The Drover’s Wife Speaks:
A Literary and Cultural History of Maternal Citizenship in Australia, 1890–2020

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Quotations have been reproduced with Australian spellings.
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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the specific construction of the maternal citizen in Australia. While the patriarchal construction of motherhood is not an Australian phenomenon, the maternal has in a settler-colonial context been inextricable from nation-building projects. Through the study of a selection of Australian texts, published from the 1890s to the decade just past, demonstrated is how Australian women’s citizenship has been constructed in relation to their maternality—actual, potential, or presumed. Apparent, moreover, is the mutual implication of maternality and citizenship which has underpinned the regulation of all Australian women, with different consequences contingent on the desirability of varying maternalities according to the dominant culture. Where “good” motherhood has been attainable, it has been regulated in such a way as to uphold dominant national interests, including the perpetuation of colonialism. The representations I consider represent the maternal as a site both of hegemony and resistance. Argued, therefore, is that Australian women have across divisions of race and class been regulated by the dominant construct of maternal citizenship against their own interests, albeit with varying consequences. Explored, however, is the potential for an autonomous maternal citizenship to challenge the oppressive structures structuring the nation. Accordingly traced is the maternal citizen’s emergence as literary subject, in response to her objectification by dominant national narratives.
The girl flushed and leaned forward. She put out both hands to me, palms up, and whispered, “But she was – a mother.”

I had no reply.

I was troubled, and I still am, by the finality of the word “mother”, this great thundering archetype with the power to stop the intellect in its tracks.¹

Introduction
The Mother as Wife

“No use frettin’”, says the Drover’s Wife. These are the only words she speaks that do not respond to her children. In this moment she speaks to herself, as she considers her husband’s long absences. The hardships of the mythologised “Bush Mum” are presented as inevitable, as facts of frontier life on the brink of a nation’s birth. And to this coming nation, she is unquestioning of her responsibilities. Reflected here is Lawson’s reputation as the “father of the Australian tradition”. No woman is accordingly credited as its mother. This is perhaps the role occupied by the fictive Drover’s Wife, instrumentalised for her husband, her children, and for the nation soon to be. She is powerless to respond but with the words Lawson chooses for her. There is an earlier Drover’s Wife, however, written by the mother of our cultural father figure. In articulating the oppression of “The Australian Bush-Woman”, a wife and a mother, Louisa Lawson is uncompromising. There are many commonalities between Louisa’s essay and Henry’s respective bush mothers. To this thesis, however, the most important of them is this: “Of her own life she never speaks”.

Federation signalled Australia’s establishment as “a nation for a continent”, in place of six settler colonies “owing their allegiance directly to Britain”. Through the fiction of terra nullius, these displaced the hundreds of Indigenous nations which had existed on the continent since time immemorial. Exposing “Australia” as a construct is the fact that no name was ever given to the continent by its First Peoples. A settler-colonial state, the nation is grounded in ideology, and the violence it predicates. “The pursuit of the goal of White

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Australia”, writes Patricia Grimshaw, is “the founding principle of our nationality”.  
Federation gave meaning to the words “Australian citizen”, and Australian citizenship is at least as constructed as the Australian state. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that before 1962, citizenship for the continent’s Indigenous peoples was conditional upon renunciation of culture. As Joan Eveline writes, such conditions upon citizenship suggest the “highly political and unstable nature of “the citizen”. Colonialism has dictated that the ideal of the Australian citizen descends from the imperial “mother”; since colonisation, this ideal citizen had not only to be imported, but reproduced. The construction of citizenship, and its significance, has therefore been predicated not only on race, but on gender. I am concerned in this thesis with the maternal as determinant of a gendered Australian citizenship for women, the evidence of which endures in the national literature and culture.

This thesis is not about “The Drover’s Wife”, or its titular mother-protagonist. Henry Lawson’s Bush Mum and her various permutations are, however, emblematic of my central concern. I begin with her, not intending to privilege her as an image of Australian maternity, but as exemplary of a foundational and enduring national mythology of the maternal. I will show at the end of this introduction how other authors’ revisions of the short story have evidenced sociocultural change, while demonstrating the importance of this figure within the Australian imaginary. “The Drover’s Wife” and its revisions, adaptations and appropriations warrant an extended study of their own. For the purposes of this thesis, the Drover’s Wife is a point of departure and ultimate return. She demonstrates the intimacy of literary representations of the mother with dominant national interests, while embodying the possibility for their subversion. I therefore begin by situating Lawson’s representation of the Australian mother within its national-historical context, and the particular representational demands of the period. Considering the Federation era, I turn also to a study of Mary Gilmore, with her corresponding tendency to idealise white women as “mothers of the

8 Patricia Grimshaw, _Creating a Nation_ (Ringwood, Vic: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 2.
9 Before 1962, Indigenous peoples could only attain Australian citizenship by obtaining an “individual certificate of citizenship” which required the recipient to “cease to be an aborigine [sic]” to this end. See Joan Eveline, “Feminism, Racism and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Australia,” in _Women as Australian Citizens: Underlying Histories_, ed. Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 170.
10 Ibid.
nation”.

I also consider her ideas as precursive to the eugenics movement, with its inflection on the dominant maternal ideology. This is the historical setting of Eleanor Dark’s *Prelude to Christopher*, alongside which I consider Ruth Park’s *The Harp in the South* and its sequel, *Poor Man’s Orange*, set in the movement’s aftermath. Second-wave feminism, or the women’s liberation movement, signals an important shift in the representation of the maternal citizen; Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip* and Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* exemplify the mother’s emergence as narrative subject. Considering the reactionary forces that have continued to stifle maternal subjectivity, I turn finally to Christos Tsiolkas’ *The Slap* (2008) and Jennifer Kent’s 2014 film *The Babadook*. These contextualise my closing thoughts on Leah Purcell’s play, *The Drover’s Wife*, first staged at Sydney’s Belvoir St Theatre in 2016. With the inclusion of what Nicole Moore calls the “mid-wave” feminism of the interwar years, each main chapter corresponds with movements pursued in the name of feminism.

My intention is not an exhaustive catalogue of representations of the maternal citizen in Australia. Departing from the cultural-nationalist icon of the Bush Mum, I intend rather to demonstrate two dominant tendencies in the representation of the Australian mother. The first is a cultural progression towards an authentic representation of maternal subjectivity. This contravenes a historically dominant tendency by which mothers and the maternal have been represented in ways expedient to the national culture. The second tendency I identify is a certain stagnation in the cultural construction of maternal citizenship, whereby women and mothers continue to be subject to reproductive regulation in the service of dominant national interests. Neither tendency reveals itself on a neat trajectory, but their conflict reveals a continuing ambivalence in the evolution of the textual maternal citizen. Though national “types” no longer weigh so heavily on the national psyche, I suggest their endurance in transmuted forms, with a continuing influence on a specifically national construction of gender.

The white masculinism of the cultural nationalism surrounding Federation bore heavily on the construction of Australian citizenship at its inception in 1901, enduring today in transmuted form. The correlative of the paradigmatic white, male citizenship has been a gendered citizenship for white women and, where accorded, a citizenship both gendered and raced for Indigenous women and women of colour. The differential valuation of women and their reproductivity according to the white-masculinist construction of Australian citizenship has been the basis of vastly different experiences of reproductive regulation for white women, women of colour, and particularly Indigenous women. The construction of Australian identity, and therefore a paradigmatic Australian citizenship, was based in “the belief in an Australian type” accorded “physical and racial characteristics” and a corresponding “moral, social, and psychological identity”. Richard White argues that the dominant national typology maintained significant purchase in the construction of Australian nationality and history well into the twentieth century. Despite decades of contest, I suggest the continuing influence of the white-masculinist national typology into the third millennium. The ideological ends served by a dominant national typology transcend the aspiration to distinction from the imperial cultures of Britain, and later the United States. White points out, for instance, that “The belief in the moral superiority of particular national types helped justify imperial expansion and the exploitation of other peoples”. This imperial logic functioned to rationalise the regulation of women for the reproduction of an ideal Australian citizenry. It also rationalised the devastating fates imposed on Indigenous mothers and their children, which have been ongoing since colonisation.

Though the national type functioned to oppress those of non-British ancestry generally, it reduced all Australia’s women to a functional role. While the essentialisation of women as reproductive is far from specific to an Australian context, it has taken a distinctive form in response to the dominant interests of the settler-colonial nation. White indicates the emphasis on masculinity in the national typology, according to which women were not only subordinate representatives of the nation, but negatory of the Australian “type”. Evoking this latter was “masculine friendships and team-work, or ‘mateship’”, while women were “at best

13 White, 64.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 65.
one who passively pined and waited, at worst as one who would drag a man down”.

Demonstrated in White’s assessment is a dominant tendency to equate the category “woman” with “white woman”. This presupposes a uniform pattern of gendered experience, despite important differences. This has been particularly at issue in the differential between white and Indigenous women’s experiences of colonialist patriarchy. Rather than mothers to a “coming man”, Indigenous women have been associated with a “dying race” and regulated towards the fulfilment of this as a national goal. Both notions of the “coming man” and the “dying race” demonstrate, however, the indispensability of women’s reproductivity for national goals. This is a dependence repressed by the dominant national culture.

An account of maternal citizenship therefore depends on a sustained awareness of “differing maternities… differing because of their relation to teleologies of power… which produce differing epistemologies”. Australia’s existence as a function of these teleologies signals the particular importance of an intersectional analysis of maternal citizenship throughout its history as a nation. This requires attention to how gendered oppression is both compounded and modified by a subject’s relation to other axes of oppression. While maternal experiences are incommensurable across categories such as race and class, I contend that women in Australia have been subject—albeit differently—to an overarching construct of maternal citizenship, one bound up with colonialist patriarchy. I hold that women’s citizenship in Australia has been defined and valued according to maternity as perceived by the dominant culture; this is whether a woman is defined as maternal, or as anti-maternal, according to its dominant national definition. But beyond national borders, too, maternalities divergent from the Anglo-Celtic, heteronormative, middle-class and able-bodied have fallen short of a colonialist-patriarchal and maternal ideal. In tandem with Australian-historical analysis, maternal theory is therefore also relevant in the investigation of the maternal as represented throughout Australian literary history. Through a series of literary studies from four key historical periods, I will demonstrate that the sites of oppression I indicate above have

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16 Ibid., 83.
17 Ibid., 77.
assumed varying significances at different times. The function of maternal citizenship’s
dominant national construction, however, has remained largely the same: to uphold an
oppressive and exclusionary construction of the Australian citizen.

The maternal can also be understood as a means of bringing the experiences of colonising
and colonised women “into relation”. This has not been a relation on equal terms, however.
White women have been instrumentalised for their reproductivity in the service of dominant
interests. The potential of their maternity to align with these dominant national interests has
constituted a site of division, particularly from Indigenous women. This is not least due to the
hegemonic potential of white maternity, evidenced in white women’s history of extensive
interference in Indigenous maternalities. As Moore writes, “The growing body of work on the
role and construction of white women as such in colonial relations has acknowledged that
maternalism can operate as a feminised figuration of paternalist domination”. Discussing
white maternalism in survivor accounts from the Stolen Generations, Brigitta Olubas and
Lisa Greenwell have accordingly indicated “the failures of maternity as a narrative device
linking Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stories and lives”, given how white women have
mobilised their maternal citizenship against Indigenous mothers and their children.
Indigenous women’s construction as inherently anti-maternal has seen white women as
inherently better mothers to Indigenous children, where Indigeneity alone was sufficient legal
cause for the removal of children during the Stolen Generations. Jackie Huggins thus warns
against feminists having recourse to accounts of white women’s limited agency in discussions
of white women’s colonising roles. One would be hard-pressed to deny the agency of those
“reformers” who, on the political platform of maternalism, sought to represent Aboriginal
women as “unfit mothers”, supporting policies of child removal and other forms of cultural
genocide. The ample potential to oppress from within a situation of oppression
demonstrates the indispensability of an intersectional approach.

