with entertainment” (14). Gelder describes the field of popular fiction in similar terms: “popular fiction is not just a matter of texts-in-themselves, but of an entire apparatus of production, distribution (including promotion and advertising) and consumption” (2). The type of fiction Gelder discusses is generic: certain conventions determine its content as well as “who publishes it, how and through what

venues it is marketed, who consumes and evaluates it, and how this is done” (2). Highbrow, middlebrow and popular fiction are positioned in particular ways (markets, venues, attributes), and these are relational: we cannot grasp or understand the distinct characteristics of one category without knowledge of the other (19). While highbrow fiction is usually associated with innovation, inaccessibility, and small audience, lowbrow fiction is industry-driven and prolific, accessed by a mass audience. “Literature” is autonomous whereas popular fiction is heteronomous, Gelder distinguishes (14). Readers can enjoy writing across the categories but each require different reading practices. Indeed, in a recent article, Humble argues that “[m]iddlebrow and highbrow books are distinguishable, fundamentally, not by any stable intrinsic differences, but by *how they are read*” (“Sitting Forward” 46; emphasis in orig.). Humble contends that reading for study and reading for leisure have implications in the perception of the value of a text. Hayes, Bishop and Johnson’s work, while having many attributes that position it within the middlebrow, also displays characteristics of highbrow fiction. The pleasures of reading these writers’ work are highlighted by Driscoll, alongside the deeper concerns and complexities of their novels.

This recent debate illustrates the tricky and sensitive nature of classifying an artwork—written or visual—in the category of the middlebrow. That the pejorative connotations of the term persist is apparent. Driscoll notes that the word middlebrow carries “a judgemental sting that makes us anxious about where we fit” (*New Literary* 1), and which is what Hayes, Bishop and Johnson seem to have felt. When the term first came into usage in the 1920s it was closely aligned to highbrow culture and this association remains, despite the critical devaluation of the term due to its associations with commerce, consumerism, and its feminised nature. Hammill and Smith remark that recent studies of middlebrow culture in the early- and mid-twentieth century seek to reassess its influence as

“affirmative, emphasising the democratising aspects of the project of bringing high culture to large audiences and the potential of the non-experimental, realist fiction of the period in negotiating new class and gender identities” (7-8). As the *Sydney Review of Books* debate demonstrates, despite the rhetorical power of democracy in Australian discourse, the general and ongoing perception of middlebrow culture remains problematic.

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The thesis is structured thematically rather than as an author study. This structure allows a comparison of the ways in which nation, gender, mobility and race are inflected in varying texts across different genres. Part One situates the four writers within their period, considering how they are indicative of the feminine middlebrow in Australia during this time. This part draws connections between the writers in the overall national literary scene. It considers contemporary reception of their work, including features praised by reviewers that are characteristic of middlebrow writing. Part One contains three chapters. First, I use Drake-Brockman’s fiction to highlight aspects of middlebrow nationalism and how it functioned rhetorically within the public sphere. As the writer who produced the most fiction of the four, close analysis of Drake-Brockman’s work sets up discussion for the following chapters. Chapter two features Durack and her novel, *Keep Him My Country* (1955), alongside her regional focus on Western Australia. Chapter three combines Hill and Adam-Smith because of their similar interests in folklore and the inscription of foundational stories of the nation’s immediate past. Each chapter contextualises the authors within Australian literature during the period of publishing and provides close textual analysis of the fiction these women produced in order to locate the middlebrow characteristics of their work, especially the nation-building focus which, as Carter points out, was particular to Australian middlebrow writing. This part concludes with a brief discussion of current views

on certain works of each writer that have been republished in recent times, considering how (or if) the perception of their work has altered over time.

Part Two focuses on travel, mobility and modernity. Like middlebrow writing, travel writing has been subject to mixed reception and has been derided as a second-rate form. Travel is linked to modernity: Johnston argues that it “operated as a way to imagine an idealised space of modernity (“Becoming” 4). Experienced travellers assert their authority as producers of knowledge. Textual inscriptions of travel journeys reinforce a sense of identity and belonging. Rolls and Johnston argue that the contributors to *Walkabout* imagined travel as “a specific cultural practice by which unique Australian subjectivities will emerge: specifically, the idealized modern settler Australian. In this way, *Walkabout* sought to bring about the modern Australian citizen and the modern nation” (48). This part analyses the cultural significance of remote north-western Australia and Tasmania in the national consciousness during this period. These were areas beyond the experience of most Australians. They were regions that had already been mythologised in the national consciousness through stories of exploration and pioneering. Tasmania, still occasionally left off unofficial maps of Australia, occupies an alternate sphere of representation in Adam-Smith’s accounts. I discuss the narrative position these writers could occupy as women, particularly in the remote regions through which they moved. This includes analysis of the ways in which they constructed ideas about the nation from these spaces and how they positioned themselves within them as white women.

The entertaining and informative accounts of travel that Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith produced brought remote Australia into the homes and minds of their largely urban readership. There are many accounts of female travellers in the nineteenth century and the late-twentieth century but this thesis provides an account of the

period from 1930–1970, focusing on travel by Australian women who journeyed within Australia in order to better “know” their country. Part Two is divided into four chapters. Chapter four considers Hill’s travel texts, *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1940) and *The Territory* (1951) and her *Walkabout* articles. It analyses the way in which Hill positions herself in these texts as a lone female traveller and considers how the transport she chose to move through the remote regions suited her purpose in travelling. Chapter five examines the travel writing of Drake-Brockman and Durack, which consists of their *Walkabout* articles. It considers the ways in which Drake-Brockman described and envisaged the north-west regions as places for potential development and how the experience of flight influenced her writing. So too Durack promoted development in her West Australian articles. Drake-Brockman and Durack’s *Walkabout* articles demonstrate how the magazine produced an image of Australia as one of “interconnected regions, often remote and distinctive”, as Rolls and Johnston argue (6). Further, through promotion of travel, *Walkabout* “impacted how Australians understood and played out emergent regional and national identities” (7). Chapter six extends these ideas to compare the ways in which Adam-Smith travelled from the 1950s onwards. Adam-Smith’s *There Was a Ship* (1967), *Goodbye Girlie* (1994), the autobiography of her adult life, and her *Walkabout* articles detail her extensive travel around Tasmania and throughout remote Australia.

Part Three furthers the discussion of national identity and the frontier regions by examining settler identity formation and representations of settler-Aboriginal relationships in the remote reaches of Australia. The textual forms in this part are a heterogeneous mix of travel text, family history, documentary, and short fiction, due to the thematic focus on white Australian constructions of belonging through identification with the land and racially distinct others (in particular, Aborigines) in the frontier regions of the nation. All four writers

recognised Aborigines' claim to country and prior belonging while simultaneously making their own claims to belonging as settler Australians. They write of the difficulties of living in and asserting ownership of the same country occupied by Aborigines and of the interdependence and conflicts this produced. The divide between settler and Aborigine is fraught and seemingly irreconcilable, yet the writers each acknowledged the necessity of forming ways of living together in this shared space. These women's experiences of the frontier regions are mediated through dominant discourses but personal contact alters their perspectives. These texts form part of the ongoing re-mediation and re-negotiation of frontier space and notions of identity formed from it. The three chapters in this part compare and contrast different aspects of representation stemming from the different ways each writer engaged with the frontier regions. Chapter seven considers Hill's representations of white settlers and Aborigines in the north-west, highlighting the ways in which she equated both early white settlers and Aborigines as fading from the landscape in the face of modernisation. The fraught nature of relations in the remote frontier regions is further explored in chapter eight through Durack's family histories, *Walkabout* articles, and books about Aborigines. This chapter analyses the ways in which the unequal relationships between white pastoralists and Aborigines are depicted in Durack's books, and the ways in which Durack shows these disparate races negotiating ways of belonging together and apart in the remote regions. Chapter nine concludes Part Three by comparing and contrasting how each writer positioned themselves in relation to representations of white Australian belonging, including how debates about Aborigines changed from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Sheridan argues that "the cultural agency of women, and the regimes of power that repeatedly render them invisible, still need to be made manifest" ("Generations Lost" 39).

This thesis contributes to this work. For me, as for Sheridan,



the point of reading women writers separately, with and against each other, is to listen to how they use, or sometimes avoid, the gendered speaking-positions available to them as *women* in cultural/ production; to see what they did with the social discourses that constructed their lives, discourses of sexual difference, class and race differentiation, Australian cultural identity; to explore the 'difference within' the category of women. (*Faultlines* x-xi; emphasis in orig.)

Women have always been producing art, yet by and large they have been relegated a marginal or obscure place in the historical record. This thesis contributes to the revision and reinvigoration of our literary past by the inclusion and analysis of hitherto overlooked voices.

## PART ONE

### The Feminine Middlebrow in Australia

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From the beginning of the twentieth century, writers such as Vance Palmer had been calling for a national literature: “What we require in our present development is not so much cultured writers as ardent nationalists,” Palmer had written in 1905 (“An Australian National Art” 169). He was still advocating this thirty years later in the *Melbourne Age*: “We have to discover ourselves—our character, the character of the country, the particular kind of society that has developed here—and this can only be done through searching explorations of literature” (“The Future of Australian Literature” 6). In early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia national identity and the establishment of a distinctive Australian literature were key cultural concerns. As Craig Munro writes in his 1986 introduction to P. R. Stephensen’s *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936), “the debate about Australian cultural identity has been a continuing national preoccupation” (vii). In 1936 the country was experiencing a period of flux due to a number of destabilising factors that compounded to produce feelings of uncertainty including political threats from fascism, economic difficulties as a result of the Depression, and environmental stresses from prolonged periods of drought. Munro writes that the “deep state of insecurity . . . led to a corresponding yearning for stability” (ix). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith took up this task of writing and promoting a national literature that told Australia’s story and fostered a (white Australian) sense of belonging. Each of these women publicly promoted her craft and its importance in the expression of a distinctively Australian voice and cultural identity. Women were writing and

publishing in large numbers<sup>8</sup> and they had a voice in the development of the nation. That this voice was still internally contradictory speaks to the tensions of the period. Examination of these women's work offers a broader vision of early- to mid-twentieth-century Australian culture and identity.

Middlebrow culture in Australia was characterised by a popular nationalism which was future-oriented and engaged with modernity, while also grounded in the pioneering past and bush tradition. This form of middlebrow nationalism had its roots in a fervent literary nationalism that arose during the 1890s. This decade has been identified as significant in Australian cultural history for the ideas (mostly masculinist) that emerged in literature and which have since been idealised or entrenched in the national psyche. As Martyn Lyons and John Arnold write, the 1890s were identified as "a creative moment when a specifically Australian literary nationalism took shape, based on a democratic and fiercely independent spirit located in a mythologised version of life in the bush" (xvi). While many of the tropes that emerged from this decade are apparent in Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's writing, there is more to these women's texts than the reiteration of a dominant masculine tradition. Magazines such as the *Bulletin* promoted a national image in literature through the work of mainly male writers and critics. Yet, as this thesis demonstrates, women were also actively participating in constructions of national character through writing, building on and challenging national ideals which arose out of the 1890s.

Part One introduces the writing careers of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith and considers how these writers' works were received and what this reveals about questions of literary value and national character, or nation-building at the time. Has their devaluation only come about in hindsight through the hierarchy of institutional values

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<sup>8</sup> See Modjeska *Exiles at Home* (1-19); Sheridan *Nine Lives* and "Sex and the City".

established in a male-dominated tradition? What did Australian middlebrow writing look like in a nation where “[m]odernity and nationhood had arrived together” (Carter and Griffen-Foley 237) and the Australian book industry was dominated by imports (mostly from Britain)?<sup>9</sup> In looking back to re-evaluate the past, Robert Dixon uses the term “colonial modernity” to describe the ways in which modernity in Australia was an exchange, a flow of culture from and to the United Kingdom and the United States. Modernity in the colonies was not a one-sided borrowing of ideas from the imperial centre. If, as Dixon suggests, the concept of colonial modernity urges a “re-envisioning [of] the historical landscape as a set of interdependent sites”, rather than simply as an extension of ideas and knowledge from the metropolis to the colonies (*Photography* xxv), then we should likewise envision the literary landscape of Australia as a rich set of diverse texts from multiple perspectives. Literary history should not be restricted to a set of canonical texts but rather extended to include a wide variety of texts across a range of areas of cultural production.

Nation-building was a key aspect in discussions of what a distinctive Australian literature should look like. The Australian national character was an overarching theme of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith’s work, which they explored through white pioneering history, the future development of the nation, and relationships with others, in particular Aborigines. These women’s writing was not centred in the domestic realm, but outward-looking, focusing on remote areas of Australia that they knew well from personal experience. They contributed to a national picture of Australia as one of “interconnected regions” with distinctive characteristics (Rolls and Johnston 6). In particular they wrote about north-western Australia, focusing on the Northern Territory, the Kimberley region, Perth, and Broome, while Adam-Smith wrote about out-of-the-way areas in Tasmania. They

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<sup>9</sup> See Munro and Sheahan-Bright *Paper Empires*.

used regional characteristics and attachments to place to explore broader concerns of national identity and contemporary debates. A regional consciousness was not uncommon during this period. The development of literary journals (which began to emerge in Australia in the late nineteenth century) in the early- to mid-twentieth century, for example, suggested a strong regional consciousness.<sup>10</sup> While most of these publications were based in either Sydney or Melbourne, Western Australia responded with their own, such as the *Western Mail* (1855–1955), owned by the daily newspaper, the *West Australian*. Contributors to the *Western Mail's* Christmas annuals, which commenced in 1897, included Durack, Drake-Brockman, J. K. Ewers, Arthur Upfield and Molly Skinner.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith did not leave Australia to pursue writing careers as many of their contemporaries did, such as Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard or Christina Stead; nor (apart from Hill) did they have any significant publishing success overseas. As professionals in a relatively small field, Hill, Drake-Brockman and Durack knew each other; on occasion they travelled together, and wrote about, or mentioned one another in their work. Like their fellow *Walkabout* contributors, they had “multifaceted writing and publishing career[s] that spanned a diverse range of genres, mediums of publication and intended audiences” (Rolls and Johnston 40). They were members of professional associations such as the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW). Drake-Brockman was a foundation member (1938) and President of FAW’s West Australian branch. Durack, with Drake-Brockman, was at the dinner which prompted the formation of this group and she, too, was one of the early members of the West Australian branch. As Lesley Heath explains, FAW was one of a

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<sup>10</sup> See Lyons and Arnold *A History of the Book in Australia 1891 – 1945*, 269.

group of literary societies established in Sydney during the 1920s [which] played a significant role in promoting Australian literature; these societies brought together Australian writers and cultural nationalists who shared an interest in fostering an awareness of the national literature, expanding publishing opportunities for Australian writers as well as increasing the readership of Australian writing. (365)

Ewers, in his tribute to Drake-Brockman following her sudden death in 1968, noted that she “played a leading part in fashioning [the West Australian branch of FAW’s] purpose and its functioning” (78). Membership of such associations attests to Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith’s dedication to writing and associations with fellow writers. They “shared a commitment to the public dissemination of literary culture and a belief in the educative agenda for Australian writing”, along with prominent male writers such as Ewers and Walter Murdoch, as Rolls and Johnston point out (56). In his autobiography, *The Turning Wheel* (1960), Drake-Brockman’s husband Geoffrey notes the writers who were part of their social circle:

in those Melbourne years I remember meeting in our home the Palmers, Nettie and Vance, Frank Dalby Davidson, Myra Morris, Xavier Herbert, Dal Stivens, and many others, including our old friends Ernestine Hill, Miles Franklin, and Gavin Casey. (279)

Drake-Brockman and Durack acted as mentors for other writers; indeed, Drake-Brockman mentored Durack (A. Hasluck 235). Drake-Brockman and Durack also acted as judges for literary prizes and competitions.<sup>11</sup>

Adam-Smith, too, was a member of FAW and a vocal advocate for women and working-class Australians. Despite her claims not to have been part of the literary establishment, Adam-Smith’s second volume of autobiography mentions numerous

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<sup>11</sup> For example: Durack and Drake-Brockman “agreed to act as judges” for the W.A. Jubilee Literary Prize in 1951 (“Close of Contest” 11).

occasions where she did participate in literary events and gatherings, suggesting a connection to literary circles even if she felt out-of-place or not wholly accepted. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright's *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946 – 2005* (2006) contains two photographs of Adam-Smith, even if she is not mentioned in the text: one at the first meeting of the National Book Council in Melbourne in 1973 as the FAW representative, and the other showing Adam-Smith in an apron emblazoned with "Collins Booksellers" and the caption: "Bestselling non-fiction author Patsy Adam-Smith at an Australian Book Week function" (Munro and Sheahan-Bright n. pag.). Adam-Smith's interests were closely related to Hill's: their driving concern was to record stories of the people they encountered in their travels, stories they believed were the bedrock of the nation and which informed the future.

While they were aware of the literary and cultural traditions in which they participated, each of these women's personal circumstances were different and affected their writing. Hill and Adam-Smith were single women (and mothers) who needed to earn a living from writing. This was not easy in Australia where the publishing industry was small and many local authors were forced to seek out overseas publishers. Richard Nile and David Walker argue that "literary morale . . . was not high" in modern Australia in the first half of the twentieth century, due in part to lack of funding for writers and an unreliable publishing industry (285). In this climate, locally and nationally produced magazines were an important source of income and exposure for writers. As well as being a period of national uncertainty, this was a period of great flux in the publishing industry, as Nile and Walker point out: "The commercialisation of mass culture intensified the struggle for control, radically reshaping the face of writing, publication and distribution", with publishers having a large influence over what was considered saleable and worth publishing (284-85). This period saw the

appearance of publications such as *Smith's Weekly* (1919 – 50), *The B.P. Magazine* (1928–42), *Man: The Australian Magazine for Men* (1936–4), Ure Smith's *Australia: National Journal* (1939–47), and the *Australian Women's Weekly* (1933 –), along with *Walkabout* magazine. These periodicals were key middlebrow institutions and were important in shaping ideas of home for everyday Australians and others beyond the shores of the (relatively) isolated island continent. As Rolls and Johnston argue, *Walkabout* “sought to imagine a modern Australian community connected by shared stories, shared experiences and a deep attachment to place” (6). Hill and Adam-Smith actively engaged with these middlebrow periodicals; they also wrote for newspapers, radio programs, and produced books of history and/or folklore. These institutions provided opportunities for many writers (male and female) to earn an income in Australia.

In contrast to Hill and Adam-Smith, Drake-Brockman and Durack came from prominent West Australian families and had relatively privileged upbringings. They had outwardly successful marriages to professional men and were also mothers. Despite their privileged position, however, they still faced certain restrictions due to their gender, as Drusilla Modjeska points out in her study of Australian women writers in the 1930s:

at every point their access to financial independence, to the professions and to the milieu they took so seriously was mediated by their position as women. For all their independence of outlook as writers, they had to contend with the pressures that women rarely escape. (14)

Time constraints, the demands of motherhood and domesticity, and the required and acceptable public personas were common pressures for women. Drake-Brockman and Durack considered themselves serious writers and, like Hill and Adam-Smith, had noteworthy publishing careers within Australia. Their prominence in literary circles and on



bestseller lists at the time they were publishing suggests they were widely read and indicates contemporary significance.

Since much of the scholarly analysis of middlebrow writing has focused on fiction, chapter one begins by examining a selection of Drake-Brockman's fiction, including three novels, a work of historical fiction, and a play set in Western Australia. Chapter two discusses Durack's novel, *Keep Him My Country* (1955), which is set on a remote outback cattle station, along with her *Walkabout* articles discussing Western Australia. Chapter three examines Hill's *My Love Must Wait* (1941), a novel about Matthew Flinders, and *Flying Doctor Calling* (1947), and Adam-Smith's books of folklore: *The Anzacs* (1978), and *Australian Women at War* (1984). These works of fiction and folklore are nationalist narratives which pay attention to Australian history and conditions of society. Close textual analysis of the representations of gender and themes of nation-building in these texts uncovers the distinctly middlebrow features of their writing and demonstrates the nature of twentieth-century middlebrow writing in Australia through indicative authors.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Nation Building and the West: Henrietta Drake-Brockman's Fiction

A 1935 article in the *Australian Women's Weekly* titled "Women Writers in Vanguard of Our Literature" declared: "One of the major features of the exhibition of Australian books, which is, perhaps, the most interesting and surprising facet of Australian Author's Week, is the number and importance of the volumes written by women" (24). The article mentions Henry Handel Richardson, Helen Simpson, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Christina Stead, G. B. Lancaster, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, Winifred Birkett, Henrietta Drake-Brockman, Mary Marlowe, Ethel Turner, Mary Grant Bruce, Mary Gilmore, Dorothea MacKellar, Zora Cross and Nettie Palmer. This list supports Susan Sheridan's argument that women were active cultural producers at this time (*Along the Faultlines* viii–xv; *Nine Lives* 1–22). Some of these women have subsequently been included in the canon and recognised for their contributions to Australia's literature; others, like Drake-Brockman, have largely fallen into obscurity.

Drake-Brockman was active in literary circles, promoted a distinctive Australian literature and was committed to producing the same. In her tribute to Drake-Brockman published after the writer's death in 1968, social historian and friend Alexandra Hasluck wrote that Drake-Brockman was "intensely self-critical" and worried about the reception of her work. Hasluck "tried to console her by saying that her novels, short stories, plays were highly representative of their time, first in their field in Western Australia, and as such were assured of a place in Australian literature" (235). This has not been the case. As Amanda Laugesen notes, Drake-Brockman's work "has largely fallen out of Australian cultural memory" (111). Among the reasons Laugesen cites for this neglect is that Drake-Brockman's

work “has not been rated highly as serious literature” (although reviews at the time it was published suggest otherwise). Laugesen also suggests failure to find an overseas audience, and a lack of alignment with the cultural left of the 1930s, as reasons for Drake-Brockman’s subsequent obscurity (112). Laugesen recognises that Drake-Brockman’s “literary output had a significant Australian audience in its time and she engaged directly with the concerns, issues and ideas circulating in the public culture of the period” (112). This is true of each of the writers this thesis analyses, and makes their work important for the insights they provide into conditions in Australian society in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

Drake-Brockman was a significant figure in her time, particularly in her home state of Western Australia, where she regularly featured in the social pages of newspapers. John K. Ewers writes about a 1938 dinner that prompted the formation of the West Australian branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (75). The dinner was in honour of visiting American critic, C. Hartley Grattan, and a number of West Australian writers attended, including Durack. The writers realised they did not all know one another and sought to rectify this by forming the group. Drake-Brockman remained an active member of the branch while she lived in Western Australia. She promoted Australian writing in many other ways, giving speeches and participating in radio broadcasts. She was a frequent visitor to the eastern states. In 1936, *The Sydney Morning Herald* describes her thus:

As well as devoting a great deal of time to writing, Mrs. Drake-Brockman does a considerable amount of national broadcasting. She plays tennis and swims with energy and enthusiasm, and is an excellent hostess in her rambling stone house at Peppermint Grove, one of Perth’s loveliest residential suburbs. She is the mother of two sturdy children—Julia, aged eleven, and Paris, aged eight—and she always keeps a piece of knitting on her needles. Mrs. Drake-Brockman is one of those lucky

people who combine brains with beauty—she is slim, with fair hair and blue eyes, widely and somewhat unevenly spaced, and she possesses a flair for attractive frocking. (“Henrietta Drake-Brockman’s Second Novel” 28)

This profile clearly positions her as a writer but also as a woman fulfilling (or performing) socially acceptable roles.

Other newspaper reviews from the 1930s include Drake-Brockman’s books with writers who have since been valued in the national literature, such as Prichard, Ewers, Frank Dalby Davidson, Richardson, Barnard Eldershaw, Stead, and Mollie Skinner.<sup>12</sup> The *Western Mail*, for instance, reports in 1936: “New books shortly to be published by Angus and Robertson Ltd., Sydney, include novels and non-fiction by some of Australia’s best known authors”: included in this list are Dalby Davidson, William Hatfield, Frank Clune, Will Lawson, Drake-Brockman, Edmund Barclay, and A. B. Paterson, amongst others (“New Australian Books” 35). Drake-Brockman was president of the West Australian Women’s Writer’s Club that sponsored West Australian Authors’ Week, 15<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1937, at which “women writers will be well represented”, as the *West Australian* reported (“Women” 7). The article mentions the publishing success of Prichard, Skinner and Drake-Brockman.<sup>13</sup> Drake-Brockman was frequently described as a “well-known writer” (“Fellowship” 14) and her work was praised for its contribution to the national literature.

Drake-Brockman’s presidential address to the Fellowship of Australian Writers (W.A. Section) demonstrates her commitment to a distinctive Australian literature:

the public are beginning to want better intellectual understanding of themselves as a people. They realise this can be best achieved by study of Australian backgrounds,

<sup>12</sup> For example: Reviewer Norbar (“Sydney or the Bush” 4).

<sup>13</sup> Drake-Brockman was friends with Prichard and wrote about her work in *Southerly* 14.4 (1953).

natural, historical and political, and by the reading of the works of Australian writers.

(“Education” 7)

In the same speech she is quoted as lamenting the gap between Australian life and the intellectual focus on European literature and American cinema, which she considers “is maintained at the expense of Australian experience” (7). She decries the “flood of sex and crime books, printed in Australia but written overseas, [which] continues to fill up the minds of our young with, at best, a litter of false and unproductive sentiments” (7). This passion for embracing and promoting Australia is evident throughout Drake-Brockman’s work.

Drake-Brockman’s fictions were praised for their faithful reproduction of Australian landscapes, as well as her lively writing, which incited engagement with the narratives. The critic known as “Norbar” praised Drake-Brockman for not looking beyond Australia for the material in her novels: “The virtue of ‘Blue North’ and ‘Sheba Lane’ . . . lies in the fact that [Drake-Brockman] sought her romance over the back fence instead of fleeing to Europe, the 18<sup>th</sup> century or ancient Rome, as so many Australian writers have done” (“The Novelist’s Craft” 3). Leslie Haylen in the *Australian Women’s Weekly* described her work as “vivid, accurate and authentic, [it] tingles with that sense of freedom and individuality which is part of our national make-up” (13). These are key attributes of middlebrow writing, which is reader-oriented and encouraged deep identification with the work and its themes.

Like the other writers in this study, Drake-Brockman’s work had a regional focus, which she used to explore national identity. Her first three books are set in Western Australia. *Blue North* (1934) and *Sheba Lane* (1936) are romance novels set in and around Broome in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. *Younger Sons* (1937) is a generational saga focusing on Perth. Drake-Brockman knew Broome well, having lived there for a number of years as the young wife of Geoffrey, an engineer and the inaugural

Commissioner for the North-West. As they lived and travelled through the area, Geoffrey recalls that Henrietta became

still more interested in the country, its problems, its people, its natives . . . [S]he practically pioneered a field since over-run with writers, and must certainly have been one of the first, if not the first, on-the-spot authors to record the North-West scene and characters. (214)

Drake-Brockman's fascination with the north-west never waned. In later years she travelled without her husband, writing for *Walkabout* (in which she published twenty-three articles between 1942 and 1958, which are discussed in Part Two). The idea for *Blue North* came from this time spent in the region. *Blue North* and *Sheba Lane* paint a vivid portrait of the pearling industry and life in remote and exotic Broome. Laugesen writes that *Sheba Lane* "became a social historical document for later readers, capturing a particular moment in the turbulent history of the town" (115). Each novel contains adventure in the form of the hero saving the villain from death, narrow escapes from storms, sexual scandal, and the intrigues and trials of pearling life. The novels portray a mixed-race population living and working together (albeit with problems) at a time when the White Australia Policy was firmly in place.<sup>14</sup> Characters in the novels find the north-west an idyll and an escape, a place of opportunity for wealth, or a hellish prison of discomfort and bad taste. Australian drinking culture is depicted as are the hardships of life for women in a "man's country" (*Blue North* 156). The coast and the sea are described rapturously but life in the town of Broome is not romanticised. By presenting Broome and its surrounds in this way Drake-Brockman made a little-known region come alive for her readers.

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<sup>14</sup> Soon after Federation the Immigration Restriction Act was passed in 1901.

*Blue North* reached a wide audience, being published first in serial form in key middlebrow institutions. It was serialised in the *Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>15</sup> and also appeared in the *Bulletin* in sixteen weekly instalments from 20 January–4 May 1932. The *Bulletin* had become renowned as “the voice of the values of the bush” even though a large proportion of its audience were urban (Arnold 264). As John Arnold points out:

The power of the myth of the bush over a heavily suburbanised society has been one of the enduring paradoxes of Australian cultural history. With the *Bulletin's* promotion of a strident Australian nationalism, its support for Australian writers, its striking black-and-white illustrations and its encouragement of readers' contributions, it became a national institution. (264)

The *Bulletin's* circulation peaked in the early 1900s. This large readership meant that “most of Australia's white three million were familiar with its style and content”, as Bruce Bennett remarks (269). Although its circulation had fallen by the late 1930s, David Carter and Bridget Griffen-Foley point out that with a publishing industry still dominated by imports in the inter-war period, the *Bulletin* “remained the most significant forum for Australian literature” (244). Being published in such a periodical gave wide exposure to the nuanced voices of women writers at a time when prevailing attitudes were influenced by nationalistic white male authors.

Drake-Brockman used the appeal of the romance genre to explore ideas of gender, race and nation in a remote corner of Australia. The love stories in *Blue North* and *Sheba Lane* take the classic (and acceptable) form of a white, well-to-do man rescuing an unfortunate, much younger and innocent white woman, yet there is more in the novels that

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<sup>15</sup> An excerpt in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 Mar. 1935, mentions this: “Mrs. Henrietta Drake-Brockman, well-known writer of Western Australia, whose novel of Broome pearl-fishing, ‘Blue North,’ was published here in serial form, will be the guest at a luncheon given in her honour by the Fellowship of Australian Writers” (“Fellowship” 14).

speaks about the north-west region than clichéd conventional romance. Romance writing is typically associated with attributes of lowbrow fiction, which is generally formulaic with a chief purpose to entertain. Middlebrow writers bridged the gap between escapist fiction and avant-garde or experimental literature in their aim to educate and entertain an audience with aspirations for self-improvement or upward mobility through culture. By imbuing her romance fiction with deeper concerns, Drake-Brockman used the genre to educate and challenge readers' perceptions about a little-known and experienced part of Australia and to address broader themes of national identity.

*Blue North* provides a realistic portrait of the region's chief commercial industry and its attendant problems, which were largely to do with race, gender and class. It contains evocative descriptions of the environment and conditions of life in the north. In contrast to this authentic rendering, the love story running through the novel is less convincing. Laugesen describes it as a "bodice-ripping romance" (114), which is perhaps a little exaggerated. The male protagonist is John Fordyce who sails north from Perth to seek his fortune and flee a complaining wife. Fordyce quickly adapts to life in Broome. He is "filled with a pleasant bodily languor" and experienced "no other feeling but one of supreme content" (*Blue* 127) in the remote region. Fordyce's love interest, Sophie Gannet, is an orphan, socially isolated and inexperienced. She fits the conventional romance heroine Sheridan identifies in the texts she examines in *Along the Faultlines* (65). Drake-Brockman uses Fordyce's first wife, Euphemia, to comment on the unsuitability of some migrants to conditions in Australia and to manipulate the romance between Fordyce and Sophie. Euphemia was an upper-class migrant from England who married for money and position. She did not take to Australia and was not amenable even to Perth, considering it a backwater. She (conveniently) drowns at sea, freeing Fordyce to legitimate his relationship



with Sophie. At the end of the novel he reflects: “Here in his arms lay the sum of all his dreams—little Sophie, his child and his mistress in one, his mate who demanded nothing and whom he yet adored” (*Blue* 282). Sentiments such as these which revert to trite romance conventions detract from the carefully constructed picture of late-nineteenth-century conditions in and around Broome and display the mixed qualities of middlebrow fiction.

*Sheba Lane*, published two years after *Blue North*, received mixed reviews. Perth’s *Sunday Times* wrote that the novel “was acclaimed as a piece of fiction far above the average” (“Out of the Library” 13); in 1936, reviewer “Peggy” of Perth’s *Western Mail* stated that “[t]he story itself is not outstanding . . . But [the characters] are drawn from life and set in a convincing background. Broome . . . is reproduced with charm and skill, and the mixed pearling outpost . . . lives in the reader’s mind” (33). The novel takes up the story of John Fordyce’s son, Peter, and his romance with June Goer, a wealthy pearler’s daughter. The changing pearling industry is featured in this novel—Malays and Japanese have replaced Aborigines as divers—and Drake-Brockman uses the novel to detail pearling in Australia at this time, revealing its intrigues and vices. Sheba Lane is an actual street, the Chinatown of Broome and, as the name suggests, the novel describes the social life of the town and its unusual mix of people from various countries and races.

The romance in this novel is less generic than *Blue North*. While Peter Fordyce is the hero of *Sheba Lane*, the Englishman Christopher Kent is arguably the main protagonist and anti-hero. June is bewitched with Kent and the township of Broome on arrival. Dressed in a white suit, Kent stands out amongst the spectators greeting the boat from Melbourne: “Romance and glamour of the pearling port enthralled June, romance and glamour of Christopher Kent, searching for pearls, wove for her an enchanting idyll” (*Sheba* 57). While

Kent is pining for an English woman, the normally pragmatic Fordyce is smitten with June on first sight. June finally accepts Fordyce as her husband yet remains ambivalent about her feelings, still wanting to save the hapless Kent at the end of the novel. The basis of June and Peter's marriage is less about unbridled passion than mutual respect and an equal friendship, as Drake-Brockman uses the romance genre to explore male-female relationships.

Kent and Fordyce are set in opposition to one another in the novel in an exploration of national character. Kent never reconciles himself to life in Australia. He has no sense of humour, cannot accept the casual ways of Australians, and is racist. As Kent lies dying, disillusioned with life, an old friend muses: "the trouble with [Chris] had been he had no sense of humour . . . if you couldn't stand up to life, or laugh at it if it got you down, you might as well end it!" (*Sheba* 281). Kent's character is not unsympathetic. Drake-Brockman uses the contrasting men to comment (even if rather obviously) on the need to cut ties with empire and fully embrace the Australian environment and way of life to succeed and flourish in the emergent nation.

While other female characters in *Blue North* and *Sheba Lane* are stereotypes—there is the social climber and the common barmaid, for example—in some ways these minor characters become more rounded than the heroines. In *Blue North* the true nature of the storekeeper's wife is uncovered as the novel progresses and Mrs Coffey's inner thoughts provide insights into the difficulties of life for women in north-western Australia. She keeps these to herself, however. After inwardly lamenting the trials of her life, Mrs Coffey stifles them to fulfil her domestic role: "Something of heroism clothed the smiling, cheerful way in which she brought her husband's tea from the kitchen" (*Blue* 256). So too Mrs Tweedy, the

Government Resident's wife in *Sheba Lane*, while outwardly full of social self-importance, is shown through the omniscient narrator to be less shallow than her manner suggests:

Mrs Tweedie in truth longed to escape the summer, to see her two young daughters (she would not allow them to come north in the hot season, and the other school holidays were always too short); how she considered it her duty to stay and cook for Alfred Tweedie. She knew too well that it would be wrong and selfish of her to entrust his delicate digestion to the tender mercies of hotel cooks or half-caste maids. (*Sheba* 233)

These are the heroic white women of the time, charged with moral and civilising responsibility in the remote frontier regions of Australia. Men went out to work while women kept house in the confines of a small, isolated society. Women in the novels are rarely shown to inhabit the landscape in their own right, as Kay Schaffer argues of women in *Women and the Bush* (1988): "They appear as daughters, lovers, wives and mothers in relationships to men. That is, they are (always) already spoken for" (63). This was the only acceptable way women could occupy remote regions at the time. Those who do not fit this description are often portrayed as morally loose or ambiguous, such as Queenie in *Sheba Lane*. Queenie is an unmarried working girl in Broome (embroiled in a relationship with June's father); however, she is independent and living in society the best way she can as a modern Australian woman.

Drake-Brockman's play, *Men Without Wives* (1938), and short stories also feature outback women who express "a specifically female strength" (Sheridan *Faultlines* 159), while also possessing male qualities of heroism and stoicism. These white women are in the outback as faithful partners to their husbands, however, the stories are told from the woman's point of view rather than the man's. In focusing her fiction around these women,

firmly situating them alongside men, Drake-Brockman effectively inserted them “into the national tradition of the outback and the pioneer from which women had been traditionally excluded”, as Laugesen notes (122). Her female characters possess ideal and altruistic traits stemming from the literary tradition of the 1890s: they are thoughtful, practical, resilient and resourceful. *Men Without Wives*—which won the Australian Sesquicentenary competition—is set in the northern Australian outback in 1933, at the fictional “Kooli Crossing homestead”. In a cast of fourteen, nine characters are women; one of these is an Aboriginal servant. The story depicts station life and is centred on the relationships of men and women in these isolated circumstances. The main female characters are Mrs Bates, described as “a hard-bitten northerner” (*Men* 2), and Mrs Abbott, the new wife of the owner and manager of Eriba Downs cattle station. An initial hostility between these women develops into admiration and the play comments on the characteristics necessary for white women who live in these circumstances. A distinctive Australian character is again a feature of this play, which iterates themes common to Drake-Brockman’s work.

Like *Blue North*, Drake-Brockman’s short stories were published in key middlebrow cultural institutions including the *ABC Weekly*, the *Australasian*, the *Australian Journal*, the *Bulletin*, *B.P. Magazine*, *Smith’s Weekly*, and *Southerly*. In her study of middlebrow periodicals in Australia, Victoria Kuttainen argues that these publications’ ability to reach a broad as well as a discerning readership—providing exposure to numerous Australian writers, many of whom have since faded from view—makes them valuable artefacts in revealing “distinctive Australian ways . . . the nation fell under the thrall of the modern” (98). With their diverse array of material, Kuttainen points out, these magazines “lay bare tensions between literary aspiration and commodity culture, sophistication and escapism, edification and entertainment, and modernity and primitiveness” (85). Further, “[t]heir

middling range allowed these magazines to modulate the scales of high and mass culture, offering easy access to domains that had once been limited to the highly literate and well-educated elite" (89). Drake-Brockman's participation in this area of publication gave her wide exposure at a critical period in the history of the nation. "Aspirational" readers (Hammill and Smith 12) had an appetite for locally produced middlebrow material through which they experienced many aspects of the Australian environment and culture, instilling a greater sense of belonging in the modern nation.

The Australian firm Angus & Robertson published a collection of Drake-Brockman's short stories, *Sydney and The Bush* (1948). Formed by David Angus and George Robertson in 1884, Angus & Robertson quickly became a formidable force in Australian publishing and one of the few local venues for writers who previously had to seek publication overseas. As Jennifer Alison writes, Angus & Robertson "dominated Australian publishing . . . from 1888 to 1989 . . . The firm gained a reputation as a literary publisher, and up to the 1950s most well-known Australian writers had been published at some time by A&R" (27). Founder George Robertson believed "producing and selling books was crucial to a civilised society" (Kent *A Certain Style* 47); the company "encouraged Australian writing and reflected Australian culture" (Alison 27). The first full-time editor Beatrice Davis was appointed to the firm in 1937. Davis was a key promoter of a large number of Australian authors including Miles Franklin, Eve Langley, Xavier Herbert, Hal Porter, Kylie Tennant, Thea Astley and Ernestine Hill. She gained a reputation as a mentor, critic and "taste-maker" in Australian publishing (Kent "Case Study" 177). Davis remained with Angus & Robertson for thirty-seven years until 1973, and is remembered as an important influence on the development of

Australian writing.<sup>16</sup> Apart from their professional relationship, Davis and Drake-Brockman became friends, sharing opinions on literary politics and literature more generally (Kent *A Certain Style* 144-47). Drake-Brockman's ongoing relationship with the publishing firm and its influential editor indicates her status as a prominent figure in Australian writing in the mid-twentieth century.

The stories in *Sydney and the Bush* cover a range of contemporary concerns, such as relations between white Australians and Aborigines, the Depression and the effects of war. The collection is divided into three sections: "Black and White", "Time of Tension", and "Civilian Front". The stoicism of ordinary people forging lives in difficult conditions is emphasised. These are the "battlers" on whom the national character is built. The stories are told in a simple, straightforward manner and often contain a poignant message. The settings—urban spaces, outback properties and beaches—situate them as distinctly Australian along with the concerns of the characters, who are struggling due to the effects of isolation, the Depression or war.

Drake-Brockman's stories are frequently told from a female character's point of view, offering an alternative perspective on life in regions predominantly populated by men and usually written through a masculine gaze. For example, "The Price" (also published in *Coast to Coast* [1941]), is a story told from the point of view of a wheat farmer's wife. The woman is "[s]o tired she could scarcely think": worn out from hard years on the land with falling wheat prices (206). She has three sons who spend their days working in the fields and nights trapping rabbits for extra money. They wait in hope for the price of wheat to rise. War is announced and the two older sons prepare to enlist. The story ends as the youngest boy, "glowing", races up to the house to tell his mother the good news that "Wheat has

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<sup>16</sup> See: Kent *A Certain Style* 2, 110; and Alison "Publishers and Editors" 31.

doubled its price . . . It's going to rise. Home on the pig's back we are—talk about a Merry Christmas!" (207). His naivety at the reason for the price rise and what it will mean is emphasised in his mother's response. At first she does not react. She notices a "shadow falling on Dick, on his lifted arms . . . the shadow of a cross" (207). She begins to laugh hysterically: "Her laughter rang down the valley. A ripple of wind caught up her laugh and blew it over the paddocks. As the wind passed, the wheat shuddered" (207). These stories emphasise the uncertainties of the time and people's responses. Connection to the land is ambivalent as characters find it both a blessing and a curse. In the foreword to the collection, Drake-Brockman wrote that she felt the stories were linked

by one trait in common; and that trait is preoccupation with a very Australian characteristic that in part, at least, can be said to arise from the mere fact of living in a newly tamed and sometimes hostile environment. All or nothing. (v)

This "all or nothing" approach to the country, the idea that people either love or hate the Australian environment, is a theme explored throughout Drake-Brockman's work.

Occasionally Drake-Brockman evoked a sense of belonging that borrows from an Indigenous connection to country. In "Smoke Signals", the last story in the collection, a woman and her children are about to flee their West Australian property and head south to safety due to the threat of war. A willy-willy has delayed their departure and the woman reflects on her first impressions of the land:

She had heard the rustle of the tide over on the Beach . . . at that moment the voice of the tide, incoming, had whispered like the voice of the centuries. She had felt as if the thread of the past was given into her hand so that she might knit the present and shape the future. She had not been able to speak. The empty country was too vast, time was too immeasurable, for one woman! (254)

Both the woman and her husband feel that the property “is [their] own country” (266), indicating a connection to the land similar to that of Indigenous Australians. It develops out of hard work, persistence and endurance—all or nothing.

Drake-Brockman’s short stories present another side to the romanticised vision of settler pioneer experience in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Australia. Often more than hard work is required to succeed. In “The Gamblers”, for instance, a husband and wife walk off the land they were granted through “a soldier-settlement scheme” and that they considered their own due to years of “sweat” and “blood” (105). Their thirteen years of work has produced no reliable or sustainable yield and they walk off into the night, leaving the land and their shack, which “gleamed white as a skeleton long-bleached” (110), in the hope of a better life elsewhere, presumably the city. Romantic ideals of bushworkers and settler farmers are questioned in the modern nation which is changing as a result of natural disasters and international turmoil. The ideal of the bush as the site of desire is challenged. Drake-Brockman reflected changing conditions in Australia where attention was becoming centred on the city rather than the bush. The “‘nationed’ modernity” (“Mystery” 184) that Carter identifies as a feature of Australian middlebrow culture is found in Drake-Brockman’s fiction as it imagines a maturing urban nation formed from conditions of the past. These ideas are explored at length in Drake-Brockman’s third novel, *Younger Sons* (1937).

### **Western Australia, the pioneering past and the future Australian in *Younger Sons***

*Younger Sons* was described as “the best West Australian novel of recent years” in the year of its publication (‘Norbar’ “Leading Novels” 7). In the Hobart *Mercury*, the reviewer known as “Scribe” wrote:

When I read Mrs. Henrietta Drake-Brockman’s ‘Sheba Lane’ a few months ago I was disappointed with it and did not hesitate to say so. I now desire to congratulate her



upon . . . ‘Younger Sons,’ which is not only by far the best novel she has yet written, but is one of the most outstanding works of fiction written in Australia for years . . . ‘Younger Sons’ is a notable piece of work . . . It is a book to delight the discerning reader. (7)

The novel was broadcast on radio station 6WA.<sup>17</sup> It appeared at a time when Carter and Griffen-Foley point out that “[m]any felt that the novel was the art form best suited to the intellectual and political challenges of the 1930s and 1940s” (245). *Younger Sons* is set in and around Perth during a period spanning the late nineteenth century to the years following the First World War and prior to World War II. This was a period when debates over national values were once again prominent due to a series of international crises including WWI, the Russian Revolution, the Depression and the Spanish Civil War (Carter and Griffen-Foley 244). The cultural nationalism that manifested as one response to such international political unrest turned again to mythologies of the bush (244-45). *Younger Sons* responded to these concerns in its exploration of national character. The novel engaged with contemporary “anxieties that [Australia] was both too modern, with no deep traditions of its own, and not modern enough” (237), locating national identity in the pre-modern landscape while recognising the impact of modernity on the novel’s current generation.

A key strength of *Younger Sons* is Drake-Brockman’s use of the West Australian setting to explore wider issues in the national story at a tumultuous period in world history. *Younger Sons* traces three generations of two fictional families, the Wentworths and the Raes. It is a *Bildungsroman* concerning three West-Australian-born siblings, Gavan, Theo and Alison Rae. The book could also be described as a coming-of-age novel about the city of

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<sup>17</sup> “J. E. A. asks who was the author of the serial story entitled ‘Younger Sons,’ being read over station 6WA. The author is Henrietta Drake-Brockman of Western Australia” (“Women’s Realm: Readers Queries” 11).

Perth. It is divided into four sections, “Family Tree”, “Saplings”, “Barren Years”, and “Full Growth”, indicating the themes of both personal and national development with which the novel is concerned. Carter and Griffen-Foley remark on the appearance during this period of a number of novels that “interpreted the effects of social crisis in individual lives through broad historical and political perspectives” (245). The broad appeal of a generational saga allowed Drake-Brockman to engage with deeper national themes in an entertaining but educative fashion typical of mid-twentieth-century middlebrow fiction. Perth and the landscape surrounding it are brought to life as the narrative moves from one generation to the next.

The novel begins with the first generation of British-born Australian immigrants who are portrayed as foolishly and slavishly trying to hold onto their roots without happiness or success. Charles Wentworth views Australia in terms of conquest: “like Columbus sighting America . . . He had large ideas, and meant to satisfy them” (*Younger* 20-21). However, “for all his pride and prosperity, [he] could not care for his many miles of country, his house, his flocks, as much as he cared for the smallest stone of Elmsborough”, the family property in England (32). Likewise Andrew Rae,

[t]ogether with the majority of the new colonists . . . was occupied, not in creating a new country with laws of its own, but in a profound endeavour to bend both country and custom to a facsimile of the land they had left on the other side of the world. (57)

By contrast, the Wentworth’s servants are shown as “quick to realize that, in the new society, the individual would soon count more than inherited privilege” (24). Early in the novel Drake-Brockman highlights the irrelevance of British notions of class in Australia. Egalitarianism and individual freedom—qualities Drake-Brockman valued as part of what

Laugesen described as her “middle-class liberalism” (114)—are an inherent and important part of the nation’s future prosperity.

The Australian-born offspring of the immigrant generation are shown to be progressive and anxious to cast off restrictive and irrelevant ideals, although the land continues to be portrayed as an object of masculine desire. Gavan, the main protagonist and first-born son of Andrew Rae, is a robust young man who expresses a primal connection to the land: it gets “[i]n the blood . . . so that queer rooted sense swept over you at times, as if you both possessed and were possessed—an emotion as primitive as lust” (*Younger* 290). Evocative descriptions of the country feature throughout the novel, presented mainly from Gavan’s point of view. It is portrayed in rich, colourful detail, and also in terms of its emptiness before white occupation: “the hostile blankness of a vacant land” (16); it is “empty” (24), and “raw” (129). It is irrevocably altered by white influence: “in Edward Wentworth’s lifetime, the country-side had grown from native-haunted bush to the semblance of an inhabited land” (33-34). The land remains an object of masculine desire throughout the novel:

That brooding, secret, alluring hostility which stirred the blood in a man’s veins to an ardour reckless as desire. It *was* desire—desire to possess the earth, to tame it, to own it, to bend it to man’s creative purpose. (308; emphasis in orig.)

Gavan and his forebears exemplify an identification with the land (gendered female) described by Schaffer as “an object to be possessed, an other to be incorporated into or appropriated by the self” (*Women* 62). For Gavan, the land is everything: “there remained plenty of space to begin afresh. That was the glory of Australia! Always a new piece of land to be had . . . The race could remain cheerful and casual, so long as there was land to be had”

(*Younger* 301; ellipsis in orig.). Gavan's character reflects characteristics attributed to the land itself; he sees it as an extension of himself yet its function is largely utilitarian.

Gavan's possessive connection to the land is in contrast to younger brother, Theo, whose engagement is more intuitive. Theo is sensitive and artistic, seeing romance in the land, which he eventually expresses through music. Rather than seeing it as utilitarian and a means for economic gain, Theo senses the age of the landscape, the silence of the bush:

Can't you feel the trees watching you when you're alone sometimes? . . . I reckon they resent our being here. They don't want their soil taken away and ploughed up . . . a hint of that malevolence with which the bush watches the end approaching: that quiet pastoral end, sweet, placid, tinkling—familiar stuff, sugary, after the throb of a primitive heart. (113-14)

Theo studies music abroad, marries into a French family, and engages in a modern, transnational lifestyle. Gavan stays in Western Australia; his connection with the land evinces the influence of environment rather than heredity on a sense of identity, whereas for Theo the connection is more instinctual in keeping with his artistic nature. Drake-Brockman uses the Rae siblings to explore different ways of belonging in emergent modern Australia.

In contrast to her brothers, Alison enjoys the freedoms of the new woman in Australia, such as frolicking on the beach and skinny-dipping at parties. She is a distinctly modern woman with a will of her own. Gavan notes as Alison approaches womanhood she has become "capable. There was nothing she could not do" (*Younger* 275-76). While her brothers spent their inheritance, Alison wisely invested hers: "It appears I'm the only moneyed member left among the Raes", she says to Gavan. "It's the age of women, after all—I think I'll be head of the House, for a change" (278; emphasis in orig.). Like Gavan and

Theo she will make her way in emerging modern Australia as a proud Australian. With her “direct and fearless” gaze, she is sure of herself and “absolutely serene” (291) in her environment of sun and sand. She is in control of her possibilities in modern Australia. The national character explored through the Australian-born generation in *Younger Sons* exhibits a strong nationalism and the “virtuous citizenship and ‘nationed’ modernity” that Carter identifies as a feature of Australian middlebrow writers of the 1930s–40s (“Mystery” 184). The future is one of hope and growth.

Leisure, the sun, the beach and the city figure prominently in the consciousness of the younger generation in *Younger Sons* and are features that came to be associated with a concept arising after the Second World War that Richard White calls the “Australian way of life” (*Inventing* 158-69; “The Australian Way of Life” 528-45). While White situates this ideal arising in the 1940s, its traces are clearly evident in *Younger Sons*. White acknowledges that “the Australian way of life” was hard to define in concrete terms; vaguely it encompassed ideals of individualism, freedom, opportunity, and leisure. These images flowed over from the 1920s when, as White remarks, the dominant image of Australia was of a “clean, chaste, young, sane and wholesome” nation threatened by “external evils” (*Inventing* 144). The beach figured prominently as an image of the wholesomeness of Australian life and is a focus in *Younger Sons*. It transforms throughout the novel, from the “hard—almost brittle” (*Younger* 17) landing place for immigrants from Britain, to a place of leisure, gaiety and uninhibited cavorting. Gavan and Alison’s discussions about the national character take place on the beach. In *Younger Sons* the beach is “pagan” (283), symbolic of freedom and hedonism: “People lost their identity with their clothes, on the beach . . . Here on the beach they were at last alive!” (286). It is also associated with the version of the “national type” explored by White that he names the “cult of the Bondi lifesaver, which was particularly

strong in the late 1930s” when Drake-Brockman was writing (*Inventing* 154). “Increasingly,” White writes, “the lifesaver appeared as symbolic of Australia . . . alongside the more traditional sheep, drovers and gum trees” (155). While women were excluded from this image more broadly, in *Younger Sons* they are an integral part of it.

Key moments in Australia’s history are integrated into *Younger Sons*: from immigrants arriving in Perth, the use of convict labour, Federation, the gold rushes, the First World War, the Soldier Settlement Scheme, politics, formation of trade unions, the centenary of Perth. The city of Perth changes along with the succeeding generations. From its beginnings as a “raw”, “hostile” settlement, it now had a “general air of sophistication” (*Younger* 277). This representation of Perth parallels the developing Australian identity through successive generations. The quest for an image of maturity and sophistication in mid-twentieth-century Australia saw a revision of the image of cities as centres of superficiality, disconnection and decadence. The “Australian way of life” was “closely related to the image of Australia as a sophisticated, urban, industrialised, consumer society” (*White Inventing* 161), which we see the beginnings of in *Younger Sons*. The novel closes with the centenary of Perth in 1929. The environment has been built over, old and new intermingle. Respect is paid to the pioneering past while celebrating the progressive future in an atmosphere of hope.

In the final scene of the book, past and present intersect as the two brothers sit in the silence of the bush above Perth. Gavan reflects that he and his brother were vehicles through which “something free, lovely, transcendental” had been created (*Younger* 336). He traces this as stemming from his mother and grandmother. The female bloodline is acknowledged as the source of the male descendants’ sense of establishment in Australia. Together, the siblings have broken from the past and made their own way in the new world.

They look down onto the “emerald and diamond and ruby-rich promise” of the city of Perth, while behind them “the black shape of a tuart-tree, centuries old, and the shapes of the eucalypts, aromatic, mysterious, watched in the night” (337). The new is shadowed by the old in this country of contradictions. In tracing stories of individual growth through successive generations set against a broad historical background, Drake-Brockman presented an image of national life that would have resonated with readers also seeking a unique cultural identity in mid-twentieth-century Australia. In true middlebrow style, she used popular forms to explore deeper themes surrounding national identity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Women and the Regions: Mary Durack's West Australian Writing**

Western Australia, the national character, and Aborigines were key concerns in Mary Durack's writing. While the topics Durack writes about fall into a similar period to Drake-Brockman and Hill, the bulk of her publishing career took place during the 1950s–1980s (this is also the period when Adam-Smith was writing). Her writing is dominated by the pioneering past in which her family were key figures. *Keep Him My Country* (1955), her outback romance between a white station owner and a young Aboriginal girl, is drawn from her personal experience of station life. Durack became increasingly concerned with the treatment of Aborigines and their future in Australian society. This aspect of her writing will be mentioned briefly here but analysed in Part Three. This chapter examines Durack's place in Australian literature, her representations of Western Australia, and her positioning within middlebrow culture, concluding with an analysis of white Australian belonging in *Keep Him My Country*.

As the grand-daughter and daughter of pastoral pioneers, Durack was inextricably bound up in nation-building myths. The pioneering past and her family history were ongoing concerns in her writing, explored in articles, plays and books. Rather than setting out to explore and develop the land for economic gain as their forebears did, Durack and her sister Elizabeth, who was a painter, explored a sense of cultural identity through art. Henrietta Drake-Brockman wrote that Mary and Elizabeth made "a contribution to the Australian tradition, continuing in a very different sphere the pioneering activities of their father and uncles" ("Our Author's Page" 42). So too Nicholas Hasluck considered that "[i]n the way they lived their lives and through their artistic aspirations the Durack sisters tried to understand



the Kimberley region they loved. They played a part in the sharing of traditions” (37). Mary and Elizabeth’s sense of belonging was inextricably bound to the remote regions that were such a significant part of their lives and family history and for which they found expression through writing and painting. Edward Relph writes that “[t]o be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place” (1; emphasis in orig.). Mary Durack explored the idea of place and national character in connection to Western Australia, particularly the remote north-west regions.

Durack made her debut in print when at the age of ten, according to Perth’s *Western Mail*: “a small book of poems, written from the time she was about six years of age, was published” (24). Once they had completed their schooling in Perth, Mary and Elizabeth worked on the family’s Kimberley properties. This time inspired their first books, *All-about* (1935) and *Chunuma* (1936), which were about the Aborigines on the station. Mary wrote the stories and Elizabeth illustrated the books. Like Drake-Brockman’s *Blue North*, *All-about* and *Chunuma* reached a wide audience being serialised in the *Bulletin* and published in book form by Endeavour Press. The books were successful in raising the profiles of both sisters. Mary and Elizabeth continued to collaborate on other projects throughout their lives.<sup>18</sup>

Drake-Brockman wrote about the Durack sisters in *Walkabout*’s “Our Author’s Page”,<sup>19</sup> describing them as the embodiment of “an often imagined, rarely-realized conception of Australian womanhood” that encompassed traditional female domestic qualities (“competent in the housewifely arts, very easy to look at . . . devoted mothers”) alongside being comfortable in the outback (“undaunted by difficulties and even hardships, ever resourceful”). Each woman is described as

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth also illustrated Hill’s *The Territory*.

<sup>19</sup> The article appeared in September 1952 with no identified author. The magazine corrected the omission of the author’s name in the October 1952 edition.

blessed with the quick bubbling humour of their Irish ancestry, tintured, of course, with a dash of that peculiar bitter Australian irony which has been brewed from hard soil and red dust and vast empty spaces far from the Irish green, and which lends to their creative work its inherent essence of Australia. (41)

By positioning the Durack sisters in this way, Drake-Brockman emphasised attributes that Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston contend were typically highlighted in relation to the artists featured in “Our Author’s Page”: a “deep connection to particular Australian landscapes and the people who inhabit them” (46). The “type of lived experience” the Duracks possessed was regarded highly by *Walkabout*, Rolls and Johnston argue, “for it establishes credibility in the claim for distinctly Australian literature” (47). Usually a full-page feature on a leading writer, *Walkabout* ran “Our Authors’ Page” from 1950–1953 (43). Durack also contributed to this page, with an article on Hill (March 1952), and Drake-Brockman wrote about Miles Franklin (March 1951); indeed, Drake-Brockman is credited with the originating idea for this section of the magazine (43). Rolls and Johnston argue that “Our Authors’ Page” was *Walkabout’s* attempt “to shape the literary tastes of its readers”: profiling the magazine’s “literary luminaries [showed] a process of mid-century literary canon formation in Australia” (43-44). The number of women featured demonstrates that “gender is rarely evoked as a limiting factor” (47). *Walkabout* magazine is an exemplar of women’s prominent participation in middlebrow cultural forms.

Women’s participation in public life was mediated by social conditions, including the professional positions they could occupy and expectations placed upon them as wives and mothers. In an *Australian Women’s Weekly* article (1981), Durack noted the many demands and interruptions she experienced in daily life that took her away from the task of writing. By this time her children were grown, but she had pressures from outside the home:

unsolicited requests from aspiring writers for advice or to read manuscripts, various public commitments such as giving speeches, writing reviews, judging literary competitions, and serving as a member on the council of the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre. Susan Sheridan examines a group of women born between 1915 and 1930 who worked seriously as artists, gaining intermittent (if any) recognition for their work while raising families at a time when a woman's place was firmly situated in the domestic realm (*Nine Lives* 2). Such personal and professional challenges similarly faced Durack and, indeed, Adam-Smith. Each was able to utilise middlebrow forms to speak to the nation and explore their identity both within and beyond the parameters of family commitments and domesticity.

Since the life of a woman writer is mediated her circumstances, Durack's public opinions on gender are revealing. In an interview, Guilia Giuffré asked Durack if she ever felt disadvantaged by her gender and Durack answered:

Never, no. I suppose I could have done a lot more if I'd had a bit more help with the kids, but 'mother looked after the children', and that was that. I did the other things when they were in bed, or when I could. Most women writers that I know seem to have done the same. (95)

Durack claims no need for feminism: "All this 'women's liberation' business has never been anything that really got to me. I always did what I wanted to do" (95). While hers was a position of relative privilege, Durack knew what it was like to work for a living, to be a stay-at-home wife and mother, and to live and work in the north. Durack managed a busy home and six children largely on her own while her husband lived in Broome and she in Perth from

early on in their marriage.<sup>20</sup> While she knew and loved north-western Australia, she did not spend prolonged periods in the region. In an article in the *Western Mail* (1934) about life in the North, Durack was reported to have been of the opinion that “no white man or woman should remain in the North for more than two summers without a break. There were a few women who stayed there for five years on end, but it was not good for them” (“Life” 24). She stated that she believed the supporting role played by pioneer women (which included her grandmother and mother), was one that they enjoyed. This indicates a traditional view of women’s roles to which Durack both adhered and stepped beyond as primary carer for her children and husband<sup>21</sup> alongside being a writer and public figure.

Despite distancing herself from the feminist movement then, Durack did not believe that a woman’s place was necessarily restricted to the home. She held that a woman “has the right to select her own role, make a success of what she can” (Giuffré 97). When quizzed on the compatibility of writing and motherhood, she said that “[v]ery few people . . . could live on books” and considered that if she had chosen to go out and work she would have had “just as much time as a mother looking after a home and kids” (96). Durack was a dedicated writer and detailed in her research, although she claimed that she did not care whether or not she was remembered for her writing. Value for Durack lay in “the association of many years with family and friends” (98), which meant that she often placed peoples’ needs before her writing, displaying a traditionally female characteristic of concern with relationships before self. This sentiment differs from Drake-Brockman’s anxieties about her literary legacy. Durack’s writing about Aborigines however, (which is analysed in Part Three), suggest a serious ambition to raise consciousness about issues of race. Like the ‘lady

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<sup>20</sup> See Niall *True North* 78-79; 122-24.

<sup>21</sup> In his later life after selling the Broome house, Horace became increasingly dependent on Mary for his physical and emotional care: Niall 212-19.

novelists' of the 1890s, Durack and Drake-Brockman "may not have written as outright feminist rebels, but they had plenty to say about the directions that [Australian] life was taking" (Sheridan *Faultlines* xii). If their personas were distinctly feminine, their public voices were forthright and assured and they did not regard gender as a limiting factor.

Durack located qualities of the Australian character in and through the environment, which, like Drake-Brockman, she saw as strongly influencing and shaping national identity. Western Australia is the setting and subject of much of Durack's writing and she used the region to comment on broader issues of national identity. She published sixteen articles in *Walkabout* between 1941 and 1965, and three of these were about Perth. In 1963 she wrote about the University of Western Australia's fiftieth anniversary. Durack provides an entertaining history of the university, first mooted by Sir Winthrop Hackett, the owner-editor of the *West Australian* newspaper, to which Durack contributed. (Hackett was also the brother-in-law of Geoffrey Drake-Brockman).<sup>22</sup> Durack used the article to not only outline the development of the university but also to comment on the uniqueness of Western Australia.

Durack's commentary resonates with Drake-Brockman's portrait of Western Australia in *Younger Sons* with its emphasis on freedom and individualism. Durack likewise used a regional focus to discuss broader issues of national identity. Durack describes the "live-and-let-live outlook of a community with plenty of elbow room, comparative uniformity of income and little competitive pressure" ("Campus at Crawley" 30). The idea of a local university was met with scepticism at first, Durack wrote, with many people contending that it "would merely encourage a form of exclusiveness the State could ill afford" (28). The university was eventually established as "the first completely free

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<sup>22</sup> See Drake-Brockman, Geoffrey. *The Turning Wheel*, 36.

university in the then British Empire” (28). Durack goes on to write that “the egalitarian ideal, so loudly voiced in other States, has always been more or less tacitly accepted here” (30). She notes a conservatism in the university’s student body that reflects the “character of its parent State and, with it, much of the conservatism of a predominantly English background” (30). Again, like the “Australian way of life,” this is a picture which leaves little room for difference—it is still firmly Anglo-Celtic—although Durack notes the influx since World War II of international students from Asia to the modern university. Durack uses the cultural climate of this elite institution to comment on broader Australian values in “this western third of the continent” (28). The “democratic” university is described as conservative, yet more inclusive due to the student body being “much more a cross section of the community” than institutions in other parts of Australia (31). The egalitarianism of Western Australia is strong in both Durack and Drake-Brockman’s assessments.

“Perth Host City for 1962” (with illustrations by Elizabeth) also commented on the unique character of Perth and its people in comparison to the rest of Australia. The article reiterates Perth’s insularity and perceived “ignorance of world standards” (45) at a time when the rest of Australia was more outward-looking. Durack notes the effects of the environment on the people of Western Australia: “the changes made by men on their new environment were less subtle than those made by the environment on her new men” (45). People’s (or “Perth’s”—the terms are used interchangeably) interests “are closely tied to the land” (46). The population is friendly but casual: “the ‘sandgropers’ are a friendly, sentimental tribe of comparatively simple tastes” (48). This romantic picture of Perth and its inhabitants touches on development but wonders at the potential cost: “perhaps it is a pipe dream that she can have ‘all this and heaven too’, industry without ulcers, development without desecration of her natural beauty and wildlife” (48). Durack was not anti-

development; in *Walkabout* articles in the previous decades she celebrated feats of industry and engineering, such as the Kwinana Oil Refinery (1954) and the Captain Cook Dock in Sydney (1945). The isolationism of Western Australia sat uneasily with aspects of modern progress and resultant tensions are displayed in Durack's writing. In using key middlebrow cultural institutions such as *Walkabout* to both raise awareness of developments and question long-term environmental effects, Durack encouraged public engagement in the future of the nation.

The seemingly incongruous concerns of development and conservation were shared by others of this period, as Rolls and Johnston note more broadly in *Walkabout*, which contained a blend of articles promoting expansion and development alongside articles displaying a lively interest in natural features, flora and fauna, and concern for the importance of their preservation. The disparate interests featured in *Walkabout*, Rolls and Johnston argue, "did not so much bolster dominant white narratives of exclusionary belonging, but disturbed them with its descriptions of, and concerns for, endemic natural difference" (132). Contributors such as Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith demonstrated an identification with the unique environment alongside optimism for economic expansion through development. Reconciling a landscape of undisturbed beauty alongside one of industry and economic growth was sometimes fraught with contradictory sentiments, as Durack demonstrates. Urban Australians could engage in these debates through the pages of middlebrow magazines, which assisted in the formation of a more complete identification with the whole of the diverse continent.

The difficulties reconciling conservation with development are apparent in Durack's 1946 *Walkabout* article about the Ord River, "River of Destiny". Durack describes the long history of the river as "the main artery of the countryside, beating a monotonous but ever-

changing tempo of the years, wet season and dry, good season and bad" (35). She provides the Aboriginal history of the river alongside the white history. She claims to have learned the unwritten Aboriginal history from Aborigines as she swam in the river with them. The "great river" is to be dammed: "Today we see her waters being plumbed and her gorges surveyed for the post-war project of a mighty dam that, when completed, will dwarf even Australia's largest reservoir" (35). While Durack sees this as inevitable for progress in the region, she has reservations about the changes this will cause: "the thought of it brings regret that then the lovely loneliness of the Ord will be gone forever" as "mighty man-made gates imprison the waters of her wanton flood" (35). The damming of the Ord saw the flooding of one of the Durack's first Kimberley properties, Argyle Downs, in 1972. Durack and her siblings described a deep sense of loss for an area they considered an integral part of their lives. Durack referred to it as her "spirit country" (*Sons* 99) and was buried in the garden of the Argyle Homestead Museum, a recreation of the original homestead.<sup>23</sup> This sense of an Aboriginal identification with the land is explored in detail in Part Three.

Durack's conflicting sense of belonging to the land as settler/invader and native-born Australian is reflected in her writing. She used her personal experiences living on the remote north-west pastoral properties as the basis for her novel, *Keep Him My Country* (1955). Similar to Drake-Brockman's fiction, *Keep Him My Country* is a romance that explores deeper themes of national identity through a focus on remote regions.

### **White settler belonging in *Keep Him My Country***

*Keep Him My Country* was first published by Constable in 1955. It reached a wide audience, being serialised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Countryman*. Brenda Niall writes that the director of Constable, Michael Sadleir, told Mary that the novel was "'one of the best

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<sup>23</sup> See Niall 207-22.



first novels to ever to pass through our hands” (139). Durack herself thought the book was unladylike and considered publishing under a male pseudonym (140). It explores relationships between white owners/managers on outback properties and the varied population who work and live in the area, including Aborigines. Durack uses the novel to provide a realistic picture of station life and the complexities of racial intermingling in early-twentieth-century Australia when Aborigines were deemed subordinate to white settlers and had very few rights of their own in response to white occupation of the country.

*Keep Him My Country* is set in the Kimberley region and based on a fictional cattle station, Trafalgar. The main protagonist, Stan Rolt, white heir to Trafalgar, has a sexual relationship with one of the young Aboriginal women from the station camp. According to Niall the book “shows how much Mary had absorbed of station life” (141). The authentic depiction of station life and exploration of controversial themes were considered to be the book’s strengths. The novel bears close resemblance to Mary’s personal experiences: Niall writes that Stan Rolt is “perilously like Reg Durack [Mary’s brother] in situation and temperament” (141). Durack stated that the character of Rolt is “[n]ot really” biographical, but “typical of quite a few people we knew who had actually loved an Aborigine” (Giuffré 93). Sir Stan Rolt, young Stan’s grandfather, is like a mixture of Patsy Durack and M. P. Durack (Mary’s grandfather and father). Young Stan reads Sir Stan’s journal, reflecting that it contained a blend of

caution and courage and an imagination restricted to enterprise. Nowhere was there a hint of how he had seen this country, that he had been aware of its haunting beauty, its wild colour, or its exciting, dramatic quality. (*Keep* 19-20)

Durack wrote her family histories using her male forebears’ journals which she described similarly as containing little subjective detail (*Sons* xi). The novel also contains a scene which

Mary later describes in *Kings in Grass Castles* as one of her own earliest childhood memories. Durack claimed that she was “trying to give a true picture” (Giuffré 94) of what life was like in remote Australia through the novel. She made similar claims in regard to her family histories.

*Keep Him My Country* is amongst those books that J. J. Healy describes as the “remarkable cluster of novels [that] hover around the Aborigine in Western Australia in the fifties” (216). According to Healy, these novels “constitute the attempt of a society to come to grips with a problem which had, on the whole, been ignored by the mainstream of West Australian society” (216). By and large he finds these novels wanting. Healy calls *Keep Him My Country* “a book out of its period” (220). Comparing its themes to Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Working Bullocks* (1921) and *Coonardoo* (1929), for Healy, Durack’s novel ultimately comes up short and is little more than a “nostalgic tribute to a way of life” (220). While conceding that Durack “had a far deeper exposure to the material of her novel” than Prichard did to hers, Healy considers the novel

was locked too heavily into the period twenty years before its publication . . . The sentiment of the book has echoes of a past moment; because the echoes are genuine the sentiment sustains the novel. *Keep Him My Country* belonged, really, in the years between *Coonardoo* and *Capricornia*. (220)

This is perhaps understandable, as Durack wrote and revised it while going through her father’s papers after his death with a view to writing the family history that would become *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959). Adam Shoemaker expresses similar views to those of Healy. For Shoemaker, “Durack’s book, though obviously sympathetic and well-informed, suffers from melodramatic and romantic excesses similar to those which over twenty-five years earlier had flawed Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Coonardoo*” (88). *Keep Him My Country*

does not seem to have been criticised for its depiction of sexual relations between a white man and an Aboriginal woman (39-40), but for its sentimentalism and because the “attempt to symbolise the Aboriginal woman as the mystically enthralling and fecund life source wears a bit thin in artistic terms” (89). This criticism of the book ties it to the feminine middlebrow, with qualities of earnestness and emotionalism allied to a serious message. If settler-Indigenous relations are sentimentalised through the characters of Rolt and Dalgerie, the depiction of station life is not romanticised, and the complexities of relationships between white property managers and the station employees—Aboriginal and white—are explored in detail.

The nostalgia and sentimentalism for which *Keep Him My Country* is criticised by Healy and Shoemaker were not found by critic Edward Barnett, whom Niall writes felt the book would not appeal to English readers because “there was too much about station life and landscape and not enough on the romance between the hero and the ‘half-caste’ girl” (52). Sheridan refers to the outback saga as a “*masculine* form of romance (*Faultlines* 27; emphasis in orig.). Like Drake-Brockman, Durack used the outback setting and the romance genre to explore deeper concerns and change readers’ perceptions of issues such as realities of life in remote Australia and relations between white settlers and Indigenous Australians.

*Keep Him My Country* displays Durack’s concern for Aboriginal welfare and is dedicated to a female anthropologist who visited the Durack’s properties and who had a lasting influence on Mary. Phyllis Kaberry (1910–77) spent time in the Kimberley region studying Aborigines and her work was influential in changing perceptions about Indigenous Australians. Durack’s dedication reads that *Keep Him My Country* is “a token of friendship and of thanks for a deeper understanding of ‘ABORIGINAL WOMAN SACRED AND PROFANE’”

(capitalisation in orig.). The dedication refers to Kaberry's book of the same name. Christine Cheater writes that Kaberry

strove to portray Aboriginal woman as she really is—an integral part of Aboriginal culture, interesting in her own right. In a period when native women were generally depicted as either 'domesticated cows' or erotic objects her approach was rare.

("Phyllis Kaberry" n. pag.)

Kaberry studied anthropology at Sydney University under A. P. Elkin. Cheater argues that Elkin hoped "to present the 'human face' of Aboriginal society"—which he saw as essential for their survival—through anthropological work such as Kaberry's ("From Sydney Schoolgirl" 144). Elkin reportedly asked Kaberry to report on Aboriginal living conditions in the Kimberley, "an area notorious for its maltreatment of Aborigines" (140). Kaberry's findings that the health and circumstances of Aborigines on cattle stations were better than those in missions supported Durack's claims that her family treated Aborigines with kindness and respect on their properties.

The influence of Kaberry's *Aboriginal Women Sacred and Profane* (1939) has become apparent over time. It was only "one of three books on Australian Aborigines to be published by social anthropologists in the 1930s and one of a mere handful of ethnographies to deal exclusively with the lives of native women, world-wide" (Cheater "From Sydney Schoolgirl" 143). While it became "the bible [sic] of future female anthropologists who decided to specialise in studying Aboriginal women" (146), its acceptance at the time of publication was not universal in a field dominated by men who thought that women, "in general, had very little to do with the development of 'Culture', the study of female institutions and social organisation was deemed to be inferior to the study of male institutions" (146). In the field of anthropology, as in literature, women's work

was seen as less valuable than that of men's. As Cheater points out, however, Kaberry's work has since received the recognition it deserved and "became the starting point for many recent anthropologies of women" (151). Kaberry certainly influenced Durack, who formed a long-term friendship with the anthropologist, each woman being dedicated to improving the situation of Aborigines in modern Australia.

*Keep Him My Country* contains detailed discussion between characters about contemporary issues to do with Aborigines working on outback stations including the responsibilities of station managers, conditions of employment, and customs around marriage in Aboriginal culture, particularly in the case of Aborigines of mixed parentage. Throughout the novel the complexities of relationships between white Australians and Aborigines are canvassed. Aborigines' changing place in the nation is debated, along with the divide between white settlers and Indigenous Australians: "Anyone can see they've got something," Rolt said, "but it's not for us. We're driven along on the tide of our time and the blacks are coming too" (*Keep* 215). This remark forms part of a conversation between Rolt and a visiting photographer, Tony Jordan, who is staying at the station in the company of writer Joe McGovern. Rolt envies McGovern's "unselfconsciousness in the face of weighty problems" (212), such as inter-racial relationships on the station. McGovern knows his audience: "McGovern glorifies the pioneers and the public laps it up. Evidently no one wants to hear how they shot their way through the blacks and worked the land out like an open cut mine" (213), Rolt observes. This sentiment expressed through her main character could be read as Durack's own comment on the authenticity of her account in comparison to other writers of the period. Conversely, Jordan has a progressive outlook. He tells Rolt that "station people miss so many opportunities" (215) to learn about Aborigines; he sees them as fellow human beings with much to offer white Australians. Rolt, on the other hand, is

shown to be pragmatic and unsentimental, considering the futility of getting too close to Aborigines because their customs “belong to a way of life that doesn’t fit in with ours” (215). “Maybe you’d do more good as a writer to talk of them as individuals,” Rolt remarks to McGovern, “not always as a race with a stock line of attributes” (214). Durack uses the back-and-forth flow of conversations such as these throughout the novel to explore difficult issues. Even if this is done in a somewhat clunky and obvious way, by popularising concerns highlighted in anthropological research through her novel Durack challenged common perceptions in order to change people’s thinking. This reflects middlebrow literature’s intent to offer insightful and educative material which extended readers’ ways of viewing the world and their place in it.

White women are noticeably scarce in the novel; none has a speaking part and they are mentioned only in the reminiscences of male characters or third-hand through correspondence by written letter. In contrast to Drake-Brockman’s fiction, in which white women were placed prominently in the remote regions alongside men, their absence in Durack’s outback saga allows an exploration of the complex ways in which white men intermingled with Aborigines in the outback and on the cattle stations. The odd white women in the “womanless land” (*Keep* 30) did not fare well. Maud Rolt, “a fine strapping girl and strong as a man” (30) died giving birth to Rolt’s father, Dave. Dave married Mary, who became mother to young Stan. Mary is described as a “gaunt, passionate, righteous, lonely woman, Australian born of Irish parentage, determined to hold the station she could never love” (38) while her husband served in the war. After his death, Mary left the land and made her living as an English teacher at a ladies’ college (39). She was proud and independent but shared no love for outback Australia. The shadow of her stern presence remained in the minds of those who knew her long after she left the station. Rolt’s

unmarried aunt Ellen is the only other white woman in the novel. Despite being a “shadowy figure” confined to a subservient role in the family, Ellen possesses a “shrewd independence of judgement” (43) and is Rolt’s confidante through letter-writing. These women’s restricted roles were defined by a patriarchal society. Their relative insignificance in the novel speaks to the positions women could occupy in the context of the times.

In contrast to the absence of white women’s voices in the novel, there are a number of Aboriginal characters (women and men) with speaking roles, including Dalgerie, Rolt’s young lover, and Liddy, the Aboriginal matriarch. Liddy is the unofficial head of the station. She is shown to have influence in running the station (albeit limited due to her position as an Indigenous woman). Liddy manages her people; she is shown to be wise and also to know the limits of relationships between white Australians and Aborigines. Rolt thinks that

[h]e would never understand the complicated workings of her mind, the intermingling of primitive superstition, sophistication and common sense, but he wondered now whether she had feared that his affair with Dalgerie would go beyond the limits she had set, feared the dread spirit of Mary Rolt if her son fathered the half-caste children she deplored. (345)

Later in the novel it is revealed that Liddy gave birth to a daughter by Rolt’s father, whom Mary Rolt raised on the station. The difficulties of Liddy’s position and past treatment of Aborigines are acknowledged: “Not for nothing had she survived the long succession of white tyrannies, regimes of futile and patronising kindness, calculated and uncalculated cruelty” (94). Liddy is an intermediary between cultures, demonstrating the negotiations that take place in the unusual circumstances of remote Australia.

Like Drake-Brockman, Durack wrote evocative descriptions of landscape. That these writers knew and loved the places they wrote about is evident in their narratives and is an

attribute reviewers praised as establishing authenticity in their work. They painted rich portraits of regions that many Australians would not have visited but which were a source of ongoing fascination, if little real understanding. Early on in *Keep Him My Country*, morning on the homestead is vividly described:

The Trafalgar homestead still lay in the grey dawn shadow, but already the sun had touched the flat topped range to gold and silver and the river, pearl-grey with a ragged scarf of mist streaking the dark trees, was stirring to life in its deep, flood-ravaged bed. Cockatoos flapped and cried and blood-breasted finches spilled out like a shower of rubies over the pale grass. (7)

The outback in *Keep Him My Country* is far from drab. It has a unique beauty described in lyrical passages interspersed throughout the novel, adding to readers' sense of engagement with the region.

Durack used the main protagonist, young Stan Rolt, to explore how white settlers built a sense connection to the land. Rolt's identification with outback Australia is complicated by the expectations of his family and his love for Dalgerie. At the beginning of the novel he is disaffected. He is trying to compose a letter to his uncle telling of his decision to leave the station: "It should not be so difficult to make a fresh start and disprove the old timers' theory about the way this country got a man for good" (10). Once he commences a sexual relationship with Dalgerie, however, his feelings change: "Rolt was to have left that year but he had lost all desire to go. Everything he wanted then was here, in Dalgerie and her country" (76). Rolt and Dalgerie's sexual relationship is explicit, including a detailed sex scene (for its time) by a waterhole on the property (72-74). The relationship is doomed because of the gulf between cultures. Dalgerie is promised to an Aboriginal man. Despite Rolt's offer of marriage she runs away from the station with the man she is bound to by



Aboriginal law. Rolt does not meet her again until the end of the novel when she is found dying out on the plains: “My country . . . keep you . . . Stan”, are Dalgerie’s dying words (347; ellipses in orig.). When Dalgerie dies, a crane flies up into the air and Rolt confesses his love for the Aboriginal woman to his white companion who dismisses it as a feverish “wandering” due to the heat of the sun (348). Rolt decides to stay on the station:

Perhaps now that he was at peace with the land he could write of them all—or must what he wrote be no more than half truth? How should he tell truly of this woman whose voice sang in his blood? (349)

The novel concludes with the Aborigines mourning Dalgerie:

Behind them lament for the dead rose on a shivering thread of sound, shattered and broke into a falling cadence of grief, throbbing on through the bush like the pulse beat of her people, desolate, enduring. (349)

As in Prichard’s *Coonardoo*, the tragic death of the Aboriginal woman was necessary for the white man to realise his bond to the land. Rolt is sure of his connection to the country by the end of the novel:

The bonds that he had feared and fought had tightened beyond escape, but the hold of the land was no longer irrational, a superstition to be defied and scorned. It was here that he belonged by reason and right for the country knew him and had given him its heart. (347)

In the last few pages of the novel, Rolt also becomes aware that Liddy’s daughter Angela is his half-sister. This realisation further strengthens his resolve to stay where he now feels he belongs.

Rolt’s connection to the land is not straightforward and is bound up in multivalent origins as Durack explores the complexities of white Australians’ sense of belonging. The

novel reveals inter-generational and cross-cultural sexual relationships between pastoralists and Aboriginal women at a time when this was not an open topic. B. E. Richardson describes *Keep Him My Country* as “a strange amalgam of lyric beauty and didactic purpose”, writing that Durack was “concerned to point to the need for a spiritual harmony between man and nature . . . which . . . the aborigines have acquired over generations” (53). In confronting difficult themes through an outback saga, Durack “wield[s] [her] pen with a degree of social power”, displaying the “cultural agency of women writers, despite their subordinate positioning as women in patriarchal culture”, as Sheridan argues about women writers in this period (*Faultlines* x). Like Drake-Brockman, Durack worked within and against the conventions of popular romance fiction to alter readers’ perceptions about conditions in society and ways of identifying as Australian.

Durack spent many years drafting and redrafting *Keep Him My Country* (Niall 139), which could be read as a working out of her memories in fictional form that she later extended in her family histories *Kings in Grass Castles* and *Sons in the Saddle* (1983). Her characters are “deftly individualised”, as Niall notes (141). Richardson sees Durack’s writing stemming from a “desire to understand the formative past, to come to terms with an alien land and establish an identity” (53). Richardson aligns the Duracks as Irish immigrants, with the Aborigines, as members of a minority group in Australia. This may be stretching a point; however, by working out her family story in writing Durack is establishing her own sense of belonging. She also documented the history of another Western Australian pioneering family, the Shaws, in *To Be Heirs Forever* (1976), which began as a play that toured Australia: “The Swan River Saga,” based on the life of Eliza Shaw. This focus on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century is typical of the nationalistic form middlebrow writing took in Australia, as Carter argues: middlebrow nationalism complicated the reading culture in

Australia by the shared belief “that an authentic tradition had been founded in outback or pastoral Australia and that this remained the truest source of nation-building values” (“Modernity” 139). The early manifestation of middlebrow culture in Australia, while closely aligned with modernity, looked back to the past as significant to the future national consciousness and sense of cultural identity. Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith’s texts participated in this form of middlebrow writing as they used foundational stories of the past and a focus on remote regions to speak about the future direction and character of the modern nation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Foundational Stories and Folklore: Ernestine Hill and Patsy Adam-Smith

#### Ernestine Hill: “a pioneer of her kind”

With her abiding passion for all things Australian, Ernestine Hill produced and perpetuated foundational myths of the nation’s history. Mary Durack wrote about Hill in *Walkabout’s* “Our Author’s Page”, referring to her as a “pioneer of her kind” who “opened the eyes of Australians to . . . the colour, and the varied immensity of their land” (8). Durack first met Hill at Ivanhoe Station homestead. By this time, Durack wrote, Hill had already “achieved an unheard of feat for a young woman in travelling overland through the Red Heart by any form of transport offering . . . describing what was then very much a *terra incognita* to city dwellers of the South” (8). While popular at the time she was published, Hill’s texts have since been negatively criticised for their flamboyant style, racism, and romanticism.<sup>24</sup> Meaghan Morris writes that “Hill specialised in a kind of writing that was once easily recognisable and very popular in Australia, but which has become quite hard to classify . . . Each of Hill’s books was as mixed as their general status was uncertain” (“Panorama” 28). This chapter considers Hill’s only novel *My Love Must Wait* (1941), a historical romance about British naval captain and surveyor Matthew Flinders; and *Flying Doctor Calling* (1947), an account of the Flying Doctor Service, to establish features of Hill’s writing and how she is positioned in discourse pertaining to middlebrow culture.

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<sup>24</sup> See Morris “Panorama” 29. In his obituary to Hill in the *Canberra Times* 23 Aug. 1972, Maurice Dunlevy wrote about *My Love Must Wait*: “Although highly praised on publication, the book was later condemned by critics for its many passages of flowery prose and its generally romantic tone” (9).

Hill wrote for newspapers and magazines, and published historical fiction and travel books, which were particularly popular contemporary forms.<sup>25</sup> She contributed thirty-five articles to *Walkabout* from 1935–1968. Morris acknowledges that “[d]uring much of her lifetime, Hill was one of Australia’s best-known and widely-read authors” (“Panorama” 28). In a recent article Morris describes Hill as “a key figure in the history of distinctly Australian forms of media culture”, noting the commemoration of *The Territory* by the Darwin pub in Baz Luhrmann’s film *Australia*, an ambitious romantic epic set in northern Australia (“‘The Great Australian Loneliness’” 239). Contemporary articles described Hill’s significance in Australian literature. In 1944 Perth’s *West Australian* described her as “a prominent figure in the literary life of the Commonwealth . . . an always welcome and valuable contributor to these pages” (“A Woman of Mark” 2). Like Drake-Brockman and Durack, Hill took her writing seriously. She spent many years researching Flinders’ life, including retracing his journey around Australia. All her books were noted for the copious research conducted in their preparation. Morris describes *My Love Must Wait* and *Flying Doctor Calling* as “idealising portraits of personalities . . . projected across a ‘landscaped’ historical account of their nation-building exploits” (“Panorama” 28). Hill was not merely writing to entertain, although her style is engaging, and at times excessive in its enthusiasm. Her “vitality human” writing style and lived experience of the country, as Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston write of the *Walkabout* contributors more generally (47), gave her accounts credibility, and are key aspects of middlebrow writing.

Hill’s itinerant writing life in remote regions not only gave her a public profile but added a woman’s voice to a largely masculine tradition. Morris describes her as “belong[ing] to a generation of writers who wanted to ‘cover’ Australia with narrative” (“‘The Great

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<sup>25</sup> See Nile and Walker “The Mystery of the Missing Bestseller” 244-52; Arnold “Reference and Non-Fiction Publishing” 288-90; Carter and Griffen-Foley “Culture and Media” 244-45.

Australian Loneliness” 243). This is the case for the group of writers examined here.

Jacqueline Kent describes Hill as subverting an enduring literary image centred around male writers, including such prominent figures as Henry Lawson and Ion Idriess: the image of the Australian writer as traveller. As a woman, and “the Australian writer who most consistently embraced the wandering life, bringing a journalist’s shrewdness and a novelist’s insight and descriptive powers to the lives and landscapes of the remote corners of the continent”, Hill undermined the dominant tradition of male writers in this adventure travel genre (Kent *A Certain Style* 76). In 1942 the *Newcastle Morning Herald* described her as “a feminine [Ion] Idriess, writing of Australia’s humour and its pathos, of the people who make its history” (“Miss Hill” 2). Hill’s gender was not necessarily an impediment; being a woman in a largely male domain gave her privileged status. She used her persona as a professional traveller (journalist) and middlebrow publishing venues to reach a wide audience. Her impassioned accounts of life in the remote regions brought them alive for readers eager to learn more of the far reaches of their country.

Hill’s gender set her apart in other ways. Contemporary reviews of her work note that as a woman with a ready and sympathetic ear, Hill encouraged an openness and willingness to share stories amongst people she met on her travels:

[Hill’s] ready woman’s sympathy and well-developed journalistic flair for scenting and following up a ‘story’ made contact with the bush men and women easy; and she presents a truthful account of all the sides that make up the tragedy and nobility of life in the ‘great Australian Loneliness’. (“Outback Australia” 10)

Her femininity was something Hill both played down and emphasised at turns in her writing, an aspect of her persona examined in more detail in Part Two. Hill was variously described

as “fragile” (“Lady” 8) and an “almost wraith-like little woman” (“A Lover” 22). Perth’s *Daily News* reported:

When one meets Mrs. Ernestine Hill . . . it is difficult to realise that this fragile-looking woman, with a soft, husky voice, is the writer whose name is now a by-word amongst Australians for her colorful [sic] stories of the great ‘outback,’ and who has travelled round and about, and across Australia. (“A Lover” 22)

Her small stature and appearance of fragility belied her determination and drive. Kent gives this description:

Far from being a female version of Paterson's Clancy, Hill was slight and wary-looking, with wide dark eyes under a thick fringe, a long narrow face and thin lips. She was a constant smoker who, as the saying went, ‘lived on her nerves’, and she could be very intense. (*A Certain Style* 79)

This slight woman with the distinctive voice travelled the country writing books that were included in the “popular historical novels and frontier or outback travel books” that were bestsellers from the 1930s (Carter and Griffen-Foley 245).<sup>26</sup> Her bestseller status and the genres and forms she wrote across firmly position Hill in the category of the middlebrow.

Throughout her career, Hill publically advocated for a distinctive Australian literature. Her views were expressed in newspapers of the day. Perth’s *West Australian* reported:

Until recently Australian writers had been like a voice crying in the wilderness, [Hill] said. Now the interest of other countries, and particularly of the Australian people themselves, would make this a land of opportunity for writers, because so far it had been a continent unexpressed in literature. (“Australian Literature” 2)

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<sup>26</sup> See also Nile and Walker “The Mystery of the Missing Bestseller” 248-52.

Hill was positive about the creative potential of Australians: “Australia needs to be presented to [the] world through the eyes of its own poets, artists, and musicians” (“A.B.C.’s Woman Commissioner” 5). She was an example of this type of artist promoting a country she wanted others to appreciate as much as she did. Her love of Australia expressed itself in the “vividness and immediacy” of her narratives, which Kent writes “quickly found their mark” (*A Certain Style* 76) with the reading public, and are qualities of middlebrow writing, with its ability to engage an audience.