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20 Ibid., 95.
21 Ibid., 100.
23 Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the
Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln:
University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 35-38.
24 Ibid., 92.
I have so far avoided use of the word “motherhood”. This is based in Adrienne Rich’s theorisation of “two meanings of motherhood”, by which she distinguishes between institutional motherhood and mothering as lived experience.  

25 This is the “ovarian” distinction founding feminist maternal studies.  

26 Rich identifies an “institution” of motherhood consisting in the sum of “unexamined assumptions” regarding the maternal, which are privileged over the lived experiences of mothers and of women.  

27 O’Reilly elaborates these dominant assumptions by identifying ten tenets of “patriarchal” or “normative” motherhood, encompassing more recent evolutions in dominant prescriptions regarding the maternal.  

28 The first of these is essentialisation, by which maternity is characterised as “basic to and the basis of female identity”.  

29 Naturalisation is a correlative of essentialism, consisting in the assumption that mothering is natural and instinctual to women, a practice “developed by habit rather than skill”.  

30 Normalisation assumes and polices the mother’s situation within the nuclear family, by which “the mother is a wife to a husband, and assumes the role of the nurturer, and the husband assumes that of the provider”.  

31 This ensures privatisation, which secures the gendered separation of spheres by “locat[ing] motherwork solely in the reproductive realm of the home”.  

32 Individualisation relatedly charges a single individual with the work of mothering, in neglect of the potential role of fathers and the broader community.  

33 Indigenous maternalities, as I will later explain, are further marginalised by “biologicalisation”, in its “emphasis on blood ties, which positions the birthmother as the “real” and authentic mother”.  

34 Locating responsibility for the outcomes of mothering with the individual underpins the “expertisation” and intensification of mothering, which has come to particular prevalence in the neoliberal age of the past thirty years.


27 Rich, 13, 22.  


29 Ibid.  

30 Ibid.  

31 Ibid.  

32 Ibid.  

33 Ibid.  

34 Ibid.
years. These dictate an “all consuming and expert driven” approach to child rearing. Idealisation perpetuates the “unattainable expectations of and for mothers” which this suggests, denying the ambivalence likely to attend the hardships of mothering. Finally, “depoliticisation” functions to deny the structural underpinnings of these hardships, while also denying the political potential of mothering. Following Rich’s distinction, which privileges the experience of the mother, Patricia Hill Collins proposes the term “motherwork”: this challenges patriarchal preclusion of mothering from the status of work, while recognising its actual and potential transcendence of the public-private divide.

The ten tenets of patriarchal motherhood as enumerated by O’Reilly are at issue throughout this thesis, with some more prominent than others during certain periods of Australia’s history. While essentialisation, idealisation and naturalisation are particularly at issue in the early stages, individualisation and intensification have become particularly burdensome to mothers in the context of the “new momism” and the related “postmaternal” age. Bearing importantly on the Australian construction of the maternal, moreover, is the “asexual” feminine archetype of “God’s Police”. The dichotomy of the sexual and maternal is by no means specific to Australia, as is made clear in Rich’s Of Woman Born. Rich writes,

> Good or evil, fertile or barren, pure or impure. The asexual Victorian angel-wife and the Victorian prostitute were institutions created by this double thinking, which had nothing to do with women’s actual sensuality and everything to do with the male’s subjective experience of women.

Rich notes how racism is inscribed in this dominant-cultural dichotomy: “The political and economic expediency of this kind of thinking is most unashamedly and dramatically to be

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Patricia Hill Collins, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorising About Motherhood,” in Maternal Theory, 313.
43 Rich, 34.
found where sexism and racism become one”. Anne Summers has argued, however, for the specificity by which the maternal and sexual have been dichotomised in Australia. She draws the terms “Damned Whores” and “God’s Police” from Australian history, “so that the classic madonna/whore dualism resonated with our own story in Australia”, situating the dominant prescription of Australian womanhood in the interrelated roles of mother and wife, against which the Damned Whore is defined. As Summers writes, “virtuous wives were seen to be the foundation of ‘the family’ and of the nation”. The God’s Police role was an ideal articulated by Caroline Chisolm, in which women exercised a “civilising” role over their husbands: “The main task of God’s police is to instil in husbands, sons, daughters or pupils the necessity of submission to existing class, sex, and race authority structures”. As Susan Goodwin and Kate Huppatz write, the “good” mother is defined according to her maintenance of the dominant culture. God’s Police are relatedly charged with “polic[ing] the perpetuation of the very authority structures that oppress them”. (I will elaborate shortly on Summers’ implication that the quintessential God’s Police figure is a wife.) Summers traces the suitability of women to the God’s Police role in light of their socialisation to a gendered subordination from girlhood, and to “imbibe the morality of their generation and class and to impart its contents to the more recalcitrant of their peers”. The role of women in the policing of the maternal under colonialist patriarchy should therefore not be neglected. As the maternal is “the unfinished business of feminism”, I contend that the maternal is the unfinished business of Australian literary and cultural history. Feminist critiques of the “Australian tradition” such as Kay Schaffer’s Women and the Bush (1988) sought to account for the suppression of female perspectives in the literature of the notoriously masculinist Federation era, which had hitherto been historicised in predominantly masculinist terms. The feminist turn in Australian literary criticism followed feminist revisions to Australian history

44 Ibid.
45 Summers, 8-9.
46 Ibid., 464.
47 Ibid., 257.
49 Summers, 257.
50 Ibid.
such as Anne Summers’ *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (1975) and Miriam Dixson’s *The Real Matilda* (1976). *Debutante Nation* (1992), edited by Sue Rowley, Susan Sheridan and Susan Magarey, embodied a systematic challenge to the masculinism of the cultural nationalism of the 1890s and its enduring influence on the masculinist construction of Australian citizenship. A persistent consideration within these texts is the association of this citizenship with the peculiarly national concept of mateship, in reference to homosocial bonds between (particularly white) men. These scholars give sustained attention to the related gendering of space and accordingly of labour in Australian culture, which gave rise to a construction of citizenship which privileged white men of British ancestry. The related matter of the maternal and reproductive has constituted an important site of neglect, however. *Creating a Nation* (1994) by Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly represented an important intervention in Australian social history. The book is a systematic challenge to the dominant view of nation-building as the remit of men, despite its dependence on women’s reproductivity. There has been as yet, however, no extended study of the maternal as represented in Australian literature.

Given the subject matter, my analysis will be informed by matricentric feminism. This is appropriate given the dominant-cultural suppression of maternal subjectivity informing representations of the mother in Australian textuality. Andrea O’Reilly theorises matricentric feminism on the basis that the category “mother” is a political category, albeit one typically excluded from dominant accounts of intersecting identities and oppressions.\(^5\)\(^2\) This account of maternity is somewhat problematised by the ongoing stigma attached to women without children, whether or not this is a function of choice. Summers critiqued the expectation that women “see motherhood and family as their ultimate aspiration”, risking “being castigated as a Damned Whore if they refused”.\(^5\)\(^3\) In the introduction to the 2016 edition of *Damned Whores and God’s Police*, she suggests the persistence of this expectation, manifest in social norms and policies which designate motherhood as women’s primary occupation, too often to the detriment of their other identities and pursuits. She writes, “We are ready for women to do more, so long as they first of all fulfil their primary role”.\(^5\)\(^4\) Summers gives as an example of the enduring gendered stigma of childlessness in Julia Gillard’s designation as

\(^{52}\) O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 2.

\(^{53}\) Summers, 8.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 9.
“deliberately barren”, and therefore unfit for the prime-ministership.\textsuperscript{55} Such instances evidence how under patriarchy women are insistently constructed in relation to the maternal, whether they are defined as “good” and maternal, or as “bad” and anti-maternal. This is not to say either that mothers are privileged compared to women without children, despite the patriarchal sanctioning of “good” motherhood and hegemonic maternal femininity. Idealisation is, after all, among the tenets of patriarchal motherhood which operate to the detriment of mothers themselves, in their privileging of patriarchal understandings of the maternal to the lived experiences of mothers. Given matricentric feminism’s specific focus on mothers, rather than the maternal more generally, its function is supplementary to a broader feminist analysis. This is how matricentric feminism is intended, not to replace any other feminism, but to inform it.\textsuperscript{56} To be informed by matricentric feminism in this thesis is to privilege maternal subjectivity in the textual analyses undertaken, contextualising them within the ongoing suppression of maternal subjectivity to patriarchal ends.

The application of matricentric feminism and maternal theory to Australian textuality shows how the paradigmatic Australian citizenship continues to be that of men, and typically Anglo-Australian men.\textsuperscript{57} It is associated with the building and maintenance of the nation through public-sphere participation.\textsuperscript{58} In Women as Australian Citizens, Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern account for women’s exclusion from “formal citizenship” as predating by centuries the existence of the nation.\textsuperscript{59} This is not least due to the enduring predication of citizenship on liberal individualism, by which a subject is presumed to be white, middle-class, male and unencumbered neither by disability—or children.\textsuperscript{60} Relatedly, and as critical maternal scholars such as Petra Bueskens and Julie Stephens remind us, the paradigmatic subject is expected to be unencumbered by children, and by the unremunerated domestic and caring labour with which women are primarily charged.\textsuperscript{61} We might consider this patriarchal

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} O’Reilly, Matricentric Feminism, 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 1-2.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{60} Petra Bueskens, Modern Motherhood and Women’s Dual Identities: Rewriting the Sexual Contract (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 7.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 194-97.; Stephens, 7.
construction of citizenship as part of the “cultural baggage” which itself has “encumbered”
national identity formation.62 This construction of national citizenship has been dependent on
a subordinate female citizenship predominantly associated with the private sphere. It is in this
reproductive sphere that women reproduce dominant social relations, in accordance with
Nancy Chodorow’s argument in The Reproduction of Mothering. Throughout this thesis I
make clear that this social reproduction is not solely gendered, but raced and classed. These
biological and social dimensions of reproduction determine the valuation of differing
maternalities by the dominant national culture. This valuation has too often been determinant
of the fates of mothers and children. White indicates the “social function” of national
identity:63 though not unique to Australia, the assumed liberal-humanist subjectivity
underpinning it partly fulfils this function.64 He contends that the most enduring images of
national identity best serve the interests of a “broader ruling class”, upon whose “patronage”
the cultural producers of national identity have primarily relied, and that the national interest
must appear to function “for the good of all”.65 This requires the repression of “class
conflicts, and sexual and racial exploitations”. The cultural history of maternal citizenship is
bound up with each of these.66

These ideological encumbrances on national identity function similarly to those upon the
dominant, institutional definition of the term “motherhood”. I tend instead to use the word
“maternity” in view of its capaciousness. Unlike the term “maternity”, it does not
presuppose being a mother, which is important in view of the persistent definition of women
as maternal or anti-maternal. Though such definitions are imposed regardless of maternal
status, the overwhelming majority of characters I discuss are engaged in maternal practice.

This is how the mother will be defined throughout this thesis, in line with O’Reilly’s
definition in Matricentric Feminism. This is based in Sara Ruddick’s theorisation of the
mother as defined by maternal practice in Maternal Thinking. In this way, I avoid the
essentialism attending dominant accounts of motherhood, such as the biologicalisation which

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62 White, ix.
63 Ibid.
64 Susan Lever discusses the assumption of the liberal humanist subject underpinning social
realism in Real Relations: The Feminist Politics of Form in Australian Fiction (Rushcutters
65 White, ix.
66 Ibid.
disavows lesbian and queer maternalities, for example. The definition of mothering as practice also accommodates the significance of aunties and “othermothers”, as additional maternal figures to biological mothers, within Indigenous and Black cultures globally.\(^67\) Furthermore, to define mothering as a practice accommodates the possibility of male mothering, in cases where men assume the primary-carer role and practice it according to the demands of maternal thinking. This encompasses the increasing recognition in the past decade of transgender maternalities, which will signal change in the landscape and conventions of maternal studies. More representation of transgender maternalities, moreover, will doubtless emerge in Australian literature and culture in light of their increasing visibility.