Although she was friends with fellow writers such as Drake-Brockman and Durack, Hill was not an insider in literary circles at the time. She was not comfortable in the large cities of Melbourne or Sydney, preferring regional centres and the outback. She spent a significant amount of time in Perth and Broome writing up her notes for publication. In 1944 the *West Australian* reported Hill’s thoughts on Western Australia:

Mrs Hill considered [that it] was a State which had already shown evidence of a creative instinct, particularly in writing. It had produced more celebrated authors than any other State of comparative population; writers whose works conveyed a lively picture of the Australian scene and were more expressive of the atmosphere of their own State than writers from other parts of the Commonwealth. (“Australian Literature” 2)

Morris notes that contemporary critics who praised her work (such as Durack and J. K. Ewers) “were often . . . those who were to be marginalised in the Eastern historical tradition not only as old-fashioned, but as ‘regionalist’”, a criticism that could be applied to all four authors examined here (“Panorama” 29). Their writing focused on regions that had become significant in the Australian cultural psyche as sites of the real Australia and the pioneering tradition. They used characteristics of Western Australia and the remote North-West as a



way to position and explore national character and particular national identifiers, as the analysis of Drake-Brockman and Durack's fiction in chapters one and two showed. Central Australia had been described as "drab" and the "Dead Heart" of Australia (Cathcart 214-15). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's representations countered that image. Susan Sheridan notes the popularity of this focus on "Australianness" in the outer regions of the country, which "meant, in practice, that most novels were set in any place but the suburbia where most Australians lived" (*Faultlines* 155). Western Australia and the Central and Northern regions of the country held classic tales of exploration, pioneering and settlement from which the Australian national character had been mythologised and became a focus of middlebrow nationalism. Paying attention to conditions in remote Australia was "a classic statement of the belief in an Australian democratic destiny as the proper outcome of pioneering efforts" and the basis of the future Australian (158). Parts Two and Three contain further discussion about the frontier and the focus on Northern Australia during this period.

Reviews of Hill's books noted her credentials as an experienced traveller, privileging and praising features that situate her work in the category of middlebrow writing. Her extensive firsthand knowledge of the regions she wrote about gave Hill's work authenticity. "Hers is not a mere superficial acquaintance", the *Newcastle Morning Herald* noted, describing *The Great Australian Loneliness* as "an armchair tour of little known Australia, with a guide who has firsthand acquaintance with the land and its people" ("Miss Hill" 2). The *West Australian* recommended Hill's books as worthy of reading "more than once" because of their "distinct value as historical documents" ("A Woman of Mark" 2). The *Adelaide Advertiser* described *The Great Australian Loneliness* as

a volume which those who would know more of the colorful [sic] aspect of their own land will read eagerly. It is splendidly produced, and illustrated with more than 50 photographs which the author took under all manner of conditions and developed how and when she could—in the corner of a pearling lugger, in a tin humpy at a mining camp, and in the open beside a soak or rockhole. (“Abroad in Australia” 10)

Her work was described as “very readable and instructive” (“Ernestine Hill’s Latest” 11), “witty” and “penetrating” (“That Other Australia” 6). The style and content of her writing and the attractive qualities of her books—photographs, illustrations and maps—are all aspects of middlebrow culture’s broad appeal. These reviews describe elements of Driscoll’s key features of middlebrow writing: Hill’s books are “commercial”, “emotional”, “recreational” and “earnest”. They are “mediated” in their attractive presentation and accessible for general readers (*New Literary* 3). Hill’s informative, well-researched books, combined with an accessible, intimate writing style, made them appealing to the general reader wishing to know more about Australia.

Hill wrote at a volatile political time in Australia when middleclass liberal values were seen to be under siege. Democratic liberalism, individualist and humanist values were seen to be threatened by fascism, as Drusilla Modjeska points out (14-17). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith did not openly align themselves to the socialist left, like others of the time examined by Modjeska such as Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Kylie Tennant, Eleanor Dark, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw (16). When Hill was appointed as the first female commissioner of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), the *Brisbane Telegraph* reported her saying: “I hope there are no politics to be exploited for I know nothing whatever of them” (“Queenslanders” 6). Writers who aligned themselves with

a particular progressive political stance have received subsequent critical attention (such as Franklin, Tennant, and Nettie Palmer), while Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith have largely remained in obscurity. Of course they operated within the dominant ideologies of their time; their celebration of freedom, egalitarianism and individuality point to a democratic liberalism, as Amanda Laugesen suggests in relation to Drake-Brockman (112-14). As Sheridan points out, by

questioning the dominant ideology of masculinity and femininity, working within and against the narrative conventions of popular romantic fiction, [these more politically conservative writers] constituted a literary counterpart to the activist women's movement in *its* challenge to the masculinist definition of Australian culture. (*Faultlines* 34; emphasis in orig.)

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith offered more nuanced imaginings of Australian cultural life which celebrated the country for its unique natural features and raised awareness of difficulties of racial difference in the hope of a productive and harmonious future. In exploring geographical, historical and cultural dimensions of the country in their writing they participated in the cultural development of Australia, sharing middlebrow nationalism's concern to look back to the past to locate characteristics that formed and underpin the national psyche.

Hill's interest in the foundational stories of the nation's past included a fascination with the figure of Matthew Flinders. She researched Flinders' life and traced his journey around Australia, documenting his story in the historical romance, *My Love Must Wait* (1941). Like Drake-Brockman and Durack, Hill used the romance genre to highlight contemporary concerns while positioning them within a broader historical framework. Through the popular form of the novel the women writers could speak to the nation and

offer re-imaginings of dominant narratives. *My Love Must Wait* was ostensibly far less about the relationship between Flinders and his wife than a detailed historical fiction of Flinders' life and achievements. Marketing it as a romance (by way of the suggestive title) was not Hill's idea. She balked at the title suggested by the publisher, wanting to call it *He Named Australia*, but was reconciled to the revised name after the successful sales of the book (Kent *A Certain Style* 78).<sup>27</sup> Hill submitted the manuscript of the novel to Angus & Robertson in 1941. Editor Beatrice Davis reportedly "thought it the best Australian novel she had read in years" and it was published in November of the same year. Hill recounts Flinders' story in great detail, romanticising both the man and his achievements. The reasons Kent gives for the novel's strong sales and popularity are indicative of its middlebrow attributes: "Its combination of evocative descriptive writing, sound storytelling and detailed research made it enduringly popular" (78). *My Love Must Wait* was a bestseller. It was reviewed in *Walkabout*, which focused on what made the book so popular:

It is evident throughout that, for her, Flinders is something more than an historical figure. She makes his joys and sorrows her own and she makes her readers feel them also. Occasionally her treatment of her subject leads her perilously close to sentimentality . . . This is a most absorbing and brilliantly written book. (Rev. of *My Love Must Wait* 3-4)

This review embodies Radway's concept of "middlebrow personalism" (283), which was bound up with a book's "ability to infuse abstractions with warm-blooded humanity and the vitality of the individual life" (281). Readers are absorbed in the story, which is part of the appeal of middlebrow writing and "middlebrow culture's commitment to realism, empathy, and intimate communication between writer and reader", as Carter explains ("Mystery"

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<sup>27</sup> See also Osborne 176-78.

193-94). Hill's portrait of Flinders had the "rich and elaborate realism of character" demanded by middlebrow personalism (Radway 282). The *Walkabout* review of *My Love Must Wait* acknowledged Hill's historical accuracy along with her enlivening embellishments: "In following with faithful accuracy the later years of Flinders's life, Mrs. Hill fills in the well-known story with colourful human touches" (Rev. 3). The Brisbane *Telegraph* also described Hill's "sympathetic imagination" and "picturesque pen", considering the novel "an attractive and valuable addition to Australian literature and to the historical records of the Dominion" ("Australia's Debt" 6). Hill is reported to have said: "I hoped some day . . . to write the story never yet told in full—not in stark biographical form, but that Australia might see it in living character, and hear the spoken word in voices from the dead" ("Southern Saga" 10). Her detailed and lively retelling achieved this purpose and sales attest to the appetite of contemporary Australians for such stories.

Despite mixed reviews not uncommon to bestselling books—the novel was criticised for Hill's "over-writing" of parts<sup>28</sup>—*My Love Must Wait* was successful: it was adapted into a children's comic strip in the *Sydney Morning Herald*; extracts were broadcast over ABC radio, and it was used as the basis of textbooks in schools (Kent *A Certain Style* 78; Morris "The Great Australian Loneliness" 226). American and British editions emerged and the Australian edition set a sales record for a novel written by an Australian author and published in Australia (Kent *A Certain Style* 79). Soon newspapers were excitedly reporting that Australian film producer Charles Chauvel had paid a significant amount of money for world film and television rights to the book. In May 1946 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported Chauvel's purchase, along with the fact that *My Love Must Wait* had "been

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<sup>28</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald* described *My Love Must Wait* thus: "The first hundred pages or so of this book are very well written. Here the author of 'The Great Australian Loneliness' displays again her flair for vivid and beautiful descriptive writing. Later, however, she over-writes: many of the pages could, with advantage, be pruned ruthlessly" ("Southern Saga" 10).

through six editions of 10,000 copies each in Australia within 4 years” (“Record Price” 4). Chauvel reportedly gave a copy of the book to Laurence Olivier as a potential actor for the part of Flinders but the film was never made (Kent *A Certain Style* 78). The novel was also one of the Australian books noted in the US Book-of-the-Month Club news in April 1944 (R. Osborne “Appendix A”). The Book-of-the-Month Club was a highly influential middlebrow institution and the subject of Radway’s study of North American middlebrow culture.

Notwithstanding criticism, Hill was praised for presenting meticulously researched historical events in a romantic, engaging style:

Evidences of research are everywhere to be found in these pages, and to the results of such study, Mrs. Hill has brought an imaginative capacity and a gift for writing which have given flesh and blood to the dry bones of fact. And there was enough of the romantic in Flinders’ life to ensure a story of fascinating adventurousness.

(“Australia’s Debt” 6)

In true middlebrow style, Hill took one of Australia’s foundational stories and turned it into an accessible bestseller. The *Australian Women’s Weekly* also reviewed *My Love Must Wait* in glowing terms:

With the sincerity and love for her own country that characterises all her work, Ernestine Hill has done a fine job in ‘My Love Must Wait’. Written in the form of a novel, it yet adheres in every detail to facts. (“The Man” 31)

If Flinders had only been scantily acknowledged before Hill’s novel was published, since then his name has been firmly written into the historical record as Petrina Osborne recognises: “Prior to the publication of Hill’s novel there had only been one Flinders’ biography . . . Since *My Love Must Wait* there has been a steady stream of biographical work on Flinders” (178). Osborne goes on to analyse the extent to which Hill adhered to facts about Flinders’ and his

achievements, concluding that Hill's version of his life, while sentimental and laudatory, relied heavily on primary documentation for the narration of key events. The earnest intent and sentimental rendering of Flinders' life attests to the middlebrow features of Hill's work.

Hill's portrayal of Sydney at the time of Flinders' first visit is squalid and grim. Her descriptions of the environment are of a strange (to the British) but lush fecundity. Residents of Sydney, convicts, and British officers are shown to be clinging to familiar ways of life which are not suitable in the new land and falling into squalor and depravity as a result. They live in fetid conditions in one pitiful area awaiting the next supply ship from England while surrounded by rivers and thick bush. Australia in this account is depicted as in Hill's other works: full of surprises, endlessly fascinating. Flinders is a romantic, heroic figure driven by his sense of destiny and wonder. This sentimental, florid style combined with historical detail lends a richness and complexity to *My Love Must Wait*. The rousing terms in which the narrative is told brings the story to life while readers are aware they are gaining knowledge of the exploration and settlement of Australia. Hill uses this novel to explore aspects of Australian identity and belonging. Like Drake-Brockman's *Younger Sons*, in Hill's novel the generation born on Australian soil were those who identified with the country as home, rather than Britain. The future Australians were the hope of the nation.

Following on from the success of *My Love Must Wait*, Angus & Robertson published *Flying Doctor Calling* in November 1947, and, like *My Love Must Wait*, it sold out before Christmas. Unlike the romantic version of Flinders' life, *Flying Doctor Calling* sets out the grim circumstances of life in remote regions. Hill's knowledge of the country is again remarked upon in reviews of this book. For example, Perth's *Western Mail* declared:

No contemporary writer is better equipped than Ernestine Hill to write about Australia. None has a better knowledge or a deeper understanding of Australia—not

merely Australia of the cities, but Australia of the outback. And none, I feel, was better suited to record the full story of one of the greatest achievements in Australian history—the Flying Doctor Service. (“Ernestine Hill’s Latest Book Describes” 14)

The reviewer “thoroughly” recommends the book to all readers, remarking that Hill writes with “sympathy and understanding” and the book “vividly describes the harshness and the beauty of the inland and tells an inspiring story of its conquest” (14). Once again, these features situate Hill’s writing squarely in the category of the middlebrow.

*Flying Doctor Calling* has a foreword by Rev. John Flynn, the renowned Presbyterian minister and founder of the Australian Inland Mission and the Flying Doctor Service (Bucknall, n.pag.). Flynn conveys “mobs of thanks” to Hill for “this loan of a woman’s ears and heart” to assist “all interested to travel beyond the paths of mere eyesight” to learn of the service provided by the Flying Doctors. Hill spends the first two chapters setting up a picture of the many miles of sparsely populated country in Australia. She uses phrases like “vast silent spaces”, “virgin earth” and “untamed solitudes” (*Flying* 7) to create her image of the huge area covered by the Flying Doctor Service. Words like “epic”, “arduous” and “pilgrimage” add to the picture. She writes of dust-storms, flash floods, droughts, and crippling heat. These features of the remote regions add to its fascination for urban audiences and Hill writes about them with flair.

Hill was aware of the ignorance of Australia’s largely urban population to the realities of the remote regions and played upon it in her writing. She writes that the general impression of the two-thirds of the population who live in cities is that:

beyond the Great Divide, Australia is as flat as a billiard-table, barren as beach sand, waterless as the Sahara with an occasional oasis . . . that the men and women of the



outback are the old style broad-axe-and-sun-bonnet pioneer hewing a home from the trunk of a tree or perishing for gold. (8; ellipsis in orig.)

Although Hill goes on to say that this impression is “far from truth”(8), she perpetuates it as she sets up her picture of the isolation and hardship of the lives of those in the remote regions. She describes extremes of weather, “cattle-stations on a stupendous scale” (13), and homesteads both rudimentary and luxurious. The stockman is romanticised as: “A splendid specimen of Australian manhood, boyish, wholesome, trustworthy, quick of speech, intelligent and full of vigour, always courteous and kindly” (15). The people of the bush are stoic and laconic characters formed and moulded by the unique conditions of the environment and the “real” Australians Hill was concerned to preserve in her narratives.

The second chapter adds further details of “the lost white race” who inhabit the remote regions. Women are an integral part of the picture of the far-flung regions serviced by the Flying Doctor: “There is never a trail too long, nor an outpost too lonely, for a woman’s fidelity and her love” (23). Drake-Brockman reviewed the book, writing “that a woman should make the record is right, too, for it is the women of the outback to whom this service means so much” (“An Epic of the Air” 2). Hill writes about the many lonely graves of women and children in the outback. This second chapter of the book reinforces the isolation and desperation of the circumstances in these regions before the radio telegraph and Flying Doctor Service were operating.

*Flying Doctor Calling* is filled with anecdotes told in Hill’s entertaining style. She recounts stories of remarkable deprivation and endurance, remarking: “They told the story casually. I looked at them aghast” (*Flying* 27). If some of the stories seem exaggerated, Hill relates them anyhow: “There is an irresistible anecdote, vouched for by the townspeople” (33). Readers are aware they are being entertained by a master raconteur. She progresses

the narrative skilfully as “[t]he scene moves from the desiccated deserts and the great spider-web of silver rivers in Queensland” to another exotic location and another compelling tale (88). The tale of one particular character begins with “Jim Hope—shall we call him?—lies on a bush stretcher on the veranda” (102). The reader is drawn into the story by this intimate style which Hill intersperses with facts (such as the design and construction of the radio telegraphs, details of the miles covered by the flying doctors, and the ways in which they secured funding: by way of lecture tours similar to Frank Clune’s travelling road shows).<sup>29</sup> The fascinating story of the establishment of the Flying Doctor Service unravels in the story-teller’s capable hands.

Interspersed with entertaining and shocking anecdotes are details of key figures in the establishment of the service, including Alfred Traeger, the electrical engineer (“[l]ean, keen and eager, a solemn and scientific young man” [56]) who was instrumental in developing the pedal-wireless radio that revolutionised communication in the isolated regions. Hill writes of the establishment of the Australian Inland Mission Hostels—“castle[s] of dreams to the sick coming in across the mirage” (46)—and the nurses who manned them. She outlines the process that saw the establishment of the first Flying Doctor Service base at Cloncurry in Western Queensland: “a small town with an environ as large as New South Wales, its population just as scattered as that of the Territory and the North-west, just as remote” (60). Hill writes about the first of the flying doctors, including Allan Vickers (70), J. McF. Rossell, G. A. Thomson, G. W. F. Alberry, and the flamboyant risk-taker loved by the press, Clyde Fenton (82). First-appointed was K. St Vincent Welch in 1928, who

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<sup>29</sup> For more on Hurley’s road shows see Dixon’s *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity: Frank Hurley’s Synchronized Lecture Entertainments* (2011).

in that first experimental year, covered twenty thousand miles in fifty flights to two hundred and fifty-five patients. He had forty-two consultations with other doctors, and visited twenty-six little centres where there was no doctor. (68)

Hill continues to provide details such as these, which are off-set with stories of the unusual life in the regions and the work of the Flying Doctor Service, creating an entertaining, eminently readable account. Three appendices and a pictorial record complete the book, of which Drake-Brockman wrote: "One closes the book with an almost personal sense of thankful appreciation" ("An Epic of the Air" 2). *Flying Doctor Calling* was no less an ambitious project than *My Love Must Wait* or indeed any of Hill's works of travel writing or historical fiction. Her style of writing enabled readers "to identify passionately with either fictional or historical characters", as Radway writes of books sought by the Book-of-the-Month Club (284). Middlebrow attributes of Hill's writing prompted readers "to respond intensely to the peculiarities of the author's vision", as reviews of her work and her sales indicate (284).

Hill is most often remembered for her travel texts, *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1940) and *The Territory* (1951). Views on her writing can be contradictory. Even Morris, who assesses her as a "key figure in the mid-twentieth century shaping of popular media culture in Australia" ("The Great Australian Loneliness" 238), also writes that "there is nothing exceptional about the phantasmatic structure of the frontier landscape" in Hill's texts ("Panorama" 35). Hill's prose "often has that terrible jocularly tinged with prurient fascination at 'alien' ways of life" ("The Great Australian Loneliness" 244). Morris acknowledges that Hill's popularity and her internally contradictory texts contribute to their value as cultural artefacts reflecting commonly held views and policies while also extending them. She remarks that "Hill's passion for the primal scenes of travel writing was combined

with a commitment to a vision of Australian ‘modernity’” (“Panorama” 33), a comment that encompasses a key feature of Australian middlebrow nationalism: looking back to the past in order to look forward to a progressive future. She describes Hill as a “journalist, a keen observer and a passionate amateur ethnographer of new communities thriving beyond the limits of coastal urban Australia” (“The Great Australian Loneliness” 244). Maurice Dunlevy’s obituary extolled Hill as “one of the finest travel writers in the heyday of the Australian travel book”. He went on to write that Hill

made new myths of the shifting sand hills of Central Australia, of the ‘mystery and beauty’ of the North . . . [Australia’s] history was written in the form of exciting, documentary narratives such as . . . *The Territory*, a colourful, anecdotal history of the development of the Northern Territory, still in print 21 years after it first appeared. (9)

Hill’s use of a popular form to entertain and educate readers about the further reaches of Australia has had an extended reach.

Hill’s work has been republished through the years; most recently *My Love Must Wait* has been republished as an Angus & Robertson Classic (2013). Johnston has written about the American edition of *The Great Australian Loneliness* which was given to American servicemen as an introduction to Australia (“American Servicemen” 84-90). The book was republished in 1977. A review in the *Canberra Times* acknowledges its contribution to the national literature: “Those who have not read Ernestine Hill’s story of Australia should buy this book. No journalist with as observant an eye will ever make such an exploration again. You can forgive the florid style” (“Lady with a Swag” 8). Hill’s subject matter and writing style, while dated, resonated at the time with an audience eager to know their country. Morris asks why we should not see her work as “bearing witness to a particular phase and

location of some of the most durable conflicts convulsing [Northern Australia] in the modern era?" ("The Great Australian Loneliness" 246). Like Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith, Hill was engaged in promoting her version of Australia and its people, drawing attention to key cultural debates for a wide readership.

**Telling stories and preserving documents: Patsy Adam-Smith, war and folklore.**

Born in 1924, Patsy Adam-Smith grew up around small railway outposts in South Australia and, though slightly younger, shared many of the same preoccupations as the other women writers under consideration in this study. Her first volume of autobiography, *Hear the Train Blow* (1964), details her childhood as the adopted daughter of railway workers. She wrote a book of railway folklore, *Folklore of the Australian Railwaymen* (1969) and a history of the railways, *Romance of the Australian Railways* (1973). Adam-Smith left home at the age of sixteen to serve as a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) during the Second World War. She married a soldier towards the end of the war and moved to Tasmania in 1945 at the age of nineteen where she lived until 1970. It was in Tasmania in the 1950s, as a young mother of two small children, that she began writing travel stories for various publications, including *Walkabout*, in which she published thirteen articles between 1960 and 1968.

Travelling and gathering stories continued to be driving influences throughout her life.

Adam-Smith considered herself a "born writer" who gave her life to her work (*Goodbye* 259).

In what she describes as the "most stringently limiting days for women", Adam-Smith made her living from writing (97). As well as writing for popular magazines such as *Walkabout*,

Adam-Smith published two volumes of autobiography, *Hear the Train Blow* and *Goodbye Girlie* (1994). She wrote two books based on her travels, *Moonbird People* (1965) and *There Was a Ship* (1967), and two collections of stories, *Footloose In Australia* (1973) and *The Barcoo Salute* (1973). *The Anzacs* (1978) won the Age Book of the Year Award. Adam-Smith

also published *Australian Women at War* (1984), amongst other works. Although she wrote prolifically from the 1950s until her death and her books were well-received, winning numerous awards, Adam-Smith has received little critical attention.

Adam-Smith's upbringing was quite different from the other women writers. She was not one of the educated middleclass. Hers was a working-class childhood in remote areas of South Australia. Resources, including money and water, were scarce and communities were small. In *Hear the Train Blow* she describes having to hide her love of reading and the difficulties of being able to write at all due to the scarcity of paper and the negative attitudes of those around her to reading and writing. Her formal education in small bush schools ended at the age of thirteen and, while she describes feeling "totally uneducated" throughout her life, she also never felt the desire to go to university (*Goodbye* 106), maintaining her distance from academia and its highbrow associations later in life. She was largely self-taught, gaining what she calls her "introduction to education" (99) through books ordered in for her by the librarian in the small Tasmanian town of Ulverstone where she lived as a young married woman. This was when her children were toddlers and she had "all the time in the world, when women were expected to do nothing, think nothing, and indeed had nothing but housework to do" (99). She describes reading in middlebrow terms: "It's what suits your needs in life that should be the only arbiter of our taste, and particularly what suits our thoughts" (101). She even chose her reading material from a typical middlebrow source, "*Books and Bookmen* (which took two months to come out from England)" (102). *Books and Bookmen* was a publication that contained book reviews and recommendations; it was one of the key institutions promoting reading for education and self-improvement. As an arbiter of "good taste", it was characteristic of middlebrow culture in this period.

From the beginning of her writing career, Adam-Smith's work was in typically middlebrow (and feminised) locations such as magazines and radio broadcasts. This work was well-paid and allowed her to be independent and itinerant. Adam-Smith's marriage finally broke down in 1955 and she moved south to Tasmania's capital, Hobart, with the two children. She wrote of never having any doubts she could support herself and her family, which she considered "a prerequisite . . . if a mother of dependent children is without a partner's monetary assistance" (*Goodbye* 121). Adam-Smith created and took opportunities as she saw them. Her move to Hobart corresponded to the six years she spent living and working at sea on small coastal trading ships. The children often accompanied her on the ships. When they did not (during the school term, for example), they were cared for by hired help, or by Adam-Smith's mother. Adam-Smith's life exemplifies the difficulties for women juggling competing demands of motherhood and career, but also the possibilities to move beyond the limits of traditional marriage and domesticity.

As well as publishing across a range of cultural forms, Adam-Smith occupied a variety of professional positions throughout her life. In 1960 she was appointed Adult Education Officer in Hobart (*Goodbye* 174). She threw herself into the role, expanding the courses from cake decorating and dressmaking to more scholarly pursuits such as ancient history and physics (175). In 1970 Adam-Smith left Tasmania to take up an inaugural position as Manuscripts Field Officer for the State Library of Victoria, a job she held for twelve years. She never lived in Tasmania again. In a profile of Adam-Smith's time in this position, Jock Murphy writes that the "varied experiences of her own life stood her in good stead, and she was as comfortable visiting a large pastoral property as the modest home of an ex-railway worker" (72). Adam-Smith was outspoken and proud of her working-class background, not considering it a limiting factor in later life, unlike the strictures of gender in a conservative

society. Drusilla Modjeska points out the difficulties for women to maintain their autonomy in the earlier part of the century: “Even for women educated to think and learn independently, it took enormous energy to maintain themselves as intellectually and artistically autonomous against unconscious pressures and emotional insecurities” (15). This was still the case for Adam-Smith in 1950s Tasmania. She faced these pressures head-on, asserting her presence boldly beyond the confines of domesticity and carving out a successful and varied career structured around writing.

Despite her success, Adam-Smith felt on the margins of the literary establishment; she was neither an insider nor a complete outsider. In *Goodbye Girlie*, for example, she writes: “There has never been much time in my life for me to socialise with the writing world, but the little socialising I’ve done has been warm and pleasant” (210). She then goes on to list the various well-known “establishment” people with whom she did mix—including a long-term friendship with famous Australian wartime surgeon, Sir Edward Dunlop—in what could be seen as an exercise in name-dropping. She had an association with the Melbourne-based Bread and Cheese Club, a (male) Australian art and literary society led by J. K. Moir (book collector and literary patron).<sup>30</sup> Adam-Smith portrays herself as negotiating with the establishment while also being apart from it. For example, in 1977 she was invited by the Literature Board of the Australia Council, in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs to travel to the USSR on a cultural exchange of writers with novelist Barbara Jefferis and playwright David Williamson (*Goodbye* 221-28). While she moved in and out of literary circles, Adam-Smith maintained a distance from highbrow or elitist associations. Her views on Australian literature in the 1980s are inflected with sentiments of the middlebrow

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<sup>30</sup> See for example: “A Brief History of The Bread and Cheese Club, Melbourne.” Web. 16 Sept. 2015. <<http://digital.slv.vic.gov.au>>.



nationalism expressed by Hill, Drake-Brockman and Durack. Adam-Smith's interest in foundational stories of the past is noted by Peter Fuller in the *Canberra Times* (1983):

It worries Patsy Adam-Smith that Australians seem to be losing touch with their traditions . . . At a time when the influence of popular cultural media is undermining much of what has been distinctively Australian—in particular Americanising it—Adam-Smith hopes that her books will help readers to see ‘what an amazing nation we are, what magnificent men and women we’ve got, and what gorgeous traditions we have here’, so that we will stop ‘copying other people, or stop making this ridiculous cry, ‘do we have a tradition?’ as academics keep saying’’. (24)

This mild criticism of elitist attitudes and the pervasive influence of commercial media positions Adam-Smith in the in-between space of middlebrow culture, striving for a distinctive and accessible tradition in the arts that was neither out-of-touch with the average Australian nor mindlessly reproducing ideas borrowed from abroad.

In seeking to produce work that celebrated a distinctive Australian tradition, Adam-Smith turned to folklore and recording the stories of ordinary (and not-so-ordinary) Australians, an interest she shared with Hill, and one that she pursued throughout her peripatetic life. In *Goodbye Girlie*, Adam-Smith writes that “[t]elling stories and folklore had been a part of our household from birth”, and it was an interest that she pursued in a professional capacity (101). Like Hill, Adam-Smith felt impelled to “preserve the documents and words of our people” that she felt were in danger of being “expunged as though they had never been” (213). She was recognised for her contribution to this record, receiving an

Order of Australia (AO) in 1994 for service to community history, particularly through the preservation of national traditions and folklore and recording of oral histories.<sup>31</sup>

Adam-Smith's working-class background was referred to in reviews of her work as establishing her credentials similarly to the way that Hill's extensive travels were seen to give her texts authenticity and authority. Ainslie Baker's review of *Romance of the Railways* in the *Australian Women's Weekly* notes Adam-Smith's firsthand knowledge of her material as a "fettler's child [who] grew up along the railway lines. Her Smith uncles are said to have cut more railway sleepers than any other family in Australia" (14). An ABC documentary about Adam-Smith that aired on 27 December 1995 detailed a life that was "remarkable although dogged by hardship" ("A Great Life" 12). She is variously described as formidable, spirited and a fighter. A feature article in the *Canberra Times* (1994) stated that

Recording, writing, putting down history as she sees it, have been her life—and her success. At no other time in history could a woman have straddled the generational shift . . . It's the lack of arrogance in her writing—and the profound understanding of human nature—that makes her books sing. ("When the Spirit is Willing" 48)

These qualities positioned Adam-Smith as an accessible figure with whom the public felt an affinity, and are qualities associated with middlebrow culture and writing.

*Hear the Train Blow* was published by Ure Smith when the company was under the stewardship of Sam, son of founder Sydney Ure Smith. Sam is noted as one of "the [Australian publishing] industry's modern founders and shapers" by Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (xii). Under Sydney Ure Smith, the company had been known for publishing mainly books and magazines about art and photography. Ure Smith published *Art in*

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<sup>31</sup> Awards: TDK Australian Audio Book Award and Benalla Award for Audio Book of the Year for *Goodbye Girlie* 1995; Literature Board Fellowship 1993; Order of Australia Association Book Prize for *The Anzacs* 1993; The Age Book of the Year Award – Non-Fiction Prize for *The Anzacs* 1978; The Age Book of the Year Award – Book of the Year for *The Anzacs* 1978 (joint winner shared with Christopher Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously*).

*Australia* (1916–1942) and *The Home* (1920–1942), “an upmarket women’s magazine” (Astbury 317-18). Sam expanded into general books to revitalise the business after his father’s death in 1949 (Carter “Case-Study” 25). Adam-Smith writes of her experience with the publisher: “What a stroke of luck! I had . . . struck gold: the best and kindest publisher one could have” (*Goodbye* 108). Her meeting with Sam Ure Smith encouraged her to keep on writing. Adam-Smith’s books were bestsellers. She was repeatedly listed in “The Month’s Bestsellers” in the *Canberra Times*: 22 Dec. 1982 (*The Shearers*); 23 Feb. 1983 (*The Shearers*: number two on the non-fiction list; the previous month it was listed at number three); 23 Mar. 1983 (*The Shearers*: number three on the list); 9 Jan. 1985 (*Australian Women at War*). She was listed as a Literary Fund winner along with other notable writers on 7 Dec. 1971, and was awarded a Literary Fellowship for non-fiction (“Literary Fellowship Awards” 22). Her bestseller status and the features of her writing praised in reviews clearly position Adam-Smith in the category of the middlebrow in Australia.

Adam-Smith’s writing was described as popular, accessible and engaging. Patricia Clarke’s review of *Hear the Train Blow* describes its affective appeal: “first published in 1964 and republished several times since, [*Hear the Train Blow*] deserves its subtitle, ‘the classic autobiography of growing up in the bush’. Even at a second reading it can still wring the emotions” (11). The book was reviewed along with a biography of Ethel Anderson and the memoirs of Catherine Mackerras, with Clarke commenting that compared with those two women, Adam-Smith “came from the wrong side of the tracks” (11). Historian Geoffrey Bolton’s review of *Outback Heroes* (1981) praises middlebrow attributes of the book:

I have never understood those academics who sneer at ‘coffee-table books’ . . .

There is after all a large and not illiterate section of the public who are never going to read serious academic textbooks but who might be beguiled by glossy pictures

and attractive print into attempting areas of non-fiction into which they would never venture otherwise. ("Book Reviews" 109)

A later book of war stories, *Prisoners of War* (1992), published after Adam-Smith's two well-received and successful histories of war received a poor review from historian Jeffrey Grey:

the author presents a melange of first-person accounts interspersed with sometimes unfortunate forays into historical narrative . . . Every variety of prisoner experience is here, and so too is every cliché . . . and it has to be said that Adam-Smith has absolutely nothing to say that is new, or even offered in a fresh manner.

Along the way we are treated with all sorts of tired old myths and absurdities. (8)

The differing opinions of these reviewers reflect the ambivalent reception of middlebrow writing by members of highbrow institutions or the educated elite. Bolton goes on to write that *Outback Heroes*

is undeniably readable. It is enlivened by humour, pathos, and the author's total sense of enthusiastic commitment to the way of life she is describing. It will succeed in its aim of communicating to city audiences much which might be forgotten about the hardships and the values of outback life. ("Book Reviews" 110)

These qualities of humour, pathos and enthusiastic commitment to the story are evident in all Adam-Smith's writing and firmly tie it to the feminine middlebrow as evidenced by Driscoll's eight attributes: notably, Adam-Smith's work is commercial, emotional, reverential, feminized, recreational and earnest (*New Literary* 3). Humour was also a key aspect of middlebrow writing that Melissa Sullivan discusses in relation to journalist and writer E. M. Delafield. Delafield's writing, like Adam-Smith's, was "comic with key arguments on gender, cultural hierarchies, and life outside of highbrow circles" ("I Return" 108). These were keen concerns Adam-Smith explored in her writing.

Adam-Smith's interest in women and the lives of "battlers" focused on the remote regions and stories of war. Her books of folklore are eclectic collections of tales collected from all over the country. Bolton describes *Outback Heroes* as "a miscellany" of tales ("Book Reviews" 110) drawn from various parts of remote Australia. *The Anzacs* and *Australian Women at War* draw on stories told from the point of view of the participants themselves, taken from diaries, letters and firsthand oral accounts. They are accessible historical documents, and examples of the way in which middlebrow culture can be seen to mediate between vernacular and highbrow material, appealing to an audience eager to learn more of their country and their own place within it. This was something Adam-Smith was particularly good at; her books are eminently readable and informative even if they are not extended studies or high literary fiction.

Like Hill, Adam-Smith extensively researched her books in her commitment to faithfully record the stories she felt were important to national culture. She claimed to have produced a more authentic version of the war in *The Anzacs* than other accounts by telling the stories through letters and diaries and not avoiding unsavoury details. She does not avoid the "figures and details of venereal disease" among soldiers, for example, and justifies this by writing:

Chroniclers of that period have habitually ignored this subject, as though to write of it might in some way lessen the immortality that the men's endurance made legendary. In my opinion this merely perpetuates the hypocrisy that made these facts appear an aberration rather than an unavoidable hazard of war . . . War is not pleasant, and those who wish to write of pleasant things should avoid it as a subject. (*The Anzacs* viii).

In 1991 reviewer Frank Cranston wrote that the book is “[f]ree from moralising, it lets the soldiers tell their own stories, interpolating only sufficiently to generate a consistent thread” (“Soldiers” 49). Adam-Smith writes of consulting “numerous manuscripts . . . 7 820 separate letters and diaries” (*Anzacs* x), visiting sites of battles and recording many stories directly from survivors. She dedicated the book to the men who fought in the war: “When time has removed this age to a distance, our descendants will speak of you as we now speak of the three hundred at Thermopylae—but I have had the rare, and peerless, privilege of knowing you” (xii). Indeed, Anzac has become legend in Australia and more recently its commemoration has grown in attendance and cultural significance with each passing year. Adam-Smith achieved her aim of indelibly recording this foundational story through *The Anzacs*.

The concern to record foundational stories of the past remained a driver throughout Adam-Smith’s writing career. Women’s war service was a subject she experienced personally and felt had been “grossly ignored”. Her aim was to redress this neglect in *Australian Women at War*: “to record the many instances of endurance, devotion, bravery and self-sacrifice while some of these women are still alive; in tapping their memories, I wish to honour them” (vii). This is reminiscent of Hill’s desire to record the stories of the “forgotten pioneers” while they were still alive. Adam-Smith refers to women’s involvement in war as the “largest social experiment with women to have been carried out in Australia: every class, type and variety of young woman in the land was represented” (373). The book is a comprehensive coverage of women’s participation in war and a celebration of their service. As in *The Anzacs*, Adam-Smith is careful not to romanticise or glorify war, writing that it is “an aberration, it is not seen as life by those swept along by it” (373). So too in *Australian Women at War* Adam-Smith intersperses facts and figures with letters, diaries

and firsthand oral accounts, telling women's accounts from the Boer war through to the end of World War II. Many photographs add to the realism and poignancy of the book.

Reviewers declared the book "eminently readable" and praised it for "filling in a very large gap in the history of Australia at war" by recognising women's contributions (Cranston "Review" 12). Adam-Smith used her voice to advocate for women and others in society who were historically less well represented in literature.

Adam-Smith is mostly remembered for *The Anzacs*. It has been reprinted as a Penguin Classic in 1991 and again in 2014. In promoting the 2014 reprint, the *Weekend Australian* included an excerpt from the book, stating that *The Anzacs* "is an Australian classic . . . And the book's opening chapter . . . still resonates today" ("The War, at Home" 8). The Penguin Classics website states that *The Anzacs* "remains unrivalled as the classic account of Australia's involvement in the First World War". An exemplar of middlebrow cultural production, Penguin books, including the Penguin Classics series, were a "publishing revolution", as Nicola Humble points out ("Sitting" 56). Founded in 1935 by Allen Lane, the company reprinted cheap, paperback versions of successful books, making a wide variety of material immediately accessible for the general reading public. Their bright colours contrasted with white banding and lack of cover images was clever marketing, "creating a strong series identity from the start" (56). As Humble explains, this commercial and mediated format "effectively transmuted [the reprinted books] into the middlebrow, as they became widely available, widely read and commodified" (57). Currently Penguin's website markets these as "books you won't be able to put down, books you'll want to show off on your shelves, books behind movies and books that have changed the world. Here you'll find thinkers, lovers, poets, scientists, radicals and the best books ever written" (Penguin Classics website). Penguin books are a "powerful tool of self-improvement"

(Humble “Sitting” 57). Being published in this format provided greater exposure for Adam-Smith and furthered her credibility as a writer contributing to Australia’s literary heritage.

Adam-Smith’s books have been reprinted over the years. *Australian Women at War* was republished by Five Mile Press in 2014. This reprinted edition was mentioned in *Good Reading*, a monthly magazine that features “reviews of literary books, award-winning books, crime, romance, sci-fi, biography: books ordinary people like to read” (“Book Bite” n.pag.). This is a recent example of a publication promoting good books and good reading for a wide but discerning audience in typical middlebrow fashion.

So too, the other writers under examination in this study have been reprinted and remarketed. Random House has republished Durack’s books under its Vintage imprint: *Kings in Grass Castles* (2008), *To Be Heirs Forever* (2001), *Keep Him My Country* (1999) and *Sons in the Saddle* (1998). The Random House website describes Durack’s *Kings in Grass Castles* in middlebrow terms: “With a profound sense of family history . . . Mary Durack reconstructed the Durack saga—a story of intrepid men and ground-breaking adventure. This sweeping tale of Australia and Australians remains a classic nearly fifty years on”. Middlebrow features of *To Be Heirs Forever* are likewise praised: it is described as “a fascinating and lively account of early Australia . . . The late Mary Durack was one of the great chroniclers of the West and Australia’s past” (*Random House Australia* n.pag.). Drake-Brockman’s *Voyage to Disaster* was republished in 1982 by Angus & Robertson and in 2006 by University of Western Australia Publishing. Hill’s *My Love Must Wait* was republished by (Harper Collins) Angus & Robertson in 2001 and 2013 as part of Angus & Robertson’s Classics Series. These books are now marketed as classic or foundational stories of Australia’s past which have contributed to the present character of the nation.



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These women writers, then, were successful in finding a voice in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia and using it to further the development of the national identity. They shared nationalist aspirations which included an affinity with the past as well as desire for modern progress. Their writing exemplifies the function of middlebrow literature, identified by Bracco: that is, it offers “invaluable insight into the ‘feel’ of the . . . [period], by uncovering not only ideas and values, but also prejudices, fears, and feelings of guilt” (4-5). The contradictions in their writing reflect contemporary tensions surrounding such issues as gender, class and race relations, and the future direction of the nation.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith can be included in the group of Australian women writers of the 1940s whom Susan Sheridan argues

shared a different and more urgent sense of connectedness to the wider world, in their acute awareness of the legacy of past wars. As well, they shared a commitment to making a life and a career in Australia: cultural life was to be established here. (*Nine Lives* 13)

Durack identified the aftermath of World War II as the period when Australia was maturing and realising the necessity of being part of a global community. She writes that this was a time when migrants were bringing “fresh vision and inspiration to the land . . . [and] ‘[u]seless things’ like the arts, higher education, research and improved conditions for the aborigines [were] being encouraged . . . as never before” (“Scroll” 30). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith shared what David Carter and Bridget Griffen-Foley describe as the “cultural optimism” of this period (248) and brought this to their representations of the nation in their writing.

The four women writers acknowledged ambivalences connected to wider tensions in the modern nation. Meaghan Morris writes that Hill “saw popular history and social as well as landscape description as an emotionally effective mode of *national* community-building (“The Great Australian Loneliness” 239; emphasis in orig.). Each writer encouraged a sense of connectedness to Australia that was located in the nation’s history, its people, the environment and modernity. They used regional attachments to place to explore wider themes, using the publishing venues of the middlebrow to “disseminate opinion and debate about the great public issues of [the] time: the status of Aboriginal peoples, the state’s role in national development, ‘population’ politics and immigration”, as Morris writes of Hill (“The Great Australian Loneliness” 239). They raised awareness of difficult issues that are still being debated today.

These writers’ popularity at the time they were publishing indicates the relevance of their writing to contemporary ideas about the modern nation. Hille Koskela contends that by asserting themselves boldly in public as Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith did, “women work as active agents in public space” (316). In this way, Koskela argues, “women are not only passively experiencing space but actively take part in producing it” (316). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith used the public platforms available to them to add their voices to representations of the nation. Their writing provides rich material for analysing cultural constructions of Australia in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

## PART TWO

# Performances of Travel: Mobility, Modernity and Gendered Space in Remote Regions

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By travelling widely throughout Australia and committing their experiences to writing, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith were actively engaged in converting space into place for themselves and their readers. These women crossed borders into remote regions that Robert Dixon describes as “ambiguous transitional zone[s]” (*Prosthetic* 21), and which had hitherto largely been the domain of itinerant (mostly male) populations in the form of the white explorer, the gold seeker, drover or pioneer. Their mobility in the spaces beyond cities can be viewed in the way Dixon sees the travel writing of Frank Clune: as contributing to the “emergence into discourse” (21) of these transitional zones. They were like the other contributors to *Walkabout* who, Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston argue, imagined travel as a specific cultural practice by which unique Australian subjectivities will emerge: specifically, the idealised modern settler Australian . . . Travel, as both entertainment and education, provided *Walkabout*’s readers with a way to imagine their place in the world in geographic, emotional and intellectual terms: it mediated national identities and neo-colonial aspirations. (48)

These writers contributed to a consolidation of (white) national identity in modern Australia. Their textual inscriptions of place played a role in helping Australians “know” their country as they read about regions many would not have visited. If, as Roslynn D. Haynes writes, “we are continually creating the landscape that we ‘see’” (3), then these women’s narratives played a part in the infinite rehearsal of national identity and what it means to be at home

in Australia. The following chapters examine Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's travel narratives, considering representations of Australia through tropes of travel, mobility, modernity and the gendered nature of space in remote regions.

Early studies dismissed women's travel writing as largely autobiographical and unreliable (Mills 12-13), however this perception is being revised. Particularly in the postcolonial situation, women's travel writing has increasingly received attention for its departures from and disruptions to hegemonic discourse. Mary Baine Campbell writes:

people began to realise that travelling . . . women did not comfortably fit the profile of 'Western oppressor' being so subtly and powerfully constructed by postcolonial theory . . . And the study of their work as writing, as records, as narratives, has provided considerable material for discussion of the gendered nature of subjectivity and the positionality or 'situatedness' of all knowledge. (264)

Travelling women represented a disruption to the dominant discourses: both physically, in the act of placing themselves outside traditionally female and private (domestic) space, and textually in their written articulation of this movement beyond normative gendered bounds. In settler colonial societies like Australia women occupied an in-between space as members of the dominant culture whilst being subordinate within that culture due to their gender. Writing from this in-between space makes women's travel texts compelling for the ways in which they reiterate and extend dominant tropes while also transgressing them, offering new or alternate ways of identification.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith adopted professional travelling personas in their texts. They wrote as "proud and unapologetic travelers rather than 'lady tourists'" as Hsu-Ming Teo writes of the modern woman traveller (174). Adopting this professional persona lends their narratives an ostensible authenticity, which is enhanced or

reinforced as their accounts are written from direct experience and often filled with facts and historical detail. This is also characteristic of middlebrow literature in general with its earnest, educative intent and aligns with *Walkabout's* brief to have embarked on an “educational crusade” with the aim of inspiring “an infinitely greater knowledge and appreciation” of Australia (Lloyd Jones 7). The areas through which Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith travelled were generally considered unsuited to women; as such they would have been conspicuous due to their gender. The following chapters consider how these writers represented themselves from this position on the margins of the nation.

A shared characteristic of Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith’s writing is the region from and about which they wrote, namely the remote north-west of Australia, and, in Adam-Smith’s case, remote areas of the island state of Tasmania. By travelling into these marginal zones the women entered spaces that were overwhelmingly populated by men. The predominantly masculine performance of settler place in Australia had been articulated since the arrival of the first fleet through stories of exploration, conquest and settlement. The bush tradition was firmly entrenched in people’s minds along with the male figures of the bushman, the digger and the Anzac soldier. How did these women transcribe their experiences in the face of a dominant male tradition? How did they enter and move through these masculine spaces (both physical and textual) as women? Did they merely replicate and perpetuate common ideas of identity and place, or did their writing offer something else, other ways of imagining the country?