I maintain woman-centred language throughout this thesis, however, in keeping with Ruddick. In an approach we might understand as strategic, her challenge to essentialist definitions of the mother is “tempered” by the recognition that degendered language would dishonour “the historical and cultural assignment of this work to women”.\(^68\) It also acknowledges the persistent and specific gendering of the maternal throughout Australian history, and the ongoing essentialism by which women are defined as either inherently maternal, or defective.

I also note that the historical importance of Rich’s *Of Woman Born* lies in its landmark adoption of a “woman-centred” account of the maternal.\(^69\) This was in opposition to the dominant patriarchal and child-centred accounts of motherhood which had proliferated in the first half of the century.\(^70\) The theorisation of a woman-centered maternity contained within it the possibility of an autonomous, liberated mothering. To theorise the maternal as actually and potentially experienced by women, rather than in keeping with a patriarchal ideal, was an important counter to a significant current of second-wave feminism that conceived of maternity as inherently oppressive, as in Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*. It also accommodated a greater diversity of female and maternal experiences, in accommodating later accounts by Black feminists of the maternal as a site of empowerment. The possibility of a liberated motherhood marks the political potential of mothering. Lesbian feminist Baba

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\(^{68}\) Stephens, 11.

\(^{69}\) O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 95.

Copper calls this “radical motherhood”, which consists in “involving children in disloyalty to the culture the mother is expected to transmit at the expense of woman-bonding and female empowerment”. Mothering in Australia, particularly Indigenous mothering, has a corresponding potential for “disloyalty” in resistance to the genocidal demands of the settler-colonial state. It is precisely this “disloyalty” which has preserved matrilineal cultural transmission and survival for Indigenous peoples. Resistant mothering is therefore not solely a gendered or feminist enterprise, though women and mothers’ experiential investment in the maternal underpins the importance of women’s interventions into patriarchal narratives of the maternal. But, as Bueskens writes, “If second-wave feminism was the task of separating out the woman from the mother, then contemporary articulations of maternal theory move in the opposite direction: the mother moves out from her place in the shadows of ‘the woman’”. Such articulations involve O’Reilly’s theorisation of matricentric feminism, which is importantly distinct from maternalism. Consisting in the use of maternal status to justify claims to rights, and to political intervention, maternalism has been mobilised by white women against Indigenous maternalities and in the general maintenance of colonialism.

The ongoing denigration of Indigenous maternalities has arguably been to the detriment of all Australia’s women, with white women included. In Rich’s revised preface to Of Woman Born, she links the institution of motherhood with whiteness, writing that “woman-centred experiences of mothering and acts of mother power can be found through history if we look at cultures other than the dominant Western one”. I hold therefore that an intersectional view of the maternal is necessary for the societal transcendence of institutional motherhood. Miriam Dixson notes Dan Adler’s account in 1966 of the Australian family as a “matriduxy”, in which the Australian mother is “the emotional ruler of the home”. Dixson refutes this as a genuine index of women’s societal power, however, noting for example the Australian mother’s lack of “any notable financial independence”. This is an important limitation to social power within and outside the home, where the sphere of production is privileged over

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71 Baba Copper, cited in O’Reilly, Matricentric Feminism, 95.
72 Bueskens, 200.
73 Moore, “Critical Juncture,” 100.
74 O’Reilly, Matricentric Feminism, 77.
76 Dixson, 48.
that of reproduction. Miriam Johnson similarly notes that women’s leadership of the home is ultimately overseen by the father, indicating the hierarchical relation of public and private spheres. She argues for heterosexual marriage as an institution defining wives as “lesser partners in any marriage”, and therefore that “from a structural standpoint, marriage institutions tend to be controlled by men and serve to control and organise women’s mothering”.

Dixson accordingly warns against the conclusion that the dominant Australian “matriduxy” within the family evidences the equal status of the Australian “Mum” to the American “Mom”. She suggests that Australia’s particular emphasis on “mateship” is traceable to the formative decades of convictism, where women were significantly outnumbered by men. She argues, moreover, for the particularly low status of the private sphere in Australia as compared to other settler-colonial nations due to the high value placed on homosocial and masculinised arenas – “pub, football, workplace, and mates” – with which the private sphere of women and children still struggled to compete at the time of writing.

This has compounded the polarisation of “mothering” and “fathering” underpinning the matriduxy. The mother’s restricted access to public-sphere participation, Dixson argues, has resulted in a familial paradigm in which “Mum… exercises power the more formidably, within the public arena of the family”. She characterises this as a “dark” reality, attributed to the gendering of “nurturant parenting” as the solely the maternal domain. This is a gendering which Ruddick challenges in maternal thinking, warning that oppressive social dynamics may be replicated in proportion with a mother’s oppression. This is the “darkness” of matriduxy which I read in Dixson’s account, whereby mothering adopts the relations of domination and subjection defining the dominant culture.

I oppose matriduxy to matrifocality. In *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives*, Johnson characterises matrifocal societies as those in which the roles of mother and sister have primacy over that of wife. Matrifocality, she writes, “does not refer to domestic maternal dominance so much as it

78 Dixson, 49.
79 Ibid., 277.
80 Ibid., 49.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 277.
does to the relative cultural prestige of the image of the mother”. Mothers are accorded a structural centrality in matrifocal societies, one evidenced by their “degree of control over the kin unit’s economic resources” and their critical involvement in “kin-related decision making processes”. Accounts of Indigenous womanhood and motherhood in this thesis demonstrate matrifocality in that women are identified “not as appendages to husbands or brothers but rather as relatively independent and active women and mothers”. This is apparent in Ruby Langford’s account of Aboriginal mothering in Don’t Take Your Love to Town, which stands in important contrast to the dominant construct of Australian women as “appendages” to men, and charged as mothers with reproducing this dominant social arrangement. That white matriduxy supplanted Aboriginal matrifocality through colonisation is an important dimension of western patriarchy’s imposition on Indigenous cultures. It is therefore not incidental that Lawson’s maternal protagonist is named only “The Drover’s Wife”, which Schaffer argues participates “in a specifically Australian signification of the feminine”. The women of Lawson’s titles, she points out, are persistently characterised by their relation to men as their most important characteristic. Schaffer’s claim for Lawson’s reduction of women to “appendages” in relation to men is consistent with Johnson’s account of societies that privilege the role of wife over that of mother. Johnson accounts for this as the underpinning both of women’s compromised autonomy as mothers, and the suppression of maternal values at the societal level.

The invocation of maternal values bears a complex relationship to maternalism, in their association with a maternal feminism. I identify maternal feminism as occupying a third space between matricentric feminism and maternalism, in something of a departure from O’Reilly’s alignment of the two in her argument for the term “matricentric” over “maternal” to describe a mother-centred politics. I locate the difference between maternalism and maternal feminism in the recognition of a necessary reorientation of the maternal from the private sphere to the broader community, consistent with Ruddick’s theorisation of the

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84 Johnson, 226.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Schaffer, Women and the Bush, 118.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 O’Reilly, Matricentric Feminism, 4.
political potential of a “transformed maternal thought”. Stephens identifies in such movements as ecofeminism the espousal of a “newly configured feminist maternalism”, by which the maternal represents “a site through which an alternative feminist politics can be imagined”.\textsuperscript{91} Rather than claiming political rights on the basis of maternal status, or assuming a hegemonic “maternal” role towards subordinated groups, maternal feminism is based in the neglected political potential of suppressed maternal experience. Maternal feminists such as Anne Manne and Julie Stephens emphasise the social and political relevance of maternal experience and practice, attending particularly to the gendered and relatedly unremunerated caring labour which, under a late-capitalist paradigm, is precluded from the status of work. The “farewell to maternalism”\textsuperscript{92} characterising government policies in late-capitalist democracies demonstrates the abandonment of the maternal as an index of citizenship.\textsuperscript{93} The postmaternal therefore functions as an exploitative paradigm, in its repression of dependence on the private-sphere labour overwhelmingly undertaken by women. This parallels the dominant repression structuring Australian citizenship, which itself represses dependence on women for its reproduction and maintenance. A society resistant to the postmaternal would be characterised by what Carol Gilligan first termed an “ethic of care”, which recognises the fact of human interdependence.\textsuperscript{94} This would parallel the alternative social paradigm which Ruddick proposes, one characterised by a “transformed” maternal thought.\textsuperscript{95} Such a society would be predicated not on capitalist acquisition, competition, and conquest, but by the participation of women and men in the preservation and flourishing of all.

As I noted in the opening of this thesis, I begin my analysis with that paradigmatic maternal figure of the Australian imaginary, Henry Lawson’s “The Drover’s Wife”. I consider her within her 1890s context, as Australia sought to distinguish itself as an independent national and cultural entity on the brink of Federation. I consider Lawson’s maternal protagonist within an emerging national typology which served the nation’s dominant interests, which were not only white supremacist but distinctly masculinist. The “Bush Mum” \textit{par excellence}, the Drover’s Wife represents a sacrificial figure for the order of a new nation. Despite her

\textsuperscript{91} Stephens, 143.
\textsuperscript{92} Ann Orloff, quoted in Stephens, 3.
\textsuperscript{93} Stephens, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 137-39.
\textsuperscript{95} Ruddick, 108.
avowed suffering, she is unquestioning of her function and fate. I consider her alongside the earlier poetry of Mary Gilmore, written after Federation and before the end of the First World War. Gilmore’s poetry is striking in context, given her consideration of the maternal from a first-person perspective, a global rarity, until the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s. Gilmore demonstrates how a first-person account of the maternal, even in a feminist voice, may still function hegemonically, to uphold and reproduce the dominant culture. Gilmore’s work nevertheless gestures to the possibility of a critical maternal perspective in that she identifies the socioeconomic structures which compromise mothering, particularly for working-class women. Demonstrated in this chapter is that the “good” mother has not always coincided strictly with the middle-class mother in Australia.

This would not last, however, into the interwar period. With the global eugenics movement at its zenith came the injunction to “modernise” the mother against the threat of “degeneracy”. In Eleanor Dark’s Prelude to Christopher (1934) the primary threat in this regard is disability and its reproduction, in a historical context where such reproduction was cast as a threat to the nation. Ruth Park’s Harp in the South novels, published in 1948 and 1949 respectively, embody resistance against the eugenicist construction of poverty as a site of undesirable social ills. I contextualise the Australian eugenics movement within the two World Wars, and their bearing on a preoccupation with “national fitness” dependent on the reproductivity of the “eugenic” population. Dominant eugenicist preoccupations produced a specific maternal ideal, embodied in Prelude to Christopher by the figure of Kay in opposition to protagonist Linda. I consider Dark’s peculiarly modernist deployment of melodrama in the representation of eugenicist ideology, her subversion of the genre amounting to a critique of contemporary orthodoxy regarding femininity and the reproductive. While Dark’s novel critiques eugenicist ideology through the modernist literary style with which it is closely associated, Park employs a modified social realism in resistance to eugenics and its preoccupation with the modern. The Harp in the South novels productively contrast with Prelude to Christopher in their decidedly local orientation. Written after the end of the Second World War, Park’s novels and their local reception are suggestive of a nation increasingly welcoming of diversity. Uncommonly at the time for works of Australian literature, the novels were

republished overseas despite their controversial reception, one suggestive of a nation reorienting itself in the world for a post-war, post-eugenicist age.  