The remote regions to which Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith travelled were largely outside the experience of their urban readership: these areas were “more a folk-memory than a reality” to most Australians, as Adam-Smith wrote (“Across Australia on the Indian Pacific” 24-25). The remote regions were the subject of increasing

attention in the early- to mid-twentieth century, as Tom Griffiths writes: “from the 1920s to the 1950s, there was a great surge of interest in the Australian outback” (176). Writers capitalising on this interest

instantly became self-appointed experts . . . There were many issues on which they felt urged to pronounce: the ‘problem’ of the Aborigines, particularly of the half-castes, the development of the north, life on the frontier, the protection of scenery and the future of tourism. (178)

Griffiths was referring to Central Australia in this instance, but the same argument can be made of the remote north-western regions of the country that were the focus of these women’s narratives, and in which they addressed similar issues.

One reason for the national (and international) focus on northern Australia during this period was the perception of its vulnerability to invasion. The sparse population in the area exacerbated public sensitivity to this threat (this is not relevant to Adam-Smith as she was writing during a later period: 1950–1974). There was an expansionist rhetoric with regard to the north; one in which Hill, Drake-Brockman and Durack participated. Russell McGregor explains that during the interwar period “the consistent assumptions were that the north held immense areas of fertile, well-watered land and that it remained empty in consequence of policy rather of natural deficiency” (“A Dog in the Manger” 165). While McGregor demonstrates that there were detractors from this view (165-72), others such as Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and male contemporaries (Ion Idriess, for example) continued to act as “propagandists” (173) for the development of the region. The focus on the North-West was bound up with protection, population, expansion, development, and the White Australia Policy.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith embraced the opportunities made available by modernisation, especially new ways of communicating and mobilising through space. They celebrated and promoted modernisation's benefits as essential to the future of Australia. Distance, isolation, lack of access to adequate amenities and communication had previously inhibited the development of the remote regions. That these women writers were able to travel alone and felt safe to do so, and that this was socially acceptable, also speaks to the changing nature of the modern world in the early- to mid-twentieth century.

The long distances Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith travelled meant that the journey and the mode/s of transport utilised were integral to their narratives; it was not only about the destination but the experience as a whole. According to Sidonie Smith, "In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the desire to pursue defining mobility at modernity's edges renders the terms of mobility every bit as critical to the project as the destination" (31). These women writers were aware of the effects of the mode of transport on the traveller in terms of spatial and social interactions and perceptions of the landscape through or over which they passed. These technologies of motion are likened by Dixon to a "prosthesis, enabling the modern traveller-God to perform a symbolic transcoding between space and time" as they cross borders into remote regions, "simultaneously troping [them] as the space of modern Australia" (*Prosthetic* 18). Furthermore, the expanding means of and access to mobility enabled people, particularly women and the lower classes, to move out of their traditional (domestic/private) domains. This also had the effect of altering the meaning of time and space. Smith examines how modern modes of transport "transformed space, time, and the subjects of travel" (xi) and how this is translated in the travel narratives of female writers. Smith sees that these ways of mobilising "functioned as a sign of modernity" (xi) and that travel itself "functions as a defining arena of agency" (ix), reinforcing or

affirming the dominant ideology of the traveller. Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith moved confidently and safely through the landscape as white Australians surveying their country and communicating their sense of it and its possibilities to others. Modern travel altered the individual's experience of themselves and the regions they traversed, affecting relationships with others and to the landscape. Hill, Drake-Brockman and Durack and Adam-Smith were enthusiastic proponents of the country they loved but which was still a land of contrasts. They offered accessible, entertaining and thought-provoking accounts to everyday Australians through their travel narratives, bringing the outer reaches of the nation into the consciousness of their largely urban audience.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Story-Telling and Inscribing the Past:

#### Ernestine Hill's *The Great Australian Loneliness*, *The Territory* and *Walkabout*

#### Writing

Ernestine Hill, an inveterate traveller, frequently expressed a deep love for Australia. In her first *Walkabout* article, published in 1935, she wrote: "I have travelled this country, wide-eyed at its magical beauty" ("Mining Mica" 37). For Hill, "Australia is like its own unique and glorious jewel, the opal. A great jagged square of colourless crystal, you must hold it up to the light to catch the flashing fires of romance" (*The Great Australian Loneliness* 2). Hill's lively and effusive accounts of her travels in remote Australia reveal another world and way of life for readers. She frequently refers to the many journeys she made across the country in a way that lends the authority of extensive experience to her accounts. In *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1940) she writes: "Across the painted deserts and the pearling seas, by aeroplane and camel and coastal ship, by truck and lugger and packhorse team and private yacht, the trail has led me on across five years and 50,000 miles, a trail of infinite surprises" (*Loneliness* 9); and later in *Walkabout* she writes of her "twenty years' sojourn all over the outback" ("Ghosts, Lights and Fairies in Australia" 17). Her books and articles are enthusiastic evocations of the places she journeys through and the people she meets. She sees Australia as the "most fascinating, the most contradictory country . . . too near to Nature to be summed up in parables" ("Crocodiles and Pink Lotus" 17). An intimate connection to the land and the people she meets permeates her writing. For Hill, the country is many things: awe-inspiring, colourful—"a Persian weaving of prismatic colours, a daub of glory in that wizard light" ("Rugged are the Ranges" 29)—wondrous, magical, lonely,

and vast. It is a land of extremes and tall tales, a land of laid-back heroism and laconic genius in the face of extreme conditions.

Hill took her travelling seriously. She projects her role in the modern nation as that of record keeper of the stories upon which it is built, considering them “indelible in Australia’s history” (“Wings to Borrooloola” 10). She is a lively story-teller with an infectious curiosity; her tales of characters she meets and hears about are vivid and entertaining. She possessed the advantages Paul Smethurst sees belonging to the travel writer: “the ability to give presence to a place, and then *in situ*, to pass through the portals of time and down through layers of sedimented history” (“Post-Orientalism” 170; emphasis in orig.). Smethurst is referring to the writing of travellers in foreign lands, in particular, William Dalrymple in India. Although British, Dalrymple spent many years living in India, which Smethurst considers gave him narrative authority by use of “the travel-in-dwelling form”: he wrote *from* and *about* India, as Hill does in Australia (161). Hill is “*in situ*” not as a visitor to a foreign place, but “a swiftly-passing pilgrim” (*Loneliness* 10) in the marginal, border spaces of her own country. Her passage through these regions enabled her to feel she had a deeper understanding of them and by extension Australia as a nation, albeit from a limited and privileged white Australian perspective.

Hill used her own historical research, anecdotes from personal experience and the firsthand accounts and memories of those she encountered to construct her narratives. Her self-assumed role is as one of

the scribes and story-tellers . . . busy with their records and recollections, writing biographies and romances that will become history and folk-lore, enshrining our heroes, setting the pattern of our early days for writers to the end of time.

(“Following the Star” 16)

The use of multiple sources gives the texts a “multivocality”—a term Smethurst applies to Dalrymple’s travel texts—that has the effect of extending “the form of travel writing from ‘sightseeing and witnessing’ to a form which locates subjectivity in the ruins, mementoes and living memories of others” (Smethurst 159). Hill, like Dalrymple, “surveys the monuments of the past [in Hill’s case mostly the early white pioneers and Aborigines] . . . [and] senses the aura of the past, and the flow of time that connects it with the present” (170). To this end, with a “journalist’s nose for news” (*Loneliness* 261) Hill sat “with the old hands to hear great tales” (118) and wrote them down. If the tales were exaggerated, Hill told them anyway, delighting in the “characters” past and present, “comic and tragic” (118), that fill her books. Whilst celebrating the benefits of modernity, her main interest was delving back in time to capture stories of the past that shaped the character of the present population and their connection with the land into the future.

Hill wrote when travel narratives were enjoying a peak in popularity (Arnold 288-9; Carter and Griffen-Foley 245). She wrote two books about her travels, *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1940) and *The Territory* (1951). Each contain detailed and eclectic mixtures of anecdote and history. They display certain characteristics of imperial travel texts, with their fascination with colonial history: “triumphal events, expansion, heroic founders, and the nature of the country in its supposedly virgin state” (Warwick 54). Hill describes her travels as an “adventure” (*Loneliness* 10) and her writing often reads as a type of adventure/romance, which was a popular form of travel narratives during the early- to mid-twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> In a three-part series of articles in *Walkabout* that describe a journey along the coast of Western Australia by ship, Hill writes that she and the crew were “eager for adventure” and “gaily confident” at the outset of the voyage (“Sailing Old Dutch Seas”

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Dixon writes of the critical neglect of “adventure/romance, despite its being one of the most popular literary forms” during the early twentieth century” (*Writing the Colonial Adventure* 2).

20). In *The Great Australian Loneliness* she describes herself as having “the tang of the wild and the star story in [her] blood” (123). She positioned herself as a “wandering ‘copy boy’”, carrying camera, swag and typewriter on a quest “to find what lay beyond the railway lines” (9). An eccentric figure herself, she sought out the unusual, another feature of travel writing which contributed to its popularity and at which Hill excelled in her sometimes exaggerated tales of the extraordinary: “I write only of the unusual, leaving statistics to the year-books” (20). According to Hill, Australia was “still a stranger to the world and to its own people” (10) and she set herself the task of discovering the “real” Australia for her readers.

Hill adopted a professional persona typical of the travel (and middlebrow) narrator, with a purpose to educate readers about regions that were unfamiliar and outside the experience of many Australians. Her tone is both informative and conversational. Smethurst is interested in the “strategies by which narrative (and actual) authority are sought, assumed, applied, and questioned” in travel writing (Introduction 4). He argues that the ‘eye’ and the ‘I’ of travel narratives are “performative constructions that assume narrative authority—the figurative re-enactment of (or the prelude to) assuming actual authority of peoples and places travelled to and written about” (4). Hill assumes narrative authority as a professional journalist with a (self-imposed) responsibility to record the stories of the people who inhabit the regions she travels through: “This is the story of a journalist’s journey round and across Australia . . . On anything that came along, I followed ‘the story.’ It was all in a journalist’s job, and it was all good hunting” (*Loneliness* 9-10). Hill describes her various informants as opening themselves up to her or providing willing assistance for the sake of “the story” and the chance to have their tales inscribed into history.

Being a professional journalist is a position Hill reiterates frequently in her texts. It is in this capacity that she gains access to the remote regions. To this end, she positions herself as impartial observer:

For your true journalist is a little more, or a little less, than human, a child taking notes. He knows no partialities, no class-distinction, no creed distinction, nor colour-line, nor bias, nor loyalty, save to the story . . . He is all things to all men, and to him all men, living and dying, are copy. (36)

Hill is far from neutral in her narratives and regularly transgresses this idealised subject position, for example when she points to her gender—either to make herself a slightly comedic figure or by portraying herself as privileged due to her femaleness—where she sees it giving her access that a man would be denied. Her commentary is often impassioned (which is part of her overall style of writing), either in reference to mixed-race Australians or when extolling the virtues and anomalies of frontier regions. Hill was constantly on the move beyond conventional domestic/private space, living amongst men, like a man, sleeping in a swag under the stars, yet set apart from her male companions in a position of relative privilege due to her gender. She used her gender and her professional status as story gatherer as tools in her self-construction as traveller and narrator. Writing from colonised space, “in the interstices of masculine culture” (Kaplan 187), Hill used her marginality as an advantage giving her access to transport and people, along with her cultural authority as a white settler positioned within and part of the dominant discourse.

While Hill does not overtly place herself as the focus of her travel narratives, an evocative picture of the woman behind the words is built up through snippets of her life on the move. We see her sitting with an old digger and sewing a patch on his trousers while she listens to his story (*Loneliness* 44). She describes herself “typewriting far into the night,

while perspiration dripped rhythmically off the end of my nose into the little machine” (197). She “waded to the bare knees through the rushing rivers in the main streets” of monsoonal Darwin to take her “copy” to the post office (198). In the tropical heat she spent all her spare time “in a fury of personal washing, resultant on at least four showers and four compulsory changes a day” (197). An example of her humour is evident in the description of riding a camel across a section of desert. She had stopped to photograph a ravine when her mount saw the rest of the party in the distance:

He was off. I just hung on to the saddle and said a prayer or two while the seven-pound camera flew out in the wind, and belted its angles down on my starboard hip every time we touched bottom. That bruise was a futurist thunderstorm for months . . . Riding a camel is one of the best new experiences in life. You begin by feeling like the Queen of Sheba, and end up looking like a lubra. (303)

Incidents such as the above put a personal face on the professional traveller and invite readers to enter the narrative alongside the narrator. Readers trust this narrator who writes with authority while not taking herself too seriously. Sara Mills argues that elements of women’s travel texts such as “humour, self-deprecation, statements of affiliation, and descriptions of relationships, which stress the interpersonal nature of travel writing” can be discursively productive: “these constraints enable a form of writing whose contours both disclose the nature of dominant discourses and constitute a critique from its margins” (23). Hill maintains a respectable (and acceptable) position as a woman in the spaces through which she moves even as she is pushing the bounds of convention by occupying that space.

The narrative persona constructed in Hill’s texts is sometimes ambivalent and contradictory. Setting herself apart as a professional traveller while frequently referencing her gender—albeit often by emphasising an androgynous identity—Hill creates an engaging

yet authoritative voice (which has been criticised for its over-the-top tone or “purple rhetoric” [Morris “Panorama” 29] or “romanticised purple prose” [Johnston “American” 88], a gendered critique, too). Mills recognises the complexity and instability of women’s discursive positions within travel texts, particularly in the colonial context where women wrote from within a dominant masculinist framework and in which certain restrictions exist because of their gender:

Each discursive position is undermined or called into question by other elements within the text, and while some elements may be dominant, there are sections of the text which temper a straightforward position being offered. (197)

Following Mills, Hill’s narratives, rather than being read as “feminine” or “colonial” texts, seem to be “caught up in the contradictory clashes of these discourses one with another. No stable position can finally be given to the text” (174). Hill’s foregrounding of her femininity, in combination with discourses that participate in white settler colonial tropes of discovery, exploration, possession and development, reveal an awareness of what and how she “should” be reporting from the frontier spaces as a woman in spaces of masculine activity.

An indicative incident is her account of an occasion when she was mistaken for a man. She recalls that an interviewee who had been particularly candid later told an acquaintance: “‘I been having a yarn to the little bloke that’s writing a book’” (*Loneliness* 48). The openness and colourful language this character had displayed in conversation with Hill was due to mistaking her for a man, and contradicts Hill’s claims that men were more open with her as a result of difference in places where women were scarce. “In that dim shanty sitting-room”, Hill writes, “unaccustomed to the ways of the new woman and deceived by my outback shirt and trousers, Jim had mistaken my sex” (48). The “ways of the new woman” arising out of conditions of modernity allowed access to previously inaccessible spaces and

also blurred gender lines. The journalist in this case, is seen as “a little more, or a little less, than human” (36), certainly not as herself.

On the other hand, Hill described men as responding generously to the presence of a woman. These were the idealised bushmen of Australian mythology. Hill describes them as “almost childishly reverent in the presence of a woman” (*Loneliness* 47), and “the soul of chivalry and courtesy” (302). According to Hill “Nothing is impossible or out of the way to the bushmen, not even a woman’s whim” (122). In return, her reverence for the “true bush gentlemen” (47) is apparent. The tales she relates of them bring these characters and their unusual circumstances to life while perpetuating the myth of the bushman in Australian history.

Hill moved through the marginal, frontier spaces in the company of men, using her gender and status as a journalist as an advantage. Men skippered the boats, drove the mail carts and cars, and piloted the planes.<sup>33</sup> Hill is often the only passenger on her chosen means of transport and actively participates in the journeys. She is “the only boarder” at an hotel (*Loneliness* 34); “the first white woman” at a station (113); the “only [passenger] in years” on a boat (164); the “only woman on the field [at] night, with nearly a hundred men” (312). She never describes feeling ill-at-ease in these situations, trusting in the “gallantry and helpfulness” (47) of the members of the company she is in. She actively assisted in the journeying when necessary, such as helping to dig a bogged cart out of the sand: “down on my hands and knees, stuffing spinifex under the wheels, merrily I helped the mailman to mat through [sand-beds]” (112). This has the effect of making her travelling experience (and therefore her travel narratives) more authentic due to her close participation and exclusive

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<sup>33</sup> In later years Hill travelled in her own vehicle, towing a caravan, and often in the company of her son, Robert. This was not the case in the 1930s however, when she wrote *The Great Australian Loneliness* and was gathering material for *The Territory*.



position in journeying. She was no mere tourist. Hill relied on the willingness of men to accept a woman into their space, but not as an equal or even a colleague. Hill manipulated her gendered position to her advantage, particularly in regions where difference is both exacerbated and conflated as a result of the unusual and exaggerated conditions of the frontier. Mills analyses the feeling of safety women travellers felt as “reinforcing the colonial presence” (22), and the unquestioned right to be in these spaces; although perhaps in 1930s Australia Hill’s ability to be in these spaces is more to do with the conditions of modernity.

As she moved through the country Hill preferred slower methods of transport that fostered stronger, more intimate connections with the land and the people she met: “You cannot do justice to that country from an aeroplane. So at Derby . . . I threw away the suitcase and took lessons from the bushmen at packing the swag” (*Loneliness* 90). She chose to tarry in places to allow time to gather material for her narratives:

I preferred to stay a while, to roam the gold and malachite hills, to listen to the tales of the old fossickers dry-blowing in the gullies, and the whistling of the butcher-birds by moonlight in the little waterless creeks. (53)

We often see her sitting on a veranda (102) or on “petrol boxes and barrels” outside a store (118) having a “yarn” with various characters. She “swing[s] down to the bottom of [mine] shafts” to watch opal miners by day and then “played bridge in the dug-outs” with them in the evenings (260-61). She “wandered along . . . mud-flats” in the mornings and at sunset (50) or “rambled the beaches” (63) taking in her surroundings. Her means of transport are often rudimentary and hastily organised and she is forced to spend time waiting due to weather or break-downs. She frequently travelled by truck and described it thus:

There is a local saying that the truck provides for three classes. First class sits in front and minds the water. Second class sits on the back among the mail-bags and lends a

hand in necessity. Third class pushes all the way. I was all three, and I did a good bit of digging on that trip, scooping out a six-foot groove for the front wheels while Ken jacked up the back on to strips of tin and drove a truck-length at a time. (285)

While acknowledging the benefits of modern transportation such as air and train travel to Australia as a whole, Hill found slower forms of mobility suited her purpose in learning about the country and its people in order to pass that knowledge onto others.

The country Hill described is one of harsh realities, while also beautiful: a source of endless fascination, and often couched in romantic terms. The stories she related of the people who lived there, past and present, are often tales of bravery, endurance, hardship, loss, and struggle to survive. She dedicated *The Great Australian Loneliness* “to the men and women of the Australian outback, and to all who take up the white man’s burden in the lonely places” (10). The term “white man’s burden” is one Hill uses a number of times in her texts and is attributed to Rudyard Kipling, popular writer and “laureate of the new imperialism” (White *Inventing* 78). The term is associated with a masculine national type who came to be identified with the outposts of empire and the bush: “the adventurer ready to take up the burden of empire, the ordinary soldier at the outposts of empire, the settler civilising its fringes” (78). Richard White describes this character as embodying values such as commonsense and decency, with the emphasis “on masculinity, and on masculine friendships and team-work, or ‘mateship’”, and encompassing “all the clichés—man of action, white man, manliness, the common man, war as a test of manhood” (83). In this way Hill endorses and repeats dominant hegemonic discourses. She does, however, include women in the role of taking up the white man’s burden and admires the (few) women who are with the men at the fringes of the nation.

Hill's calls to populate the North matched the expansionist rhetoric of the period. Interspersed in her tall tales of unusual characters and feats are effusions about the idyllic life to be had there, optimism for its future, and exhortations for people to come and see for themselves: "It is a clean life, and a free life, infinitely to be preferred to the squalid idleness of the back-streets of cities" (*Loneliness* 314). Meaghan Morris recognises Hill's contribution to promoting the frontier regions as part of "an inclusive national story", writing that remote Australia in Hill's texts is "not just an experimental zone designed for urban cultural fantasy but also a real social space in which new possibilities for community originate, become actual and develop concrete shape" ("The Great Australian Loneliness" 244). Hill imagines "a land of promise for a multitude of people" ("Following the Star" 15), where "[g]ood roads are now to be made, and the day is coming when the 'Top End' of Australia will be a tourists' delight" ("Rugged Are the Ranges" 29). She wrote about irrigating the Murray River Valley in *Water into Gold* (1937) and the Flying Doctor Service in *Flying Doctor Calling* (1947). Modernisation was changing the north-west in a positive way as old ways of life, which Hill considered should be remembered, were fading from view in the modern nation. She concludes *The Great Australian Loneliness* on a positive note: "Even as I write, the contours of the map are coming clearer. The aeroplane, the radio, and the motor-car are changing the face of nature, and the king-tide of colonization is setting to the full" (340). This optimism and vision for a bright future permeate Hill's texts even as she tells stories of hardship, perseverance and failure.

In drawing attention to the marginal spaces of Australia's frontier Hill participated in a complex re-imagining and re-working of Australian identity and possibility in these regions. Her anecdotal character studies put a personal face to the region. While some of the stories are fantastical (suggesting exaggeration), they are at the same time intimate and

occasionally poignant; stories of a region and people outside common urban experience. Hill was both complicit with hegemonic discourse and resistant to it by boldly stepping outside gendered boundaries and presenting the others she encountered in accessible ways for a wide audience. The space Hill writes about becomes “fragmented, multi-dimensional, contradictory, and provisional” (Blunt and Rose 7) as she participates in one discursive construction amongst others. While sometimes reiterating and confirming common tropes (harsh life, gallant bushman, childlike native), Hill goes beyond these stereotypes, presenting individuals and details of life on the frontier that bring it to life from a multitude of perspectives. By exposing such differences her texts offer “[c]ounter-narratives of the nation”, which Homi Bhabha argues “continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb[ing] those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (*Location* 213). Hill claims to “have learned a little of the amazing private life of this Australia” (*Loneliness* 10), and through her travels “was beginning to know [her] Australia” (114). She is like the (mostly male) explorer figure White describes as permeating Australian travel writing who demonstrated the constant ambiguity of the Australian sense of place “not simply through his imperial gaze, but also through his mode of travelling rather than settling the land” (“Travel, Writing and Australia” 6). Hill’s role was to bring remote regions and the inhabitants of them to the lounge rooms of urban Australians, and to “write a saga of the silent pioneers” (*The Territory* 4) in an act of inscription that would be passed on and added to by future generations.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Development Versus Preservation:

#### Henrietta Drake-Brockman and Mary Durack's *Walkabout* Writing

This chapter examines Henrietta Drake-Brockman and Mary Durack's representations of themselves and modernity and development in the remote regions of north-western Australia through their *Walkabout* articles. Drake-Brockman travelled extensively in the north-west in the company of her husband as part of his work as Commissioner for the North West, and also on her own as a freelance writer contributing to newspapers and magazines. Her travel was mainly concerned with reporting on large-scale developments in the north-west. Durack's writing did not focus on travel, hence my analysis of her work here is brief, examining representations of development in the north-west and an article discussing a road-trip across the Nullarbor with friends. More detailed discussion of the way Durack positions herself in her writing is undertaken in Part Three, since her key concerns were the relationships of white settlers to the land and the welfare of Aborigines.

#### Drake-Brockman's Australia: "land of the future"

Drake-Brockman's travels in north-western Australia inspired her to write about the region. As discussed in Part One, her initial trip with husband Geoffrey in his role as Commissioner for the North-West inspired her first novel, *Blue North*. In a later *Walkabout* article she expressed her strong connection to the region: "Too long ago I was enmeshed by fine unbreakable threads of fascination—infatuation, if you will" ("Sky Track Record" 18). Drake-Brockman celebrated the uniqueness of the Australian environment in her writing. Her articles for *Walkabout* contain romantic descriptions of country that is varied and beautiful: "the exquisite, often dramatic, hues of Australia . . . dispel forever the absurd legend of a

colourless land" ("Sky Track" 15). While still describing the country in terms of its vastness, emptiness and remoteness, Drake-Brockman's accounts did not display the "morbid nationalism" identified by Michael Cathcart, which lamented the notion of a drab, monotonous landscape and "the melancholia associated with the Dead Heart [which] had become a core national ethos" (215). Indeed, this is the case for all the writers examined here. They extolled Australia's immense diversity and wonders that were there, according to Hill, for those with "seeing eyes" ("Along the Last Lost Border" 43). Drake-Brockman's enthusiasm is communicated in articles that invoked interest in Australia's further reaches.

The vision of the modern nation in Drake-Brockman's writing is utopian, full of potential and promise. She travelled by plane, train and motor vehicle into remote areas of Australia being developed to increase "expansion and wealth" ("Water Means Wealth" 5). For Drake-Brockman, "Australia is essentially a land of the future" (11) and she celebrated modern progress in her articles. She represented the remote north-west Australian landscape as brimming with potential for opportunity, development and progress. While acknowledging the achievements of the pioneers lauded by Hill, Drake-Brockman's *Walkabout* articles emphasise the heroic achievements of modern Australians: "By foot, by beast, by train, by air" she celebrates "the progress of mankind in defying distance". The "Nullarbor was conquered" ("On Wings to the West" 5) with the building of the trans-continental railway. Agriculture is contributing to the spread of civilisation: "New patterns of cultivation drove back the wilderness" (7). She is a passionate advocate for ambitious projects such as damming the Ord River (a project with which her engineer husband was involved):

If we are to expand, to develop as a whole, to lose our present restricted condition of being a fringe-country with the majority of our people and most of our amenities

crammed into coastal cities . . . we must all develop a water-conscience . . . Water means growth, growth means wealth, wealth means power. (“Water Means Wealth” 6)

Her promotion of commercial opportunities was not motivated by capitalist or commercial self-interest but appears to have been motivated by a genuine desire to see the country succeed as a modern, economically viable nation and to dispel the “menace of emptiness in the West” (“Water Means Wealth” 5). Her robust advocacy of the advantages and possibilities for development was probably influenced by her experiences with Geoffrey on his work-related travels. Like Hill, Drake-Brockman promoted the need to populate remote regions in order for Australia to progress, and to this end she actively participated in a persuasive expansionist rhetoric.

Drake-Brockman’s *Walkabout* articles fed into the optimism surrounding industrial and manufacturing developments after war. The Second World War altered Australians’ outlook and saw a rapid increase in modernisation through industrialisation.<sup>34</sup> The “paranoia and isolationism of the 1920s” that had been intensified by the Depression (White *Inventing* 146) was replaced by the realisation that Australia needed to be competitive in global markets. Thirteen of Drake-Brockman’s *Walkabout* articles were published during the Second World War (1942–1945). Her most prolific year in *Walkabout* was 1946, when six articles were published. The effects of war on the north-west is apparent in these articles. War provided impetus for road-building projects that benefited remote regions; however large areas were neglected during the war as people were evacuated under threat of invasion. In the Kimberley region and Broome, businesses were abandoned and land left to deteriorate as attention was diverted to the war effort elsewhere. Richard White argues

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<sup>34</sup> See White *Inventing Australia* 148-49.

that after World War II Australian manufacturers “encouraged a view of Australia which stressed industrial progress” (*Inventing* 149), and which Drake-Brockman promoted in her articles. Modernisation was crucial for the economic and cultural progress of the nation and Drake-Brockman was an active proponent of its promises and benefits.

Scenes of development in remote regions are spaces of “masculine endeavour” (“Island of Iron” 9) in Drake-Brockman’s articles as “mother-earth is torn up by huge mines” (“Gold” 25); waters are “harness[ed]” (“Research in Kimberley” 12); ore is “forced, by the ingenuity of man, to render up its wealth” (“Gold” 28), and nature is “tamed forever” by the building of the highway across Australia (“Building the East-West Road” 14). These man-made and engineered feats “stand like a pledge made by human will to vanquish time and space” (15), just as the aeroplane and train have “eaten” up “lonely distances” and “altered the rhythms of a country once called ‘the land of wait awhile’” (“Research in Kimberley” 12). Drake-Brockman ascribed the men who worked in these spaces similar qualities to the bushmen of Hill’s narratives: they are hefty, capable, stoic types whose “quietness is the silence of capacity that feels no need for boasting, the voiceless ease of familiarity that is scarcely aware of a dangerous and dramatic way of life” (“Sky-Lines in the Forest” 11). In this way, the present occupants of the north-west continued the character traits and traditions of the past. The bush myth however, is being replaced with a celebration of modern enterprise as the nation enters a new phase.

When she was not travelling with her husband, Drake-Brockman moved through these masculinised spaces as a professional traveller relying on the helpfulness and “good will” of men (“The Blue Asbestos Gorges” 16), much like Hill. She slept uncomplainingly in awkward places and travelled by whatever means of transport was available, but we do not see her actively participating as Hill did (clearing roads, crewing on board ship). So too, on



occasion, she represents herself as the first woman in these remote places: the “first woman to visit The Gorge” (“Research in Kimberley” 16); the first car to go through the Kimberley after the wet (13). She is careful to construct an acceptable feminine persona in her narratives, and portrays herself behaving modestly in these circumstances: she segregates herself from her male companions when she goes for a swim and depicts herself writing alone in her lodgings. Unlike Hill she does not draw overt attention to her status as a professional traveller, yet her articles display detailed knowledge of history and facts about the regions she moves through and the industrial projects she reports on while maintaining a conversational tone. She addresses readers directly—“By the way . . .”; “Which reminds me. . .”, and “Well you must not forget, . . . readers” (“Where the East Meets the West” 25)—drawing them into narratives which are told with confident authority. Hers is a model of travel narrator Jack Warwick describes as one who presents themselves as

central actor and witness and is the unifying factor for information . . . First-person narrative does not necessarily lead to introspection; there are few scraps of information about the authors outside their travels, and the traveller is rather an emblematic figure. (“Imperial Design” 54)

In the same way Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston argue that *Walkabout* “encouraged an active, affective and experiential engagement with particular places and people” (7), Drake-Brockman’s confident, engaging tone creates a persona readers trust to lead them in the exploration of regions outside their realm of experience.

Drake-Brockman was enamoured with and fascinated by remote Australia’s natural features, expressing a traveller’s awe at the country she passed through, yet hers is largely an imperial discourse in so far as the natural landscape is viewed as territory to conquer, offering an “irresistible challenge to the engineering ability of modern-minded man!”

("Water" 7). She is outspoken in her opinions about what is best for these regions, along with offering comments on how the government of the day should respond "in the writer's opinion" ("Gascoyne's Hidden Water" 10) to issues in the north-west. She is like the "self-appointed experts" identified by Tom Griffiths who felt the urge to "pronounce" on topics (178). This is part of the construction of an authoritative narrative persona. She often relays facts and figures relating to aspects of development projects, recording these with an objectivity, "precision and authority" associated with masculine or imperialist travel writing, in which "[a]uthority is derived from objectivity", as Wendy S. Mercer points out more generally about nineteenth-century travel writing (156). Descriptions of the natural landscape are given alongside detailed facts about the amount of cement used to construct the dam wall, for example.<sup>35</sup> Drake-Brockman also mixes objective reportage with more creative description: for example, an electric scoop "looked exactly like an immense rat" as it "rushes out from the trucks, gnaws up a mouthful of ore or mullock, scuttles back, spits it out, and scampers back for more" ("Blue Asbestos" 18). In these ways, Drake-Brockman's writing defies characterisation as either typically feminine or wholly ascribing to dominant masculine tropes.

While she was an advocate for large development projects that irrevocably transformed the landscape, Drake-Brockman's affinity for natural features of the north-west permeated her accounts in passages of rich description. When writing of the asbestos mines in Western Australia, for example, she came across one gorge whose natural features she felt should be preserved as a national park. For Drake-Brockman, Dale's Gorge is "the ravine of one's most romantic dreaming":

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<sup>35</sup> In "A Dam is Raised" (1951), Drake-Brockman provides detailed facts and figures about the construction of a dam wall.

How shall I describe this Australian high-light? With its stark arid rocks and its fern-  
 ledged pools, it is unlike any other place I have seen. So strange that it recalled no  
 image from Australian poets, but Coleridge's dream-poem of *Kubla Khans*. ("Blue  
 Asbestos" 19)

She considers it "imperative" to preserve the gorge as a National Park, imagining tourism  
 developments which could be planned so:

the immense and glorious sense of isolated grandeur which is half the charm need  
 never be broken . . . With adequate Government forethought and planning, we can  
 keep our national high-lights bright, available, and still enchanted. (19)

In Drake-Brockman's accounts, conservation is touted alongside development. This  
 seemingly disparate interest was common to *Walkabout* as a whole, as Mitchell Rolls argues:

The ostensible norms of progress, of peopling and watering the continent, of  
 forever increasing primary production, of celebrating instances of winning-the-  
 battle-against-nature . . . are temporarily displaced by a shift in genre to natural  
 history and the foregrounding of concerns for conservation. ("Flora" 20)

These seemingly discordant concerns contribute to a reimagining of place that "was not  
 reproducing hegemonic forms of radical nationalism, but more an ambivalence that was  
 ripe with possibilities" (14). If their focus on remote regions revealed incongruous avenues  
 for the area's future potential, Hill, Drake-Brockman Durack and Adam-Smith envisaged  
 Australia as a modern nation of expanding possibilities.

The dissonances in Drake-Brockman's vision for the nation reflect wider tensions in  
 Australia during this period. She lauds the "magnificent gigantic, awe-inspiring" ("Blue  
 Asbestos" 17) countryside alongside the harnessing of natural resources for human  
 "prosperity and comfort" ("Water" 6). Drake-Brockman can often marry the two: in the case

of the asbestos gorges, their immensity is so profound “that these gorges are not so greatly disfigured by these human activities as is too frequently the case” (“Blue Asbestos” 17).

Likewise the structures associated with the Munwaring Weir do “not detract from the beauty of the natural bed of the Helena River” (“A Dam is Raised” 34). These attempts to reconcile development with preservation of natural features are indicative of “postcolonial anxieties peculiar to settler societies in the aftermath of the war [and] were a corollary of [the] continuing process of maturation” in Australia, as Rolls and Anna Johnston point out (94).<sup>36</sup> Drake-Brockman and Hill’s texts “disrupt imperial claims of transparent space and mimetic representation” by revealing other ways of imagining Australia and its people which strive to be distinctly Australian and which celebrate this uniqueness (Blunt and Rose 11).

Amanda Laugesen writes that Drake-Brockman saw herself:

very much as an *Australian* writer, writing stories *about* Australia . . . [H]er work explored ideas about what it meant to be Australian, but most particularly, Drake-Brockman was seeking a historical narrative that could tie a native-born generation to a new land, and to articulate why and how this generation was distinctive and not purely European. (116; emphasis in orig.)

Like Hill, Drake-Brockman sought to identify Australia as an unfettered modern nation with its own literature, identity and traditions.

While Drake-Brockman envisaged a future of progress and development in the remote regions, north-western Australia is still other in her imaginings of place, possessing a mystical dimension. Australia by this time was an urban nation clinging to the littoral regions, and cities were increasingly seen as places of modern sophistication, stemming from the emergence of a wider cultural life in the 1930s (White *Inventing* 147). The city in Drake-

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<sup>36</sup> Rolls expands on this in “Flora, Fauna and Concrete”: 3-28.

Brockman's articles, by contrast, is depicted as a place of constrictive, reductive impersonality: "In cities nowadays many a man wilts beneath the pressure of a world so crammed with people that he feels lost—an excrescence, a creature of no account" ("Spell of the North" 9). In contrast, remote Australia is a place where a man can get

his perspective right: he is indeed an infinitesimal speck in the universe, but also is he the lord of creation . . . As he fights a lone battle he feels neither lost nor unwanted, for he is too intent upon the grim and fascinating task of possessing a new land. (9)

The "spell of the north" is tied up in conquest, possession and battling to tame the land but also with a "subtle" magic (8) which is elusive in its articulation. Drake-Brockman attributes this mystical charm to the area's "freedom shorn of false conventions . . . freedom from stiff collars and office hours" (8), and to its "intimacy" (8). This intimacy stems from human's reliance on each other in remote regions, and is also borne out of close connection to the land: "The oldest land on earth—and the youngest. A land goading you into action, yet lulling you to mooch through the years with a swag and billy-can, worrying about nothing" (9). Drake-Brockman claims that this romantic view of the frontier regions stems from her own connection to them. It is also tied up with her vision for the future, which involves inevitable change as the country "matures" and "the magic [of the North] is doomed to die, as dies the magic of all youth" (9). Her nostalgia for this earlier feeling of spiritual connection to the north-west has an elegiac quality as the inevitability of changes wrought by modernity penetrate these regions.

Broome, where she lived for a time, is a central location for Drake-Brockman's affinity with the north-west. She wrote about it in two articles for *Walkabout*, and her first two novels are set in this remote West Australian town. Drake-Brockman considered

Broome to possess an “indescribable exotic quality of languor and romance” and to have “a knack of assuming character itself” in fiction (“Broome and its Tragic Yesterday” 35). She felt “it must remain an integral part of the Australian legend” (36). By setting her novels in and around Broome she ensured it would take its place in history. Years after she left the area, Drake-Brockman describes flying into Broome and the feelings this evoked: “the familiar tender turquoise of Broome seas once again made my breath catch” (35). The exotic location and its varied population also appealed to Durack and Hill. Durack described the area as one that both “fascinated and repelled” in an article for *Walkabout* (“A Collector in Broome” 35). Hill also found romance in the town and its surrounds:

‘The soft pedal on romance,’ said my better journalistic self, and I found romance, wearing size tens, walking shell-grit footpaths all day and every day, for the little white town is a novelist’s paradise, where truth is far stranger than fiction.

(*Loneliness* 63)

The remote regions held these travellers in their thrall. Like other *Walkabout* contributors, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith “sought to create and to satiate a local interest and curiosity in the diversity of [Australia] through articles that represent and encourage travel as a cultural practice central to the emergent nation” (Rolls and Johnston 49). The middlebrow attributes of their writing engaged a wide audience. They communicated the intensity of their feelings through their narratives as they moved across the landscape.

### **Flight and “the new rhythm of the air”**

Drake-Brockman was aware that air travel as a technology of modernity was essential to the emerging nation. She describes feeling “the new rhythm of the air, which, property [sic] handled, must mean so much to the development of Australia, land of vast empty tracts, at

present unproductive, and of nomadic-minded inhabitants" ("Sky Track Record" 15).

Describing a flight across the country from Melbourne to Perth, Drake-Brockman likens the plane to a live creature: "a giant silk-worm moth [that] quivered and shook" ("On Wings to the West" 6). It has "gilded wings" and its ascent is rapturous: "The roar of our going, the throb of our engines in space, recalled to me the grand symphonies of the Finnish composer Sibelius" (6). She positions herself as a wide-eyed passenger, feeling the full effects of travelling by air, compared to the pilot and crew for whom the trip and mode of transport is routine: "For them it was just another day!" (11). Air travel altered the traveller's perspective of the landscape and opened new possibilities in remote regions.

The landscape viewed from the height of the aircraft is another world, "like a relief map" ("On Wings" 5) seen in patterns of colour quickly sailing past like the clouds that occasionally obscure the view below: "We sailed serenely alone in an immeasurable world that was utterly impersonal . . . We were alone in our sunlit glory . . . [T]his was a vapour universe we traversed" (6). For Drake-Brockman and her readers, aerial vision operates in the way Robert Dixon describes, as the master trope "of both a modern and a colonial way of seeing. The viewer has extended to him the privileges of modernity: mobility, vision, the ability to see" the landscape from an altered perspective (*Prosthetic* 79). The land viewed from high in the "vapour universe" revealed "[m]an-created patterns, incredibly neat and attractive" ("On Wings" 6). Wheat fields, which "on earth . . . must appear a little monotonous" are transformed from the perspective of the plane: "from sky-high it was fascinating. It looked, I thought, like an aboriginal drawing T-squared off by white men's laborious skill" (6). This view from the plane is a colonial vision of satisfaction, marvelling at the signs of conquest and possession beneath.

In her articles, evidence of white man's progress is contrasted with what Drake-Brockman associates as the primitive space of Aboriginal Australia. Areas that remain in their natural state with no evidence of white "conquest" are signs of the "aboriginal world" ("On Wings" 7). From the ground, gum trees on the outskirts of the city of Melbourne are likened to "aboriginal outposts defying the city menace . . . dark and tattered beneath a waning moon" (5) in contrast to the red flames of the runway lights which guard white man's achievements. Later, from the air:

Green of crops was the solitary alien note. Everywhere else were native reds and browns and ochres, with road-tracks looking exactly like animal tracks drawn by aboriginal artists, with gorgeous snake-tracks of water-ways, dark-brown across the tobacco earth. (6)

Aboriginality is associated with undeveloped wilderness in contrast to white man's progress and the green of new life: "New patterns of cultivation drove back the wilderness" (7). It is as if in Drake-Brockman's utopian new Australia, Aborigines are already in and of the past—ancient, mystical, tattered, waning—needing to be neatly "squared off" or kept in another time and place, rendered non-existent, by white men's laborious skill.

While *Blue North* and *Sheba Lane* explored and evoked Australia's past, Drake-Brockman's articles for *Walkabout* celebrated the future, progress, and change. She acknowledged that times were changing:

Overhead the stars wink. The earth is warm, sweet-scented, amorous—the North weaves her magic spell . . . Will the spell of the North vanish forever once she has been tamed by man? ("Spell of the North" 9)

For Drake-Brockman it is inevitable that the country (personified as she) is tamed by man and this is a good thing. Her sense of connection is closely related to possession,



development, expansion and future potential but also to the uniqueness of the environment. Drake-Brockman saw a “New Australia that is forming, slowly but surely” (“Service with Wings” 11). The past has a fading, mystical quality, mirroring the dying race trope that was prevalent at the time. The past is like the scenery passing beneath the plane: “below, was an aboriginal world, shadow-filled: a sort of angel-eyed glimpse of our earth as but a small planet rushing through space. Queer. Fascinating” (“On Wings” 7). Drake-Brockman’s *Walkabout* articles evince what Paul Smethurst argues are “the overlapping of conflicting spaces and temporalities” (Introduction 7) produced by travel writing: evidence of the past remains but the modern world is encroaching and pushing it back, projecting “order from the imperial centre [or Australian cities] to the farthest peripheries” (5). The past exists as a pale backdrop of another time that has all but disappeared—out of time and place—replaced by a bright, utopian future of modern technology, expansion and development.

Drake-Brockman’s speaking position in these articles is aptly identified by Kay Schaffer: one who “identified with the land, either on behalf of British imperialism or Australian nationhood, imagin[ing] it as . . . an object to be possessed, an other to be incorporated into or appropriated by the self” (*Women* 62). Imperial discourse highlights women’s subject positions within a settler colonial framework where they are consciously or unconsciously caught between structures of power which are both integrating and alienating. In the mid-twentieth century, traces of this discourse are evident in Drake-Brockman’s writing. Hers is an example of women’s writing that supports “even as it seems to challenge, the [masculine] codes of national identity” (107). According to Schaffer, the woman writer “cannot escape the relations which structure her difference . . . [I]f she speaks on behalf of the land as it has always already been conceived in the discourse, the woman writer takes up a position within the male imaginary” (107). None of the women

writers in this study can escape this dominant discourse, but they push at its edges and transform it in subtle ways (even by making a living as professional writers involved in cultural representation during a time of transition in Australia). Their often contradictory representations extended imaginings of place and the future direction of the nation.

### **Western Australia and modern developments in Durack's *Walkabout* writing**

Australia's remote north-west was also a focus for Mary Durack who lived for parts of her life there as the daughter of a cattle pioneer. Much of Durack's writing was concerned with the Kimberley region which her family were amongst the first white people to settle. She formed a strong connection to this region which she described as her "spirit country" (*Sons* 299). Her inscriptions of Western Australia, in particular the remote north-western frontier spaces, show another facet of this region and its significance in the national story. Durack's family histories are foundational stories of pioneering endeavour revealing the complex relationships between white settlers, the land they occupied and Aborigines, which are discussed in Part Three. Here I examine Durack's *Walkabout* articles to consider how she represented herself and the potential effects of modern industry in these regions.

Durack positioned herself as a modern woman with authority to speak about her country as a member of one of the pioneering families, and as a woman born in Australia and raising a family of her own. Her texts are compelling for how she writes from the ambiguous position she occupied: as privileged coloniser, woman, and self-appointed advocate for Aborigines and the Australian nation. Like Drake-Brockman, she is confident in expressing her views on fellow Australians and what she considers Australia needs. As Susan Sheridan argues:

If 'postwar modernity' is understood in terms of both everyday life and the war of ideas, women writers of the time were positioned on the fulcrum of these two

forces . . . They tended to direct their energies to such causes as Aboriginal rights, refugees, conservation and peace, without aligning themselves to political parties.

*(Nine Lives 16-18)*

These were key interests in Durack's writing. As noted in Part One, she fulfilled a duty as a daughter in a patriarchy, living and working on the cattle stations and faithfully recording the family history, as well as a traditional role as wife and mother alongside her writing career.

Hill and Drake-Brockman each noted the Durack family's contribution to the nation. Hill's association with the Duracks began through travel. Hill joined Durack's father on a section of one of her many journeys throughout Australia and stayed at the Durack's cattle stations, experiencing a fragment of their itinerant life firsthand. She compared the family's trek overland from Queensland to Biblical journeys of the Old Testament, writing: "Through its long and patient history, Duracks of three generations have given the work of their lives to this Kimberley country" ("North-Westward Ho!" 10). Drake-Brockman travelled with Kim Durack (Mary's brother) from Argyle Station (one of the Durack properties) to the site of the Ord River dam ("Research in Kimberley") and also acknowledged the Duracks contribution to the nation's expansion into the frontier regions.<sup>37</sup> Both Drake-Brockman and Durack wrote about the engineering project to dam the Ord River. A life of movement in the remote regions was one that Durack knew well and it informed her sense of belonging as a white Australian. Hers was a story of unsettlement as her family were continually on the move in remote regions managing vast properties and various business interests. Durack herself moved between the city of Perth, a house in Broome, and the family's Kimberley cattle stations throughout her childhood and adult life.

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<sup>37</sup> Argyle Station was flooded in the damming of the Ord.

The country Durack describes in her *Walkabout* articles is one of progress due to engineering feats and the establishment of modern industry. She writes of a “new phase” in northern Australia due to changes being brought about by modernisation (“North Australia” 25-27). The isolation that hampered many ventures in her father and grandfather’s time is being overcome by modern transport and communication. Travel by air was an interest due to her husband’s company, MacRobertson-Miller Aviation. Established in 1928, the airline operated throughout Western Australia and into the Northern Territory. The company amalgamated with Airlines of Western Australia in 1955 and in 1963 came under the control of Ansett Transport Ltd. Miller remained a director until the late 1960s (Byrne n.pag.). Drake-Brockman wrote about the changes brought about by MacRobertson-Miller Aviation in *Walkabout* (1946):

I doubt if anywhere in the world there is another air-route that offers sharper contrasts or longer mileage within the boundaries, not merely of a single continent, but a single State, than the regular route of the MacRobertson-Miller Aviation mail line in Western Australia. As for its diversions (in every sense of the word), they cover a field as romantic and as amusing and as tragic as the history of the vast terrain now so easily and comfortably winged over. (“Sky Track” 13)

The airline is one of the many benefits of modernisation for the north-west region. Durack discussed the company in terms of the opportunities for development it offered to remote parts of Australia, rather than the unusual route and circumstances that Drake-Brockman points out.

Like her fellow *Walkabout* contributors, Durack participated in frank boosterism and advertising in promoting the need to develop the frontier regions. She used rhetorical flair to persuasively advocate the benefits of modern industry and technology in overcoming the

vast distances and conditions that had made it difficult to access the remote regions. Her father was constantly frustrated in his efforts to secure markets for beef due to the difficulties of transporting it from north-western Australia. "Beef on the Wing" (1951) is an article about the formation of Air Beef Limited, a company with which her husband's airline was involved to transport beef by air for shipment to local and overseas markets. The piece was written the year after her father had sold his cattle properties after years of "disappointments and misplaced hopes" ("North Australia" 27). A 1942 article about her father outlines the problems faced by earlier generations who had none of the benefits of modern transport and communication. This was all changing in Durack's lifetime and her articles celebrated the positive effect of modern development for the economic viability of the region.

Durack writes of the "urgent" need ("Beef" 15) for development in the north-west, claiming that Air Beef Limited has already helped by bringing

a feeling of hope and faith in the future to a country grown weary of unfulfilled promises and long-range recommendations that never take shape. Believing where many have doubted, acting where others have hesitated, it has started up the pendulum of progress in a neglected land, and if it does no more than stimulate into application competitive developmental schemes, the enthusiasm of those who have laboured to fulfil a dream of cattle on the wing will not have been in vain. (15)

According to Durack, "Air Beef brings to the country an opportunity of putting into practice new and wiser principles for 'farming' rather than 'mining' the land" (15). Even in Durack's lifetime the principles of farming practiced by her family were being questioned for their

detrimental effects on the land, and were a concern of her brothers, Reg and Kim.<sup>38</sup> The generation of Duracks to which Mary belonged were learning more about the country of their birth and were open to new ways of responding to the environment.

Durack's articles also fed into the optimism surrounding industry and manufacturing following the Second World War. In 1945 she wrote about the building of the Captain Cook Dock in Sydney, ending the article by remarking:

It must be classed as an undertaking of world as well as Commonwealth importance, and in a day when international trade and travel are again part of our lives we may hope to see the ships of all nations come peacefully here to dock. ("Captain Cook Dock" 12)

The Kwinana Oil Refinery in Western Australia is seen "as part of a forward movement of State industry . . . West Australians are aware of a rising tide of prosperity and optimism such as has not existed here before" ("Kwinana" 20). This overt promotion of heavy industry coupled with Durack's nostalgia for the past, and hints at the need to preserve natural features, are part of the "productive tensions" Rolls and Johnston (9) examine in *Walkabout* more generally, revealing the magazine's engagement with an emerging global outlook that was in tension with an increased awareness of the importance of conservation.

Only one of Durack's *Walkabout* articles shows the author engaging in personal travel. "Friendly Highway" (1964) describes a road trip across the country with four female friends. The group of women are travelling from Perth to Adelaide, a trip of "1,700 miles by car" ("Friendly" 10) covering much the same ground as Drake-Brockman in "On Wings to the West" (1944), but from a different perspective and in the opposite direction. For the road-trippers, the pace is as slow or fast as they choose. The freedom of travelling by car allows

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<sup>38</sup> "Kim had plans to redeem the land, diversify its use, repair the damage of the cattle industry and make the Kimberley fertile" (Niall 7).

for impromptu deviations and stops along the route. The travellers take advantage of this, calling in at towns and remote communities along the way. An unplanned overnight stop-over in Kalgoorlie, for example, allowed the women time to look over the town and gain a sense of its atmosphere, as well as to meet local characters such as a passer-by who introduces himself as the “oldest Kalgoorlie-born inhabitant”, and who regales them with his memories of the town (11). In much the same way, they meet another “friendly old inhabitant” on a stop in Norseman. On the suggestion of the old man, they drive to the top of a hill behind the town and discover a view of “awe-inspiring emptiness [across] vast, treeless expanses” (11). The view reinforces the isolation of Western Australia:

this is all part of the great ghost land that jealously guards Western Australia from her more progressive sister States. Modern transport has weakened its defences, but Perth is still 1,338 air miles from its neighbouring State capital, Adelaide, and the journey merely serves to highlight the void that lies between. (11)

The “void” between Perth and the Eastern States is a liminal space out of time with the more settled areas of Australia. Richard White argues that the sense of separation between eastern and western Australia stemmed from the nineteenth century, and saw the development of “independent colonial identities” between States:

Victoria was proud that it out-shone the others in political and economic progress; South Australians felt superior because they were without the convict taint; Queensland was the new frontier; Tasmania was the most English; Western Australia the most isolated and suspicious of the rest. New South Wales was . . . the background against which the other colonies defined themselves. (*Inventing* 63-64)

Durack's texts discuss the sense of isolation and difference of Western Australia to the other States; this was changing, however, as the nation's imagined borders shrank as a consequence of modern technology.

Durack and her companions experienced a different landscape and way of being on their trip, which was one of adventure and shared camaraderie with other travellers:

Fellow travellers are few and far enough between to become humanly interesting, and no one fails to stop and exchange reports on the road. Even a big yellow dingo, trotting on some unlawful occasion through the salt bush, stops and grins at us.

("Friendly" 12)

At a stop along the route in a motel "with most of the comforts demanded by pampered modern travellers", they are welcomed by a friendly group of Nullarbor residents, who Durack says, cannot "understand how this district, to them so full of interest, variety and genuine mateship, should be described as 'monotonous'" (11). Durack agrees with the residents' assessment; for her, as for Hill, Drake-Brockman and Adam-Smith, Australia was a land of vibrancy, colour and potential.

The road trip across the country changes the travellers for a brief period, but on reaching the city and civilisation they quickly return to the performance of being in an urban environment:

After the long, empty desert stretch, so much evidence of the controlling hand of man is almost overpowering . . . We have already begun to behave conventionally, to talk about hairdressing appointments, where to hide the vehicle until it can be cleaned, and how to avoid being picked up for vagrancy while finding an hotel. (13)

The women experienced a feeling of escape and freedom from convention as they travelled across the vast desert space. The space between cities is representative of another world; a



passage in time that enabled the travellers to leave their normal lives and circumstances for this exotic space within their own country, yet it felt like another place altogether from their usual experience of Australia. Durack and her friends had been “lifted . . . out of historical time” (or “real” metropolitan time in this modern case), during their interlude between city spaces (S. Smith 8). Durack’s record contains what Sidonie Smith describes as “experiences of sublime encounter with landscape, an encounter through which [the travel writer] celebrated the intensity of sensuality released from . . . constraints forced upon the . . . body at home” (7). The women once again conform to social conventions and expected performances of gender when back under “the controlling hand of man” in the space of the city (“Friendly” 13).

Durack acknowledged that Australia had become an urban nation, yet considered that the remote regions indelibly influenced national identity. These were, of course, the regions that had strongly shaped Durack’s sense of identity and those which had been mythologised in poetry and literature from the late-nineteenth century. The sentiments she expressed here are similar to Hill and Drake-Brockman who also locate the “real Australia” in these regions. “The Scroll on Which We Write” (1965), Durack’s last article in *Walkabout*, describes the colonisation of Australia in the form of a pitch for a story by a “pioneer science-fiction writer of the last century” to his publisher (“Scroll” 27). Having the publisher find the proposal too fanciful for a book is Durack’s way of highlighting the unique history of the country. She continues the article in her own voice, writing: “Since then [1870, the imagined time-period of the imagined book proposal] the fantastic experiment has gone rolling on to create the sort of Australia we live in to-day” (28). After drawing attention to the fantastical or improbable events of Australia’s history, Durack outlines the various types

and classes who make up the Australian people, including differences in character which exist between the various states (28).

Like Hill, Durack sees modern Australians as still pioneering: "In terms of history none of us, except the aborigines, can claim to have been here very long, and between us we may better define and more closely approach the dream of nationhood that inspired but eluded our forefathers" ("Scroll" 30). The effects of modernisation and a changing global situation cannot be ignored: "The second world war and its aftermath did much to change the face and outlook of Australia. We know that we can no longer isolate ourselves from the fate of the world" (30). Durack's article displays the transformation of thought taking place in Australia at the time. She recognised the benefits of multiculturalism, rather than expressing the fear of racial mixing and miscegenation which had driven the White Australia Policy. She saw a new economic and social confidence emerging in modern Australia, which she welcomed. Nostalgia for the remote regions remains:

Though few Australians would put up for long with the discomforts of outback life most share a sentimental yearning for the bush, and feel the great, empty expanses where the million-acre properties run out into the desert wilderness of the last wandering tribespeople to be 'the real Australia'. (29)

Like her fellow contributors to *Walkabout*, Durack had a complex relationship with Australia and her place in it. She was one of a second generation of Australians to be born here; as such her connection to the land and its people was different from her grandfather, an Irish immigrant, and even her father who, while born here, was still strongly aware of his Irish heritage. Durack worked this out in her books and articles, in an ongoing negotiation of national identity in modern Australia. Like the other women, writing within a masculine hegemony, Durack could not escape the influence of dominant discourses; however she

does more than subscribe blindly to such ideologies, questioning the past and seeking new ways of imagining the future in her texts.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Tasmania and the Railways:

#### Patsy Adam-Smith's Travel Writing

In the first chapter of her book of travels, *Footloose in Australia* (1973), Patsy Adam-Smith writes: "I have never been stumped for an excuse to travel. There was always a story somewhere" (3). Adam-Smith describes herself as having "loose feet" and being set with the seal of "wanderlust" (5, 1). From the time she left home at sixteen to join the army as a nurse until her death at the age of seventy-seven, Adam-Smith travelled widely throughout Australia and overseas. In conservative 1950s Australia, Adam-Smith defied convention, stepping outside the traditional, feminised space of the home to embark on a roving existence on the road and at sea, often living and working as the only female amongst a group of men. Adam-Smith's move to Tasmania as a young woman was the catalyst for her writing career. While her early experience of 1950s Tasmania was repressive it became the launching pad for her life on the road beyond the confines of domesticity. Movement was central to Adam-Smith's life as an independent modern woman. She used the experiences and stories gathered on her travels as material for freelance articles and books across her writing career.

The circumstances that brought about Adam-Smith's move to Tasmania arose out of the tumultuous time of war. World War II provided Adam-Smith with opportunities but also challenging personal experiences that initially tempered her capacity to display the optimism evident in Drake-Brockman and Durack's *Walkabout* articles. Adam-Smith met her soldier husband in the northern Australian state of Queensland where she was serving as a nurse in the army. He was medically discharged toward the end of World War II and she was

obliged to follow him to Tasmania to live with his family. She found herself plunged from tropical Queensland into the cold climate of Tasmania and a world of “old people as opposed to the vital warm youth I had lived with for so long” (*Goodbye* 87). In her second volume of autobiography, *Good-Bye Girlie* (1994), Adam-Smith described her first visit to Tasmania as “brief and unhappy and full of foreboding, but it was not crippling” (88). After that first visit she described sobbing each time she “forced [herself] to return to that island state . . . It was as if I was exchanging paradise for perdition . . . I cried and cried inside and out, as the coast of the mainland of Australia faded behind and the island threw its loneliness at me” (90). She described feeling “earthbound, pegged out like a sacrifice” (112) and the object of disapproval in the small northern Tasmanian community of Ulverstone, a complete contrast to the time she served as a nurse in the military hospitals, which for her was “a time of excitement, fun, horror, pain, love and purpose” (*Ship* 4). Along with the difficulties of adjusting to a new home and married life, Adam-Smith found the 1950s “surely the most uninteresting, soul-destroying decade Australia has passed through” (4). Stemming from these inauspicious beginnings, Adam-Smith’s relationship with Tasmania remained ambivalent and feelings of displacement contributed her itinerant existence.

The feelings of confinement Adam-Smith felt in 1950s Tasmania were partly due to the place women were expected to occupy. In his analysis of Australian national identity, Richard White writes that the role of women in society during this period

was two-edged. On the one hand they were central . . . as the great consumers, dominating family, home and garden . . . However this role was a very restrictive one . . . Women had at last been given a role in the dominant image of Australia, but it was one that worked to keep them in their place. (*Inventing* 165)

Adam-Smith recognised that as “a newcomer [to Tasmania] I saw what those who had lived there for generations took for granted, and I wanted to tell the world” (*Goodbye* 97). She approached the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) in Hobart and became a “stringer”, reporting on various happenings in the north of the island, and writing articles for a number of popular magazines. This was when her son, Michael Julian, was seven (Michael was born in 1945 when Adam-Smith was twenty-one), and daughter, Cathy Danae, was three (Cathy was born in 1948). Her job as a stringer took place from 1952–1955. Prior to this, when her son was a toddler and she was pregnant with Cathy, Adam-Smith wrote a children’s radio series (including theme song and music) called “Pufftah”, episodes of which were bought by the ABC in Sydney, and Radio 3DB in Melbourne (103–04). In *Goodbye Girlie* she writes that no one in her local community, apart from the librarian, mentioned her work at a time when a woman’s place was firmly tied to the home (104). Actively pursuing an individual career outside the home was stretching the bounds of convention in a conservative society, but possible because of conditions brought about by modernity and areas of work available for women in and around the institutions of middlebrow culture.

Gender, background and marital status were all factors affecting Adam-Smith’s social position. The complex relationship between women writers and cultural history is discussed by Drusilla Modjeska, who remarks that it is “mediated by ideology, by class and by the ways in which women become social beings in the first place” (12). While Modjeska was referring to women writers in the 1930s, Adam-Smith’s position in the 1950s was similar, albeit in a different social climate. Adam-Smith writes that the “1960s were the best times one could have chosen to make a break” (*Goodbye* 162), yet considered that her generation of women in the 1950s “had so much further to leap to fulfilment and had to make such a stupendous effort that we just up and flew” (173). She saw travel as a way out of her domestic

unhappiness. She writes that she “first cut loose from the oppression of convention in the 1950s” and never looked back (170). This was when she began writing freelance articles for newspapers and magazines, establishing a career which was to keep her on the road.

Alexandra Ganser contends that “discursively, the doorstep becomes a sort of demarcation line” between separate spheres: public/private, male/female (69). When women leave the domestic realm, then, it follows that the travel writing they produce critically engages with the public/private dichotomies of space. Despite (or because of) the restrictions she felt were imposed upon her, Adam-Smith looked beyond her personal circumstances to create opportunities to make life more bearable. She created a life of movement to escape what she experienced as the subordination and strictures of domesticity.

The 1950s was marked by “dichotomies of modernity and tradition” as Australia was being transformed by modernisation while remaining conservative in its gender relations, amongst other things (White “Retreat” 90). According to Richard White, these dichotomies were “complicated by the popularity of travel writing” (“Retreat” 90). For White, Australian travel writing “has always straddled the conventional explorer-traveller-tourist hierarchy” (90). Travelling women represented a “form of resistance” when traditionally travel and adventure were a masculine domain; women travellers “had to assert their class, cultural and metropolitan credentials all the more forcefully” than their male counterparts as a result (White “Retreat” 90-91). Adam-Smith seems to have found this the case, declaring at the beginning of *Footloose in Australia*: “If it is necessary for a man to present a good and sufficient reason for heeding the urge to be somewhere else, then it is certain that a woman must invent an even more foxy excuse” (1). Hille Koskela contends that women have to insert themselves boldly in public spaces—to be “spatially confident”—in order to claim a place for themselves in traditionally masculine space (305). According to Koskela, “women’s

ability to use public space . . . is a question of (re)defining and (re)producing space as well as managing the self” (303). Adam-Smith reproduced space for herself, and consequently for other women, through movement as she worked and travelled, colluding with and resisting hegemonic tropes: variously positioning herself as adventurer, traveller and tourist in her texts.

Adam-Smith both openly discussed and elided certain aspects of the ambiguous position she occupied for much of her life as she moved across sectors of society in various professional capacities. Although her words and actions proclaim her as flying in the face of convention and living as an equal with men, certain omissions in her work are telling. One such is evident in *There Was a Ship* (1967), the tale of her years spent at sea around the Tasmanian coastline. There is no mention of her long-term affair with the captain of one of the ships, whom she simply refers to as the “Big Fellow” in the book. In fact she draws attention to the lack of privacy on board ship as an assurance that romantic liaisons between crew members were not possible (or rather that nothing untoward went on in Adam-Smith’s circumstances as the only female member of the crew), writing: “There is little scope on a small ship for dalliance. Lack of privacy is one dissuading factor; another is fatigue” (*Ship* 126). She also mentions taking her children with her on some of the voyages. In *Goodbye Girlie*, written nearly three decades later, she writes of her relationship with the Big Fellow (now called by his Christian name, Alastair), and the difficulties for a woman in her situation carrying on such a romance. (This is despite the fact that her husband was also in an adulterous relationship at the same time). In this way it is apparent that it was not easy for a woman to subvert convention and negotiate her way in traditionally masculine space, even in the relatively progressive 1960s and 1970s. By committing her experiences to the page in this way, by “daring” to go outside traditional feminised spaces, Adam-Smith



participates in “produc[ing] space that is more available for other women. Spatial confidence is a manifestation of power” and a “practice of resistance” (Koskela 316). Maintaining this “spatial confidence” was not straightforward, however, as Adam-Smith’s texts demonstrate.

The equivocal reception Adam-Smith experienced was common for women on the road who were not seen to fit cultural norms.<sup>39</sup> Adam-Smith’s sense of exclusion can be seen as extending from childhood. She discovered in her teenage years that she had been adopted, something she explored in the autobiography of her childhood, *Hear the Train Blow* (1964). Joy Hooton considers that *Hear the Train Blow* is “a conscious attempt to lay the personal memory of estrangement, and is preoccupied with ideas of belonging, kindred and even clannishness, which make the bush myth a particularly consoling one” (307). Adam-Smith found a sense of belonging during her days as an army nurse that she lost again on marrying and moving to Tasmania. She continued to create relationships through travel and work, translating them into entertaining stories. According to Hooton, “[a]s declared outsider, [Adam-Smith] has an emotional affinity with the outsiders and underdogs of depression Australia and with the defensive egalitarianism of the familiar [bush] myth” (307). Her background also lent her texts authenticity as the frequent mention of her working-class roots in the media and reviews noted in Part One indicates. Adam-Smith positioned herself as able to mix across sections of society yet identified most closely with people whose roots were similar to her own.

It is perhaps her feeling of being an outsider that contributed to Adam-Smith’s mixed identification with Tasmania, which she describes as both “terrible” and “entrancing”. She

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<sup>39</sup> See for example, Mills, *Discourses of Difference* (1991); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992); Smith *Moving Lives* (2001), and Ganser *Roads of her Own* (2009).

travelled across most of the island and occupied various professional positions during her time there. She writes of the island:

Conditions in Tasmania bear no resemblance to the legendary Australia of tradition. Because of this the people of the island are Tasmanian, not Australian. Their folk culture is different, their struggles have been different; their pace, outlook, and environment are so different that they are a separate people, as tough and tenacious as the 'mainlanders,' . . . but different. A visitor to Australia who does not tour the island cannot claim to know a thing about it or its people, but a visitor from abroad visiting Tasmania alone of the Australian states cannot be said to know anything at all about Australia or Australians. The subtleties of this distinction would be worthy of a thesis – if any candidate for a Ph.D. had the courage to attempt it.

(*Footloose* 32)

In many ways Adam-Smith's writing about Tasmania is her personal study of the island; her own thesis stemming from an education gained by getting to know the island by land and from the sea.

Adam-Smith's first book, *The North-West Coast* (1955), was published under her married name, Beckett, with the husband of a friend, Piet Maree. Maree was the publisher; Adam-Smith supplied the text and photographs, and, "for an additional sum . . . [also] volunteered to get the advertising" (*Goodbye* 107). According to Adam-Smith, the book "was a sort of descriptive, historical thing" (107) promoting the north-west region of Tasmania and its businesses. It reads as she describes, covering the landscape, wildlife, attractions and industries of north-west Tasmania at the time of publication. In the introduction, the publisher writes: "we have embarked upon a modern voyage of discovery" in order to encourage tourists to come and "see the real beauty of this lovely North-West

coast of ours" (*North-West* 3). Following typical middlebrow conventions, the book aimed to educate and enthuse Tasmanians and those beyond the shores to discover more of the country surrounding them. *The North-West Coast* followed a similar brief to that stated in *Walkabout*: to "intrigue the armchair traveller . . . and . . . inspire an infinitely greater knowledge and appreciation" of Australia (Lloyd Jones 7). Adam-Smith travelled throughout the area to gather material for the book, which has middlebrow literature's entertaining and informative style, combined with a mediated and commercial purpose.

Features of Tasmania captured in Adam-Smith's writing emphasise the "terrible" and "entrancing" effects the island held for her (*Footloose* 33). Elements of her texts can be seen in David Spurr's terms to participate in a form of "aestheticization" of the natural environment and its history, which has the effect of "mak[ing] it into the object of beauty, horror, pleasure, and pity", and which in turn "commodifies reality, securing it for the expansion of the observer's sensibility" (59). This was a technique Spurr identified in popular travel journalism, where "violence and atavism are both evoked and tamed for the would-be tourist" (48). In a 1968 article, for instance, Adam-Smith describes the experience of being one of a group of artists who visited a remote lake in south-west Tasmania before it was flooded as part of the hydro-electric scheme. The flooding of Lake Pedder provoked strong opposition from Tasmanians and many people on mainland Australia, and was a catalyst for widespread environmental activism in Tasmania. The group of which Adam-Smith was a part went on a farewell visit to the lake which Adam-Smith refers to as "the most remarkable in Australia . . . far older than the civilisation about to overwhelm it" ("Vale! Lake Pedder" 34). Included in the party of eight were the well-known Tasmanian artist, Max Angus, and famous photographer, adventurer and environmentalist Olegas Truchanas. Adam-Smith describes the lake as being

like a tideless ocean in miniature . . . where sometimes a quick breath of night wind sets the surface whispering, as if a tide were changing . . . the massive impression is of lowering mountains, like a Wagnerian backdrop. Summits like flying buttresses ring it around (35).<sup>40</sup>

There was an urgency to their absorption of the experience: “The artists painted with a sort of hurried stillness, as though the engulfing waters of ‘modification’ were imminent” (36).

While the painter and photographer were busily capturing images of the lake which was about to disappear Adam-Smith writes that she and another member of the party

did nothing all day but wander to the forests edging the mountains, look at the tall rock-walls and the plains of quaking grass with yellow pom-poms, and find small harbours and tiny ports at the edge of the motionless water. We called it a wise and masterly inactivity. (36)

As they hiked out of the lake area, Adam-Smith’s closing words summed up her feelings about the time spent there: “We would never have the impertinence to try to describe its beauty, but in this, the only way we knew, we would perform some small act as a tribute” (36). Her tribute is to absorb the environment and commit it to writing. In trying to set the lake apart in her visual representation, Adam-Smith distances herself from debate around the potential devastation of a significant natural feature in the name of development and progress.

Like the Lake Pedder adventure, Adam-Smith’s other Tasmanian stories described remote areas and their history, bringing them vividly into the homes of urban Australians. She visited Bruny Island, which lies in the D’Entrecasteaux channel in the south of Tasmania, and wrote about the famous people in history who sheltered there, such as James Cook and

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<sup>40</sup> A modified version of this article appears in *Footloose In Australia* (23-35) including news of Olegas Truchanas’ death by drowning in the Gordon River at a later date.

William Bligh (“Adventure Bay”).<sup>41</sup> Other articles featured the notorious penal settlement of Sarah Island and Macquarie Harbour. Her *Walkabout* article about the *Cape York*—the “scruffy old ship” on which she had sailed around the Tasmanian coast delivering supplies to remote lighthouse stations—is a cleverly-told tale of adventure, all the more authentic due to her intimate knowledge of life on small trading ships around the Tasmanian coast. She writes with admiration for the people who live and work in difficult circumstances: “In this scientific age, with machines taking the risk out of most occupations, the work of the lighthouse supply ships remains one of the few jobs which retain a tang of adventure” (“Serving the Lights” 18). A certain wistful nostalgia for community born of necessity in isolated conditions permeates Adam-Smith’s work and is reflective of the sense of community she sought throughout her mobile life. Her stories contain the “ability to infuse abstractions with warm-blooded humanity and the vitality of the individual life,” a quality described by Janice Radway as essential to middlebrow non-fiction writing (281).

If Hill, Durack and Drake-Brockman used remote regions to explore and more fully locate a national identity, Adam-Smith set Tasmania apart from the Australian mainland in her writing: “If it wasn’t for the few wattles and the fewer eucalypts a visitor would hardly recognise the country as Australian” (*When We Rode the Rails* 97). Travel in Tasmania is difficult not because of vast distances but because of the impenetrability of dense bush:

Growing either in a solid, matted impenetrable jungle or tangling among the other varieties of trees and scrub are two peculiar growths . . . Interlaced and crocheted together by its horizontal branches which from [sic] a network of almost solid timber, it is possible for a man to walk some distance over the top of it, 20 feet or so

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<sup>41</sup>Cook and Bligh are significant figures in early Australian history. Both sheltered at Bruny Island. Cook, en route during his voyages of discovery, and Bligh four times between 1777 and 1809, on the way to Tahiti, stopping to replenish wood and water supplies.

above ground. And the terrain is one huge mountain slit by ravines and gulches over which roads could not be built easily. The first road out of the west went eastwards to Launceston and Hobart. It was opened in 1932. To the north it was roadless until 1964. (97)

It was a dense, lush and atavistic landscape that resisted development. The workers who built the railway on Tasmania's west coast had to contend with

some of the most inaccessible country in Australia . . . [W]hile the navies building the Trans-Australia line across the desert of South Australia cursed because there was not a single stream of running water in all that 1100 miles, the navies in Tasmania's wild south-west cursed the climate that gave them more than forty creeks and rivers in 72 miles on one line. They declared that it rained 4 yards a year and that each shower lasted twelve months. (*When We Rode* 96-97)

The Tasmanian countryside changed little over time, much like the society. The natural environment largely erased past signs of human occupation. For instance, the "quiet bay" of Bruny Island was once host to a "motley lot, a fabulous lot, a group the like of which the world will not see again" ("Adventure Bay" 35), yet little has changed since that time: "penguins still come to breed; . . . oyster-catchers pick at the water's edge as they did when Fletcher Christian shot two; . . . fish are still plentiful and oysters grow as they grew when Bligh's men got stomach upsets from eating 'muscles'; . . . trees grow that could still plank the *Bounty*" (35). Likewise the environment around Sarah Island is little changed from when it was a cruel penal settlement: "the place of [the prisoners] confinement is as isolated and primeval as it was when they accomplished the feats that prompted Marcus Clarke to write *For the Term of His Natural Life*" and "the surrounding forest is as impenetrable and as silent as ever" ("Savagery on Sarah Island" 33-35). Tasmania's history, like its environment, is one

of wild beauty, harshness and brutality, and reflective in some ways of Adam-Smith's early experiences of the island, when she felt like an exile and a prisoner in her unhappy marriage.

Travel for Adam-Smith proved both a personal and professional education. She wrote with confidence and authority, interspersing her stories with informative material, usually in the form of historical detail, about a region. As a freelance writer, she was often commissioned to write about certain places or means of travel (*Goodbye* 122). The Tasmanian Government Transport Commission asked her to sail as a guest on the *Naracoopa*, a "wooden vessel three-hundred feet long . . . grubby, grimy, sails patched, rigging in . . . disrepair" (123). Adam-Smith writes entertainingly of the voyage, which resulted in six years working at sea as part of the crew on the same vessel: "She was my home, my pride and my saviour" (123). Her career continued to develop in these fluid ways, and her life of movement provided rich material for her writing. Of her time living and working on the small supply ships around Tasmania, she writes:

sailing . . . taught me seamanship and the ways of those who go about their lives on deep waters. As well, I now knew a lot about myself. My knowledge and way of life had helped to make me Australia's best known freelance writer of the time<sup>42</sup> because, as well as working my passage . . . I was writing 3,000-word features for eight major national magazines, averaging one article a week. (*Ship* 114)

Adam-Smith treated her life as an ongoing education, fuelled by her wanderlust and endless curiosity. She used middlebrow forms to broadcast her experiences and explore conditions for women and working-class Australians in the modern nation.

### **Adam-Smith and modern modes of mobility**

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<sup>42</sup> This is an unqualified statement, with no direct evidence to either prove or disprove it.

Modernisation was crucial for the emergence of middlebrow culture and in creating the conditions that enabled Adam-Smith to travel the country and overseas as a single woman both before and after her marriage. The “new technologies of motion that drove modernity” were significant enablers for women to move out of the traditional domestic realm into public spaces, as Sidonie Smith points out (xi). According to Smith, “the individualizing logic of mobility, as it translated traveling [sic] women into a masculine logic and domain, enabled some women to alter the terms of their ‘cultural construction in difference’” (xi). This is arguably the case for Adam-Smith. Anna Johnston considers that “middlebrow travel writing sought to inculcate a particular kind of imaginative community, one characterized by engagement and a sense of the opportunities available” to everyday Australians due to technologies of modernity. Further, “travel operated as a way to imagine an idealised space of modernity” (“Becoming Pacific-Minded” 4); this was certainly the case for the contributors to *Walkabout*. These writers, including Adam-Smith, were able to utilise modern means of transport and communication to convey their travel experiences. Adam-Smith felt that experiencing travel in this way helped her writing become “stronger, with the confidence that knowledge lends” (*Ship* 114). Doreen Massey argues that the limitation of women’s mobility is “a crucial means of subordination” (*Space, Place and Gender* 179). Adam-Smith valorised her ability to move about freely, describing it as crucial in defining her individuality; it was liberating and foundational to her identity.

Adam-Smith mobilised typical tropes used in the travel writing genre in her texts. A large part of her early writing arose out of her experiences on board coastal trading ships. She transcribed her years at sea as tales of adventure, out of the ordinary realm of everyday life. The crew members were misfits but also heroic, defying tumultuous seas and living in Spartan conditions on board the small supply ships. Adam-Smith identified with these social



outcasts, appearing to relish being set apart from conventional society and belonging to this “tribe”. From the moment she saw “a trader ease her way out of the swell in Bass Strait”, the ocean strait which separates Tasmania from mainland Australia, Adam-Smith describes herself as losing all reason: “I would go to sea, I decided, and be a part of the danger these men spoke of that made my present life suddenly seem to be merely a marking of time until I should die” (*Ship 1*). She describes the strong connection between Hobart, the southern capital city of Tasmania, and the sea, positioning herself in a unique (gendered) way within this context as the first articulated woman on a coastal trader:

Our city faced the sea; ships cruised right up to within one block of the GPO. Shop girls and messenger boys ate their lunch on the wharves and the talk of the town was around the ships in port, their cargo and the men who sailed in them. In Hobart there have always been women going down to the sea in ships, mostly fishing boats and ferries, although here I met the only woman—the only person actually—I have ever known who has sailed into every major port in the world. But no woman had been articulated on a coastal trader. (*Ship 126-27*)

Referencing gender in this way illustrates Smith’s point that the “meanings women make of travel are inflected with the protocols of gender out of which, through which, and against which they negotiate their movement from sessility to mobility” (S. Smith 11). Adam-Smith’s gender is a defining aspect of her travel texts. She depicts herself working alongside the men, sharing their camaraderie and the work load, even getting salt-water boils along with them (*Ship 45*) yet she maintains her feminine status, worrying about her white board floor, knitting for the crew, acting as a nurse for their various ailments and often working as the cook. This positioning is somewhat contradictory; on the one hand she sets herself apart from the crewmen and also the paying passengers (by having knowledge of the nature of

life on board ship which they do not), all the while considering herself an integral and equal part of the team on board the ship. This is similar to the ambiguous ways in which Hill, Drake-Brockman and Durack represented themselves in their travel texts, both responding to cultural expectations in order to construct acceptable narrative personas at the same time as they stepped outside gendered bounds.

The difficult position occupied by women in traditionally masculine spaces is examined by Smith, who argues that their narratives reveal “the category crisis of the woman who participates in defining spectacles of muscular masculinity” (S. Smith 148). In these spaces, women explore “the ways in which rigid and fixed sexual differentiations become blurred in the camaraderie of dangerous work. If you act dependably and do your work, then you are accepted, if grudgingly” (148). To gain acceptance with the crew Adam-Smith recognised that “I’d have to buckle down and show that I was capable of adjusting to anything” (*Ship* 9). She depicts herself working as hard as the crew and being accepted as one of them while remaining an object of curiosity. The all-male crew curb their language around her; she is also a source of amusement for them, and, subsequently, for the reader (33-35). A description of her first experience going to the toilet on board the small ship, for example, is typical of Adam-Smith’s self-deprecating humour: “The first day I sat in it, a fountain of icy cold sea-water smacked up on me from below with such force I was almost lifted up into the air . . . All very hygienic, very French” (46). By depicting herself as an integral part of the crew and at the same time not taking herself too seriously, Adam-Smith creates an acceptable, authentic persona in the face of a subversion of gendered norms, and a transgression of masculine space. Spurr recognises the woman travel writer’s “self-consciousness concerning her own position” and considers that she “resolves the question of her own interpretive authority by giving herself, as well, a part to play” (55) in the

narrative, as Adam-Smith does in her travel writing. By creating spaces for themselves in their narratives in these ways, Ganser writes, women travellers “repeat the dominant masculine model with a difference” (32), creating new spaces for renegotiations of space and new forms of cultural production that include women.

The railways and rail travel were a significant part of Adam-Smith’s life and writing. In Australia the building of the railways was a significant feature of modernisation and changed the way people moved across the country. According to Jon Stratton, “In Australia's discourse railways are a powerful figure of integration” (41). This was no different in Tasmania where the impenetrability of the terrain on the west coast meant that a connecting road was not built to the north until 1963. Prior to this people relied on a small, privately run railway for connection with the populated regions to the north and east. Adam-Smith rode this railway as well as travelling across mainland Australia by train. Growing up on the railways, Adam-Smith was aware of its importance for connecting people and places, and utilised train travel in her writing to convey its benefits to the modern nation. Adam-Smith’s experience of this type of transport was like that described by Smith for other female train travellers:

When they climb onto the train, women travelers climb into the cultural history of train travel with its politics of gender. On that train they experience mobility through the transformed semiotics of railway perception. When they write about their travels and locate themselves as subjects of locomotion, they contribute to the long history of cultural representations of the railroad. (S. Smith 131)

Adam-Smith attached a romance to rail travel in her writing while also embracing it as a symbol of modernity.

Adam-Smith experienced the benefits of locomotion from both sides of the tracks: as tourist/traveller and a member of the group who worked for the railways. Travelling on the modern railways evoked nostalgia for the past:

with all their diesels and dining cars and elaborate service and smoother tracks they hadn't completely robbed a journey by rail of its magic. I had been shunted right back to the excitement, wonder and joy of my childhood when the old steam engine had whistled, jerked and jolted me in its yesterdays. ("Round" 19)

The railways provided a livelihood for Adam-Smith's family members. She frequently expressed her family's (and her own) pride in their working-class position and their sense of connection with other railway workers:

There was a camaraderie about navvies; whether it was the period we were passing through or the age of our young society, or the type of hard . . . work . . . We had the feeling of 'belonging to a big family'. (*Hear* 101)

Adam-Smith's family were hard-working, Irish Catholics. The communities Adam-Smith lived in, small and obscure, and sometimes "not on any map" (31), are described with fondness, mainly for the characters who peopled them. These remote communities were loosely bound together by circumstance; inhabitants were described as always willing to lend a hand to others in a continuation of the bush tradition described in Hill's narratives. Like Hill, Adam-Smith considered it "a sad commentary on our national outlook that the poor are never mentioned in the annals of pioneering history" (85). Along with Hill, part of her life's work was to rectify these omissions through her transcriptions of folklore, travel writing and autobiography.

In her articles about rail travel Adam-Smith positions herself as a tourist along with the other passengers, enjoying the comforts of train travel as the scenery passes by outside

the air-conditioned compartments. This was a new kind of subject position in travel writing that appeared in Australia in the 1950s. White identifies popular writers such as Frank Clune and Colin Simpson challenging traditional hierarchies that privileged the male adventurer and traveller over the female tourist by proclaiming themselves to be tourists and insisting on “the validity of the tourist’s gaze” (“Retreat” 94), thus subverting traditional gendered notions of travel as well as traditional narrative personae. The touristic gaze is different from that of professional traveller, such as that projected by Hill in her role as journalist. On the train, Adam-Smith sits with the other passengers, “protected from heat and dust . . . sipping our iced orange juice” (“Across Australia” 36). This is a different persona from that on board ships as one woman working alongside men (and unlike Hill in her exclusive, elevated position as singular passenger on certain transport, or lone white woman at a remote outpost). On the train Adam-Smith is one of the nameless, tourist crowd being served by staff in the allocated public spaces unless otherwise ensconced comfortably in the quiet retreat of their private compartments.

There is a hierarchy in rail travel extending from the railway workers, to the cleaners, dining-car stewards and different classes of passengers. Smith argues that while “locomotion enhanced . . . women’s agency by offering a vehicle through which they could become less sessile . . . and more autonomous” (S. Smith 127), by offering women “miniature [safe] domestic sites long the rails”, rail travel also “reinforced cultural stereotypes of women’s incapacity for arduous travel” (128). Adam-Smith describes modern rail travel as “comfortable and conventional”:

we each had our luxurious compartment, with shower, toilet and hand-basin,  
breakfast in bed, drinks in a sophisticated saloon car, turkey and cranberry sauce in

the dining car. The rolling stock of Australia's railways is now among the best in the world. Travel has become a rather glamorous affair. ("Round" 16)

She demonstrates awareness of its effects on the passengers and their travelling experience.

She positions herself as both participant and observer commenting on fellow passengers:

"ladies are tinkling away . . . on the piano and the gentlemen are pretending to read the papers while keeping their eye on them" ("Across" 30). Adam-Smith's depiction of the space inside the train upholds acceptable gendered roles as passengers politely interact in a microcosm of civilised modern society hurtling across vast stretches of landscape.

For Adam-Smith, the train itself was integral to the travelling experience, and functioned like Robert Dixon's prosthesis, as an extension of the modern traveller's gaze (*Prosthetic* 21). Rail travel alters perceptions of passing through the landscape. Cocooned in insulated carriages, travellers do not notice the passing of time and distance. Adam-Smith described the disembodied experience of travelling in this enclosed world across the vast Australian continent: "The change from green pastures to the hostility of desert-like lands comes while we sleep" ("Across" 30). All the landscape from the train is sight, not sound, as the train passes scenery out there:

you become a flat-earther travelling by train on these plains. The earth can scarcely be round when you can see with your very eyes its saucer rim in a 360° circle around you . . . And it's a bigger sky than you've ever seen before. (30)

Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that train travel has the effect of "mechanizing" the traveller's perceptions, reducing them to "size, shape, quantity, and motion" (288). He describes perspectives from the train as "evanescent"; passengers can perceive only "the broadest outlines of the traversed landscape" (289), similar to Adam-Smith's description of the experience of train travel. Landscapes are viewed fleetingly; long distances covered

imperceptibly. Adam-Smith was aware of the effect of the “immaterial barrier” (293) of the train, separating the traveller from the landscape, and draws attention to this in her narratives.

Along the journey, travellers are given brief interludes in the “real” world, stopping in small outback towns such as Menindee and Broken Hill. Adam-Smith describes these brief excursions as strange transitions from one space to another. She meets the artist Pro Hart in Broken Hill and as she listens to him speak about his life, “the train seems a long way away” (“Across” 30), just as scenery outside the train appeared a long way from the detached, enclosed carriage space as it moved inexorably on its metal tracks through the landscape. Schivelbusch describes detachment of the modern form of train travel “in which intervening spaces are . . . skipped over or even slept through, strikingly illustrat[ing] the systematically closed and constructed character of the geographical space” (287) of modern society compared to the intense experience of travelling by older forms such as horse, coach or on foot. It is as if the two spaces—the cloistered finite space of the train and the tangible real world beyond it—are completely separate, detached from one another. The modern train traveller is more focused on the internal social structure of the carriage and the ultimate destination than the environment outside. The inner sanctum of the carriages is a transient world, cut off from time and space.

Part of Adam-Smith’s enjoyment of the experience of rail travel is the social interactions between fellow passengers during the journey. The camaraderie on board the train is similar to the experience Adam-Smith had of being at sea and the sense of community felt between crew members while on board the ship, which dissipated as they went their separate ways on shore. In contrast to train travel where the outside world is distanced from the traveller, in “small ships . . . the eeriness of the sea is more apparent and

the closeness of the elements more real" (*Ship* 154). In Smith's examination of Linda Niemann's railway narrative, she considers that being a railway worker offered Niemann "an arena of rugged individualism, an arena for the enactment of an outlaw identity—outside the norms of femininity . . . and middle-class respectability" (S. Smith 152-53). This is what Adam-Smith's peripatetic life on ships and roads across Australia offered her. On the train, however, she was a polite, respectable fellow passenger. She found connections through these travelling experiences, both long- and short-term. Adam-Smith's was "a life of liminality, a life of perpetual displacement that captures her sense of herself as always exceeding fixed identifications" (S. Smith 150). The capacity in which she travelled (as worker or passenger) and the mode of transport was central to Adam-Smith's experience and influenced the nature of relationships and experiences in what was a transitory space. Adam-Smith observes that with time on your hands in the restricted space of the train, "the sort of thing that is tiresome elsewhere is here, when the mind is free from the telephone and the mail-box, suddenly the most absorbing thing" ("Across" 34). While gendered boundaries remain in place, social interactions take on an altered significance in the long journey by rail as people are detached from the everyday realities of their lives elsewhere.

Time is altered in the modern experience of travel, as it becomes compressed in the enclosed space of the train: "Time was suspended, while we, folded in like a flock, looked out our windows" ("Across" 38). Cut off from the world outside "[s]ome of the passengers find [passing through the desert] heavy going dull. But then some people bring their boredom along with them" (33). Interestingly, the passenger who stands out for Adam-Smith is an Englishwoman who "was to be in Australia for only seven weeks and wanted to see all she could of it" (33). This woman is the type of tourist with a "desire to pack a lot in" that Frank Clune was at pains to construct in his 1950s travel texts (White "Retreat" 94). The



Englishwoman is described as the life of the party, mixing with employees and passengers alike and showing a keen interest in everything about her, in contrast to some of the urban Australians who were bored with the journey and the countryside. The tourist is eager to make the most of the adventure, whereas travellers wanting to get from one point to another as efficiently as possible find the experience mundane; all are thrown together on the train.

The modern experience of travel by rail then, is a social one overall, albeit in a temporary, isolated and unnatural setting. When the train arrives “too soon” at the end of its journey in Perth, Adam-Smith reflects on the trip:

We’ve crossed a continent from ocean to ocean and seen neither of them, but we have seen a great gusset of life. From Sydney to Perth we’ve come in three days, thanks to the old map shrinkers who surveyed the track from camel back and horse-drawn buggy (“Across” 38).

As she reflects on conversations she worries about how much personal information she inadvertently revealed: “I wonder how much I told them? You do seem to talk a lot too much on a train, even a swank and sophisticated *Indian-Pacific* type” (38). Adam-Smith is a story-teller and made a profession out of writing about Australia, yet this comment suggests she liked to be in control of the story-telling. The train functioned for Adam-Smith as a

multivalent site for human drama . . . its rhythm of pulling out of a station, journeying through the landscape, and pulling into a destination bears the marks of narrative itself . . . it is simultaneously a potentially liberating and constraining vehicle for identity and its discontents. (S. Smith 133-34)

All these aspects of train travel are apparent in Adam-Smith’s observant accounts. Her accounts of travelling by rail function like the “[g]uide books, advertisements, and staged

spectacles” which Smith sees “contributed to cultural understandings of the social utility of travel” (124). Train travel is not about seeing the landscape but rather the experience of the train itself as an efficient and convenient product of modernity. The landscape becomes secondary to social interaction due to the inability to properly engage with it. Adam-Smith actively promoted this means of transport for the traveller and tourist, and as a vital means of connecting people across space in Tasmania and mainland Australia.