Out of the dominant celebration of feminine domesticity following the war emerged the women’s liberation movement. This signalled a renewed consciousness among women of the historical subordination of their lived experience, and Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip* can be read as a response to an international reclamation of female and maternal subjectivities in resistance to dominant countercultural narratives. Soon after the arrival of second-wave feminism in Australia came the election of Gough Whitlam’s Labor government. Landmark policy interventions at once fostered the expression of previously marginalised subjectivities in the arts, while enabling and normalising alternative models to the nuclear family. Such were the conditions of possibility for Helen Garner’s representation of countercultural maternity. Not all female and maternal subjectivities came to equal attention, however. Despite numerous similarities to Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip*, Bundjalung woman Ruby Langford Ginibi’s 1988 memoir *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* embodies a subjectivity itself marginalised by the dominant feminism and early theorisations of the maternal. Langford Ginibi’s memoir is, unlike *Monkey Grip*, explicitly autobiographical. This calls for an approach to the text as an example of maternography, a genre theorised by Carla Pascoe Leahy, consisting in the first-person narration of the lived experience of mothering. This approach exposes the marginalised specificity of Indigenous maternal experience and practice. Like *Monkey Grip*, *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* consists in a depiction of mothering outside the nuclear family. Langford Ginibi’s memoir tellingly disregards the women’s liberation movement, however; her concerns are with her emancipation as an Aboriginal woman, and the survival of her family as intertwined with cultural survival under the oppressions of the settler-colonial state.

Critiques by Indigenous women of the women’s liberation movement signalled faults within it. The movement’s ultimate incompleteness might therefore be attributed to an incomplete analysis of women’s oppression from the outset. The grievances of women marginalised by

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the dominant feminist movement were still subordinated to dominant interests, however, in
the backlash against feminism which took hold in the 1990s, abetted by John Howard’s
Liberal-National Coalition government elected in 1996. Maternality and the family were a
significant driver of the “failed feminism” narrative mobilised by the Howard government in
the interest of family policies which were both neoliberal and traditionalist.98 While claiming
to uphold motherhood as a “career” for women and incentivising stay-at-home motherhood,
the Howard government’s policies are readily characterised as postmaternal in their failure to
recognise women’s private-sphere labour as necessary care work upon which Australian
society depends.99 The impact on women’s, particularly mothers’, lives is imagined in
Christos Tsiolkas’ *The Slap* and in Jennifer Kent’s *The Babadook. The Slap* represents a
Howard-era zeitgeist in which the central maternal figure, Rosie, embodies what Sara
Ruddick refers to as “maternal inauthenticity” in pursuit of redress against her sense of
disinheritance in twenty-first-century, multicultural Australia.100 In *The Babadook*, Jennifer
Kent represents the maternal in the language of horror in a way traceable to the legacy of
Howard’s postmaternalism in the policies of successive governments after Howard, and the
impact on a single mother of the postmaternal paradigm. Here I apply Julia Kristeva’s theory
of abjection to account for the interplay of the psychic and the social in the marginalisation of
maternalities outside the dominant ideal of the nuclear family.

The mother’s accession to the status of subject, where previously she had existed almost
solely as discursive object, is ultimately shown to be incomplete. This overarching narrative
is not that of one mother, as might by suggested by the title of this thesis, but of the maternal
as a political category and paradigm. The Drover’s Wife never was, after all, a singular
mother. In Louisa Lawson’s original essay, she described the oppression not of one woman,
but a figure overlooked and held in subjection by the dominant national typology. Lawson’s
renaming of “The Australian Bush-Woman” to “The Drover’s Wife” suggests a paradigm
under which the identity of “wife” takes precedence over that of “mother” in the dominant

98 Natasha Campo, “‘Feminism Failed Me’: Childcare, Maternity Leave and the Denigration
99 Maryanne Dever gives as an example of the dominant pronatalism an incident in 1999,
when then Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett “exhorted” students of the prestigious
MacRobertson Girls’ High to “make a career out of motherhood”; see “Baby Talk: The
100 Ruddick, 102-03.
discourse. This does not contradict my claim that women’s citizenship has been defined in relation to their maternality. It rather bespeaks the autonomy women have been denied in the service of national interests. When Lawson’s short story was published, the overlap of categories “mother” and “wife” was prescribed as total. While mothering outside the nuclear family is significantly more common and accepted in the present day, solo mothers remain subject to a level of long-term financial disadvantage far exceeding that of mothers with male partners, suggesting the dominant culture’s persistent favouring of mothers as wives.101 As Manne writes, “Single mothers, by violating the norms of patriarchal marriage, have long been considered “dangerous mothers”.102

“In the hands of the critics”, writes Schaffer, “‘The Drover’s Wife’ has been a prized commodity for public consumption.”103 The many interpretations which this story has received demonstrate both the evocative, symbolic richness of the text and the ways in which the story as a cultural object has been enlisted in the defence of dominant ideological perspectives concerning the nature of Australian culture”.104 Such an example is Manning Clark’s idealisation of her as a “saint”, a sacrificial mother: “Lawson knew that her heroism, the halo of glory with which he endowed this Bush Mum, was of a high order”.105 What “metaphysical terror” Lawson accorded to her was assimilable, apparently, with Lawson’s own, in that she conquers “all the fears of despair and defeat which ‘touched [Lawson] deeply’”.106 The Drover’s Wife has been similarly commodified by imaginative writers. Murray Bail’s 1975 revision of the short story takes the drover himself as the story’s narrator. While satirical, it suggests the marginalisation of masculinity. The narrator is a dentist whose wife, Hazel, is characterised by a “silly streak” which caused her thirty years ago to leave him for the Drover.107 Bail appears to challenge the narrative of the Drover’s Wife’s oppression, according her an agency oppressive in its own right: “Hazel—it is Hazel and the rotten

102 Ibid., 20.
103 Schaffer, Women and the Bush, 131.
104 Ibid.
105 Manning Clark, quoted in ibid.
106 Ibid.
landscape that dominate everything”. Unconsidered appears to be the fact that Bail’s story, like Lawson’s, is narrated by a man. The same applies to Frank Moorhouse’s 1980 version which takes the form of a conference paper by a fictive Italian postgraduate student, Franco Casamaggiore. Moorhouse applies a transnational dimension to national mythologies, applying through his narrator a satirical ecocritical perspective to a “sheep-shagger” narrative of Australia. The Drover’s Wife “lives out her life as if she were a sheep… it can be taken that this is a literary transformation by Lawson for the sake of propriety. Or, as with all works of art, it could be that Lawson was unaware of the story he was truly telling”. ¹⁰⁸ The narrator imagines an Australia in which “a Green ideology takes hold”, one which will “celebrate interspecies reciprocity, as it is now beginning to celebrate women, hitherto lost to Australian history”. ¹⁰⁹

Barbara Jefferis’ 1980 revision of the story coincides with the beginning of a decade remembered for the feminist recuperation of these “lost” Australian women. Here, the Drover’s Wife narrates at last, responding to Lawson, Bail and Moorhouse’s respective depictions of her life. The killing of that “most Freudian of snakes” is recast as a minor event of the woman’s life. ¹¹⁰ Instead, she foregrounds the experiences of miscarriage and infant mortality in response to Henry Lawson’s marginalisation of her stillbirth in the original story. As in Louisa Lawson’s original essay, she is attributed an interest in poetry rather than the fashion-plates of the Young Ladies’ Journal. She narrates: “I wish they had more poems from women”. The stakes are made clear by the contrasting emphases she indicates between her account of her own life, and its rendering by male authors and narrators: “I wanted to tell it just to show how wrong they are when they write about us”. ¹¹¹ In view of Johnson’s claim that women are “strong as mothers, but made weak by being wives”, Jefferis’ Drover’s Wife resists her subordination to the patriarchal “wife” role. ¹¹² This is in spite of her defence of the absent Drover: “He doesn’t talk about me as though I’ve got four legs and he doesn’t think

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 272.
¹¹² Johnson, 269.
the way to praise a man is to say he thinks like a man, acts like a man. Perhaps it’s why I’m still with him after all these years. That, and the kids”.113 Still, the narrator alludes to what Johnson characterises as the “debilitating” dimension of hegemonic femininity as “the generalised personality cognate of ‘wife’”;114 “[Men] don’t understand the strength women have—won’t see it, because they think it takes away from them”.115 This accords with the argument of Patricia Grimshaw et al. in Creating a Nation, that women’s reproductivity has been “appropriated” in the building of the masculinist, settler-colonial nation.116 The reclamation of maternal subjectivity is incomplete at the point where Jefferis’ Drover’s Wife appears, not least due to the short story’s limited reception. This Drover’s Wife makes the apparently self-contradictory claim, that “Truth is there are many sorts of men, all the same; only one sort of woman, all different”.117 The claim ironises the reduction of women to “one sort” through a national typology, and for white women this has largely been true. The exclusion of Indigenous, migrant and racialised women from the dominant national typology cannot be neglected: their subordination has been without idealisation by the dominant culture. The women’s liberation movement, from within which Jefferis’ story was written, was incomplete due to its assumption of “the white middle-class woman as the universal woman”.118

It would be difficult to account for the conditions that would make possible such a transformed society encompassing maternal values and informed by relations of mutual vulnerability and care.119 Prevalent sociopolitical models are self-naturalising, making alternatives difficult to imagine. But the imagination of political alternatives is certainly

113 Jefferis, 40.
114 Johnson, 246.
115 Jefferis, 34.
116 Patricia Grimshaw; Marilyn Lake; Ann McGrath; Marian Quartly, Creating a Nation (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 4.
117 Jefferis, 39.
118 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xviii.
119 This is a goal Stephens identifies through her reading of Eva Feder Kittay, who writes “we are connected through our own vulnerability when dependent and our vulnerability when caring for dependents, as well as through the potential of each of us to become dependent and to have the responsibility for a dependent. The bonds that form through relationships of dependency are frequently deep and count among those we most cherish” in “Postmaternal Thinking”, 63.
within the remit of literature, as I will show in my concluding remarks on Leah Purcell’s *The Drover’s Wife*. My primary project is, however, to trace what has gone before in the representation of the Australian mother as citizen. What emerges specifically from a literary analysis is the gradual recuperation of maternal subjectivity in Australian textuality. Where the mother begins as the object of literary representation, as in “The Drover’s Wife”, she emerges as subject over the course of the decades. Where before the literary mother fulfilled the ideological function of upholding the dominant national culture, she begins to speak her subjectivity, regardless of its expediency to the ideological forces that hold her in subjection. This is what Lawson’s *Drover’s Wife* is charged with upholding, as she defends the homestead from the intruding snake. Perhaps the greater potential threat to the dominant national order is the mother herself, as she emerges in her autonomy.


1. Bush Man, Bush Mum

Henry Lawson and Mary Gilmore

The birth of Australian citizenship is arguably the most important of Federation’s implications. For the purpose of cultural analyses such as this, Federation is best conceived of not as a moment or an event in the nation’s history, but a defining period beginning in the 1890s and ending at around the outbreak of the First World War. This period and its aftermath, the years of the First World War, were decisive in the national construction of women’s citizenship. Challenges to the white-masculinist ethos of the cultural-nationalist movement came to prevalence in the 1890s, a revisionism Docker dismisses as the “Feminist Legend”.¹ The latter is emblematised by Marilyn Lake’s “reworking” of Russel Ward’s “Australian Legend” in her essay, “The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context”.² In so doing, Docker suggests that claims for the exclusionary masculinism of the 1890s have attained the status of orthodoxy; this is despite the ongoing masculinism of the cultural nationalist ethos, encapsulated by the cultural institution of mateship.