Adam-Smith disrupted and subverted gendered notions of space, offering alternatives for others (particularly other women), and a revision of traditional conventions. She can be seen, in Ganser’s terms, to “symbolically contest the notion of the road [and travel] as a masculine space . . . [Women’s] stories can be seen as a renegotiation of spatial politics by which they counter physical as well as symbolic borders and enclosures” (75). While Adam-Smith described her time at sea as “the best six years a woman could know”, she also acknowledged the difficulty of occupying such a position: “It would be foolish to pretend that social disapprobation did not hurt. Of course it did. One does not slough off a lifetime of conditioning easily” (*Ship 5*). Adam-Smith’s travel narratives can be seen in Ganser’s terms as “turning the road into a site of feminine presence, at the same time map[ping] dominant gender ideologies onto space, but also allow[ing] for [textual] spaces that oppose order and social regulation” (77). Adam-Smith opens up possibilities for other women to participate in “transgressive acts” of travel (77). Growing up as female and a member of the working class, Adam-Smith exceeded conventional (normative) ways of identification in mid-twentieth century Australia.

While her early experience of 1950s Tasmania was stultifying, it became the launching pad for Adam-Smith’s life on the road beyond the confines of domesticity and the feminine space of the home. Hers was a life of “itinerant difference” (S. Smith 152). She was

a story-teller who structured a career around writing about Australia. Like the other Australian female contributors to *Walkabout*, Adam-Smith's *Walkabout* travel narratives are not inner journeys of self-discovery; rather their purpose is to convey to others a sense of the country and life she knows well. This is in contrast to her other works such as *There Was a Ship* and *Goodbye Girlie*, which combine autobiography and travel; however Adam Smith's persona in these texts is equally carefully constructed to portray a certain image of herself as a modern woman living in the face of convention. Tasmania shaped her through personal experience of marriage, motherhood, domesticity, travel and independence. Her interest in recording the stories of the people she met is similar to that of Hill, writing for *Walkabout* in its earlier decades. Adam-Smith's legacy to Australian folklore, history and literature is a valuable contribution to the nation. Adam-Smith's *Walkabout* articles are not calls to populate or conquer—the time she is writing from has moved beyond this way of thinking about the country—rather, they encourage Australians to get out and see more of their country beyond the cities, following *Walkabout's* brief to “intrigue the armchair traveller . . . and . . . inspire an infinitely greater knowledge and appreciation of their own” country (Lloyd Jones 7). Boldly asserting herself in traditionally masculine space, Adam-Smith's refusal to conform to convention, and her prolific, entertaining writing and endless enthusiasm for Australia and its people have left a wealth of material for the reader and critic.

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The genre of travel writing is particularly suited to revealing how performances of space and identity are played out on the page. Paul Smethurst describes it as “a genre in which mobility is central and potentially disordering” (Introduction 6), through which borders and boundaries (both physical or spatial and psychological) were explored and either

renegotiated and renewed, or reconfirmed, stabilised and therefore not closed. Space in Massey's terms is "open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming" (*For Space* 59). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith were active cultural producers who turned space into place through their narratives. Occupying an in-between space—both privileged (white settlers) and marginalised (women)—they write from both within and outside the hegemonic discourses of the time. They used the public platforms available to them to construct new ways of seeing the nation and identify a place for themselves within it. Their writing displays characteristics of the settler subject's "self-conscious engagement with the available discourses of truth and identity, [while] foreground[ing] processes of negotiation and transformation" (Whitlock 45) as they engaged with and extended contemporary debates.

These women writers contributed to shifting representations of the country at a time of change. Publishing across a variety of mediums, their travel narratives reached a wide audience. Their representations of Australia are passionate and enthusiastic calls to appreciate the diversity of the whole of the country, not just the crowded coastal fringes. According to Kay Schaffer: "Australia, read deconstructively, like the signifiers for 'women' and the 'land' can be regarded not as a stable entity but as a site of constantly shifting representation" (*Women* 26). For Schaffer, in nineteenth-century Australia the "landscape functions as the nexus of a network of meanings which allow a series of identifications between men" (94). In the twentieth century Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith challenged this through their confident, unapologetic representations of a country they saw as a land of vitality and opportunity for all (white) people. While reproducing dominant images and mythologies such as that of the hardy, skilled bushman and intrepid pioneer,

other representations of the country penetrated their work, which in turn opened the way for ongoing renegotiations of identity in the modern nation.

## PART THREE

# Settler-Aboriginal Relations in the Frontier Landscape

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In the introduction to *Kings in Grass Castles*, Mary Durack wrote that “frontier conditions . . . [have] left a lasting impression on [Australia’s] national character” (*Kings* xii). Kate Darian-Smith notes that the colonial frontier was “not only a geographical space, but a powerful imaginative site” which lent itself to many national myths of identification (99). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith wrote from the remote frontier regions in Australia, transcribing white histories of pioneering and settlement alongside Aboriginal communities and cultures. These women wrote from personal experience of the region and its others. Their texts grapple with difficult social issues and while they largely fail to arrive at (enlightened and) progressive solutions to problems of cultural difference, by actively engaging with contemporary debates from a position of personal contact they made some steps towards consciousness-raising through their largely sympathetic identification with Australia’s others in these regions. They strove for some understanding of the cultural divide and how to live and work alongside people of varied race and backgrounds. Black and white histories intersect in these liminal spaces. The following chapters in Part Three examine white settler negotiations of belonging in these regions, focusing on the ways in which relationships between white Australians and Aborigines are portrayed.

The lives of settlers in the remote north-west were ones of uncertainty and transition in the early- to mid-twentieth century; the people of these regions were constantly on the move. In the writing under consideration, we read of the nomadic

existence of both settlers and Aborigines in these remote areas. Hill's accounts tell of people on the move, either farming, droving or chasing their fortunes in gold. Hill herself was a "passing pilgrim" many times over in the region. Drake-Brockman's stories in *Sydney and the Bush* show a population that comes and goes with changing economic fortunes.

Durack's family were constantly travelling as they managed vast tracts of land, the births of children and business markets both in Australia and abroad. Durack's father sought security for his family but was "always anxiously seeking an acceptable and continuing pattern of life" in the north-west (*Durack Sons* 89). Brian Musgrove recognises the state of "unsettlement" in these regions: "The process of transition, and its associated liminal rites, were always anthropologically theorised as modes of 'unsettlement' rather than transcendence or occupation" (39). The white inhabitants of these remote regions were unsettled occupants of a transitional zone from which they either conceded defeat and were forced to leave, or in which they stayed, clinging onto hope for a prosperous future which they continued to believe was "a foregone conclusion, though still tantalizingly just out of reach" (*Durack Sons* 69). They lived at the edges of civilisation, always on the threshold between past and future, and held in place by a difficult-to-define attachment to a region that kept them enthralled.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's contributions to imaginings of white Australian belonging in these regions were inevitably tied to Aborigines. Aborigines feature in their texts living and working alongside white settlers. These texts are "useful social documents for developing a picture of a fringe community" (Jebb 19) in the same way that Mary Anne Jebb refers to the romance/adventure fictions of Ion Idriess. Aborigines in these texts are more than "a silent backdrop in an empty land" (19). Adam Shoemaker also attributes significance to Idriess' works as their popularity points to a wide readership, which suggests his books would have influenced public perceptions of Aborigines. So too Hill,

Drake-Brockman and Durack's books, written in much the same period as Idriess' (and likewise contributors to *Walkabout*), appealed to a similar audience and contributed to constructions of cultural identity in Australia at the time; as such they are crucial sites for an investigation of the operations of colonial power and the languages of authority and resistance at work in the vast north-west frontier regions.

In the early- to mid-twentieth century Aborigines were the subject of anthropological studies as white Australians were slowly forced to deal with the repercussions of colonisation for Indigenous Australians alongside a growing awareness that Aborigines were not going to die out as previously assumed. Common discourses such as cannibalism, the dying race theory, miscegenation, and the instinctual physicality of Aborigines (often translated as excessive sexual desire) reveal the anxieties circulating around disparate cultures. These discourses generated much debate amongst white Australians. The continued presence of Aborigines was undeniable and a "problem" that needed addressing. Much of the anthropological and literary interest in Aborigines was in their traditional lives and customs. Shoemaker notes that the idealisation of traditional Aboriginal culture in the literature of the period had the effect of relegating all that is worthwhile "to the traditional realm rather than to the ongoing, adaptive life of the people" (88). Like most of their contemporaries, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith did not mention non-traditional Aborigines living in urban spaces in their writing. In many ways these women espoused common tropes, yet they also extended these as they grappled with the realities they saw firsthand in remote regions. Their textual representations are complicated by general confusion and misunderstandings that had roots in conflict, violence, dispossession, misguided ethnography, and ideas about eugenics in colonised Australia.



Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith wrote of the difficulties of living in and making claims to the same country occupied by Aborigines and of the interdependence and conflict this produced. They recognised Aborigines' claim to country and prior belonging while at the same time making their own claims to belonging as settler Australians. The in-between position occupied by settlers, as Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson write, is not "unbounded space, but a place of negotiation; colonialism is a relation, an unequal one, but no less a relation for that" ("Settler Colonies" 370). The divide between settler and Aborigine is fraught and seemingly irreconcilable, yet these writers acknowledged the necessity of forming ways of living together in this shared space. While their texts inscribed a white history in the remote regions and their interest in Aborigines was largely in traditional culture, these writers showed Aborigines and white settlers adjusting to altered ways of living together in the modern nation. Adam-Smith in particular, writing in a later period, was interested in how Aborigines could maintain their cultural identity at the same time as they were forced to adapt white Australian ways of living in order to find a place in modern society.

Hill lauds white settlers' heroic occupation of challenging country: while at times she participates in common stereotypes and elisions of settler culpability, she also confronts many of these issues, highlighting issues of race that readers would not have encountered in their daily urban lives. In Hill's sprawling accounts of remote Australia, *The Great Australian Loneliness* (1940) and *The Territory* (1951), Aborigines are acknowledged as always already there in the landscape and working alongside white Australians in relationships of interdependence. Hill acknowledged Aborigines' contribution to colonisation and settlement of these regions as one without which white settlers would almost certainly have failed in their bid to establish themselves in an alien landscape. As a direct descendant of

white pastoralists, Durack had a lifelong concern for Aborigines that stemmed from a position of privilege and echoed the paternalism of her forebears in assuming responsibility for the ongoing welfare of Aborigines in the changing modern nation. While well-meaning, this concern was always inflected with white “civilising” sensibilities. In her detailed and comprehensive family histories *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959) and *Sons in the Saddle* (1983), Durack portrays a close working relationship between settlers and Aborigines in the north-west. Aborigines are seen as negotiating their place in a “new order of things” (*Sons* 49) alongside white settlers. Drake-Brockman’s novels are noticeable for their lack of representation of Aborigines; they rate only passing mention. Her short stories, however, attempt to bring to light the difficulties of relationships between white Australians and Aborigines, even if they do not offer any real solutions. Adam-Smith’s *No Tribesman* (1971) applauds efforts to assimilate Aborigines into white society. No longer a dying race, assimilation is considered the only way for Aborigines to “progress” and be able to participate successfully in modern Australia. In *No Tribesman* Adam-Smith represents Aborigines as individuals caught between worlds. Her book reveals the difficulties faced by a dispossessed people trying to find a place in the new world imposed upon them. Each of these writers reveal how identity is scripted through “oppositions, intimacies and distinctions with others . . . adjacencies . . . associations and dissociations that are complex and ongoing” (Whitlock 43) in the settler colonial situation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Remote North-West, Time and the Other:

#### Hill's *The Great Australian Loneliness* and *The Territory*

“The more humanity changes, the more it is the same old thing”, Hill wrote in *The Territory* (348). Hill’s interest in the remote regions meant that she met many people of varied race and background in her travels. Hill set out “unknown into the unknown, to meet the people of the real Australia . . . black and white” (*Loneliness* 17-18). She acknowledged herself as other in these regions, a traveller who, along “with the other six million post-office clock Australians” living in the urban spaces, knew “nothing whatever” about the people who lived in these marginal spaces on the edge of modernity (18). As Regina Ganter remarks, “the image of a long and solid history of a white Australia founders under the weight of sheer population balance in the north” (1), particularly before World War II when

Asian, Aboriginal and coloured populations, either together or singly, outstripped a thin white layer. In the far northern townships, the dominant lived experience was not of a white Australia but of a polyethnic one. (254)

Hill discussed the polyethnic population she encountered in her travels in *The Great Australian Loneliness* and *The Territory*, as well as in articles for newspapers and magazines such as *Walkabout*. Hill was attracted to the mixed collection of people she came across, and their connectedness—to each other, to the land and to nature—so “far from the rhythm of ‘the big machine’ and the sameness” of urban Australia (*Loneliness* 9). She writes of spending time “in the half-caste shacks and the blacks’ camps, . . . ma[king] many friends, all so generously interested in the note-book and pencil, finding me ‘characters’ in all colours . . . Malay and Manila and Mahomedan and Ming” (72). This collapsing of

boundaries between people seemed to be part of the area's attraction. For Hill, in north-west Australia people experienced

liberty, fraternity and equality in full measure. It reduces humanity, black, white and in-between, to its highest common factor . . . no paltry distinctions, no petty dignity . . . All men and women . . . are children of circumstance. (*Territory* 422)

This apparent conflation of difference due to out-of-the-ordinary circumstances in the frontier regions alters the nature of relationships and hierarchies. Musgrove argues that “travel is *not* the simple inscription of an established meaning over a neutralised, identityless other” (39; emphasis in orig.) and Hill discovered this as she moved through these regions spending time with those who occupied them. Stereotypes collapse in the face of lived experience, even if momentarily. So too Jebb contends that “the ranges provided [Idriess] with a geographic and metaphorical boundary where extraordinary events and relationships could be rationalized” (20). This chapter examines how Hill positioned herself in relation to Aborigines and what this suggests about white Australian belonging in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia.

Hill was intrigued with Aboriginal culture and customs at a time when Aborigines were still largely a curiosity for many Australians. She could write with insight and sympathy about Indigenous Australians:

For too long the Australian blacks, by friend and foe, were looked upon as something less than human . . . The white man has never known—and now never will know—this silent, sensitive, long-suffering people. (*Territory* 345-6)

Along with popular opinion at the time, Hill believed Aborigines were a dying race and she

was concerned to learn and record something of their cultural life before they disappeared altogether. Aborigines featured in Hill's texts in vastly contradictory ways. These representations have mostly been read by critics as racist and imperialist, and pilloried for their "sentimentality, purple rhetoric and rosy optimism", as Meaghan Morris writes ("Panorama" 29). Mitchell Rolls and Anna Johnston analyse Hill's descriptions of Aborigines in her *Walkabout* articles as "more the product of prejudice, hearsay and imagination than observation and learning" (80). They see her attitude towards Indigenous Australians as "condescension (at best) . . . lack of concern and apparent lack of any serious interest" (80). Rolls and Johnston agree that while this assessment of Hill's writing is easy to make, there is more to her representations of Aborigines than the reiteration of common stereotypes. If her *Walkabout* articles convey an impression of lack of real interest in Aborigines, when taken into consideration alongside her books, a more complex picture emerges. Her language is often insensitive and she represents Aborigines as homogenous stereotypes at times, including romanticising tribal life and relegating them as primitive beings from the Stone Age destined to die out. This can also be read as part of Hill's overall oeuvre, as she indulges in a similar rendering of the pioneer bushmen who are swiftly becoming part of Australia's past. She romanticises the bushmen in the same way she romanticises traditional Aboriginal culture; each are seen to be fading from view in the modern nation and Hill takes it upon herself to record, nostalgically, this aspect of Australia's immediate past.

Like Central Australia, the north-west regions through which Hill travelled were typically referred to as vast, empty space. Hill uses this descriptor in her writing, yet the country in Hill's texts is empty only in terms of white settlers (particularly white women); Aborigines are an undeniable presence throughout her accounts. When travelling through "seven million-acre cattle runs" for example, Aborigines are there "roaming . . . in the

distance”, part of the landscape: “they flattened themselves in the landscape as we passed” (*Loneliness* 102). Aborigines prefigure white settlers in Hill’s texts; she acknowledged that their history pre-dated white history. From the first page of the first chapter of *The Territory* she places Indigenous and white Australians together in the landscape, writing of “Black men wandering and white men riding in a world without time where sons do not inherit” (1). Early pioneers are referred to as the “first white men” (*Loneliness* 123) to inhabit areas already inhabited by Aborigines, who Hill refers to as “the first of the Australians” (185) or “the first landlords” (317). Hill becomes intimately acquainted with Aboriginal practices and customs in the capacity of amateur researcher and observer, collecting information before the full-blooded Aborigines disappear from the landscape. Hill takes the idea that Aborigines are fading out of existence further in her texts, applying it also to the white bushmen, or early pioneers (“earlies”). She refers to both Aborigines and the early pioneers as “the last of the first” who are inevitably fading out of existence in the face of modernity. In *Kabbarli* (Hill’s memoir of Daisy Bates), for example, Aborigines are described as “the Last of the First [who are] fading out of life” (77); then white settlers are “the last of the first, the forgotten pioneers” (92). Hill’s concern is to record their lives so that they are not forgotten in the modern nation, giving these figures of the past a place in Australia’s history.

Hill devotes three chapters to Aborigines in *The Great Australian Loneliness*. She describes intimate details of Aboriginal lives and customs, yet seems to feel she has gained little understanding of them, concluding this section by writing:

I went to the Australian wilderness to study the blacks. I found the whites in that vast and lonely country so much more interesting, so much more ‘the story,’ and the natives so palpably a lifetime’s study—three lifetimes, rather—that I touched upon them only in passing. (191)

Hill seems motivated by a genuine desire to understand the others she encounters, however this desire is baffled by an unbridgeable cultural and ideological gulf. She is obviously influenced by general assumptions of the time, which she exceeds, however, as a result of her close association with those about whom she writes. Hill participated in well-rehearsed contemporary tropes (such as Australia as a land of vast empty spaces and Aborigines as a primitive and doomed race). Yet by inserting herself in Australia's remote border spaces and actively engaging with the people who lived there, including Aborigines, Hill offers re-negotiations of fixed identifications and ways of belonging in her narratives. She writes from these margins where past, present and future co-exist in an uneasy border space. Homi Bhabha considers these boundary regions to be the places from which "*something begins its presencing*" through the "ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond" (7; emphasis in orig.). It is liminal space, "the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white', on the margins of metropolitan desire" (131). The repetitious slippage between difference and desire is played out in Hill's contradictory representations that reveal anxieties about Australia's others which were circulating in early- to mid-twentieth-century society. Re-reading texts such as these today, paying attention to the context in which they were written, reveals them to be part of a dynamic and ongoing process of (re-)negotiation in postcolonial Australia; a continuous rehearsal<sup>43</sup> and re-enacting of ways of identifying and belonging arising out of a complex history of misunderstanding, conflict and violence; rather than simply as essentialising iterations of racial and cultural otherness.

Stereotypes are reiterated but they also unravel in Hill's texts. Her representations of herself and others in the north-west display the "perplexity" that Bhabha sees "of living and writing the nation" from these spaces, and the "disjunctive" narratives that result (232).

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<sup>43</sup> See Tompkins 144.

“Perplexity” is a particularly apt description of Hill’s reaction to the others she encountered. She struggled to comprehend other ways of living, resulting in descriptions that vacillate between depicting Aborigines as an alien, savage and primitive other, and as fellow human beings sharing their lives with white settlers. Life in the frontier regions uncovers complex ways of understanding the nation and its others.

Alongside declaring the remote north-west of the country the “real” Australia, Hill recognised the region’s otherness in relation to urban Australia. It is “the land of the strange but true” (*Territory* 19); a location where “[t]ime and space count as little with the white people as the black” (318). This rendering of the north-west as both real and unreal is a typical characteristic of postcolonial texts which evince “the endlessly problematic” double inscriptions pointed out by Johnston and Lawson: “the settler subject can be seen working out a complicated politics of representation, working through . . . anxieties and obsessions in textual form” (“Settler Colonies” 363). Hill’s “real” Australia in the frontier regions was an idealised space of limitless potential yet conversely she tells stories of adversity and failure. These stories highlight the “other” nature of the region in comparison to the “sameness” of urban living. The inconsistencies and incommensurabilities in her texts illustrate the discursive complexities of working through a complicated politics of national identity.

This rendering of the north as both “real” and “other” has led scholars to regard the region as a site of inarticulation, disjunction and transition in the discourse of the nation.

Jon Stratton writes:

The north of the continent has been constructed as the site of the Other, of that which has been repressed in the south’s production of the real. The area denoted as the Northern Territory is the least ‘real’ area of Australia, and is, therefore, the weakest moment in the articulation of the dominant discourse of ‘Australia’. (38)



According to Stratton, histories of the Northern Territory, from Hill's *The Territory* onwards, "have tended to accept the articulation of the Territory as unreal and have produced mythic histories" (43). Hill's view that the region is the most "real" in Australia is at odds with her textual representation of its fantastical nature. Deborah Bird Rose also sees the frontier as a destabilising space "where everything is in transition" (29). Like Stratton, Rose sees Hill as presenting "a mythologised and unchanging Territory" in the "liminal time-space" at the margins of the nation (20). This is partly true; Hill contributed to enduring myths about the remote regions as empty spaces waiting to be filled through acts of exploratory and pioneering heroism. Her inscription of north-west Australia is more complex than this, however; the Territory Hill writes about is changing in the face of modernisation.

This sense of change drives Hill's narrative as she feels impelled to record the epic (mythic) characters and events that she considers have contributed to the nation's past and paved the way for the future. In this way her texts can be seen in Bhabha's terms as "renew[ing] the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (10). Hill's texts do not efface Indigenous history, but they do relegate it as something belonging to another time, along with the ways of living enacted by the early pioneers. She participates in what Patrick Brantlinger terms a "mode of proleptic elegy", which imagines Aborigines (and early white pioneers) as "self-extermimating" and soon to be nonexistent in the modern nation (118). Australia's foundational stories are located in the immediate past that Hill sees as important for the identity of future Australians. Her narratives occupy an intervening space, looking back in order to look forward to a refigured, re-imagined sense of place. As Morris writes, remote Australia in Hill's texts "is not just an experimental zone designed for urban cultural fantasy but also a real social space in which new possibilities for community originate, become

actual and develop concrete shape” (“The Great Australian Loneliness” 244). Hill brings past and present alive to the urban imagination through her vivid portrait of the north-west, and the people (past and present) who occupied the region, as well as envisioning a future in line with modernisation.

Hill writes of past failed attempts to develop the Territory and expresses regret at the failures: “Wandering there, I stumbled upon all the traces of a century of failure. I heard everywhere the stories of white men taking on a job too big for them” (*Loneliness* 131). This is not a situation that Hill sees as ongoing and inevitable, however; there are reasons for past failures such as distant disconnected governance, the effects of the war, and isolation prior to the age of modernisation. Stratton reads a *topos* of failure in the north that “provides the basis for the deployment of a history which moves oppositionally to the dominant Australian historical discourse of progress/expansion/development” (44). While Hill recounts previous failed ventures, she sees failure as a thing of the past and proposes a future of progress/expansion/development in northern Australia thanks to the effects of modernisation:

Even as I write, the contours of the map are coming clearer. The aeroplane, the radio, and the motor-car are changing the face of nature, and the king-tide of colonization is setting to the full. (*Loneliness* 340)

Hill expressed optimism for a new future due to the technologies of modernisation in which the path of present settlers “is no longer the tragedy of the old pioneers, and they will not easily be cast down, with much in this age to help them” (*Territory* 16). While this rhetoric is part of the expansionist propaganda of the day, Hill’s enthusiasm is infectious as she expounds on the possibilities for the region and exhorts more white Australians to move to an area peopled by a relatively scant population of diverse races and nationalities.

Lack of population is an ongoing problem on which Hill opines:

the Territory is too generous. Everything flourishes far too well, making it difficult for a few white men to cope with. Superstitious old hands, reviewing its history for seventy years, told me that the country was cursed, but it is cursed only with the mistakes of misunderstanding and the hoodoo of its loneliness. (*Loneliness* 132)

Hill targets white women in this call to “populate or perish”. White women “are rare as roses in the great North-west” (47), where the “dominant need is for the great national stimulus of home life . . . In a word, its crying necessity is more white women, who will share the lives of their own white men (132-33). The white women Hill encounters at homesteads are “remarkable” (124), “housekeeper[s] and ministering angel[s] to the wilderness and all its wanderers” (99); beacons of womanhood fulfilling a civilising, domestic, reproductive role. They are “holding the North for us, which without them must slip back, ever and again, to a haunted, homeless loneliness (133). Hill considers the influence of white women “deep and illimitable” and “the dire need” of the far north (133). While this role is a traditional one it is overlaid with difference due to the challenges of occupying these marginal regions, and also negates the presence of other women, such as the Chinese in Darwin. Hill’s vision for the frontier is by and large a white one even as she writes of the people of varied race who occupy the region.

Other white women in the area were curiosities: either they were part of “lost white women” or “captivity” narratives, (like that of Eliza Fraser), or rough figures (mostly unmarried harridans), taking advantage of gold rushes and running money-making operations such as sly-grog shanties. Hill writes of Mrs Witchetty, who was a curiosity as “the only authentic case to date of a white woman ‘living black’ with the tribes” (*Loneliness* 271). She mentions a “strange rumour” of two white women living in Arnhem Land with the

“savage tribes”: Florence Willet and her mother, wife and daughter of the captain of shipwrecked *Douglas Mawson* (219), similar to Fraser, who was shipwrecked on Fraser Island and lived with Aborigines until she was “rescued” and returned to England. In her study of the discourses which have arisen around Fraser’s experience, Kay Schaffer wrote that she examined the story

not so much as an historical event but as foundational fiction aligned . . . with the makings and remakings of the Australian nation. The event has generated an abundance of both popular and intellectual knowledge which circulated together to produce, maintain, contest and uphold various representations of difference. (*In the Wake of First Contact* 3)

Narrative constructions of Fraser from various sources depict her as a victim and survivor of native savagery. As recently as 2016 Larissa Behrendt published another study of representations of Fraser, writing that “so many people have used her story, appropriated it for their own purposes, that in the end it is hard to see who she really is” (6), and the representations have cultural and political power as well as they “meander into our value systems and our institutions” (9). Hill’s north-west is peopled with such as these, characters out of time and place who form part of the myths of Australia’s national history.

While Hill berates complacent white women for not venturing north to help increase the white population and participate in civilising the region, she admires Aboriginal women for the part that they have played in the white woman’s absence:

The part that the lubra has played in colonizing Australia is never acknowledged, except by a few of the more honest old pioneers. In wild country . . . she is always the first to make friends. Her sex is her protection . . . Averse to bloodshed, she temporizes. (*Loneliness* 333)

Hill fails to acknowledge that Aboriginal women may have had little choice in their “relationships” with white settlers. Again, in *The Territory*, Hill writes of the part played by Aboriginal women: “Leading the white path-finders to aboriginal waters, she colonized the country and, with her piccaninny on the saddle in front of her, she was one of the world’s best ‘stock-boys’” (311). Of course, the irony here is that the piccaninny on the saddle in front of her is more than likely one of the mixed-race generation Hill, Bates and others at the time deplored. Jebb discusses this in relation to Idriess, who was careful not to portray Aboriginal women cohabiting with white men: “The fact that they were never placed in a white man’s bed was consistent with the dominant European view which excluded them from the realm of domestic intimacy” (22).<sup>44</sup>In implying that sex is female Aborigines’ protection, rather than a commodity to be traded and abused, Hill elides the responsibility of white settlers. Aboriginal women “colonised” the country in ways that Hill cannot openly acknowledge in this context, demonstrating the deeply conflicting attitudes in contemporary society.

Hill does not completely ignore the taboo relationships between white men and Aboriginal women. She admits not wanting to meet the white men in these sexual relationships:

With a city in mind and a White Australia complex, I had hoped I would not meet them. I learned that it was difficult to avoid it. I also learned that many of them were the salt of the Territory earth, and I was proud to shake hands with them. As I have said, their lives are their own. (*Loneliness* 230)

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<sup>44</sup> However, in “Where the Wild Men Roam” *Walkabout* Jan. 1953, Idriess writes about a “black-gin” tending the fire of “her white lord” and “mate”: “Quite evidently she sticks by her white lord because she wants to; she likes him; she bosses him, too, to his surly acquiescence. An air of the tiger-cat about her pairs well with the watchful readiness of her mate” (17).

She concedes the apparent success of relationships between white men and Aboriginal women and the practicalities of these unions, while still not finding them acceptable under any other circumstances. Ultimately, Hill blames white women: "If there is any blame for Australia's present half-caste problem, it lies at the self-contained flat door of the white woman of the overcrowded cities, for men are only human" (230). This is another example of ways in which "extraordinary events and relationships could be rationalized" (Jebb 20) in the frontier regions.

Hill's pioneering bushmen are lauded as "[s]plendid men . . . playing a tremendous part in the colonization of their country, but the silence has taken them, the loneliness has won" (*Loneliness* 336). They have forgotten the world and are "by the world forgot" (336) as they live out their days in the remote regions. Like Jebb writes of Idriess', Hill's images "encouraged southerners' pride in the white men (and very occasionally white women) who settled [the frontier] for the sake of civilization and the Australian nation" (19). These men are the epitome of gallantry and chivalry: "Future Australians will see him in tapestry or mosaic, antediluvian as King Arthur's knights. He is a knightly figure. Red-brown as the country, riding, he is a terra-cotta bas-relief already" (*Territory* 421). These offhand medieval references are interspersed throughout Hill's writing. In her examination of references to medievalism in novels written by Australian women in the nineteenth century, Louise D'Arcens found that "medievalism offered a range of discourses on which [the novelists] drew frequently, but also inconsistently" (55), which is likewise the case for Hill. Hill's "multifarious" (55) and haphazard use of medievalist references is usually applied to bushmen, Aborigines, and the Australian landscape in order to draw attention to the ancientness and exoticism (or Otherness) of each. D'Arcens describes a "miscellaneous medievalism" in which "[g]eneralized ideals and motifs associated with chivalry are evoked

ubiquitously, yet often so briefly that they are almost emptied of association with the Middle Ages" (123). This is how such references function in Hill's texts and is what D'Arcens terms a "superficial medievalism . . . unconcerned with medieval culture except as a repository of literary motifs and allusions" (122). Occasionally Hill inserts an oblique reference to a classic poem (such as Sir Walter Scott's "Marmion"), and she compares Aboriginal legends to the ancient Greek or Hindu legends. These casual references to established canonical texts enhance Hill's romantic, idealised visions of bushmen, tribal Aborigines living as they had before the arrival of white settler/invaders, and an ancient landscape. They are tied to the inevitable loss of a past environment (undisturbed and non-urban) and people which Hill inscribes in the hope of confirming (and establishing or reinforcing) an Australian national tradition.

In many ways Hill's texts participate in mythologising the past (or near past) in the remote regions. Alongside acknowledging the unique history of the area however, they raise questions about its future and issues of race which were troubling at the time. Both Aborigines and the early pioneers are destined to fade from the picture as modernisation spread and changed old ways of being in and on the land. Adam Gall argues that "Hill's characters are constructed as fast-disappearing 'types' . . . Indeed, her 'type' portraits could also be understood as archetypal in the sense of embodying aspects of a white Australian mythology" (201). Gall argues that Hill displaces "onto frontier whites . . . the 'fast-disappearing' qualities attributed contemporaneously to authentic Aboriginality" (205). The same could also be said of her portrayal of the bushmen. Hill writes elegiacally of these figures:

To take the sun-down trails is to find them still, all that are left of them, the men whose roughened hands have made history, who have circled the Continent again

and again . . . Thirty years ago they were friends of the old Australia. The new one has left them behind . . . Let the younger generation have its talkies and the flying machines. Theirs were the days. (*Loneliness* 44-45)

In Hill's texts, then, black and white are shown together in time and place,<sup>45</sup> but also always culturally divided. Neither will inherit the regions they inhabit; they occupy them for their lifetimes (perhaps) and are replaced by others in part of a changing order, as Australia changes along with forces of modernisation. The figure of the bushman is fading from existence along with the Indigene. Previous ways of living and prior ways of belonging are no longer relevant or sustainable in the new order of things. Aborigines and bushmen become inscribed as part of the foundational story on which the nation is built in texts such as Hill's; they forged the way for future Australians.

Hill's conflation of Indigene and pioneer as relics of the past confers qualities ascribed to Aborigines onto the early white settlers. Terry Goldie refers to this as a process of "indigenization". This is a term Goldie coined to refer to colonisers' need to write themselves into the history of a country, usually by writing their history over that of the original inhabitants in an act of effacement of the colonised people, relegating them to a mythologised past (13). Penelope Ingram takes Goldie's idea further, considering that for white settlers to become Indigenous required removal of "the indigene entirely, inscribing himself or herself [that is, the white settler] in the blank space . . . and performing a kind of textual genocide that erects the white settler in place of the indigene" (94). Hill does not go to these lengths to inscribe a white history that replaces or effaces that of the autochthonous Australians in her narratives. While she is inscribing a white history of

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<sup>45</sup> A term known as coeval: see Fabian 1-35.



pioneering, expansion and development, it is just that: a *white* history, one in which the Indigene prefigures white settlers and is a continuing presence.

Aborigines are a feature of Hill's texts; they are always already present in the landscape. Their prior belonging is not disputed even while the right of the white settler to take and occupy land is not questioned. Aborigines and white settlers are separate entities occupying different cultural positions in Hill's texts and it seems impossible to bridge the gap between these cultures let alone usurp the characteristics of one and from there inscribe oneself in the blank space left by the autochthonous culture. Projected optimism for the future means the death of certain aspects of the past, as Rose recognises in relation to Hill: "for white people the passing of the frontier is both a death and a fulfilment, and thus a bittersweet and inescapable destiny" (30). The closest Hill comes to creating an Indigenous culture for white settlers is in reference to the bushman and the survival skills he acquired which enabled him to live and work in remote Australia. Life and/or death for the bushman is close to that of Aborigines and of nature: "When the day comes, your true bushman dies naturally and casually as the blacks and birds about him" (*Territory* 432). Bushmen work and die alongside the Aborigines in Hill's texts. They are "like" the blacks but still reliant on them in difficult or extreme situations (and also in everyday life).

Throughout Hill's texts, then, Indigenous and white Australians feature alongside each other in complex relations of corruption, violence, friendship and interdependence. Aborigines are depicted in the present despite a dying race discourse. On cattle stations and in remote outposts they are working alongside white Australians. When travelling with drovers as they make camp in the evening, Aborigines are droving and camping alongside: "When you turned out for dinner-camp under a tree," Hill writes, "you put on the billy and 'cut off the dinner' for you and the blacks" (*Territory* 425). They are in the city of Darwin.

They are at the horse races (*Loneliness* 126), at the movies (35) and travelling on trains (134). Her texts contain descriptions of the ways in which Aborigines have adapted to altered ways of living and being in the face of colonisation. In the case of modern initiation ceremonies, for example, telegrams are sent to participants who arrive by train for the ceremony bringing “pocket-knife” and “a pot of red paint” in a suitcase (*Territory* 363). Her descriptions of features of the landscape such as the baobab tree contain detail of its significance for both Aborigines and white Australians. Rivers and features are given their Aboriginal names, such as on the Nullarbor plain, which Hill writes was called “Oondiri the Waterless . . . domain of Dijarra, an immense legendary serpent” (*Loneliness* 248). By interweaving Aboriginal history into her white history in these ways, Hill implicitly acknowledges Aboriginal presence and belonging while she is also inscribing white presence and belonging.

If Hill’s association with Aborigines is largely only as a curious observer it has the effect of giving her a complex perspective; she cannot simply understand them in terms of the common stereotypes of childlike primitive or wild savage, although she reverts to this type of signification in her texts. Her texts reveal a persistent cultural divide as she tries to make sense of customs and ways of life that are alien to hers; while she falls short of achieving any real understanding, she certainly goes further than most of her contemporaries in bringing a more informed awareness of Aborigines as a people and the difficulties they endured as a result of white contact and settlement. Although her views were tainted by prevalent discourses on race that she often reiterated, Hill reached beyond stereotypes and common tropes. Her wide readership would have garnered insights and understandings of an unfamiliar region and its people through Hill’s texts. An awareness of

difference and its attendant complicatedness for ongoing relationships in the modern nation was placed firmly in the minds of Australians through Hill's accounts.

In her observations of Aborigines Hill distanced herself from empirical scientific enquiry:

I am no anthropologist, and these stray notes of mine, gathered mainly from blacks and from a few observant whites in many days and many ways of roaming, are no attempt to set a figure in mosaic, but only a bower-bird's playground of shining bits and pieces, facets of the aboriginal mind. (*Territory* 348)

And yet her texts have been read as anthropological: Morris writes that Hill "saw herself not only as a historian, but as an anthropologist collecting data while there was still time left to do so" ("Panorama" 36). Margriet Bonnin saw travel writers (Hill included) as having scientific and humanitarian interest in the Aborigines (392). Hill's self-professed attempts to transcribe accurate, well-researched versions of people and events suggest an anthropological (or ethnological) bent. She considered her personal contact with Aborigines to give her accounts an authenticity lacking in others and provides a detailed list of the tribes with whom she had contact in an extended paragraph of Aboriginal tribal names in *The Territory* (351-52). She was interested in Aboriginal languages and customs which she described in detail in her texts, claiming to "have spent months among some of the groups of natives, collecting vocabularies—the only way to translation—and quietly looking for legend and lore (350). Others—trained anthropologists and untrained observers—pursued similar "studies" at the time. Hill writes that she studied Aborigines' lives and beliefs far from the railway lines, where he is still to be found unharnessed with the horrible rags and half-comprehensions that civilisation has inflicted upon him, and I have stepped into a strange world, the psychology of the savage that, except in a

few scientific works of great value but little public recognition, has never been written. (*Loneliness* 175)

Hill's interest in Aborigines, if only as "Other" and alien to white culture, resulted in knowledge of Aboriginal people and their ways that few white Australians had.

This anthropological (or ethnographic) intent in Hill's work bears remarking on in light of her association with Daisy Bates, whom she first met in 1932. Bates is largely remembered as an eccentric who spent years living in a tent in close proximity to Aborigines. She famously and controversially considered it her duty to "smooth the dying pillow" of a race she believed would die out completely by the end of the twentieth century. Bates took extensive notes detailing Aboriginal culture and languages. Although dismissed by anthropologists,<sup>46</sup> Bates' influence on general perceptions of Aborigines was widespread through publications in newspapers, journals, and with *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1938)—co- or ghost-written by Hill—which was republished a number of times. Shoemaker considers the book's wide influence at the time of publication and in the years since:

There is little doubt that Bates's book, first published in 1938, had a significant impact upon the perception of Aborigines by European Australians and overseas readers. *The Passing of the Aborigines* is a prime example of a work published in the 1929-1945 period which still exerted some influence upon Australian readers as late as the 1970s. (50)

Popular writers like Hill, Bates and Idriess reached a wide audience and influenced readers' perceptions about Aborigines. While their representations and sentiments were flawed, they nevertheless raised awareness of issues outside everyday experience that were engaging the national consciousness—albeit mostly from a distance—at the time.

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<sup>46</sup> Bates was "written out of anthropology altogether", Marie Lepervanche wrote in *First in Their Field* (6).

Bates is one of the women discussed in Julie Marcus' *First in Their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology* (1993), along with Phyllis Kaberry, Ursula McConnel and Olive Pink. As noted in Part One, Kaberry published one of the few accounts of Aboriginal women in the 1930s. During the early- to mid-twentieth century Kaberry, McConnel, Bates and Pink were notable women who contributed to pioneering anthropological work on Aborigines. Marie de Lepervanche writes:

Even though some of these [women] did not have the formal qualifications acceptable today [such as Bates and Pink], this should not prevent their belonging to the discipline. After all, men without such qualifications have received reverential treatment. (6)

The stories of each of these women's careers is similar. They experienced obstructions and restrictions not unlike those of women writers in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia. The male-dominated field of anthropology relegated them to the margins, and it is only in retrospect that their work is receiving the recognition it deserves.

Hill and Bates were oddly similar in their refusal to conform to restrictive gendered roles. Hill writes that "marriage became an impediment [for Bates], a frustration, a subjugation of her temperament and will . . . Child-bearing, child-rearing, women's work that is never done: the radiant future was receding" (*Kabbarli* 27). Each of these women invented lies to free themselves from society's conventions: Hill invented a husband and Bates hid one of hers. *Kabbarli* (1973), Hill's memoir of Bates, is an elaborate tribute to Bates' life and revelatory of the nature of the relationship between the two women. While there were tensions, Hill defends Bates' reputation:

Shall we think less of her scientific work, her knowledge drawn from the fountain head, because it was not presented in textbook form, and was pursued, without

benefit of university salaries or government endowments or subsidies, by a woman alone in the Loneliness? (10)

These two unconventional women forged a bold unrepentant path for other women to follow through lives that challenged gendered norms.

**Mimicry: “a difference that is almost nothing but not quite”**

Hill’s use of time in her texts—both in relation to the space from which she writes and the others whom she encounters—can be seen to correspond to the uses of time Johannes Fabian sees taking place in anthropology at the time, particularly in the colonial or postcolonial space in relation to the marginalised other, the subject of the (anthropologist’s) gaze. For Fabian, “anthropology sanctioned an ideological process by which relations between the West and its Other, between anthropology and its object, were conceived not only as difference, but as distance in space *and* Time” (147; emphasis in orig.). Fabian posits this distance as “denial of coevalness” which he considers “the *allochronism* of anthropology” (32; emphasis in orig.). Fabian claims that this is a “device” (unconsciously) used by anthropologists in their inscriptions that displays “*a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*” (31; emphasis in orig.). Hill relegates Aborigines as primitive beings from the “Stone Age” (*Loneliness* 236) or as savages (175); yet conversely they occupy the present spaces living and working alongside white settlers, albeit in unequal relationships of power.

Hill describes Aborigines as having a different concept of time and space from that of white Australians—“[c]hild of the world’s childhood, he has no gauge of time or space” (*Loneliness* 161)—however, this is the case for all people in the north-west: “They don’t count time by the calendar in far North-west Australia. Up there, where life’s a long vacuum,

the years and months are ‘wets’ and ‘Koolindas’” (90).<sup>47</sup> In *The Territory*, she writes: “There’s no time here. We go by the shadow,” they told me at Borrooloola when I asked the time. So they grow old without knowing” (*Territory* 425). These regions where time is denoted by the seasons and by contact with others (such as the arrival of the mail) are analogous with Bhabha’s contention that “the imaginary of spatial distance—to live somehow beyond the border of our times—throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity” (6). Temporal and social difference become something other in the remote north-west border regions.

The Aborigines Hill encounters and spends time talking with and observing are simultaneously objects of desire and revulsion or abhorrence, due to vast differences in background and cultural practices. For Hill, “[h]orror and beauty mingle in all the rites of the aborigine. Harmless and likeable for the most part as a ‘possum, he suffers surprising reversions to the sheer savage” (*Loneliness* 174). Her language alternates between likening Aborigines to nature and to animals, and referring to them as simple beings from a prehistoric time, to sympathetically situating them as fellow humans who have been grossly misunderstood, mistreated and under- (or de-)valued. Bhabha uses the term “mimicry” to describe this contradictory discourse (121-31). For Bhabha mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (122; emphasis in orig.). It can take two forms as it arguably does in Hill’s writing:

The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry*—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite. (131; emphasis in orig.)

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<sup>47</sup> The *Koolinda* was a ship that brought people and supplies to the area.

Hill admires Aborigines' qualities and customs and considers that white Australians could learn from them, while conversely describing them as savage, violent, and incomprehensible. These uncertainties (or perplexities) in her discourse reveal a mimicry which is "at once resemblance and menace" (123), and reflect the ambivalent attitudes towards Aborigines in contemporary Australian society. Stereotypes are easy to apply to a faceless other but when encountering others on a personal level it is harder to do so, as Hill discovers. Her disposition is sympathetic when she engages with Aborigines on a personal level. She confesses a certain admiration:

I like these people. I like their ever-ready laughter . . . their wide grins and the melancholy in their dark eyes, their graceful gestures, their soft voices, their infinite patience, their uncomprehendingness of life's complexity, their kinship with the lazy Australia that is so much more theirs than mine. (*Loneliness* 173)

She finds an affinity with Aborigines in her direct experience of them as individuals; in discussing them as a race, her representations become more stereotyped.

Hill refers to Aborigines as "our inarticulate dark people" (*Territory* 351), yet describes at some length their story-telling, cultural customs, and performances of corroboree, even referring to "performing rights" and "copyright" in the travelling performances of corroboree (354). She displays knowledge of "aboriginal art galleries" in the caves (360); she refers to educational practices as an Aboriginal "Rhodes scholarship" (368), and compares Aboriginal belief in "their own hazy zodiac" to "the readers of our women's journals" (356). Despite acknowledging these customs, because Aborigines do not use written language, Hill translates this as an inability to communicate their culture. She recognises the cultural gulf between white Australians and Aborigines: "it is all part of an age-old aboriginal mysticism that the white man cannot possibly comprehend in one



lifetime” (*Loneliness* 116). Although she spent time in their company trying to learn their ways she failed to reconcile “discrepancies between image and experience and discontinuities between culture and context” (Lawson “Acknowledging Colonialism” 135); and she struggles to explain these to herself and to her readers.

Despite acknowledging huge gaps in understanding between white Australians and Aborigines, Hill considers it

the Australian poet’s rightful licence to translate our inarticulate dark people, and we rejoice in all writers who weave their fact and fancy to express and to help those who are with us still, but let us leave a life-mask for future generations to see, and not a cook-up of *Hiawatha* and the *Just So Stories*. (*Territory* 351)

Hill considers the “writing of aboriginal legends in Australia . . . has become a literary vogue” (350). She writes with admiration of Elizabeth and Mary Durack’s and Bill Harney’s Aboriginal stories because “[s]uch as these know and understand the blacks, in the casual and friendly association of many years” (350). She considers the Duracks’ books “valuable and delightful . . . of delicate legendary grace and rare poetic insight of aboriginal life, [and] are among our happiest, most human and most authentic studies of the black Australian” (*Territory* 244). Hill also mentions the work of scientist, anthropologist and administrator Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860–1929):

No anthropologist has left us such a complete and authentic study of the wild man of Australia, laws, religion, the index to his mind . . . Spencer’s many books are neglected on our library shelves, yet for the student of ethnology, theology, philosophy, for the poet and the imaginative writer. (273)

Spencer's work is credited with inspiring the Jindyworobak movement<sup>48</sup> which was in full swing during the time Hill was publishing (1938–1953). In trying to establish an autonomous Australian literature, the Jindyworobaks borrowed or symbolically used elements of Aboriginal culture in their work. Ellen Smith notes that “[a]t the crux of the Jindyworobaks’ modern localism was a reformulation of the relationship between the provincial and modern world culture” (12). It was a cultural movement that was “inward-looking, directed towards the local and the national” (9) as it tried to promote Indigenous ideas and customs in literature with a professed desire to improve everyday Australians’ understanding of them.

Like the Jindyworobaks, Hill wanted to create a distinctly Australian literature rooted in the country and its people. In the preface to the second edition of *The Great Australian Loneliness* she wrote that she hoped the book would be “a stimulus to our writers—pathfinders all in a new southern literature”. To that end, Hill saw herself providing a voice for Indigenous Australians, which they could not do for themselves. This voice was obviously tainted; despite some knowledge of Aborigines from personal experience, Hill’s understanding was limited and deeply influenced by prevailing white attitudes, ideologies and ethnological ideas. If Aborigines were seen as unable to represent themselves, for Hill, it is likewise in relation to the pioneers: “I write a saga of the silent pioneers” (*Territory* 4). To Hill’s mind both the “silent pioneers” and the “inarticulate dark people” required others such as herself to inscribe their histories so that they did not disappear from the nation’s foundational history.

Hill does not shy away from the devastating effects of colonisation on Australia’s Indigenous population—“In teaching him how to live, we have taught him only how to die”

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<sup>48</sup> See Brian Elliott’s introduction to *The Jindyworobaks* i – lxxv.

(*Loneliness* 179)—or the culpability of whites in their dealings with Aborigines. Paul Miller remarks on the “incompatibility between [Hill’s] colonial discourse promoting inland expansion and her counter-imperial discourse sympathising with Aborigines highlights the tension that existed within white Australian society itself” (91). She tells some graphic stories of the frontier wars, laying blame with neither white settlers nor Aborigines, recognising fault on both sides, and is more often than not sympathetic to Aborigines in her re-telling. She acknowledges white Australia’s overall culpability in its dealings with Aborigines: “Not only Queensland and the Territory, but every State in Australia has its crime sheet in callous inhumanity to the blacks” (*Territory* 198). Hill uses the euphemism “disperse” to describe this in a way that acknowledges the inappropriateness or deliberate misuse of the word in attempting to cover up the wholesale slaughter that occurred.

Hill acknowledges the ways in which Aborigines were exploited: “native labour was free, too free. A bag of flour and a stick of tobacco bought a human life” (*Loneliness* 39). She spent time as an observer of criminal trials in Darwin and writes of Aborigines’ apparent bewilderment and incomprehension in the face of the white Australian courts of law. In relating these stories her rather distant, offhand style has the effect of enhancing the impression of Aborigines’ hopelessness and helplessness in the face of a culture they do not understand but in which they have become irrevocably and tragically enmeshed. She recognises misunderstanding on both sides:

Half of the white population died at their hands in the very early days . . . To some of the first white colonists, particularly the multitude of the gold rush, they were just niggers, the boys shot at sight, the women used brutally. It led to complications, and the innocent suffered for the guilty on both sides. Even to-day there is an occasional tragedy, not often the black man’s fault. (89)

While acknowledging white culpability, Hill writes of this being a past occurrence; her way of writing about this in a manner acceptable to white sensibilities is to relegate violence by and large to the past.

Hill is not able to form a cut-and-dried opinion of the “half-caste problem”. In trying to revert to common tropes such as “breeding them white” she is confronted with the problems of an expanding population contributing to society without being recognised by it. She is influenced by the contemporary concern with racial purity and tracing origins. She refers to Dr Cecil Cook and his ideas to “breed [them] white” (*Loneliness* 226), concluding by questioning his theories: “I fear, that for all the apparent watertightness of his theories, Dr. Cook may be propounding a domestic problem of the far future” as there is no sign of the “coal-black complexion” dissipating (232). While she advocates populating the remote north-west with white Australians and considers miscegenation a “tremendous social problem” Hill extends her thinking as a result of personal encounters:

In all my experience in outback Australia, chary at first of a tremendous social problem where only fools rush in with superficial judgements, I found the half-castes always cleanly, helpful and trustworthy. (227)

The mixed race population is “prolific . . . in contradistinction to the aboriginal” (227) and Hill acknowledges that the north-west would not function without its racialised population: “they are playing a very considerable part in the colonisation of a country that is actually more closely theirs than our own” (227-28). Yet “half-caste” children are progeny “of a tragedy far too deep for glib preaching, half-way between the Stone Age and the twentieth century” (227). By the time she wrote *Kabbarli*, published posthumously in 1973, Hill’s subscription to the dying race trope had altered: “After seven generations of assimilations, tribal and racial, we still call them ‘Aborigines’ today. In 1900 it was a different story”

(*Kabbarli* 38). The problem of reconciling Aborigines and white Australians in relationships of equality, however, remained.

When she sets aside the “threat” of multi-racial north-western Australia, Hill finds much to admire in the people and the ways in which they occupy these regions. In Broome and Darwin in particular she finds a “weird interweaving of race and colour” (*Loneliness* 144). Similar to her list of the Aboriginal tribes with whom she had contact, Hill lists the various nationalities she encounters in these outposts, “all or any of these blended for a generation or two with each other and with the Australian black” (145). She spends time among these people and seems to enjoy their company, not finding them less than human but curiosities nonetheless. Her rich descriptions evoke senses of sight, sound and smell, and have been read by Gall as “imbued in their particulars with a theatricality, a sense of otherness as a performance . . . and a source of genuine pleasure” (Gall 200-01) for Hill and her readers. The “polychromatic collections of humans” (*Loneliness* 68) she finds in Broome and Darwin have created successful industries and found ways of living together: “Manila cooks are selling their *satè* on the verandahs, Chinese gramophones and Asiatic cats wail in the by-ways. Announcements are made in four languages, English, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic” (68). For Hill, the people are kind, harmless, industrious and honest. She spends time amongst them, talking with them and sharing their food:

The lemon-drinks that the little Japanese ladies brought me, shuffling along in their wooden slippers with many a bow, I shall remember every summer of my life. They were a foot long, all crushed ice and deliciousness, with a whole lemon and a syrup-secret from Osake. (72)

She engages happily and wholeheartedly with the others she meets and puts a human face on these people while still calling for an increase in the white population in these regions.

As Gall points out,

Hill evinces a fascination with the limits of White Australia . . . While this interest is far from unique, Hill's emphasis on these limits exceeds contemporary forms of anxiety and also suggests limits to the critique of indigenisation. (205)

She challenges common perceptions even as she reiterates them, emphasising successful activities and cooperation between disparate, multi-racial communities in the far North.

In her representations of racialised others, Hill demonstrates how those of mixed race continue to occupy an in-between space: neither inside nor completely outside contemporary society in the remote regions, this is a space that is neither fully here nor fully there, less than whole but also more than whole. "The infinite rehearsal is not so much a counter-discourse as a continually re-cited/re-sited one", according to Joanne Tompkins in her study of rehearsal, performance and identity in settler culture drama (144). Hill recognises the disjunctive problem faced by those of mixed race on an individual and national level at a time where purity of race was valued and those of mixed race considered lower on the human scale and with less rights. They were seen as less authentic as a result. She inadvertently identifies the problematic issues of individual identity and notions of belonging for those of mixed race who are "an extraordinary study in dual nationality" (*Loneliness* 148). She describes a Chinese-Australian as "an amazing dual mentality . . . an exile in his own country, a stranger to the children of his own race" (148). Even while she considers mixed-race progeny a national problem, Hill finds the human face behind the problem of race. Gall reads Hill's representation of

the degraded present of the ‘half-castes’, who are a frontier type in another way in that they are read as between races and cultures . . . [as] evidence of a potential political power, albeit transmuted into a national problem and a threat. (202).

In challenging commonly deployed representations of Aborigines and racial others, Hill gives them a humanity denied by simple stereotypes.

In Hill’s texts Aborigines perform many different roles: they are fearsome savages, peace-loving, quaint sylvan creatures, fellow human beings, wise sages, “simple souls marooned from the Stone Age” (*Loneliness* 115), “inarticulate”, and so on. Using Tompkins’ argument, in the performance of these many roles, the “structure, set, and costumes all contribute to . . . transformations”, and in the end produce a “dis-union” in the production of cultural difference which is seemingly incommensurable with white settler society and yet exists uneasily alongside and within it (150). By placing Aborigines implicitly and prominently in her texts Hill raised awareness of their contested space within white consciousness and placed the difficult issues of cultural difference and how to negotiate it firmly in the eyes of Australian society.

The tensions within contemporary white Australian society are clearly revealed in Hill’s texts. Stemming from a history of violence and misunderstanding, relationships between white Australia and its others were necessarily finding new ways of being through the “infinite rehearsal” of identity found in texts such as Hill’s. This continuous rehearsal “force[s] a revision—or a re-acting—of (and to) the traditional paradigms” (Tompkins 144). Hill’s wildly vacillating language and ideas concerning the others she encounters are prime examples of the limits of white identification in the remote regions. Rolls and Johnston write that

Few articles [in *Walkabout*] maintain a consistently coherent ideology in respect to Aborigines, no matter how assertive the language. Contradiction, ambivalence, uncertainty, as well as romanticised tosh and the strut of those confident in the encompassing project of modernity, exist within a single article or across a single issue, and certainly across the magazine as a whole. (101)

This is certainly the case in Hill's texts. However, in presenting individual stories and characters, Hill challenges "the singular classifications of people within the national identity paradigm" (Tompkins 152) and paves a way for more nuanced and sympathetic understandings of a wider social conundrum. Her quirky individuals serve to put a human face to the remote north-west, bringing it closer to the urban consciousness and having the potential to lead to new ways of identification across cultures. Clearly delineated boundaries (which had been culturally imposed through racial hierarchies) between cultures could not be perpetuated in regions like the remote north-west if Australia was to progress as a modern nation. Aborigines do have a place in Hill's Australian society. How this place is negotiated between Aborigines and white Australians is the subject of ongoing debate but it is a debate which Hill encouraged through her discussion and textual representations. Aborigines and racialised others were seen to occupy a place in the past, present and future which cannot be ignored or written over if the nation was to progress in any meaningful way.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Pioneering, Paternal Pastoralism and Aboriginal Welfare:

#### Mary Durack's *Kings in Grass Castles*, *Sons in the Saddle*, *All-About*, *Child Artists*, and *The Rock and the Sand*

Mary Durack's family were among the early pioneers of the nineteenth century on whom Australian nation-building myths are based. Durack herself inscribed these myths in two volumes of family history, *Kings in Grass Castles* (1959) and *Sons in the Saddle* (1983). Durack wrote that she believed the family story "should be recorded if only for archival purposes", and she approached her histories "with something of the dogged spirit of those overlanding drovers who, having undertaken the job, were committed come what might to see it through" (*Kings* xi). By transcribing these histories, Durack is "working out a complicated politics of representation, working through the settler's anxieties and obsessions in textual form", as Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson argue about the settler experience ("Settler Colonies" 363). Durack occupied the place of Homi Bhabha's double inscription as a white settler trying to locate an authentic sense of belonging in postcolonial Australia. Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs' work on the idea of the "uncanny" in relation to Australian identity is useful here. In Australia, they argue,

one's place is always already another's place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled. The conventional colonial distinctions between self and other, here and there, mine and yours, are now by no means totally determinable. (138)

This is evident in Durack's texts which display the complexities which arise from being "in place and 'out of place' at precisely the same time" (139). Her family occupied land in marginal regions by displacing Aborigines. In the process they formed relationships with Aborigines, albeit unequal ones. Mary Anne Jebb describes this relationship as that of "intimate strangers": white settlers and Aborigines lived and worked in close association with each other yet remained culturally divided (12). As a white settler, Durack is positioned "within the structures of colonialism even as [she] is somehow located beyond them or 'after' them" (Gelder and Jacobs 24); it is this complex relationship of the white settlers to the country and to Aborigines that Durack explores on the page.

In writing her family histories, Durack claimed her intention was to present an unbiased and accurate account: "I have tried to be . . . objective and to present as balanced a picture as possible of black and white relationships", she wrote in *Sons in the Saddle* (x). She referred to her books as "documentaries" and used primary sources such as letters, newspaper articles, journals, ledgers and transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews to construct her histories. In gathering recollections from "the remaining old-timers whose ranks were dwindling year by year" (x), Durack expressed a similar urgency to commit these stories to paper as that of Hill. To this end she interviewed both white settlers and Aborigines to reconstruct the past. She found the memories of the Aborigines "remarkable" and wrote that she was "often moved by the objectivity of their interpretations and by their understanding not only of the *djoalung* (black man) but the *guddea* (white man) point of view" (x). Despite recording Aboriginal accounts as part of her research, Aboriginal voices are rarely heard in Durack's texts. They are a presence in the books but Durack is speaking on their behalf. In writing these accounts of white settler history, then, Durack occupies a subject position that has been the focus of discussion in postcolonial theory; one that is

simultaneously characterised by authority (exercised as a coloniser) and resistance (to the absent imperial [i.e. British] power). Durack's close affiliation with Aborigines manifests in desire (for identification with the Indigene as authentic Australian) and disavowal (of Indigenous presence and violences committed against them by white settlers). This desire and disavowal often leads to effacement of the autochthonous subject altogether, as the white settler writes him/herself into the place of the original inhabitants. Durack strives not to do this in her texts; her concern to include Aborigines and her advocacy for their welfare indicate altruistic motives which manifest in contradictory ways due to the "uncanniness" of her in-between position.

Durack speaks (and writes), then, from a position of implicit cultural authority; however well-intentioned her motives, she performs the function explained by Penelope Ingram, whereby "in the act of inscribing indigenous culture in their texts . . . white settlers are attempting to write themselves into origin, to become indigenous" (83). The "textual genocide" (94) necessary for the white settler to do this, erecting themselves in the place of origin, does not occur in Durack's narratives. It is impossible to tell the Duracks' history without including Aborigines; the stories are intertwined. Aborigines are integral to Durack's narratives in complicated ways; her story of white settlement shows how they were driven off their land and their way of life irrevocably altered. The Duracks are shown to treat the station Aborigines kindly yet the right to defend their lands against "wild blacks" is implicit. Jebb describes this as the "double-edged sword of paternalism built on acts of kindness within unequal power relations and distinctive cultural systems" (12). Despite close contact between white settlers and Aborigines, cultural hierarchies remained firmly in place in the remote north-west.

By settling the land in an act of white expansion Durack's family stand in the place of Aborigines who had no choice but to resist or conform. The interactions that take place between white settlers and Aborigines under these circumstances are revealed in Durack's texts in complex ways. Aborigines are not shown wholly capitulating to white settlers but rather adjusting to an altered way of life in conjunction with settlers. They had little choice in this due to the cultural authority of the settlers but they used means available to them to find new ways of living on their lands. Durack's texts show the complicated relationships that developed in the push and pull of conditions in these frontier spaces. Alan Lawson argues that the settler subject is "caught by both interpellation and inscription", as they assume authority to "speak for" the autochthonous culture and also occupy the space of (or "stand in" for) the Indigene ("Postcolonial Theory" 24). Lawson also points out that the "in between of the settlers is not unbounded space but a place of negotiation; colonialism is a relation, an unequal one but no less a relation for that. The boundaries of civilization are especially porous" (29). There was a certain amount of exchange between Aborigines and settlers in the frontier region. Conditions there necessitated the negotiation of ways of living together in relationships of mutual dependence, even if by and large the authority of the settler invader was absolute. The act of retracing and reclaiming a past from which to move forward in the modern nation necessitated the inclusion of Aboriginal presence, which Durack does, even if the act of representation is flawed.

In keeping with her serious documentary interests, Durack only occasionally references her own personal memories in her texts, generally in verification of something as innocuous as an attestation to the overwhelming number of insects with which those of the Kimberley region had to contend (*Sons* 265). One powerful memory stands out, however, as a revelation of her ambiguous position as settler-subject:

My own recollections . . . begin . . . at Ivanhoe, which locality I have always felt to be, in an Aboriginal sense, my 'spirit home'. Even before the face of my own mother, I can see Dinah's [an Aboriginal woman] smiling countenance as she hoists me on to her shoulders and bears me off to fish, with a bent pin for a hook, from the edge of the Ivanhoe lagoon. The wriggling inches of our catch, loudly applauded by an Aboriginal audience complete with yelping but carefully tethered dogs, are a shining memory. (299)

This recollection illustrates the close interactions and relationships Durack had with Aborigines from a young age. Henrietta Drake-Brockman notes Durack's "dominating interest" in Aborigines, "not as the whites see him but as he sees himself" ("Our Authors' Page" 42). She quotes Durack as saying "you cannot really know the blacks until you work with them, until they have been your companions" (42). Time spent in the north-west on the family properties had a significant influence on Durack and her siblings. In an interview Durack spoke of the two to three years she and Elizabeth lived and worked on Ivanhoe as young women: "Our staff consisted of a number of trained Aboriginal stockmen and their womenfolk. We got on together like members of an interdependent family and have kept up our association ever since" (Jack Bennett 44). Brenda Niall writes that "[a]lthough officially Mary and Bet were in charge of the Aborigines, they were given motherly protection by the older women" (44). This was an enduring relationship: "Every year from the early 1960s until the end of her life, [Mary] went north to see the Aborigines whom she had known when they were all young together" (204). Niall's account of Mary and Elizabeth draws out their close connection to the Aborigines they had known.

This affinity extended to Durack's assumption of the voice of an Aboriginal woman in a poem expressing her sorrow at the flooding of the Argyle Downs homestead when the Ord

River was dammed in 1972. Titled “Lament for a Drowned Country”, and written in the first-person voice of an Aboriginal elder, Maggie Wallaby, the poem “echo[ed] the cadences of the voices Mary had known so well for many decades” (N. Hasluck 36). In his obituary to Durack, Geoffrey Bolton wrote that the poem was

[o]ne of [Durack’s] most moving verses . . . When Durack recited that poem she became that Aboriginal woman. The empathy was complete. Probably only someone of her generation, poised between the years of first contact and the modern complexities of racial politics, could have achieved that balance, but it also required rare qualities of insight. (11)

Niall writes that the poem was judged Durack’s “finest” (210), while acknowledging that “[a]t a later time, her creation of a first-person voice for Maggie Wallaby might have been questioned. In 1972 it was taken as she intended it, as a work of empathy and imaginative identification” (210). Niall and Bolton’s words, and Durack’s use of an Aboriginal voice require comment here, particularly in light of Elizabeth’s controversial adoption of an Aboriginal persona in her artwork following (but not related to) Mary’s death, which attracted nation-wide publicity. (Durack also included the English translation of an Aboriginal love song in *Keep Him My Country*). This usurping of Aboriginal culture and identity by white Australians would now clearly be considered unacceptable appropriation and, indeed, this has been the view of many of Elizabeth’s critics. The issue is more complex when placed in historical context, however, as Maggie Nolan and Carrie Dawson point out in their examination of cases of imposture in Australia, noting the complexities around particular cases due to “the very different cultural forces that are brought to bear” at particular historical moments (xiii). I deviate here to engage in a brief discussion of this issue.

When Elizabeth was seventy-nine years-old she invented an Aboriginal male alter ego named Eddie Burrup, “a synthesis of several Aboriginal men” she had known (R. Smith 5). She created an impressive back-story for the character and displayed paintings under the Burrup pseudonym in a mixed exhibition in the Broome gallery run by her daughter Perpetua, in January 1995. The paintings were shown all through the year but not listed for sale (Niall 226). This success of this exhibition led to a showing the following year in Adelaide. The Burrup hoax quickly spiralled out of control as the paintings were shown in Darwin between August and October 1996, and entered in Telstra’s 13<sup>th</sup> National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (227). Paintings were sold under the pseudonym, and Perpetua entered a Burrup painting for the Sulman Prize, a national competition (227). Realising it was time to reveal the hoax, Elizabeth invited Robert Smith, art historian and contributor to *Art Monthly Australia*, to hear and publish the story (228). The article made headline news throughout Australia, generating considerable debate.

The use of a male pseudonym by female artists is not uncommon: examples stretch back through the years. Indeed, Drake-Brockman initially began publishing articles under a male pseudonym, Henry Drake. *Blue North* was published under her own name, which she used thereafter. Henry Handel Richardson was the pseudonym of Ethel Robertson; Miles Franklin used a number of pseudonyms, male and female; likewise, poet Gwen Harwood. Niall sees parallels between these writers and Elizabeth Durack, considering it was Durack’s way of being taken seriously. Perhaps this was the case. In the colonial situation, however, it is fraught with difficulty, as Julie Marcus explains: “the sense of Aboriginal lives and bodies presented through the work of non-Aboriginal artists is necessarily caught up within the politics by which the colonisers dominate the colonised” (“... like an Aborigine” 49). Durack’s position of privilege meant that the adoption of a culturally subordinate subject

position can hardly be seen as anything but inappropriate appropriation that does nothing to benefit the “other” whose identity has been assumed, as Marcus recognises:

It is Durack who is liberated, not an Aboriginal person. This is not reconciliation but the act of final possession, an act in which those few approved and valued qualities allocated to Aboriginal people, particularly Aboriginal cultural and artistic abilities, are consumed and re-presented through the intimate capture of an Aboriginal identity and persona. (“... like an Aborigine” 46)

In contrast to Marcus, when the hoax was revealed in *Art Monthly*, Robert Smith concluded that

the work of Eddie Burrup can be seen as not just a homage to Aboriginal Australia, but a concrete exemplar for reconciliation between two communities and two cultures, in Elizabeth’s view ‘foundering so badly at the present time’. (5)

The issue is complicated however, by history and hindsight.

Elizabeth’s compulsion to create an Aboriginal persona has been analysed by Christine Dauber as providing Elizabeth with a power she did not possess within her family, where she was “recognised by her relationship with others . . . [and] inscribed a secondary status within patriarchy. Under the mask of Eddie Burrup she finally achieves an autonomy that is denied in the patriarchal society she has inhabited” (11). Marcus compares Elizabeth with female travellers who adopted other (usually male) personas: “in doing so, they found the freedom denied them through the hierarchical gender order of their European lives” (“... like an Aborigine” 48). Being a male member of the tribe, Eddie had access to tribal law and secrets and could express these in ways Elizabeth, the outsider, could not. Larissa Behrendt notes that the “choices [Elizabeth] made about Eddie provides an interesting account of how a non-Aboriginal person sees an Aboriginal one” (8). Elizabeth had long expressed an



interest in Aborigines and Aboriginal culture through art. She had a studio at the family property of Ivanhoe on the bank of the Ord River where she often painted alongside Jubul, an elderly Aboriginal artist (Niall 109-12). She had been accused of copying Aboriginal motifs by art critics before the Eddie Burrup controversy. Niall sees no malicious intent in the Burrup hoax: "It was naive to use the Eddie persona, but not a deliberate exploitation" (235). She compares other cases of imposture with Durack's, concluding: "Reading Elizabeth's own account of the Burrup deception, it is impossible to write the Eddie Burrup story off as opportunistic" (236). This discussion illustrates the fraught (and inappropriate) action of adopting the voice of another, particularly a subordinate other.

The privileged position the Duracks occupied in relation to Aboriginal people was changing during their lifetimes as the pastoral properties were struggling to service large debt in the face of decreasing markets and the Depression. These circumstances eventually led M. P. Durack to sell his assets just when his offspring felt that their place was firmly tied to the land in the Kimberley region: "the next generation's love of the region was taking shape as the commercial viability of the various stations declined", Nicholas Hasluck notes (34). This is where the complexities of this case in the colonial situation manifest: both women and Aborigines have been constructed as oppressed groups yet Mary and Elizabeth Durack were also privileged as colonisers and members of a pastoral dynasty seen to exploit Aborigines. Mary and Elizabeth were both with and without power: in place and out of place at the same time, in Gelder and Jacobs' reckoning (24). They used their art to explore complex issues of belonging.

Mary and Elizabeth Durack's close connections to Aboriginal people deeply affected their attitudes. As Hasluck points out:

in order to see the past clearly we have to understand the way in which the people of the relevant era saw what they were doing, and learn to what extent it lay within their power to effect improvements. (N. Hasluck 35)

Mary and Elizabeth brought difficulties issues surrounding the treatment of Aborigines to the attention of white Australia. Whether they did this in the most appropriate or sensitive way is questionable but they seem to have acted from altruistic motives at a time when there was mixed public opinion on the “Aboriginal problem”.

### **Pioneering and settlement in north-western Australia**

In her family histories Durack traced her family’s origins back to their migration from Ireland through to their occupation of vast properties in remote (frontier) regions. Durack’s grandfather, Patsy, migrated from Ireland to New South Wales in 1853, when he was eighteen years old. Patsy’s father, Michael, died as a result of a horse and cart accident in the year of their arrival. Patsy took on the mantle of provider and soon acquired a hunger for land, moving from Goulburn in south-western New South Wales up into south-western Queensland and then across into north-western Australia, “taking up” large parcels of land along the way. Durack describes her grandfather riding

on and on, hungry for land and more land and the security that seemed always just out of reach. Land hunger was a disease of his time, leading many besides himself on pastoral trails that ran out as often as not into sand and ruin. (*Kings* 163)

He lived a largely itinerant life, constantly on the move building his cattle empire. His sons were to continue this drive into the Kimberley region of north-western Australia on an epic pioneering trek to establish pastoral properties there. Aborigines were either pushed out or taken along as the white settlers penetrated further and further in the establishment of new

frontiers for the pastoral industry in what they saw as expansionist endeavours essential for the future economic prosperity of the nation.

The cattlemen were lauded for heroism, bravery and enterprise in developing the land for economic gain. Prior occupation of the country by Aborigines was ignored. This is one of the “key feature[s] of the frontier, from first settlement” onwards recognised by Deborah Bird Rose as plunder: “a form of exploitation that tips wealth out of the land without regard for the long-term consequences” (33). Durack’s father, referred to as M. P., saw the cattle empire as a business, as Durack noted: “He never regarded it as the setting for a permanent way of life for his family, but rather as a means to the ultimate attainment of a more satisfactory lifestyle somewhere else” (*Sons* 54). Hasluck wrote about the effect of this on M. P.’s family:

MPD always contended that the Kimberley stations were essentially a commercial proposition and were not intended as a dynastic inheritance . . . In the end, with a touch of King Lear about him, MPD dispossessed himself and his children. (N. Hasluck 34)

A sense of “unsettledness” plagues Durack’s texts due to the tenuousness of life in the frontier regions. Settlers are continually defending their hold on the land in contestations with Aborigines, the government of the day, and the environment. Durack’s texts contain many discussions about land rights and the uncertainties and precariousness of settler life in the remote regions. The frontier space holds Gelder and Jacobs’

condition of unboundedness . . . [O]ne can never be completely in possession of place: one is always (dis)possessed, in the sense that neither possession nor dispossession is a fully realisable category. (138)

The sense of unboundedness permeates Durack's histories: the books show white settlers constantly on the move throughout Australia's north-west, trying to find some sort of accord with the landscape and its others.

Durack's family histories detail the difficulties settlers had in trying to establish and maintain homes and viable businesses in north-western Australia. She writes: "For all his natural optimism and determination to 'travel hopefully', [M. P.'s] journals are still to a great extent chronicles of hardship and misfortune" (*Sons* 132-33). She describes her father "pondering somewhat gloomily on the nature of a region that, for all its potential and scenic grandeur, remained seemingly so resistant to the forces of change and progress" (132). In Durack's accounts the pastoralists are either buoyant with hope or "somewhat jaundiced" in the face of trials and setbacks. Her grandfather, Patsy, ended his life a broken man after suffering heavy financial and personal losses due to the many difficulties he encountered. Nor did her father see the realisation of an ongoing empire. This recalls the topos of failure in the north discussed in the previous chapter. Durack mentions a section of Hill's *The Territory* in *Sons in the Saddle*. M. P., she writes,

would no doubt have been depressed to read Ernestine Hill's description of the Territory written over half a century later: '. . . a colony in quicksand . . . Black men wandering and white men riding in a world without time where sons do not inherit . . . [a] land of an ever-shadowed past and an ever-shining future, of eternal promise that never comes true'. (*Sons* 11-12; first two ellipses in orig.)

These failures add complexity to settler representations and notions of indigenization which we see in both Hill's and Durack's texts. Their ways of being in the frontier do not continue indefinitely; their presence irrevocably changes both frontier space and its future. As Rose writes, Durack's family "helped generate and fill a disjunctive and transitive moment. The

white man on the frontier is in a paradoxical position . . . His compelling presence is about to produce his own absence” (Rose 25). This paradoxical position is a further identification of the settler with the Indigene: both were itinerant and fading out of existence in modern Australia, as we have seen was also the case in Hill’s representations.

Durack describes M. P. as “trapped in a life pattern that he was destined not to escape” (*Sons* 317), along with other settlers in the region. They were constantly on the move, between pastoral holdings within the frontier, between city and bush, across the continent and overseas in search of new markets. They were perpetual nomads due to the nature of the land they chose to occupy. This marginal lifestyle in marginalised space allies white settlers to Aborigines, as Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra argue: “Paradoxically his marginality allies him with . . . types [of people] his surface meanings seem designed to oppose: the old Australian, the Aborigines whom he helped to dispossess” (xvi). M. P. found this unsettled way of life unavoidable as he was “always anxiously seeking an acceptable and continuing pattern of life for himself and his family” (Durack *Sons* 89). Security was never assured on marginal land with fixed government leases. The frontier settlers’ identity in this roving existence set them apart from southerners who lived in areas of densely populated civilisation. In this case, Stratton’s idea that the north “provides the basis for the deployment of a history which moves oppositionally to the dominant Australian historical discourse of progress/expansion/development” is reinforced (44).

The pastoralists’ identification with frontier regions remained strong despite the precariousness of their lives there. Peter Read describes a sense of attachment to the land which is born out of labour: “the harder the labour, the greater is the implied right of attachment”, which many of these pastoralists seem to have felt (118). In his analysis of contemporary notions of identity surrounding pastoralism, Nick Gill argues that “pastoralists

draw on a form of social nature constituted through labour, to construct space/territory and identities of insiders and outsiders” (54). This social construction of space “is a process charged with relations of power” (54), and occurs from the moment of contact between white settlers and Aborigines. Gill refers to this sense of identification as “embedding”, which he describes as an indigenising process which “occurs through work and in time”, and which is a way by which pastoralists constructed (and still construct) “a sense of place, a sense of self and a sense of others” (63). Although he is writing about the late twentieth century (1990s), when pastoralists were facing challenges over land ownership and usage—similar issues to those that Gelder and Jacobs discuss in *Uncanny Australia*—there are corresponding notions of identity tied up with the settlers’ sense of “embeddedness” in the areas where they lived and worked in Durack’s family histories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Durack described the settlers as “ardent naturalists”, “eager to learn all they could from the blacks of their country and its wild creatures” (*Kings* 100). Her grandfather and the others who settled these regions “learned to know the land they had claimed” (99) through their contact with Aborigines and their constant movement through the landscape. They rode their claims, pegging boundaries and marking territory:

Although the area was still almost a blank on official maps, they charted the land they rode with extraordinary accuracy and detail, marking the twists and turns of creeks and river channels that so seldom ran, plotting the good country, shading in the mulga scrub, marking the rocky belts of eroded range in elaborate ‘herring bone’, smudging in the sandhills. (110)

Their “‘tracks’ were on [the land] and that was that” (110), regardless of the tracks of Aborigines extending back thousands of year prior to white occupation and settlement.

Lorenzo Veracini notes a “distinction between ‘colonialism’, as exercised over colonised peoples, and ‘colonisation’, as exercised over a colonised land”, in settler accounts of themselves (14). As such, Veracini argues, settlers participated in a disavowal of the negative and violent acts of colonialism, seeing themselves as settling the land in an act of colonisation which is “an act that is exercised exclusively over the land”, and which “sustains fantasies of ‘pristine wilderness’ and innocent ‘pioneering endeavour’” (14). (This recalls Johnston and Lawson’s notion of vast and empty lands calling out to the European imagination to be filled with stories legitimising settlement). While the pioneers of Durack’s histories settle the land in a presumption of possession, they are seen to negotiate with Aborigines as well as to forcefully (and violently) dispossess them as they occupy country. The settlers’ claims to the land remain tenuous due to the frontier conditions and also to the laws of the time:

They had no more than a tentative right to the grass on which they pastured their herds and in law had no right to the soil or any minerals it might yield . . . there was no guarantee that government demands might not at any time force them out of the country. (*Kings* 162)

This sense of uncertainty permeated the lives of the settlers in the north-west region where government regulations (including lack of funding for ventures in remote areas) and extremes of environment made continuity a gamble. Despite these difficulties, settlers are described as establishing strong connections to the land through the work they performed and also due to the investment it took to occupy this country against tall odds.

Durack closed *Sons in the Saddle* with her father’s optimistic hopes for “the beginning of a new era of postwar expansion, of pastoral and mineral development, new modes of travel and communication, and the fulfilment of many other long-cherished

dreams” (364), some of which were to be realised. M. P. was never content or secure in his occupation of the remote regions. Durack’s final sentences tell readers that he “was to meet with more adversity than prosperity in his ‘new era’” (365). The sale of his properties and dissolution of the company ended M. P.’s connection to the north, but not his offspring’s: “For many decades the sons and daughters of the patriarch lived in the shadow of a heroic legend” (N. Hasluck 34). The abiding connection to the region expressed itself through Mary’s books and Elizabeth’s art.

Over time pastoralists are described as acquiring a sense of duty or responsibility toward the Aborigines who lived and worked on their properties. Jebb’s description of Mount Elizabeth station in the Kimberley region as it existed in 1989 is similar to Durack’s account of her family’s cattle stations in the early twentieth century. Jebb describes the system of “pastoral paternalism” that “framed the majority of Indigenous people’s experiences in the Kimberley, much of the Pilbara, and other parts of northern Australia” (3), and which we see operating in *Kings in Grass Castles* and *Sons in the Saddle*. According to Jebb:

The managers at Mount Elizabeth, especially the Missus, were confronting the double-edged sword of paternalism built on acts of kindness within unequal power relations and distinctive cultural systems. They were faced with the burden of having been intimate strangers for thirty to forty years. (12)

This idea that the pastoralists and Aborigines remained “intimate strangers” is one that is evident in Durack’s family histories. The northern pastoralists or cattle pioneers have been both lionised and criticised for their methods of expansion and farming; their dealings with Aborigines have been characterised by disregard, coercion and violence. While Durack does not deny the harsh and unfair treatment of Aborigines at the hands of settlers in her



histories, her portrayal of life on the stations for the Aborigines is largely one of security and protection in a mutually satisfying arrangement:

big encampments of natives had gathered within a few miles of Thylungra and Kyabra homesteads to receive regular rations from the station people. This pleased the blacks who had thrown in their lot with the settlers but were still bound by strong ties of loyalty and relationship to the outside natives. (*Kings* 112)

Domestic living arrangements were still separate, as Aborigines lived in camps at the edges of the station homesteads. The closeness of this arrangement is illustrated in certain anecdotes, such as Durack's memory of Dinah discussed at the beginning of this chapter. She describes the time when her Uncle Pat was to be christened: "In a flash he was through the door and across the yard, to the protection of the blacks' camp" (137). White women on the stations are depicted as providing "effective and homely panaceas . . . and in tending [the Aborigines] grew to love the strange, wild people whose ways they would never understand" (112). These examples demonstrate the close relationships between settlers and Aborigines in remote regions. They also show the cultural divide which persisted despite the intimacy of living and working conditions. Each are never completely reconciled to the ways of the other and remain in place and out of place in these conditions of mutual dependence on the frontier.

Aborigines working on the stations are shown to enjoy security and protection from the pastoralists and "at least a tacit respect for, their tribal customs and beliefs, and . . . the enactment of sacred rites and ceremonies" which they could still practice in negotiation with their white employers (*Sons* 191). For example, they are shown to negotiate the hunting of kangaroo about which Durack surmises:

Much as these people must have resented asking permission to hunt on their own tribal territory, it would seem that they had come to the conclusion . . . that negotiation with the white boss was now their only means of protection. (157)

Protection and security are two of the benefits for Aborigines in their relationship with the settlers.

In Durack's chronicles there are two types of Aborigine: the station blacks and the bush blacks. The latter are shown as wild and hostile, the former as adjusting to a "new order of things" (*Sons* 49). The arrival of the white settlers irrevocably altered life in the north-west; the pre-existing order of Aboriginal life was usurped. Durack does not ignore conflicts between white and black in her histories. If the cultural authority of the Indigene is effaced in Durack's histories it is not by the author herself so much as it is portrayed through the actions of settlers who mete out unjust treatment to Aborigines out of wilful ignorance, in keeping with general attitudes of the time. Durack does not shy away from depicting the harsh treatment of Aborigines by settlers; there are numerous accounts of murders and wrongs committed against Aborigines told both from settler reports and diaries, as well as from transcriptions of tape-recorded memories of Aborigines who were privy to these events. Durack expressed ongoing concern for wrongs committed that were neglected or ignored by white society and which Aborigines recalled matter-of-factly as part of their history since occupation. Her interest in Aborigines is not in their past but in the conditions of their existence in the face of white settlement and how this can be improved into the future.

Along with settler injustice, Durack acknowledged the difficult position occupied by Aborigines who worked on the cattle stations: "Boxer had already learned to tread carefully in his two worlds, balancing his role as trusted servant of the white man with that of

Aboriginal ‘dreamer’ and ‘doctor man’” (*Sons* 110). Rather than fading into the landscape, Aborigines are shown to have adapted (fatalistically) since the arrival of the cattle kings:

his pragmatism matched that of the invading European. He accepted the taking-over of his country by the white man quite fatalistically . . . He at least knew where he stood, and knew that as long as he played the white man’s game he would be assured of adequate tucker, with the addition of tobacco, clothing, blankets, and other pleasing perquisites. He also knew that by a process of attrition and subtle intrigue—in which fields he excelled his white masters—he would succeed in bringing a steady stream of tribal connections into the orbit of white responsibility.  
(49)

M. P. is shown to recognise Aborigines’ “beginning to adjust to a system wherein they retained their traditional culture under a European concept of land ownership, usage and improvement” (212-13). *Sons in the Saddle* shows more pragmatic relationships than those of the previous generation in *Kings in Grass Castles*, which Niall reads as a romantic version of the Duracks’ history. Aborigines in *Sons in the Saddle* are depicted as having a reasonable life if they chose to live and work on the stations in capitulation to the new order of things. Indeed, they are even shown to have an investment in the properties on which they work: for security and provision for the wider family group; for certain status within the new society that is forming in the north-west; as well as enabling them to remain in their traditional lands albeit in an altered capacity.

Aborigines who remained in the bush in lives of resistance, on the other hand, were relegated to violent retribution and deprived existences of hopelessness, conflict, lack, and fear. Durack does not condone the practices meted out against Aborigines who tried to continue their traditional way of life, however her accounts depict a harmony of mutual

dependence when Aborigines succumbed to settler occupation and adjusted their ways of life accordingly. While presenting a picture of harmony on the station, Durack's language portrays station blacks who conform as doing so out of a sense of fatalistic pragmatism. Whether their lives were actually improved is an ongoing debate. In Durack's histories bush blacks are generally faceless, voiceless, rising smokes in the wilderness whereas station blacks have tribal as well as white names and personalities, even if they essentially remain "intimate strangers" in these interstitial frontier spaces. White families on the stations "were as tribal as the Aborigines" (*Kings* 135) in this open region of blurred boundaries.

The overall impression of Durack's father M. P., is complex. He typified a white patriarch, taking seriously the duties implied by his inherited position. Durack did not write her histories until after his death, and she writes: "I find it hard to place my father positively for the reader, nor is this solely because I am too close, for people found him hard to place in life" (*Kings* 282). She also wrote of feeling she came to know her grandfather, Patsy, more clearly than her father through accessing his diaries and through the act of writing *Kings in Grass Castles* (xi). Her texts reveal the ambivalences of M. P.'s and his contemporaries attitudes toward Aborigines. For example, "[o]ne detects in such contemporary jottings a note of puzzled exasperation rather than of real sympathy for these miserable dispossessed" (*Sons* 48); as well as the following in which Aborigines are likened to "some wild creature" in the eye of the "bosses" who saw themselves also as benefactors:

the attitude of the white boss towards his Aboriginal worker was often one of genuine affection and concern. It was the sentiment he might feel toward some wild creature he had tamed and trained to useful purposes, and by whose intelligent response and devotion he was touched and gratified. (48)

While many references are given to M. P.'s upstanding qualities as a white man, he is not singled out as especially enlightened in his dealings with Aborigines; rather he is shown to act out of obligation, "[n]ever lacking in a conscience towards the Aboriginal people" (133). He adopts a paternalistic attitude to their so-called welfare in the wake of settler occupation of their lands:

M. P.'s reasoning on the Aboriginal question was very much that of his contemporaries. It was surely the duty they owed their fellow Australians to utilize this immense area of natural pastureland, and in the process to train the country's savage children to useful occupations. (49)

Durack's ongoing concern for the welfare of Aborigines was more enlightened than the previous generation.

Durack uses the words of another writer, Gordon W. Broughton, to comment on the complex attitudes and relationships between settlers and Aborigines in the Kimberley region. Broughton visited the Duracks' Argyle station. Durack writes that his initial experiences of the north had "both fascinated and shocked him" (*Sons* 193). He recorded his recollections of the north-west regions in his life story, *Turn Again Home* (1965). In his book, Durack writes, Broughton "was both understanding and gently critical of many local attitudes" (194). She quotes his diplomatic conclusion to a sobering representation of white men's unsatisfactory dealings with Aborigines: "Men's actions can only be judged as in and of their time, and life was new and raw in Kimberley in the period of which I write" (198). So too Durack is careful to note throughout *Sons in the Saddle* that what she writes of is "[i]n the context of the times" (191). For example: "In the context of the times, a station where they could enjoy their fill of beef without being hunted down by the police and led away in chains to face the white man's justice was a welcome form of security" (191). While

acknowledging settler culpability in the mistreatment of Aborigines, the suggestion, as also in Hill's texts, is that this is past behaviour and arose out of ignorance.

There are similarities between Hill and Durack's depictions of black and white relations. Like Hill, Durack does not deny wrongs committed against Aborigines; she writes of the continuing "war" (*Kings* 304) between black and white. She acknowledged Aborigines' place as Australia's "original inhabitants" (57), and also referred to them as the "undisputed occupants" (16) of areas beyond white settlement. Paradoxically, she writes of white settlers taking up "unoccupied" land: "A man had only to run a few head of stock on to a piece of unoccupied country to lay claim to it" (110). Durack's family histories were already records of a time gone by, a way of life that no longer existed due to changing conditions in the north. Her books contain tales of struggle, hardship, persistence, and periods of prosperity, but ultimately long-term failure to thrive in the remote north-west. In many ways Durack's accounts contain typical elements of settler narratives identified by Gina Wisker: "settlers write of hardships endured . . . the perceived hostility of both landscape and indigenous peoples, and the difficulties of adjusting and making the new place their own" (157). The settlers in Durack's histories forged new pathways for white Australians in the frontier regions and grappled with an unfamiliar environment and the unfamiliar others who preceded them. This led to relationships of fear and violence but also of friendship and interdependence, all of which are represented in Durack's texts. Life in the remote regions is complicated for all concerned; white settlers and Indigenous Australians are shown living out the struggles and necessary compromises of occupying the same space which arose from a place of "first contact" between disparate peoples and cultures.

If, as Veracini argues, settler colonialism is "premised on the systematic disavowal of any indigenous presence" (14), the continuing presence of the settlers' themselves is also

systematically disavowed in Durack and Hill's texts as new ways of living in these regions brought about by modernisation, along with changing markets, relegate the pioneers to the past. Veracini recognises settler colonialism's tendency to "obscure the conditions of its own production" (14), blotting out unpalatable details of occupation. These foundational myths perpetuate a heroic white history of struggle, endurance and stoicism which ignores Aboriginal history. While Durack's texts go some way in participating in these myths, like Hill, Durack acknowledges Aboriginal presence and the "dark side of the dream". The long-term consequences of the mistreatment of Aborigines are not ignored, along with the devastation caused to the environment by over-stocking cattle in the Kimberley region, which were evident in M. P.'s lifetime and a burden for his sons to try and amend.<sup>49</sup> Durack positioned herself as advocate and benefactor, a role she could implicitly assume as a white Australian.

While Durack's texts do not show Aborigines inevitably dying out, the coming of the white man is shown to have had devastating effects in some instances:

The breakdown of tribal ecology was soon reflected in the appearance of a people who not long before had been described as 'fine, sturdy specimens' . . . M. P. reports significantly about this time: 23.10.98: Shot a beast today for bush niggers hanging about the station—the most wretched, haggard looking lot of 38 individuals I ever saw together—all suffering from sore eyes, sickly and hopeless looking. (*Sons* 48)

Durack realised that conditions for Aborigines needed to change if they were to progress in the modern nation. Relationships needed to be more equal as the old ways of paternal pastoralism faltered. If, for her grandfather and father, the land was utilitarian, Durack and

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<sup>49</sup> Kim Durack's attempts to repair/restore the land are noted by Niall: 7.

her siblings saw the land as something more innate to their identities. Durack's accounts allow "alternative terms for reading texts which seem to legitimise the ideology of occupation and settlement" (Musgrove 44), revealing undercurrents of discomfort concerning the way the land had been occupied and the ongoing implications, both for the displaced and dispossessed Aborigines and for the environment itself (such as erosion and denuding of natural bush).