Docker rightly points out the ascendancy of the Woman Movement, also known as first wave feminism, from the 1880s into the 1890s.³ In doing so, he suggests the movement’s welcoming by the dominant national culture. Not unfairly, however, does Docker challenge the structuralist reduction of the period to definition by “a single structure, or a single opposition”.⁴ The importance of the 1890s for the Australian labour movement is ample evidence of the interplay of power structures during the period, as is the implementation of the White Australia policy immediately after Federation in 1901. That these events are common knowledge suggests that Docker’s naming of a “Feminist Legend” is itself a reduction. The interplay of gender, class, and race in the definition and valuation of the Australian citizen is definitive of the Federation years. Political claims concerning these sites of oppression, moreover, frequently infringed upon the rights sought by those situated

² Ibid., 17.
³ Ibid., 25.
⁴ Ibid., 19.
on other axes of oppression. This is evidenced, for example, by the racism for which first wave feminism is reputed, and the notorious masculinism of the labour movement. Not inaccurately have dominant accounts of the Woman Movement characterised its proponents by an essentialism of white women as guardians of societal virtue. Against dominant assessments associating first-wave feminism with Victorianism, however, Susan Magarey characterises the first-wave feminists by their championing of a citizenship by which women would be recognised as “human beings’, rather than as ‘the sex’”. The suggestion is that their resistance to a secondary citizenship defined by subordination to the full citizenship of white men, a citizenship contingent on their actual or potential role as wives. Docke meanwhile neglects the reactionary bent of the dominant culture, in its function to re-situate women in the reproductive domestic sphere. To illustrate, I will consider in this chapter the representation of maternal citizenship in that canonical cultural-nationalist text, Henry Lawson’s “The Drover’s Wife”. This will be set against a study of Mary Gilmore’s earlier poetry, focusing particularly on Marri’d and Other Poems, with references to the evolution of her concerns in her second volume, The Passionate Heart, and other uncollected poems published between these two. Despite the feminist call for women’s autonomous citizenship, the authors’ respective emphases on the mother as wife are instructive.

Given their respective roles in the notoriously masculinist “Australian tradition”, it seems almost inevitable to discuss Lawson and Gilmore themselves alongside their work. I suggest that both function paratextually in a cultural-nationalist context, as Kay Schaffer implies in her study of Henry Lawson’s role in the Australian legend. Regarding women’s role within this legend, I intend to demonstrate that the Federation era saw the definition of women’s citizenship—to the extent that women were accorded citizenship at all—as essentially maternal. Susan Magarey argues that this was a function of work and family policy implemented in reaction to white women’s suffrage, which situated their citizenship firmly

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6 Magarey, 3.
7 Ibid.
within the private sphere. Those women who were enfranchised in 1902—that is, white women—were accorded a citizenship which was secondary in its relationality, contingent on their assumed maternal qualities. Meanwhile, as Australia self-defined as a white nation, the complementary construction of Aboriginal women as anti-maternal informed the implementation of protectionist policies depriving them of the right to their own maternity. As pronatalism took hold in response to anxieties regarding the birth rate of the 1890s, the White Australia policy was implemented restricting population increase through immigration. White women’s citizenship hinged on the dependence of white Australia on its own reproduction, requiring their conformity to dominant national agendas regarding gender and race.

Gilmore and Lawson’s respective representations of the mother and her citizenship stand in productive contrast. Lawson’s Drover’s Wife is represented according to a white-masculinist cultural-nationalist ideal. That she is represented with a sympathy Lawson would later largely abandon in relation to women does not preclude the ideological expediency of her representation for the white-masculinist cultural-nationalist narrative operating in his favour. Gilmore’s representation of married and maternal life bears the evidence of a maternalist essentialism for which the first-wave feminists would later be roundly criticised. Gilmore nevertheless makes a claim in her poetry to white women’s right to equal citizenship despite sexual difference from men. Gilmore and Lawson’s longstanding friendship is noteworthy. Evident from their correspondence is Gilmore’s rather maternal attitude towards Lawson, despite being only marginally older. Both authors had in common their ultimate accession to the status of significant national figures, though only Lawson remains widely read or studied. Gilmore, however, still appears on Australian currency—on the “literary” ten-dollar note.

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 8.
10 WH Wilde writes that “If there was a strong emotional link between them... then on Mary’s side, it sprang, not from love but from a friendly, even maternal, concern for the intense but awkward young poet whose writing she admired”. See Courage a Grace: A Biography of Dame Mary Gilmore (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 63.
While Gilmore’s career was significantly longer and her persona far more public, Henry Lawson’s memory looms larger in the national mythology. This doubtless owes in part to gender, but it is also significant that Lawson is perhaps best remembered for his fictional representation of a woman imagined to be quintessentially Australian—to the extent a woman could be. As Richard White reminds us, national identity is constructed according to dominant interests. The institution of the White Australia Policy in the same year as Federation is a clear demonstration of the exclusionary function of national identity formation. But exclusions from full Australian citizenship, and the idea of Australianness, were not enacted solely on the axis of race. Until the 1890s all women of the Australian colonies were denied the full citizenship implied by the right to vote. The first Australian women to be enfranchised were South Australian women in 1894. This legislation, which enfranchised Aboriginal women as well as white women would, however, be overturned by the 1902 federal legislation, which granted suffrage to white women only. As Susan Magarey has shown, not even for white women did this amount to citizenship on equal terms to the enfranchised man. Further legislation followed immediately to undermine even white women’s citizenship in the new nation’s first decade:

other changes in the labour market and the polity, occurring around the same time as the female suffrage campaigns reached their successful conclusions, reasserted the importance of biological difference between women and men, constricting women’s newly won citizenship rights to the economically “dependent” and—a biologically determinist sub-category of the “human”—the “maternal”.

The distinct white masculinism of the 1890s, characterised by an upsurge of the cultural nationalism which would lay the ground for Australia’s federation, is well established. The Bulletin, where “The Drover’s Wife” was first published in 1892, was a leading proponent of a national mythology based in whiteness, rurality, and masculinity.

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13 Magarey, 19-20.
14 Ibid., 8-9.
I have mentioned Docker’s disputation of the established “Feminist Legend” of the 1890s on the basis that women were “very much on the move” during this decade. The implication is that this contradicts the masculinism of the cultural-nationalist ethos. It also perpetuates a patriarchal assumption that women’s rights have been bestowed upon them, rather than fought for and won. Docker does not entertain the notion that the legendary masculinism of the 1890s might in part be a reaction to feminism’s ascendency during this time. He writes,

The era was marked by [women’s] growing participation in the workforce and in a wider range of occupations; increased entry into education at all levels, from elementary to university; and by a falling birthrate and low marriage rates. The era was also witness to the smoking, bicycling, Rational Dress and trousers-wearing New Woman, that spectacular cultural figure admired by Miles Franklin.

He also suggests that the 1890s are sooner characterised by “modernist gloom and despair, uncertainty, pessimism, ambivalence”, as though this were necessarily in conflict with the “aggressive, self-confident masculinism” by which the period has been characterised by historians such as Marilyn Lake. As Mark Hearn writes, the emergence of the New Woman was an international phenomenon. This figure, and the new freedoms for women with which she was associated, was commonly considered symptomatic of the fin-de-siècle and its attendant cultural malaise. Given Australia’s Federation in 1901, the New Woman assumed additional national significance as a Federation figure, and a source of anxiety regarding the future of the family and the nation. Mary Gilmore and Louisa Lawson, Henry Lawson’s mother, were among those women who advocated for women’s rights at the turn of the century, the most prominent of these being the right to vote. Of the two, however, only Louisa Lawson could readily have been characterised as a New Woman. Magarey insists that the Woman Movement was not only broader but significantly more radical than its dominant

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15 Docker, 25.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 17.
19 Ibid., 366.
20 Ibid., 366, 75.
21 While suffrage would not appear to be high on the list of white women’s rights she championed, Mary Gilmore makes a claim once to having campaigned for women’s suffrage in Letters of Mary Gilmore, ed. WH Wilde and T Inglis Moore (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 222.
historical construction. She refers for example to Marilyn Lake and Anne Summers, who respectively have characterised the movement’s women as “spoilers of men’s pleasures” and “God’s police”.22 I will show that despite her somewhat ambiguous relation to the Woman Movement, Gilmore is perhaps more closely aligned with this characterisation. Gilmore’s tendency, I suggest, is to represent white women primarily as maternal citizens, rather than as citizens in a shared humanity and “Australianness”.

To the extent women were accorded Australian citizenship, it was won and exercised on a maternalist basis. Though justly premised on “an assertion of the public, social importance of motherhood and the nurture and care of children”,23 maternalism also takes these as the primary basis for women’s political claims and agency.24 As Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern argue, women have been excluded from “formal citizenship”, an exclusionary construct predating the nation.25 “Formal citizenship”, they contend, has been defined “exclusively on male terms” and associated with the public-sphere participation women have throughout most of history been denied.26 Women have therefore sought to participate in public life through less formal means, “through actions on behalf of their families, communities, and societies”.27 Magarey argues that the maternal citizenship white Australian women ultimately attained immediately after Federation was entirely inimical to the first-wave feminists’ demand not to be relegated to a secondary citizenship on the basis of sex.28 The trajectory of this thesis will substantiate my suggestion that this still marked a progression from white women’s primary definition as wives. It would, however, uphold a maternalism which further enabled the oppression of Indigenous and non-British migrant women and men. I contend that the emergence of the maternal as the basis of white women’s citizenship had important implications for the present, including the “gendered and racist

22 Marilyn Lake and Anne Summers in Magarey, 1.
24 Andrea O’Reilly, Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2016), 113, 16.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Magarey, 3.
exclusions” implied in this dominant model of citizenship.\(^{29}\) It will be evident over the course of this thesis that many of the causes of exclusion from full and equal citizenship for all Australian mothers remain at issue today. I refer particularly to the gendered separation of public and private spheres, and the diminished financial independence experienced by mothers resultant from their maternal work.\(^{30}\) During the Federation years, the quintessential citizen was established as white and male: this would reinforce the subordination of all women, the exclusion of non-British migrants (compounded through the White Australia Policy) and the suppression of Indigenous presence.

Discussions of Henry Lawson, largely concerned with his peak in the 1890s, have tended almost to synonymise the author with the incipient nation itself.\(^{31}\) Situated within its Federation-era context, the ideological function of this is unmistakable. As Schaffer writes, “In the popular imagination, the Australian tradition finds its origin in the writings of the democratic nationalists of the 1890s”.\(^{32}\) Lawson’s resonance within an essential period of national identity formation suggests his preeminent compatibility with dominant-cultural narratives. His representation of women, most prominently the unnamed Drover’s Wife, promises therefore to be telling with regard to women’s place within the coming nation-state, as it sought to distinguish itself from its Imperial mother. The masculinism of this narrative has become an accepted revision to dominant constructions of Australian history, despite Docker’s dismissal of “the Feminist Legend”. In *The Real Matilda*, Miriam Dixson characterises the national mythology established at Federation as not simply masculinist, but actively misogynist.\(^{33}\) Kay Schaffer elucidates Richard White’s claim regarding the ideological function of dominant mythologies embodied in national figures or “types”. Of Lawson’s mythic status she writes, “like all myths, the myth of Henry Lawson helps us to understand something about Australian culture *while it also imposes that meaning on us*” (emphasis mine).\(^{34}\) This imposition of meaning through the perpetuation of dominant

\(^{29}\) Crawford and Maddern, 2.
\(^{30}\) Petra Bueskens attributes women’s ongoing constraint as mothers despite freedom as individuals in part to the artificial separation of spheres in *Modern Motherhood and Women’s Dual Identities: Rewriting the Sexual Contract* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 3.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 29.
\(^{34}\) Schaffer, 112.
narratives has had a lasting impact on the status of women in Australia. Before conducting an analysis of “The Drover’s Wife”, then, it should be re-emphasised that the “Bush Mum” is a white, male construction. This explains the strict limitation of the “types” according to which women were represented: as rural mother, “Australian Girl”—a local incarnation of the New Woman—or, for Aboriginal and migrant women, sexualised as “black velvet” or generally as “whores”, in such a way as to justify their sexual exploitation by white men. According to the patriarchal dichotomy of the maternal and the sexual, these latter women are constructed as inherently and necessarily anti-maternal. Rather than existing as a citizen in her own right, argues Schaffer,

The category “woman” is empty and filled by shifting significations which mirror the place of woman in what might be called the Australian Imaginary (in the Lacanian sense of what we take to be real but is imagined with reference to patriarchal symbolic order).