Durack wrote a number of books which highlighted Aboriginal lives and circumstances. *All-About the Story of a Black Community on Argyle Station, Kimberley* (1935) showed Aboriginal life on the cattle stations. It was the first of a series of children's books written with her sister, Elizabeth, when Mary was twenty-two years old. Other publications included: *Chunuma, Little-bit King* (1935), *Son of Djaro* (1940), *Piccaninnies* (1940), *The Way of the Whirlwind* (1941), *A Book of Picture Stories* (1942) and *The Magic Trumpet* (1943). The books were popular, providing "unsentimental" (Marcus "... like an Aborigine" 45) depictions of the lives and characters of the station Aborigines amongst whom Durack lived. *All-about* contains black-and-white illustrations of the Aborigines drawn by Elizabeth. It is dedicated "The Black Community at Argyle", opening with the lines: "You will never read this, for to learning you have no pretensions. You cannot sue us for libel, though we have exposed your characters, your secrets and your private lives" (5). These lines demonstrate white Australians' assumption that they can speak for and on behalf of Aborigines. However, in the context of the times the Durack sisters' representations could be considered enlightened. They represented Aborigines as individual characters going about everyday lives. The cultural divide between white settlers and Aborigines is alluded to in *All-About* through the character of the "Big Boss". He has lived with Aborigines all his life, from having them as childhood playmates to "helpmates" and station employees. A basic understanding



of Aborigines and their culture still eludes him, however: “He thought he understood them once. Now he knows that he never will. He does not even know whether they are fond of the few white people among whom most of them were born and bred” (*All-about* 92-93). White settlers failed to understand Aborigines but Aborigines seemed to accept white culture and adjust to changed conditions.

Like her family histories, *All-About* represents Aborigines as “fatalistically” accepting the ways of white settlers: “What the white man chooses to do for [Aborigines] betterment [they] take as a matter of course. [They] . . . asked no favors [sic]” (*All-About* 93). Aborigines are shown negotiating with the “Big Boss” and the “Missus” over items such as flour, tea and tobacco as well as the general running of the station. There is acceptance of difference on both sides but it is also inevitable that white culture takes over and pushes out Indigenous ways of life. Aborigines are shown to make way for white settlers, even in the poignant last lines of the book, when an Aboriginal woman prepares to leave the campsite where she has spent the annual “walk-about” holiday: “She will turn from [it] without a sigh or a wistful backward glance. It is inevitable, this farewell, like everything else that happens in her world . . . the destiny of things” (105; ellipsis in orig.). The book answers the question it posed in the dedication—“Were you ever savages?”—by demonstrating that “there is much you can teach us that is not in the white man’s knowledge” (5), and that white settlers and Aborigines can live together in some semblance of harmony.

In 1952, Durack published *Child Artists of the Australian Bush*, a sympathetic representation of a group of disadvantaged Aboriginal children who came to prominence through their exceptional art. Durack used their example to examine the ongoing problems for Aborigines in a thought-provoking but complex book displaying a considered and enlightened view of the difficulties of settler-Aboriginal relations at the time. *Child Artists*

contains a foreword by “The Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of London”, who writes: “It is only too often concluded that [the Australian aboriginal] is . . . of a very low type of intelligence. Nothing could be farther from the truth” (5). Bishop London considers Durack’s book “will arouse in us a sense both of achievement and of failure”, and hopes “that as a result of the publicity now given . . . artistic skill will be given another chance and the social failure will be fully retrieved” (5). Drake-Brockman reviewed *Child Artists* in *Walkabout*, January 1953, writing: “Into this neat book have been packed much of Mary Durack Miller’s life-time knowledge of the aborigines” (“Book Review” 41). According to Drake-Brockman, the book was written with “a clarity and urgency frequently missed in both good fiction and more factual documentaries” (41). She considers that the book “cannot fail to interest artists and writers, or to invite speculation amongst politicians, educationists, psychologists, and anthropologists as well as all people concerned at the present situation of the Australian aborigines” (41). In the preface to *Child Artists* Durack wrote:

The object of this book is no more than to put forward certain facts in the hope that they may become stepping-stones to an understanding of a complicated problem and a lost and lovable people. Conditions are improving for the coloured people of Australia, but progress is still slow and faltering. When the whole story is told it will be seen that the natives, so long inarticulate, are contributing largely to their own advancement. (7)

While Aborigines are contributing to their own advancement it is under the direction and control of white Australians, as *Child Artists* demonstrates. The promising art produced by the group of young Aboriginal children at the Western Australian Government native settlement, Carrolup, under the tutelage of a white couple, Mr and Mrs White, attracted a great deal of publicity but ultimately did not change the long-term prospects of the children

involved. Once they were old enough and had to leave the school and be “assimilated” into white society (usually placed in menial city jobs), the children felt displaced; they quickly became homesick and failed to adjust to their altered circumstances.

The story of the Aboriginal children in *Child Artists* is one of bumbling mistakes on the part of well-intentioned white Australians and institutions all approaching the Aboriginal “problem” from a white point of view and failing dismally. The Department of Native Affairs is even said to have found the Aborigines’ “lack of response” to their efforts to assist them “hurtful and disappointing” after it had adopted what it considered a “kindly and paternal” attitude toward its charges (*Child Artists* 72-73). Durack’s account reveals errors on the part of people ostensibly acting on Aborigines’ behalf. The school eventually closed and the students were dispersed. Durack writes that the story “embraces the problem of institutional children, of misfits and unwanted, the world over, and throws sidelights on general educational problems not confined to the teaching of coloured children” (7). She includes a postscript to the book telling what became of Carrolup Native Settlement and the child artists who were the subject of the story, writing “[a]s far as can be ascertained none of the boys are continuing with their artwork” (77). All, it seemed, struggled to find a place in white society outside the settlement. Durack tries to find a lesson in the “experiment”, hoping that the story will prompt an education system in which Aboriginal children are “encouraged to succeed for a definite future and to sustain success into adult life” (78). Plucking a select few children from obscurity and promoting them for a brief interlude then expecting them to find a place in an unfamiliar world had been a failure.

Durack’s reflections on the ways Aborigines perceive their art and culture in *Child Artists* contain grand claims on Aborigines’ behalf: “The modern aboriginal . . . regards the art of his forefathers as a snake regards his cast-off’s [sic] skin. He has grown out of it, and it

is to him of no further use or interest” (62). She suggests that Aborigines have lost touch with their culture and their roots in modern Australia. There was a “*way of life and thought* not to be divided into component parts—this good, that bad. It was an intricate mosaic of meaning only in its entirety” (63; emphasis in orig.). Durack sees art as a way to communicate culture and is concerned that Aborigines have lost touch with their traditions.

It is the white artist (Durack may have had Elizabeth in mind here), “delighting in aboriginal design, often attracted also to the philosophy as reflected in the work, who effects the fusion of cultures we would look for from the native” (63). Durack credits the Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira with doing more, “through his work, than any other individual to bring about a change of heart and attitude towards his people” (64). The breaking down of tribal life as a result of white occupation has ensured that “whether he liked it or not [the Aborigine] was swept along . . . on the same currents of social change and conflict as ourselves” (63). Aboriginal culture is changing in modern Australia and it is Durack’s hope that it can find new ways of expression through art. A review in the *West Australian* (1952) remarks that Durack’s “presentation of the story will do much to correct false impressions, and remove many prejudices” (“Native Children’s Pictorial Art” 20). Durack’s *Child Artists* demonstrates the complexities of blending cultures in contemporary Australia. Aborigines are shown to be an undeniable part of white society but still to occupy an unequal position, an issue that has yet to be satisfactorily addressed.

Durack’s voice in these books is unmoderated and articulate. In *All-about* and *Child Artists* Durack speaks for Aborigines in two different ways. In *All-about*, while she tells their stories in a way that could be seen as appropriation, she represents Indigenous Australians in such a way that they can be “seen”, if not heard, by white Australians. Aborigines are characters with individual personalities and speaking voices in the book. In *Child Artists*

Durack speaks as an advocate for Aborigines from her privileged position as white settler, again giving voice to Aborigines but in a different way from that in *All-about*: this time she speaks on their behalf, ostensibly to raise general awareness of the difficulties they face in a white-dominated world which is anathema to their culture.

Later works such as *The Rock and the Sand* (1969) and a play set in Broome likewise drew attention to Aboriginal welfare and racial harmony. *The Rock and the Sand* is an extensively researched study of Catholic Missions and their dealings with Aborigines in the north-west. Niall considers this Durack's "finest work" (186), although it was not popular with the general public. The opening sentences, which re-imagine a moment of first contact between Aborigines and white settlers, set up the gulf between cultures: "Neither could appreciate the other's logic" (5). Durack describes Aborigines' "shock of impact with a race unable to concede them a point of view and in whose outlook they found neither solace nor sincerity" (6). The book is dedicated to Father Ernest Ailred Worms, whom Durack wrote about in *Walkabout* 1956, describing him as "a missionary and anthropologist . . . with few illusions . . . of the gap that separates the aborigines from our own world" ("Women of 'Dreaming'" 32). When she completed *The Rock and the Sand*, Durack wrote a musical play, "The Ship of Dreams" which was performed in Broome. Tom Hungerford reported on its performance in the *Australian Women's Weekly* (1968), writing that Durack had "used the play to show the children how people of many races can live together in harmony—as they do in Broome" (Hungerford 31). Durack used various forms to communicate her concern for racial harmony to wider Australia.

Durack also used the medium of film to highlight Aborigines place in society. In 1977, the *Australian Women's Weekly* ran an article titled "Mary Durack's 'Tribal Grandson'" promoting a documentary film scripted by Durack called "Tjakamarra—Boy Between Two

Worlds". The film was about "a young Aborigine torn between his commitment to the customs and beliefs of his ancestors and his need to learn and adapt to modern living" (161). The star of the film was one of the descendants of Aborigines who worked for the Duracks at Argyle, demonstrating Durack's continuing relationship with the station Aborigines. She opened her home in Perth to young Aborigines to assist them to find a place in white society, even mentoring a writer, Colin Johnson, who, through Durack's help and connections, published *Wild Cat Falling* with Angus & Robertson in 1965. Johnson is now known as Mudrooroo, a major figure in Indigenous writing. Controversy has since erupted over the racial origins of Mudrooroo, who it was revealed was of African and not Aboriginal descent. This is not a story to be told here. It has attracted a large amount of scholarly attention (see, for example: Maureen Clark. "Mudrooroo: Crafty Impostor or Rebel with a Cause?" 101-10; Niall 196-200), but it provides another angle on Durack's engagement with Aboriginal voices, and her at times misguided but genuine efforts to consider Aboriginal points of view.

The incomprehension Hill experienced through her contact with Aborigines manifested in contradictory textual representations. So too Durack's family histories reveal a background of misunderstanding, misappropriation and, occasionally, reconciliation. Durack found her way through the blindnesses and misapprehensions of the pioneering past to a place of genuine concern for Aborigines' future in the modern nation. Kay Schaffer recognises that there "are always multiple histories, perspectives and contestations" (*In the Wake* 9) involving cultural domains which intersect and overlap. Although she was sympathetic towards Aborigines and concerned for their ongoing welfare in the changing conditions of the nation, Durack's voice is still a white one speaking on behalf of a subjugated other. Durack is invested with the implicit cultural power and authority denied to Aborigines; she was hopeful that they were finding a voice for themselves, however, and

she was dedicated to assist them in doing so. In trying to raise awareness of the place Aborigines occupied in the modern nation, Durack attempted to find new ways of understanding and negotiation between disparate races in Australia.

## CHAPTER NINE

### The Complexities of White Australian Identity Across All Four Writers:

#### Multi-Faceted Ambivalences

This concluding chapter to Part Three looks across Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith, drawing out similarities and differences in their representations of white Australian belonging in relation to the land and in particular to Indigenous Australians. Each woman shared an interest in exploring national identity through history, the landscape, and in relationship to others. Of the group, Hill and Durack provide the most interesting and complex set of relationships between white settlers and Aborigines. They located an authentic sense of identity in the remote regions, albeit stemming from differing personal perspectives and motivations. Drake-Brockman's interest in white Australian and Aboriginal relationships was not prominently displayed in her writing. It is mainly in her short stories that difficulties of race were explored. While these raised awareness of difficult issues, they did not offer any real solutions. Adam-Smith's *No Tribesman* and *Walkabout* articles dealing with Aborigines reveal where debates in the 1930s would progress into the 1950s and beyond. Adam-Smith regarded Aborigines as equals although she affirmed policies of assimilation as necessary for their successful participation in modern Australian society. This chapter summarises Hill and Durack's position and perspective on settler-Aboriginal relations and analyses how Drake-Brockman and Adam-Smith's representations concur or differ. In writing about settler-Aboriginal relations in the remote regions and trying to imagine how these could continue successfully in the modern nation, the four women contributed to a raised consciousness about Aborigines. As Mitchell Rolls argues about *Walkabout* magazine more generally, Hill, Durack, Drake-Brockman and Adam-Smith



“helped to promote on a popular level a greater awareness of [Aborigines] and recognition of the issues faced, two factors upon which increased sensitivity towards Aborigines could and would be built” (“Finding” 195). Across Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith’s writing, Aborigines were an undeniable presence as new ways of belonging were being formulated in modern Australia.

Hill’s compulsive wanderlust, curiosity and passion fuelled her writing. For Hill, “even at its worst, Australia is a land of strange beauty and many surprises” (*Loneliness* 267). The ways in which she positioned herself in relation to the others she encountered was often contradictory. Hill herself was an anomalous figure (for the time) as a single mother striving to earn a living from writing. She created an engaged, sympathetic and professional narrative persona. She stressed her professional curiosity and desire to “learn” about the regions through which she passed and the people she encountered. She admitted to being influenced by opinions of the time but she was able, if only intermittently, to see beyond these to imagine new ways of living and working in remote Australia. Her depictions of Aborigines vacillated wildly from dated stereotypes to sympathetic and perceptive representations. While it is easy to read an inherent racism in Hill’s sometimes derogatory and often fanciful and romanticised interest in tribal Aboriginal culture, closer readings of her work reveal more a complex identification. As Adam Gall recognises, a “simplistic rendering” is precluded by the “space in her text[s] for multiple readings” (201). Although contradictory and offering no enlightened solutions to ongoing problems of racism, Hill’s representations and discussions at least contributed to a “working though of issues still poorly understood” at the time (Rolls “Finding” 195). Hill ultimately failed to achieve any real understanding of Aborigines. While her “real” Australia contained a polychromatic mix of races, Hill’s vision of modern Australia was a white one, placing hope in the continued

spread of white settlement throughout the continent. Meaghan Morris writes that in articulating “a popular cultural economy of action and eventfulness”, Hill’s “stories of community and race immediately spill over the frame of the insularity . . . to highlight currents of social, cultural and kinship connection flowing beyond Australia” (“The Great Australian Loneliness” 243). Hill offered middlebrow writing’s “vitality human” (Rolls and Johnston 47) perspective on the regions she moved through and the people who inhabited them, both reinforcing and challenging stereotypes in a modern nation grappling to locate an authentic sense of identity.

Out of the group of four writers, Durack most fully occupied the position of settler subject seeking an authentic way of identifying as a white Australian. Durack’s enduring interest in the national character and the welfare of Aborigines in modern Australia stemmed from a complex position as daughter in a pioneering patriarchy on which foundational stories of white possession and belonging were built. Durack herself contributed to these through her work, particularly in her family histories. In postcolonial Australia she occupied a place Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs describe as one that is

innocent (‘out of place’) and guilty (‘in place’) simultaneously. And this is entirely consistent with postcoloniality as a contemporary moment, where one remains within the structures of colonialism even as one is somehow located beyond them or ‘after’ them. (Gelder and Jacobs 24)

Durack took it upon herself to explore the complexities of white settler and Aboriginal relationships with as objective an approach as possible. Her ongoing relationships with Aborigines who lived on the family properties attests to enduring connections formed through often difficult circumstances in remote regions. She used her position of power and cultural authority to raise awareness of racial inequities in modern Australia.

By referring to the remote Kimberley region as her “spirit home” (*Sons* 99) and speaking on behalf of Aborigines, including adopting an Aboriginal voice, Durack performed a type of appropriation that Penelope Ingram argues “would seem to be inseparable from the settler’s need to establish a cultural identity” (Ingram 82). In establishing a sense of cultural belonging by transcribing her family histories, Durack is arguably attempting to write her family “into origin, to become indigenous” (83). In doing this, as Ingram points out, the paradox for the settler is that the act of achieving origin and becoming ‘authentic’ can only occur through a textualization of the site of ‘inaccessible blankness,’<sup>50</sup> yet, by inscribing this space, the settler necessarily represents that which can only be figured as unrepresentable. (93)

Durack’s texts emphasise that “settlers’ claims to autochthony must be always already usurped by the *actuality* of the already/still-resident indigenous population” (Ingram 79; emphasis in orig.) who have not conveniently faded out of the picture. There is no “authentic” Aboriginal voice in these texts, yet by attempting (explicitly and implicitly) to represent Aborigines, the continued presence and plight of Indigenous Australians cannot be ignored.

Durack also used the public platform of newspapers and magazines to address the ongoing situation of Aborigines in modern Australia, opining on common debates of the time such as the decreasing population of Aborigines, race suicide, miscegenation, cannibalism, and the granting of citizenship to Aborigines. Durack uses strong language to try and generate public sympathy and action in a 1945 *Walkabout* article:

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<sup>50</sup> Ingram employs Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s term, “inaccessible blankness”, meaning that because the voice of the subaltern is always coming to us through another’s voice, the subaltern ceases to have a voice at all: “the ‘real’ voice itself can only exist under erasure, in displacement, in silence ... a presence represented only by absence” (Ingram 87).

If black Australia cares nothing for its own survival, what is the attitude towards it of white Australia? Are we to pursue the policy of leaving the native to follow his destiny of rapid extinction? Left to his own devices the full-blood aborigine will scarcely survive another fifty years. ("Vanishing" 32)

In this article Aborigines are described as instinctual rather than rational ("The native does not attempt to rationalise a racial instinct he cannot explain" 31), and as dying for no apparent reason. If left alone, the Aboriginal population will continue to decrease until they are only a memory: "[T]he first Australian is becoming something of a romantic figure"; "[p]ushed into the background, already no more than a museum specimen to Australian city dwellers, he pursues his unobtrusive way" (32). Although the language and ideas expressed in this article are dated, Durack used her voice to rally public support in finding solutions to difficult racial issues. She ends the article with an emotive but perceptive point about the future:

The black man with one foot in the white man's world has a hard row to hoe. Surely, one exclaims, he would be happier living his life as his forefathers did. But, alas, the gates of Eden has been closed to him. He has tasted of the apple of the tree of knowledge, and there can be no return. (33)

There can be no return to pre-contact ways of life but attitudes need to change if future cultural relations are to succeed. Durack was a crusader for Aborigines, a spokesperson on their behalf. Her views reflected the attitudes of the time but she also saw beyond these, envisioning a society of cultural tolerance and acceptance, making her one of the progressive thinkers of the time in the area of race relations.

Drake-Brockman's interest in Aborigines also stemmed from a privileged position that she used less overtly than Durack to raise awareness of unjust disparities. Husband

Geoffrey recalls Henrietta's engrossing interest in Indigenous Australians, which began with their first forays into the north-west regions as part of Geoffrey's job as State Commissioner for the North-West (*Turning Wheel* 172). In 1922 they travelled with A. O. Neville, Secretary to the North-West Department and Chief Protector of Aborigines (179). On this trip (during which they stayed at the Duracks' property of Argyle), Geoffrey writes that Henrietta showed "much interest in the natives, their customs, their philosophy and way of life . . . She took every opportunity she could find or make to study them at close quarters" (186). This interest only really appears in the short stories in *Sydney and the Bush* (1948). While the stories do not offer solutions (or happy endings) they are sympathetic portrayals of sensitive issues which focused attention on moral issues and injustices.

"Kaditcha", the first story in *Sydney and the Bush*, appeared in the yearly anthology, *Coast to Coast*, published by Angus & Robertson. The title is derived from an Aboriginal word meaning a magical spirit that could perform acts of healing and death (N. Drury *Dictionary of Mysticism and the Esoteric Tradition* 1992). "Kaditcha" is the tale of the budding romance between a rabbit-trapper, Dingo James, and Mollie, the daughter of the station master at a remote station on the Nullarbor Plain. Dingo offers work to two "hoboes" who rode illegally on a train to escape the city and find work out west. He sends the two men out one morning with a "half-caste" trapper, Yarda. Dingo describes Yarda as

one of the best. I'd trust him better than plenty of white men I know. I'm thinking of putting him on percentage 'stead of wages. He's got a family to think of now, and he's worth a rise, and worth being made independent, too. (7)

Aborigines were not granted equal wages until 1968; the issue of paying them for work at all had been the cause of much debate in the 1940s. Drake-Brockman's inclusion of a "half-caste" as an honourable character working for a wage is progressive.

“Kaditcha” represents the corrupt, mercenary nature of city dwellers (the hoboes) in contrast to the hard-working honesty of people living out west, and the placelessness of those of mixed-race (“half-castes”) in white society. In contrast to Yorda, the white vagrants are undesirable characters. They poison a waterhole that causes the deaths of some Aborigines who use it. The Aborigines blame Yorda and kill him. Dingo explains: “He’s one of them—and not one of them, if you get me. He belongs to hostile country” (11). After Yorda’s death, Dingo vows to take his own vengeance on the hoboes, because “What white man has swung for an abo yet? None that I know of” (13). There is no happy ending to the story; Yorda’s family are bereft and so is Mollie, as Dingo chooses to remain a lone figure ranging the country. The complexities and turmoil of life during a hard period in Australia’s history and in a harsh environment are emphasised, as they are in most of the short stories in this collection, which are largely unsentimental depictions of the realities of life early-twentieth-century Australia following World War One and in the midst of the Depression.

Other stories in the collection demonstrate how misunderstandings result in misplaced blame, with Aborigines bearing the violent repercussions of white settler vengeance. In “Fear”, a white woman left alone on a property flees in the night with her three children, afraid of how the Aborigines mean to respond to a stockman’s cruelty toward them: “She did not want to think the childlike people she had so often looked after would set out to harm her children or herself; but she had to remember that two years ago they had not even seen a white man” (19). The Aborigines set fire to the homestead and the white woman and her offspring spend the night on the run across country “[c]old, cruel, impersonal, rejecting the soft alien woman and her brood” (21). When she is found the following day and tries to explain that the fault lay with the stockman, she saw it was “no use . . . The work of years had been destroyed . . . What devils fear made of men, whether

black or white . . . she felt sorry for the natives” (23). This bleak story, told from the white woman’s point of view, shows a harsh way of life “on the very rim of civilization . . . [where] the dry, aromatic smell of an uninhabited land rose fragrant to the nostrils” (14). The white settlers are alien in this land, while Aborigines are an uncertain, unpredictable presence; they are “employees” dependent on the station owners, yet part of the “uninhabited” landscape. “Not So Simple” depicts a surveyor’s assistant Fin Campbell befriending a group of Aborigines at a well on a stock route. He plays a game to entice a “solemn piccaninny” (34) to smile. The baby later becomes sick and dies. In hindsight the Aborigines interpret Fin’s antics as placing a curse on the child and they kill the next white man who stops at the well. The story ends: “So now Fin Campbell and other bushmen give travellers the low-down to keep their eyes skinned along that route: the abos are a sulky lot, with a reputation for treachery” (38). Drake-Brockman uses the short story form to expose tensions and anxieties in contemporary white society toward Aborigines. Unfamiliarity translates into fear and perpetuates an ongoing cultural divide.

Feelings of displacement that result from miscegenation and the (sometimes) well-meaning but misguided treatment of Aborigines by white Australians are explored in “Their Country”, “Dead Wool”, and “Black and White.” None of the stories end happily for the Aboriginal characters, who are shown as individuals trying to adjust to irrevocably altered ways of living and belonging in their country. The white characters are false or cunning and cruel in their regard of Aborigines, which has devastating effects on the lives of the Indigenous Australians. Their place in the modern nation is shown to be one of displacement and dispossession. They are powerless to change their circumstances unless the attitudes of white Australians are to change. Assimilation is not a straightforward solution to complex issues of race. Amanda Laugesen sees Drake-Brockman’s “use of

sentiment to touch readers' emotions" as laudable but ultimately offering no solutions (126). Drake-Brockman used ordinary characters in the remote regions (on isolated farms, in towns or living itinerant lives) to illustrate her points about human nature. Aborigines are not a dying race in Drake-Brockman's texts but they are misunderstood and mistreated in the face of white "progress".

The nation-building focus of Drake-Brockman's novels, with their interest in the development of white Australian character, displayed little interest in Aborigines. They are mentioned only in passing as part of a primitive past which filters into white consciousness in barely perceptible ways. In *Blue North*, the main character John Fordyce muses on the sounds of corroboree: "songs of the world's infancy, their rhythmic rise and fall made him feel ancient beyond belief and at the same time alien and new. They were mysterious and terrifying; they were simple and a part of all life" (61). In *Younger Sons* the ancient sound of corroboree finds a new form of expression in Theo's music, which Gavan describes as "the earth-currents of a mute continent" (335). Aborigines are ghosts in the novel: "There were no ghosts to walk in his country, unless the wraiths of dispossessed black men and a few chained convicts passed unobserved in the black night" (163); "The only trace left of the blackmen who once hunted through the forest were the names they had given to different waters" (312). Two of Gavan's observations stand out: he notes that Aborigines "took life so cheerfully, so easily, as it came, as if they owned the country. Well—they did! Except that slowly their country was being taken from them" (262). Aborigines' displacement is recognised but no other comment is given. Corroboree is again invoked as a way of locating white identification and a dim reminder of Aboriginal presence as Gavan listens to the ocean:

The surf made ceaseless undertone, persistent as the chant of corroboree. Perhaps, drowsed Gavan, this ritual of the beach might most truly be compared to the



ceremonies of Australia's blackmen. Was the wilful Continent teaching her new white lovers a similar abandonment to earth and sky, to sea and wind, a new rhythm of existence which reached back to the very beginnings of life? (286)

These insights show an acknowledgement of Indigenous belonging that has a romantic appeal to white Australians yet effaces the autochthonous Australians in the search for an authentic white identification. Drake-Brockman was "seeking a historical narrative that could tie a native-born generation to a new land", according to Laugesen, and this did not include Aborigines in any significant way in her novels (117).

Drake-Brockman's one *Walkabout* article which explicitly discussed Aborigines appeared in 1945 under the title "Coloured Characters". Drake-Brockman opens the article thus:

The majority of white Australians, I suppose, regard the Australian native as an object of interest to be studied in books by anthropologists—the living specimen of the Stone Age sort of thing—or else as an object of pity and ridicule, or of shame ... But I am glad that I have met him in country he can still almost call his own: seen him come into first contact with civilisation, a hardy figure smeared with ochre and clad in nothing but a wudbin, or belt made of human hair. ("Coloured Characters" 13)

This opening, fraught as it is with contradictions, encapsulates contemporary white settler attitudes toward Aborigines and the difficulties of negotiating these in writing. Like Hill and Durack, Drake-Brockman's engagement with the Aboriginal "problem" was a genuine attempt to confront difference and misunderstanding, and to draw it to the attention of readers largely removed from Indigenous Australians, yet it fell short of offering any solutions to complex problems. Laugesen considers that Drake-Brockman's efforts to

address questions of race in her fiction reinforce racial stereotypes and difference, offering “no hope of reconciliation” (121). In doing so “boundaries are tested but never subverted . . . racial boundaries remain intact” (124). By testing boundaries, I would argue, Drake-Brockman contributed to a shift in understanding of issues surrounding racial difference in her texts. Even if they offered no radical or innovative solutions, they placed difficult issues firmly at the forefront of white Australians’ minds.

Writing at the end of the period I am considering, Adam-Smith’s representations of efforts to integrate Aborigines into Australian society show where debates in Hill and Durack’s work would develop toward the latter half of the twentieth century. Adam-Smith wrote about the complexities of life for Aborigines in modern Australia where they remained caught between cultures. The dying race trope was a thing of the past. Assimilation was the new strategy, seen to be the only way forward for Aborigines if they were to participate in meaningful ways in the modern nation. In 1967 Adam-Smith wrote

When I was a child no one had thought to educate the aborigines. Those of us who lived on the edges of the inland deserts and shared our lives with them believed what we were told: ‘The aborigines will disappear’. (“Winds of Change” 35)

This was the opening of an article in *Walkabout* which discussed education for Aborigines in the Northern Territory. (Interestingly, although Adam-Smith writes of sharing her youth with Aborigines, there is no mention of them in the autobiography of her childhood, *Hear the Train Blow*). Rolls and Johnston point out that Adam-Smith’s article made the first reference in the magazine to the May 1967 referendum amending the constitution by removing two clauses that discriminated against Aborigines (96). Rolls and Johnston argue that the absence of any discussion about the referendum in *Walkabout* is “suggestive of a magazine uncomfortable with or uncertain of the Aboriginal present, and instead turning to the

Aboriginal past” (97). Certainly, as my examination of Hill and Durack indicates, the past was the chief interest of writers who felt that it represented an authentic way of life which had largely disappeared in the modern nation.

Adam-Smith was interested in education as part of the program of assimilation. Having a limited education herself in bush schools, Adam-Smith promoted the benefits of sound learning. The “successful emancipation of aborigines depended on their adaption” to white Australian culture, according to Adam-Smith (“Winds of Change” 36). Adam-Smith notes the increase in the population of Aborigines in the Northern Territory: “it has begun to increase faster than the European population. Aborigines there now number almost 19,500” (35). While acknowledging “gross misunderstanding” between settler Australians and Aborigines, Adam-Smith advocates leaving the past behind: “They are a dated negative group who dwelt only on the wrongs done. It is the positive thinkers and planners who are responsible for what advances have been made in the world of the aborigine” (35). Adam-Smith attempts to present a positive picture of the future of relationships between white Australians and Aborigines: “Prejudice is on the way out” (37), helped by programs of equal education. Without these, Adam-Smith writes, Aborigines “would be unable to be part of the new world in which they would find themselves, except for what Professor Elkin has termed ‘intelligent parasitism’”(36). As much of their “ancient culture” as possible was to be “retained and nurtured” (36). Assimilation into white culture is depicted as necessary for Aborigines to participate in modern Australia.

Other aspects of programs of assimilation were the subject of Adam-Smith’s *Walkabout* articles. On Groote Eylandt she notes attempts to include Aborigines in B.H.P.’s mining venture (conveniently eliding the fact that the mining company assumed Aboriginal land to carry out mining). In 1966 B.H.P. was mining manganese on the island and built a

village to house workers: "These houses are available for native workers as well as whites", Adam-Smith notes ("The Great Island" 40). She goes on to explain the mining company's policy to give "every chance of employment" to Aborigines against whom "no discrimination will be tolerated" (40). Aborigines are employed "in direct consultation with the Church Missionary Society's missionaries on the island" (40). The article admits to difficulties with assimilation, citing "the experience of both government settlements and missions" of Aborigines' "reluctance, even outright resistance to change" (42). The unwitting juxtaposition of traditional Aboriginal ways of life with the presence of the mine reveals the clash of cultures to which Aborigines were forced to adjust: "At the waterfront, where natives spear fish from their canoes, a conveyor belt for loading the ore into ships stretches 1,200 feet out to sea" (41). The discussion turns to education of the Aborigines and the "half-caste" problem, familiar concerns. The inevitability of change is again highlighted through a quote from the missionaries of Groote Eylandt: "These people would have had to face it sooner or later. That it has come sooner merely means that we will have to double our efforts to help them to adjust more quickly" (42). Adam-Smith concludes: "It may be that eventual complete assimilation will add the non-material wealth of community well-being to Groote Eylandt's mining prosperity" (42). Assimilation is touted as beneficial to both white Australians and Aborigines.

"Winds of Change in the Territory" and "The Great Island" are incorporated in Adam-Smith's *No Tribesman* (1971), a loose collection of stories displaying a largely sympathetic representation of Aborigines in modern Australia. The stories are taken from Adam-Smith's encounters with Aborigines in Central and Northern Australia during travels in winter to escape cold, damp conditions in Tasmania. Adam-Smith had a lung condition which saw her hospitalised frequently; escaping to the dry, hot climate of north-western Australia in winter

became her way of managing this aspect of her health. In the opening chapter Adam-Smith wrote about an Aboriginal woman, Mary Woollong, saving her life as a baby when she was failing to thrive, by giving her cows' milk to supplement powdered milk. Adam-Smith's mother was silent about her relationship with Mary in the 1920s due to fear of being ostracised by other white Australians, and this story is not mentioned in *Hear the Train Blow*. This is telling of ways in which Aborigines were ignored in the earlier part of the century. Adam-Smith outlines changing attitudes and government policies in relation to Aborigines in *No Tribesman*. While she applauds education programs that teach a "whole new concept of life" alongside retaining the "best of the old traditions" so that Aborigines are not "left rootless" (78), Adam-Smith writes that assimilation inevitably splits families, "alienat[ing] the young from the old . . . To work with and for Aborigines is to accept this; there is no other way, tragic as it is" (100). Similar to Durack, Adam-Smith sees that Aborigines must adapt to "the new order" (100) or be left on the margins.

In *No Tribesman* Adam-Smith admitted to the ongoing curiosity and lack of understanding of white Australians toward Aborigines that she had seen firsthand from childhood. She writes that she "certainly didn't intend to look for Aborigines" (4) on her travels, considering "[b]y now there was a glut of material about them on the market" (5). She also felt that "it was no easier for a southerner of this generation to feel kinship to Aborigines than it had been for my parents' generation" (5), as most people had little contact with Aborigines other than through stereotyping in touristic representations. In writing about Aboriginal drovers and stockmen, various mission stations and settlements, education programs, and stories of individual characters, Adam-Smith concluded that Aborigines' diversity defied simple representation and recognised that the problems they faced in modern Australia were complex. Her examination of the effects of government

policy, described ways in which white Australians were helping Aborigines “progress” so that they could participate in “everyday Australian life”(99). Adam-Smith saw this as a necessity if Aborigines were to be able to function in a meaningful way in modern Australia.

There are contradictions in Adam-Smith’s texts as she represents the culpability of white settlers in the ongoing oppression of Aborigines. Her optimism about the future and calls to leave the past behind are somewhat naïve. She considers it “dangerously unfashionable to walk the tight-rope of a middle line on the colour question” (162). She admits that problems of white and black relationships are easy to judge from “the south” but much harder when confronted with realities in the remote north-western regions of Australia. Part of this thinking could stem from her own working-class background as she defends “the battlers”, setting them apart from the “absentee landlord and his family who live in the comfort of the cities, a safe distance from the problems of colour” (163). She criticises the lauding of pioneers (like the Duracks) and the lack of attention to the “unlettered [individual] toiler”:

It is certainly a sad commentary on our national outlook that while we extol in historical and literary journals our pioneering gentry who could afford to take up the best land and who, up in these northern latitudes, worked whole tribes of Aborigines for no more than scant food . . . we rarely mention the gallant, unlettered toiler who set out to ‘give it a go’, without money, property, or family, to back his sortie into the wilderness. And—this is the important thing—they lived with the blacks and formed some sort of alliance with them. (163)

In the final analysis, Adam-Smith can offer no solutions to ongoing problems:

in no other field of endeavour have so many people, each unquestionably sincere in his approach, been so bitterly divided as to what should be done . . . The critical

analysis and judgement of the exploitation of the Australian Aboriginal was made long ago. Nothing new that comes to light will alter the finding. The future alone can be altered. (168)

Her representations, however, show individual Aborigines as fellow Australians caught between cultures in a world that continues to discriminate against them on the basis of lack of understanding. Adam-Smith represents Aborigines as equals in her texts, challenging stereotypes and raising awareness of the need for acceptance in modern Australia.

While Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's texts are problematic—particularly as they are intent on inscribing a sense of white belonging—even addressing issues of difference as they did in their work, was a step toward understanding. While the space that Aborigines inhabit in these texts may only be “an ascription of false presence onto a fundamentally un-inscribable, hence essentially unknowable, subaltern” (Ingram 80), what these texts demonstrate is that national identity in postcolonial Australia is not homogenous or whole; myths are always being re-imagined and recreated. By placing Aborigines implicitly in their narratives, and addressing issues of difference, however awkwardly, these women contributed to changing ways of identification which at least acknowledged Aboriginal presence in the past, present and future of the nation.

## Conclusion

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This thesis has argued for the value of examining middlebrow literature for representations of cultural identity through four indicative mid-twentieth-century Australian authors. The perception of middlebrow literature as unworthy of analysis is changing as recent critical attention to this category indicates. My research contributes to scholarly discussions about the value of middlebrow texts—fiction and non-fiction—as cultural artefacts and offers new work on previously neglected Australian female authors. These women contributed to nationalist discourses at a time when such debates were at the forefront of the Australian consciousness. In drawing attention to difficult and contradictory issues, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's work provides illuminating insights into contemporary tensions as the nation progressed from being a settler colony to a more confident and distinctive modern entity.

These women wrote across a range of forms and genres that were increasingly accessible due to technologies of modernity in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia, such as mass media venues and the availability of cheap paperback books. While the burgeoning institutions of middlebrow culture gave women a public platform, the ensuing devaluation of this category as feminine resulted in critical neglect or derision. With a small national publishing industry, the locations of middlebrow culture in Australia provided opportunities for writers to earn an income. Highly regarded poet Judith Wright spoke of having to do "the housewife jobs in literature" (such as writing plays for the Australian Broadcasting Commission and children's books) in order to earn an income that allowed her to write poetry (Davidson 403). These "housewife jobs" were situated in middlebrow institutions. Wright aspired to and wrote "serious" literature alongside her "hack work", as



she referred to it. “Hack work” allowed the writers featured in this study, particularly Hill and Adam-Smith, to live independent, itinerant lives, beyond the bounds of domesticity, and they continued to produce this type of writing throughout their lives.

While not producing works of high literature, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith considered themselves professional writers with a serious calling to communicate their love of Australia in order to influence others and shape ideas about the nation. They “actively fostered a common engagement with Australian history, landscapes and people in a distinctly modern national imagining”, as Rolls and Johnston argue about *Walkabout* magazine (6). That this work has not been valued as part of Australia’s cultural heritage is an omission this study addresses. The recent *Sydney Review of Books* debates demonstrate the tensions that still exist around perceptions of the value of middlebrow writing. The devaluing of women’s writing is an ongoing problem that has led to the creation of the Stella Prize in Australia. As Wright noted: “Trivialisation of life is a real problem for women, dealing so much with what’s regarded as trivial, and trying to find your own value system and live by the values of a serious writer is very difficult when you haven’t got what you might call a support base” (Davidson 403). Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith developed their own value systems in Australia through personal exposure of living and moving through remote regions and writing about their experiences. Middlebrow forms provided avenues through which to address issues they considered important and communicate them to a wide audience. They can be counted amongst the group of writers Susan Sheridan considers—such as Miles Franklin, Katharine Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw, Nettie Palmer, Dymphna Cusack, Kylie Tennant, and

Eleanor Dark<sup>51</sup>—who looked back to earlier periods of Australian history and contributed to revisions of dominant narratives in order to expand ideas about the modern nation.

While they shared similar concerns in their writing, the women addressed these from different perspectives and personal situations. Drake-Brockman and Durack had conventional support bases in the form of professional husbands. They managed the demands of domesticity alongside their writing careers. Key concerns in their writing were the promotion of economic developments as well as cultural development. They used their writing and public profiles to express views on current affairs, reaching a wide audience. At a time when many ignored the white invasion of Australia and its detrimental effects on autochthonous Australians, these four writers drew attention to Aborigines, depicting them both as stereotypes but also as individuals with a stake in the future of the nation. Hill used her profession as a journalist as a reason to maintain her wandering lifestyle with a purpose to record stories she felt were important in the national story. Her narratives ranged across an array of concerns as Hill confronted conditions in remote regions and attempted to formulate her own vision for the future of these areas. So too Adam-Smith chose an itinerant life to explore varied ways of living and working in Australia. Travelling and publishing books related to their experiences allowed these unconventional women autonomy in a society that was still largely governed by a masculine hegemony. The narrative personae they adopted reveal the ways in which women's performances of gender were constructed in response to (and pushed against) cultural expectations.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith were aware of the ways in which conventional genres could be manipulated to encompass broader themes and used these forms—romance, travel narratives, historical fiction—to mediate social comment. These

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<sup>51</sup> See Sheridan *Along the Faultlines* 153-65.

women writers shared *Walkabout's* concern “to imagine a modern Australian community connected by shared stories, shared experiences and a deep attachment to place” (Rolls and Johnston 6). Their enthusiastic, engaging writing styles made their texts popular and accessible to a wide audience with an appetite for knowledge about the further reaches of their country. Their texts display complex and interrelating discursive formulations of race, gender and national identity in early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia. The concerns in their writing are both old and new and multifaceted in their similarities and differences. While in many ways they remained in lockstep with the dominant discourses of their time they also unsettled these through their differing perspectives and the manner in which they wrote of complex issues disturbing the national conscience. Their reach was extended through the use of popular forms such as the outback romance and travel narrative.

Many of the debates these writers canvassed continue into the present, further demonstrating the relevance of analysing how and through which forms these issues were circulated and discussed in the mid-twentieth-century, and by whom. Racism, inequities of gender, development versus conservation, and what it means to identify as Australian, remain ongoing matters of public interest. Drusilla Modjeska argues that women’s fiction in the 1930s indicates “the ways in which women—and men—were acting out their lives in a class and patriarchal society, values and ideas by which they made sense of those lives, but which at the same time tied them to dominant social structures and values” (12). The same could be argued of women’s writing today. Literature thus exposes the nature of a society at a particular time and in particular locations, including the hierarchies, oppressions, and tensions which operate across class and race. Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith were part of “a collective of writers, publishers and other cultural commentators forming the emergent field of contemporary Australian literature” (Rolls and Johnston 45). They

actively engaged in a public dialogue advocating a distinctively Australian literature, which they were also producing.

While I have demonstrated the value of these writers' contributions to ideas about the nation and to a broader picture of Australian literature more generally, the work of this thesis represents a proportion only of work that could be done. It does not address archival material apart from a selection of relevant newspaper and magazine articles. There is scope to broaden the work commenced here by accessing these writers' personal papers to delve further into the nature of their connections to one another, to other contemporary Australian writers, and the contribution they make to Australian literature more generally. This work would assist in contextualising Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith's place in the cultural history of the nation.

Nor have I addressed all these women's works. Notable exceptions include Adam-Smith's *Moonbird People* (1965), which is about the community who lived on the remote Bass Strait Islands. From conversations I have had at conferences and on other occasions during my research, controversy surrounds Adam-Smith's representations of the people concerned. To properly address this text would require sensitivity and further research, including collaboration with descendants of these people. Drake-Brockman's *The Wicked and the Fair* (1957) and *Voyage to Disaster* (1963) are significant among her works: the story they tell of the shipwreck of the *Batavia* off the West Australian coast in 1629 still generates interest. *The Wicked and the Fair* was a fiction based on the wreck, and *Voyage to Disaster* was an historical account based on years of research. It was reprinted by Angus & Robertson as part of the Australian Classics series in 1982, and by the University of Western Australia Press in 1995. Popular author Peter FitzSimons' *Batavia* (2011) retells the story and mentions Drake-Brockman in the introduction. The story of events surrounding this

shipwreck was consuming for Drake-Brockman and she is credited with aiding the eventual discovery of the actual wreck, which had eluded exploratory parties for many years. Drake-Brockman's *The Fatal Days* (1947) also warrants analysis for its representations of American troops stationed in Australia during the Second World War (in particular in the town of Ballarat). This is another romance novel with a regional setting that Drake-Brockman used to explore broader themes, including the value of art in society.

In 2016 Marianne van Velzen published a new biography on Hill, *Call of the Outback*, indicating renewed interest in Hill's unusual life. Sheridan's review of the book (which she notes does not pay attention to Hill's writing) asserts Hill's unanticipated relevance today:

But if we feel like mocking the romanticised view of empire and race relations couched in this rhythmic purple prose, we might at the same time notice that the shining future Hill envisaged for the Northern Territory was uncannily like that of the 2015 White Paper, 'Our North, Our Future', recommending the damming of the rivers to enable an increase of fifty per cent in Australia's food production capacity. Myths and tall stories persist because they contain the truth of a long-held desire or fear. ("Susan Sheridan Reviews" 13).

Similarly, *Water into Gold* (1937), Hill's book about a failed irrigation scheme in the Murray River Valley region, bears continued relevance to the ongoing challenges of fruit growing and manufacturing in Australia. So too Durack's attention to complexities surrounding Aboriginal welfare helped pave the way for broader conversations about race. The issues she addressed still circulate in today's debates about settler Australia's relationship with Indigenous Australians.

Hence there remains work to be done on Australian mid-century writers, as also evidenced in emerging scholarship. Karen Lamb's 2016 biography of Thea Astley, for

example, mentions the friendship between Adam-Smith and Astley, noting that “the two women had a lot in common” (241), further demonstrating the close connections between various writers in Australia during the early- to mid-twentieth century and beyond. This thesis demonstrates how Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith’s lives and careers intersected with other careers and literary movements in a lively period of Australia’s development. While other writers of this period have generated retrospective scholarly attention, Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith have largely faded from view. My research addresses this omission.

Hill, Drake-Brockman, Durack and Adam-Smith engendered a strong sense of place through their writing about Australia, extending ideas of “Australianness”. Tim Cresswell argues that

Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an *a priori* label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice. Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure and ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence. (Cresswell 49)

Scholarly attention to neglected middlebrow texts contributes to a more inclusive picture of the many and disparate representations of place and cultural identity across time, building on the ever-changing national discourse. As members of the dominant class and race whose position was mediated by their gender and social conditions, mid-twentieth-century women writers provide another window on the nature of society and the ways in which people across communities related to each other and identified as Australian. This work is ongoing as studies such as the one undertaken here indicate. In *Walkabout* in 1940, Marjorie

Barnard wrote about the importance of discursive representations to a sense of national identity and belonging:

A people cannot be native to any land before it has become a part of their national conscience. . . . Art holds the mirror to nature, and, because we are prisoners within our senses, coming in contact with the natural world only through them, we see more clearly, in a mirror than directly. (“Scribbling on the Map” 36)

The exploration of place, self and others through art—textual, aural and visual—is vital if we are to understand ourselves and how to negotiate our place in the world.

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