She asks conversely of one the principal propagators of the masculinist national mythology, with its attendant implications for women, “Who is ‘Henry Lawson’—this absent centre around which national identity takes form?” If we take Lawson’s work to perpetuate the dominant cultural narrative, it follows that Lawson’s women are constructed in the service of patriarchal interests.

Despite her isolation, the Drover’s Wife is by no means autonomous: where the matriarch “takes” over male power, Kay Schaffer writes, the Bush Mum “comes into it”, substituting for her husband’s absence. His absence is nevertheless emphasised by her isolation in a hostile landscape: “Bush all round—bush with no horizon… Nothing to relieve the eye”. Schaffer accounts for the intrusion of the snake, against which she keeps an overnight vigil, as that of a feminised other which threatens chaos to the dominant order: in biblical terms, the snake is aligned with the sexual Eve against the Madonna; emerging from the landscape, the snake also represents Indigenous presence, despite the nation’s establishment on “terra

36 Schaffer, 161.
37 Ibid., 139.
38 Ibid., 72.
nullius”. But Schaffer also suggests a concomitant allegiance between the Drover’s Wife and these feminised others, suggesting a remnant threat to the dominant order signalled by her provisional rule of the isolated home. She is nonetheless “happy to protect the position of her husband, his property and the ‘natural’ social order of family life”41. Despite sharing in the tenacity and resourcefulness of the male stock characters of the Australian bush mythology, Lawson’s Bush Mum is constructed according to the interests of a patriarchal national imaginary, as a wife. Though there is no male “hero” to enact the gendered hierarchy this implies, the ideal of the drover’s wife bespeaks her subordination in the cultural-nationalist narrative. The most recognisable type of the Bush Mum is legible as “a pioneering hero of the Australian tradition”42 like Lawson’s men, as Schaffer argues. She nevertheless “fulfils the people’s dream of the perfect mother”.43 This, as Adrienne Rich reminds us, is an inevitably institutional and patriarchal fantasy; the institution of motherhood functions to further women’s subordination through idealisation and denigration. Schaffer writes that the Drover’s Wife is “powerful, yet capable of being mastered herself”.44 It is telling that “The perfect Australian fantasy” coincides with this institutionalised patriarchal fantasy of the mother.45 Schaffer characterises the Drover’s Wife as able to occupy a privileged and dominant “masculine” position in the story, while maintaining an idealised “feminine respectability”.46 The former is arguably made possible by the latter. In occupying both “privileged” and “inferior” masculine and feminine roles, as Schaffer argues in her deconstructionist reading, the Bush Mum “mediates the threat of otherness” while occupying “the symbolic space of the other”.47 This latter is feminised by virtue of subordination, and is in Lawson’s story embodied in the snake, the Indigenous other, and nature itself.48 Whichever role she embodies, it is in the service of an inherently patriarchal national project, whatever the “surface heroism”.49
The Drover’s Wife’s maternal “perfection” does not lie, however, in her conformity to a middle-class, hegemonic ideal of femininity—the cultural-nationalist tradition, after all, sooner idealised the rural working class. Rather, it lies in an ideal of sacrificial motherhood:

As a girl she built, we suppose, the usual air-castles, but all her girlish hopes and aspirations are dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies’ Journal*, and, Heaven help her, takes a pleasure in the fashion-plates.\(^50\)

We are moreover told that despite her isolation and suffering, and despite her ceaseless labours which leave her “no time to show” her love for her children (or in the story’s focal episode, to sleep), she seems “contented with her lot”.\(^51\) But who is the narratorial “we”? In foregoing the first-person singular to refer to the narrator for a collective “we”, Lawson arguably obscures his own subjectivity to position his as the voice of the nation. And as Schaffer suggests, Lawson has been thus construed in response. The result is that the most canonical Australian literary representation of Australian motherhood is represented according to a white male subjectivity, with the dominant interests this implies, while purporting to be objective and disinterested. This makes an irony of EV Lucas’ claim in a review for London’s *Academy* that “Mr Lawson makes the woman’s thoughts reveal herself to you as she sits there, until by the time the climax is sighted you know her as you know yourselves.”\(^52\) While “The Drover’s Wife” is a story of “a woman’s courage and fortitude”, her representation remains, as Schaffer argues, “within the carefully delineated parameters of masculine discourse”\(^53\).

“The Drover’s Wife” is striking in that it represents a gendered separation of spheres so extreme as perhaps to be self-undermining. We are told that while her husband works away from home, she has been left for up to eighteen months at a time to manage the homestead and care for the children. We are also told that “there are things a bush woman cannot do”, and that there have been instances where she has had to invent the nearby presence of husband and sons (presumably older than her own) working nearby to discourage masculine threats such as “a bushman with ‘the horrors’ or a villainous-looking ‘sundowner’… [who]

\(^{50}\) Lawson, 65.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 69.
\(^{53}\) Schaffer, 133.
always cunningly enquires for ‘the boss’”.54 Lawson does not fail to remind us repeatedly of the absence of an adult male to mediate the threats to the private sphere by the world outside it. This would appear to be the primary preoccupation of this short story. The bush mythology, and therefore Australia’s incipient national identity, are premised on a gendered ideology of separate spheres. In his apparent sympathy for his female protagonist, however, Lawson would appear to represent this extreme separation of spheres with ambivalence. Sue Rowley argues for the centrality of spatial metaphors in the construction of gender difference, the bush and the home embodying the separate spheres fundamental to the “Bush Mum” trope.55 Following from this is a gendered division of labour in which settlement is carried out by men clearing the land, and “women bearing children to inherit it.”56 Rowley contextualises this as stemming from prevalent anxieties regarding gendered divisions of labour, in an 1890s context in which women’s work outside the home was seen as a threat both to men’s ability to earn a livelihood, and the declining white birth rate.57 But the separation of spheres implies male absence in the domestic sphere, which would appear to be the source of Lawson’s ambivalence in “The Drover’s Wife”. As Rowley shows, the disruption occasioned to the working-class rural family by “the absence of male authority and material support” due to the demands of seasonal and itinerant labour effected a destabilising of the public/private dichotomy.58 This is the same dichotomy upholding both the cultural-nationalist bush mythology and the institutional family. Women’s increased participation in the paid labour force in the 1890s posed an additional disruption to these institutions. It was therefore met with significant resistance by the dominant patriarchal culture and, relatedly, the growing labour movement.59 Lawson was among those to despair in his work of a perceived causal relation between women’s participation in paid work—particularly factory work—and the declining birth rate of the 1890s.60 The “Drover’s Wife” certainly does betray dominant anxieties regarding the “femininity” of the Australian woman in the approach to Federation. Of his protagonist’s apparent lack of maternal tenderness, Lawson writes, “Her

54 Lawson, 67.
55 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 For a discussion of post-Federation policy changes limiting women’s growing workforce participation, see “Chapter 5: Work” in Magarey, 117-40.
60 Rowley, 89.
surroundings are not favourable to the development of the womanly or sentimental side of nature”.

Among the institutions under threat in the 1890s was indeed hegemonic femininity, despite Lawson’s ideological attempts to align it with “nature” in “The Drover’s Wife”.

But like “Australianness”, femininity and motherhood are constructed in alignment with dominant interests. In the new nation, the ideal of femininity would be bound up not solely in the maternal, but relatedly, with whiteness. I have mentioned the opposition of the sexual and the maternal in dominant prescriptions for femininity in Australia, and I have mentioned race as determinant of women’s status as “Madonna” or “whore”. Against Anne Summers, however, Schaffer claims that it is not the “Damned whore” but the “bad mother” who represents “the predominant underside for the code of Australian femininity”. Though Schaffer rightly identifies the maternal as a site of particular anxiety regarding the regulation of femininity to national ends, she neglects the racialised dimension of the maternal-sexual dichotomy.

Inimical to the project of white nation-building, the dominant construction of the Indigenous woman is anti-maternal. Not incidentally is Black Mary, who assists the drover’s wife in a particularly difficult birth, referred to as “the whitest gin in all the land”. In her midwifery to the Drover’s Wife, she arguably fulfils a hegemonic role. Even while facilitating white maternity with its nation-building significance, however, Mary is referred to with a distinctively gendered racism. In such instances, the sexualisation of the Indigenous woman is never far from view. Schaffer also points out that, according to the semiotics of the cultural-nationalist narrative, the bush itself constitutes a “bad mother”, substantiating her characterisation of the snake as a feminine “other” whose penetration of the domestic sphere threatens the order represented by white maternal femininity. But, as I have mentioned, this order depends on the separation of spheres, a gendered order upon which the cultural-

61 Lawson, 69.
62 Schaffer, 134-37.
63 Drawing on Kate Millett (1971), Jill Matthews accounts for femininity as a site of patriarchal prescriptions, characterising it as “a concept waiting to be given meaning by whoever conjures it into use” in Jill Julius Matthews, Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-Century Australia (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 7-8.
64 Schaffer, 63-64.
65 Lawson, 65.
66 Schaffer, 63-64.
67 Ibid., 112-46.
nationalist mythology of the “Lone Hand” bush man depends. Marilyn Lake writes that the Bush Man “represented the promotion of a particular model of masculinity—the Lone Hand—by men with firm views about gender relations and who, whether married or not, enjoyed the pleasures of ‘bachelordom’”.

Still, the Bush Man cannot reproduce himself. A specifically national ideal of femininity is therefore produced by the division of labour this necessitates, which is spatialised in the dichotomy of public and private spheres.

Accordingly, where the Drover’s Wife is represented in a “masculine” role, she does so in the interest of “good” motherhood. In performing the role of the “good mother”, despite the “men’s work” it may require her to undertake, the Drover’s Wife conforms to a feminine ideal adapted to the conditions of the Australian bush. But doubt remains; the breaking of “sickly daylight” over the bush hardly suggests optimism for the future. Rather, it serves as something of a vindication of Docker’s heterodox characterisation of the prevailing mood of the 1890s as one of fin-de-siècle unease. The eldest son’s promise to his mother that he “won’t never go drovin’” would appear to be an indictment on her situation, specifically in the absence of male presence and authority.

This was certainly a source of anxiety for Lawson, who acknowledged a “dark side of the valorisation of mateship”, a distinctly homosocial phenomenon demanding male absence from women and the domestic sphere.

We might attribute this anxiety principally to two phenomena apparent in “The Drover’s Wife”, issuing from a situation of extreme gender segregation. The first is the Drover’s Wife’s necessary assumption of roles coded masculine in the absence of an adult male to fulfil them. That this troubles her maternal role is evidenced in Tommy’s mirth in response to her wearing trousers to fight a bushfire, which causes the baby to howl “until she appear[s] in skirts again”. This suggests the importance of hegemonic femininity to “good” motherhood. Rowley accordingly emphasises her efforts to maintain “feminine respectability”, for example, by dressing her children up for Sunday walks. This, despite the absence of anyone to witness such rituals towards the preservation of her husband’s social standing and, given

68 Lake, 2.
69 Schaffer, 135-37.
70 Lawson, 71.
71 Ibid.
72 Rowley, 88.
73 Lawson, 66.
74 Rowley, 82.
the according hierarchical implications, “the ‘natural’ social order of family life”. Rowley writes that in the late nineteenth century, working-class mothering practices in particular were judged according to “respectability, domesticity, hygiene, dependency and sexual morality” in such a way, I suggest, as to foreshadow the eugenics movement. The second of the anxieties in evidence regards the absence of the husband and father to preside over the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere and the woman who represents it are therefore left vulnerable to strange men enquiring after “the Boss”, though the extent to which the primary concern is the Drover’s Wife’s welfare is a matter commanding of scrutiny.

With specific mention of Lawson, Dixson characterises the “Australian gods” as “largely misogynist”. Given the national significance of both Lawson and “The Drover’s Wife”, Dixson’s assessment warrants further consideration. Despite the complex gender relations at play, one would be hard-pressed to consider “The Drover’s Wife” an outright misogynist text. This is not least due to its reinforcement of a gender order functioning to subjugate women like the Drover’s Wife, all the while denying this subjugation by claiming her “contentment” with her patriarchally designated role. While the swagman, bush man, and related national types have been accorded individuality and agency despite their positioning within a stock national typology, women are routinely subsumed into the roles of wife and mother. Importantly this was not—and cannot have been—based in Lawson’s experience of women. Despite her maternalist ideals, Mary Gilmore was a woman by no means reducible to her maternity. Such was Gilmore’s influence on Henry that it is possible, as she claims in her correspondence, that “The Drover’s Wife” was based on the experience of her own mother. Against this, Lawson attributed the basis of the story to his aunt, Gertrude Falconer. But it is likely that the basis of his story was yet closer to home. Henry’s mother Louisa Lawson, having married Niels Larssen (anglicised to Peter Lawson) endured several years of rural isolation with young children whose father was largely absent. These circumstances are illustrated in “A Child in the Dark, and a Foreign Father”, published in Henry’s last collection of fiction, *Triangles of Life and Other Stories* (1916). I will discuss

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75 Schaffer, 135.  
76 Rowley, 82.  
77 Dixson, 12.  
78 Gilmore, 62.  
79 This is clarified in Elizabeth Webby’s notes following Lawson, 71.
this further shortly as evidence of Lawson’s deepening misogyny across his life and career. At this point, however, I will turn to the evidence of his mother’s influence.

Henry Lawson would not appear to have been especially influenced by his mother’s pioneering role in Australian first-wave feminism. Founder and editor of feminist magazine The Dawn, which enjoyed a wide readership throughout Australia, Louisa Lawson was a prominent campaigner for women’s suffrage, and a writer herself.80 Xavier Pons’ comparison of Henry’s “The Loaded Dog” to an untitled short story by Louisa demonstrates the obvious influence, though this is put down to “curious similarity” and “parallelism” with no attempt to situate either in chronological relation to the other.81 This would not appear to be of particular concern to Pons, who claims Lawson’s superior adaptation of his mother’s ideas. While acknowledging Louisa as likely the most significant influence on Lawson’s life and career, he characterises this influence as “essentially negative”, characterising her as “a hindrance to his development”.82 Given that when Henry was a child she “would read to him, mostly from the works of Dickens, Defoe and Poe, thus moulding his literary sensibility”, this seems a bold condemnation.83 It is, however, concordant with Pons’ consistent characterisation of Louisa as an anti-maternal figure: he characterises her as “shallow” in “maternal feelings”, “inadequate as a parent”, and “not a very motherly sort of woman”.84 She is also described as “A neurotic, frustrated woman who carried a chip on her shoulder and was inclined to a brand of self-pity now and then laced with violence”.85 Pons’ assessment of Louisa is strikingly reminiscent of unsympathetic tropes applied to contemporary feminists. Despite discussion of Louisa’s tireless campaigning for womanhood suffrage, he neglects to consider any structural basis for Louisa’s frustration, instead participating in a pathologisation of the New Woman more befitting of her time than of his own.86 Lawson would come to condemn her similarly, as evidenced in “A Child in the Dark”.

80 Magarey, 18-19.
82 Ibid., 29.
83 Ibid., 25.
84 Ibid., 24.
85 Ibid., 24-30.
86 Mark Hearn writes of the New Woman as an embodiment of dominant anxieties regarding societal degeneration at the fin-de-siècle in “Originally French”, 365-66.
The autobiographical dimension of this short story is thinly veiled, detailing a father returning home to the isolated family home to find his children neglected while his wife lies in bed with a migraine suggested to be more likely a case of “nerves”. As Laurie Hergenhan shows in his article on “A Child in the Dark”, the mother (her “sparingly used” first name being Emma) is depicted according to misogynist tropes whose familiarity “approach[es] parody”. Herneghan describes her characterisation as “nagging, self-centred and lying”, and moreover draws our attention to an informative detail: “Among other emendations to the original manuscript, Lawson changed the book the wife reads in bed, from Jane Eyre—a serious literary novel in which the “mad wife” is named Bertha—to a trashy novel by Marie Corelli called Ardath.” While Hergenhan offers a potentially exculpatory explanation, suggesting that this emendation might have been intended to obscure any association between the character and either Louisa or Bertha Lawson, the fact that the father in the story is named (Nils) for Henry’s own casts his reservation into doubt. Moreover, the emendation is consistent with Lawson’s increasing tendency towards overt misogyny over the course of his life, particularly following his divorce, the consequences of which saw him pen his unambiguously titled essay, “The She-Devil”. “A Child in the Dark” implies the decay of the domestic sphere in the absence of oversight by the patriarch.

It is arguably in large part due to Henry Lawson’s reputation as “the founding father of the Australian tradition” that his misogyny has largely been suppressed in Australian literary history. That is, perhaps, until the release of Kerrie Davies’ biography of Bertha Lawson, A Wife’s Heart (2017), which included the details of an affidavit alleging Henry’s violence against Bertha. This brought unprecedented publicity to the matter of Henry Lawson’s history of domestic violence, and was met with a telling resistance by commentators affronted by a purported effort to “tarnish” the reputation of a national hero. It was on the basis of this 1903 affidavit that Bertha was able to divorce Henry, after which he would be required by

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
law to pay child support. Leaving Bertha unsupported in single motherhood, however, caused Henry to be gaol ed numerous times for non-payment. In an “angry memoir” concerning her relationship with Henry and Bertha Lawson after the former’s death, Mary Gilmore cast Bertha as Henry’s oppressor. Gilmore’s suggestion was that in her vengefulness and instability, Bertha had effectively ended his literary career. Summers argues, however, that his allocation of a Literary Pension by the Commonwealth government in 1920 amounted to a tacit acknowledgement that his alcoholism would for the remainder of his life prevent him from writing. The “muddying” of Bertha’s reputation and Henry’s correspondent “whitewashing” would establish a tendency for future biographies of Henry Lawson. This is not to say that Lawson’s masculinism in his perpetuation of an according cultural mythology went unchallenged.

Barbara Baynton’s short stories in Bush Studies embody a fictional critique of Lawson’s reduction of women in his nationalist narratives to a purely maternal and domestic citizenship. The suggestively titled story “The Chosen Vessel”, in particular, has been read, most thoroughly by Schaffer, as a “dissident” response to “The Drover’s Wife”. The story culminates in the rape and murder of its maternal protagonist, by a swagman whose threatening arrival in the daytime echoes that occurring in “The Drover’s Wife”. The story exposes what “The Drover’s Wife” suppresses, and what Lawson’s biography demonstrates: that the bush is “no place for a woman”. But this is due less to the threat constituted by Australian nature than that posed by Australian culture in its emphatic masculinism, leaving women isolated and vulnerable. This is in spite of the feminisation of the bush itself in the dominant, masculinist bush mythology, indicating the gulf between female experience and patriarchal constructions of “the feminine”.  

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
96 Davies.
97 Schaffer, 148-70.
98 Francis Adams in ibid., 52.
99 Ibid., 156.
Lawson’s characteristic conflation of the categories “woman” and “mother” is not only in keeping with the patriarchal institution of motherhood. It is also a reflection of Lawson’s anxieties about the future of the Australian family, and relatedly the future of the nation. The insistent representation of women as mothers in the bush mythology coincides with a fall in the national birth rate, despite the emphasis on women’s role as mothers of the nation.\textsuperscript{100} Rowley attributes this to the refiguring of the child in “nationalist and imperialist discourse” as a “national resource”.\textsuperscript{101} She argues that the consequent representation of the maternal is “inscribed with anxiety about the welfare of the infant and the undermining of the ‘national strength’ inferred from the drop in the birth rate”.\textsuperscript{102} Such anxieties on Lawson’s part, as a reflection of the dominant culture, are further reflected in his depiction of an ideal of sacrificial motherhood, which takes on additional national significance in the historical context of a falling birth rate. The 1903 Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth Rate in New South Wales, chaired by Dr Charles Mackellar, would blame women’s “selfishness” for their reduced fertility throughout the 1890s.\textsuperscript{103} Father of poet Dorothea Mackellar, Charles would become an enthusiastic proponent of eugenics in Australia, authoring in 1917 a book in support of measures “for the segregation of the mentally deficient”.\textsuperscript{104} Alison McKinnon writes that the panel of commissioners—all but one of them male—attributed the “spectacular decline” in fertility to the “pathological practices” of contraception and abortion.\textsuperscript{105} Lawson was no dissident from this reproach by the State against white women for shirking their “national duty”.\textsuperscript{106} Rowley writes.

In his poetry, Lawson explicitly intervened in the debates about the birthrate. He supported the pro-natalist position, and his demands for high white fertility are articulated in terms of national and race survival. He too attributes the decline in birth rate to selfishness, particularly on the part of women.\textsuperscript{107}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{100} Rowley, 90.
  \item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Rowley, 88.
\end{itemize}
She writes that the suggestion of “selfishness” may well refer to the fact that, during the 1890s, women’s birth-control and family-limitation methods had become “public knowledge”. This triggered a masculinist reaction “legitimated in terms of the national interest”, and that Lawson’s ideological shift reflects the intersecting ideologies of pronatalism and nationalism. Intervention into women’s fertility by the new nation-state, as well as anxieties regarding “national strength”, foreshadow the interventions comprising the eugenics movement during the interwar years. This is suggestive, in part, of women’s influx into the paid workforce in the 1880s and 1890s, evidencing the advancement of women for which Docker dismisses the “Feminist Legend” concerning the period. Clearly Docker ignores the masculinist and misogynist response to this, one which moreover demonstrates the labour movement’s functioning to protect male interests at women’s expense. We need not wonder, in this context, why Gilmore’s simultaneous allegiances with feminism and socialism have been characterised as “fraught.”

The dominant justification of the labour movement’s opposition to women’s presence in the workforce was that women’s employment threatened that of men—particularly given women’s lower wages. But while expedient as a means of rationalising the separation of spheres, this fails to explain the extent of the resistance from within the labour movement to women’s presence in the paid workforce. This is evidenced by the “masculinist reaction” to Louisa Lawson’s employment of female compositors at the Dawn. The boycott to which she was subjected in 1889 by the New South Wales Typographers’ Association, as Magarey points out, could not have been based on lower wages constituting a threat to men’s wages. It is to women’s lower wages that union opposition to women’s employment in the 1890s is frequently attributed, but in this instance the Dawn’s compositors were the highest paid in Sydney, according to Louisa’s claims. The Dawn could only conclude that it was women’s employment altogether to which the trade unions objected. A month later, the Dawn’s

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108 Ibid., 89.
109 Ibid., 88.
111 Magarey, 127.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
representative at a Trades Hall meeting was asked to leave on the basis that the *Dawn* was anti-union, on no apparent evidence but for their employment of women.\footnote{Ibid., 128.} This is reflective of the dominant cultural-nationalist tendency to associate women with conservatism, particularly the “good” white mother, paradigmatic of the “God’s police” role. It is worth noting, however, that this was not of necessity a view Lawson subscribed to—at least, not when he wrote “The Drover’s Wife”. Schaffer even describes his attitude to women as one of “idealisation” in the early 1890s, when he wrote “We’ll know the worth of a purer youth/When women rule with men”.\footnote{Schaffer, 114.} Well acquainted—not least through his mother—with women’s struggle for citizenship, Lawson sooner idealised women as “symbols of the revolutionary ferment of the times”.\footnote{Ibid., 113.} The superficiality of Lawson’s idealisation of women is evident, however, in “The Drover’s Wife”, and I would note idealisation’s function as a form of objectification. Bertha Lawson’s leaving of their marriage due to Henry’s violence and the events that followed are readily traced to his scapegoating of women for his ultimate “wretchedness”.\footnote{Ibid., 114.} This is telling with regard to Lawson’s earlier idealisation of women, if we understand Bertha’s leaving as an assertion of herself as a subject in her own right.

Ultimately, however, Lawson owes his best-known work to a maternal experience appropriated in the service of dominant national interests. These align both with masculinity and whiteness and, as Rowley suggests, an ultimately bourgeois subjectivity. This is not necessarily to characterise Lawson himself as bourgeois—the hardships of his early life are well-documented, and he has even claimed to have been born in a tent—but an acknowledgement of a phenomenon White indicates in the construction of national identity. White emphasises the role of economic power in the construction of the most influential national imagery, given that its creators rely on those who have it.\footnote{White, ix.} It is perhaps in part for this reason that neither Mary Gilmore’s poetry, nor her public persona, have acceded to the nationally iconic status of Lawson and his works. I suggest that this is not due simply to her womanhood, but to her primary concern with working-class white women. Yet a working-class white woman is precisely what “The Drover’s Wife” is concerned with. At this point, I come to the matter of the provenance of the story, which Gilmore’s biographer WH Wilde
dismisses as a matter of limited importance.\textsuperscript{119} I dispute this given the probability that the story was derived from an article by Louisa Lawson called “The Australian Bush-Woman”, first published in the \textit{Boston Woman’s Journal} and the \textit{Englishwoman’s Review} in 1889.\textsuperscript{120} As Elaine Zinkhan shows, the similarities in the woman’s characterisation are unmistakeable, down to her “timid literacy” which is downgraded in Lawson’s story from “poetry and pictures, and what newspapers come her way” to the frivolity of the fashion plates in the \textit{Young Ladies’ Journal}.\textsuperscript{121} Striking also are the formal correspondences between the two works. In a comparison of two similar passages, Zinkhan writes,

Louisa’s and Henry’s phrasing in these passages is not, of course, identical: Louisa’s use of inversion, parallelism, and alliteration, and her more sophisticated use of punctuation, ensure that her passage is more emphatic, and more “literary”. But the passages are sufficiently close syntactically—both writers favour the simple, active sentence; and in both the cumulative use of the pronoun assists in evoking a sense of the heroic—to make even the most cautious reader wonder just how familiar Henry was with his mother’s writing.\textsuperscript{122}

This casts into doubt Wilde’s claim that “it is not the incident itself that has made ‘The Drover’s Wife’ one of the most famous pieces of Australian short fiction; it is Lawson’s craft in telling it”.\textsuperscript{123} There is an important difference in characterisation, however, which perhaps bespeaks some of the reasons for the iconic status of Henry’s story, while Louisa’s article has “escaped the searching nets of Australian literary scholarship”.\textsuperscript{124} Zinkhan’s comparison shows that Louisa’s bush woman “thinks her lot peculiar to herself… and works till she dies, without murmuring”.\textsuperscript{125} By contrast, Henry’s Drover’s Wife seems “contented”, a suggestion consistent with his placing considerably less emphasis than Louisa on the bush woman’s suffering—particularly at the hands of men.\textsuperscript{126} I contend that this is a matter of ideological necessity, as part of a patriarchal idealisation of the mother’s role—positioned as auxiliary—in the business of nation-building. Henry’s conclusion in “The She-Devil” is telling in this

\textsuperscript{119} Wilde, 72.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 497.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 498.
\textsuperscript{123} Wilde, 72.
\textsuperscript{124} Zinkhan, 495.
\textsuperscript{126} Lawson, 69.
regard: “I look forward hopefully to the time when Australian women and girls will be happy looking after their own homes and Australian men again”. The dominant tendency in Australian literary scholarship has been moreover to minimise Louisa’s influence, despite the credit that may be due to her, which is instead attributed to the “founding father of the Australian tradition”. Arguably, both the work and the experience of his mother are appropriated in “The Drover’s Wife” to the end of a white-masculinist national identity formation.

As I have suggested, this likely explains the posthumous fortunes of Mary Gilmore. As was the case for Louisa Lawson, Gilmore’s representation of the maternal was based in personal experience. Even so, there are ways in which Gilmore’s attitudes in this regard were more closely aligned with her friend Henry’s. Though professing to have campaigned for women’s suffrage, Gilmore’s work suggests the relatively low priority she places on women’s public-sphere participation. This is evident, for example, in “I Gang na Mair t’ Lecture Ha”, in which for the speaker the public sphere can no longer compete with the pleasures of the private: “I bide contentit jist a wife/Wi’ ane dear bairn t’ guide an’ kiss”. Mary Gilmore was nevertheless an important public figure well before the publication of her first collection of poetry, *Marri’d and Other Poems*. While Gilmore’s early works advance an ideal of womanhood hinging on a “Victorian” doctrine of separate spheres, her feminism is distinguished by a maternalist advocacy for the public relevance of women’s domestic roles. This is evidenced by her placing apparently higher priority on the maternal allowance than women’s suffrage in her advocacy of a range of social causes. To whatever extent Gilmore’s construction of womanhood and the maternal were prescriptive, however, they were in the interest not of a nationalist masculinism, but of feminism. Magarey characterises the dominant current of the Woman Movement as concerned with attaining the full citizenship enjoyed by white women’s male counterparts. This implies opposition to the relational, maternal citizenship to which the level of citizenship white women attained was

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128 Schaffer, 34.
129 Gilmore, 222.
131 Vickery, 24.
ultimately limited. Gilmore, by contrast, appeared in her feminism to embrace women’s relational citizenship, given her investment in the institutions of marriage and motherhood, as well as traditional and spatialised gender roles.

For Gilmore, motherhood was the highest of occupations, accorded that status, and of quasi-sacred significance. She identifies motherhood in her work as a woman’s highest aspiration, “her mission and throne”, to the exclusion of all paid work outside the home.\(^{132}\) Her “separate-but-equal” account of relations between the sexes resembled her view of those between white settlers and Indigenous peoples, with whom she would become more concerned—albeit most problematically—in her later works.\(^{133}\) These are views attributed in large part to the influence of William Lane while Mary Cameron was in her twenties and early thirties. A journalist and prominent labour-movement figure, Lane was also the founder of the socialist-utopian and eugenicist colonies New Australia and subsequently Cosme in Paraguay. Mary Gilmore, then Mary Cameron, left Australia to take part in the latter of these in 1895. In addition to his white-nationalist philosophy, Lane advocated, in Anne Vickery’s words, “the re-establishment of true manliness, which relied on a complementary but dependent womanliness”.\(^{134}\) Lane’s vision implied the late-Victorian eugenicist vision of “purity and ‘race vigour’”, and the avoidance of miscegenation in the interest of “Australia’s emergence as an autonomous, self-authorising nation”.\(^{135}\)

Gilmore’s primary commitment to working-class white women is nevertheless apparent in her earlier work. Her cause was that of the “mother-citizen”, as Susan Sheridan writes.\(^{136}\) In both her poetry and her “feminist journalism” in the Worker between 1908 and 1931, she “powerfully claimed maternal authority”.\(^{137}\) Gilmore used the “Women’s Page” of the Worker to draw attention to her related political commitments, the foremost of these being

\(^{132}\) Ibid.
\(^{133}\) Ibid.
\(^{134}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{135}\) Ibid.
\(^{136}\) Susan Sheridan, “‘Mothers of the Race’ or ‘Working for the Army’? : Women and the Worker, 1908–1931,” in Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing –1880s–1930s, ed. Susan Sheridan (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1995), 103.
\(^{137}\) Ibid.
socialism and “the welfare of the working class”. Her lifelong interest in socialist politics, as Ann Vickery indicates, began when Henry Lawson introduced her to Sydney’s slums. Despite the troubled relation of socialism and the labour movement to feminism in Gilmore’s context, socialism was naturally aligned with Gilmore’s feminism in their mutual aspiration to egalitarianism—this, at least, in theory. Rather than advocating for women’s involvement in paid work, however, Gilmore directed her energies towards securing financial independence for mothers through a family pension or Motherhood Endowment. This would take the place of a Family Wage, by which a man’s wages were set at a level allowing the support of himself, a wife, and a family of two or three children. Gilmore’s opposition to the Family Wage in supporting the Mother Endowment, or Child Endowment Scheme, was in the interest of a woman’s freedom to exercise her “natural” capacity as mother and homemaker, while ensuring improved maternal and child welfare. Importantly, it would also allow women to exercise these capacities in a position of relative financial independence from their husbands, with recognition for the state significance of their mothering. This is consistent with Gilmore’s view of the domestic sphere as “an important source of social power”. For Gilmore, the “feminine” and even maternal qualities—in Vickery’s example, “piety, love, and compassion”—were justification for, rather than against, women’s involvement in public and political matters. Despite the apparent basis of Gilmore’s advocacy for mothers being an essentialist and institutional view of the maternal, her priorities demonstrate foresight given the ongoing problem of financial independence for mothers in a capitalist paradigm which fails to recognise private-sphere labour.

139 Vickery, 7.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Gilmore supported a family wage intended for a family with three children, as long as this wage would not be accorded solely to the male breadwinner. See ibid., 24-25. The Harvester Judgment set the “family wage” according to the number of children a man had a “right” to have, which was two. It was to be paid to the male breadwinner. See also Magarey, 136-7.
143 Pearce, 92, 98.
144 Ibid., 98.
145 Vickery, 18.
146 Ibid.
In *Marri’d and other Poems* (1910), the domestic sphere is indeed a site of “exceptionally hard graft” as well as unparalleled personal fulfilment for women.⁴⁴⁷ This, particularly through motherhood.⁴⁴⁸ Poems such as “Kissin’, Kissin’, Kissin” appear to conform to a genre of poems on the bond between mother and child, and there are a striking number of very similar poems in the volume depicting ordinary moments of joyous affection. Rarely if ever are the maternal role, children, or husbands represented as a source of suffering, except insofar as circumstances such as poverty or bereavement bear on maternal circumstances. Motherhood tends to represent redemption from these circumstances and remains an unquestioned institution. In “Grief”, for example, whose speaker is a bereaved mother, motherhood represents solace and survival, a *raison d’être*: “An’ but for the wee bit bairnie/I think that I wad dee”.⁴⁴⁹ In “To My Son”, entry into motherhood—for which she would appear to credit the son she herself birthed—is granted the status almost of an apotheosis: “the diadem of Life upon/My brow” which “made it holy in/The gift of Motherhood”.⁴⁵⁰ Here, Gilmore’s idealisation of motherhood is further emphasised by her employment of capitals in the Germanic style. There appears to be something of a propagandistic dimension to the notion, given the secondary citizenship accorded to white women without children, or who remained unmarried. In this context, the absence of children and the situation of the unmarried woman are presented as tragic. “The Babe” subverts readerly expectation in that it begins like other poems of her “kissin’” genre, but concludes in the final stanza as a depiction of a childless woman’s longing regret:

> Leave him just a little while,
> Leave us all alone—
> Never at my breast will lie,
> Children of my own.⁴⁵¹

Unlike those feminists of the Woman Movement who opposed a “maternal citizenship” on the basis that identification as “the sex” would undermine white women’s status as constitutional equals to men, Gilmore identified motherhood as the very justification for

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⁴⁴⁷ Pearce, 91.
⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., B51.
⁴⁵¹ Ibid., B112.
women’s citizenship. In the context of women’s relational citizenship, even after suffrage, there was indeed an element of tragedy to a situation such as the speaker’s. While the spinster could count on being socially maligned, the married white woman was permitted a “central position in society”, to the extent that this was attainable for any woman. For Gilmore, the married woman stood certainly at the centre of the family, responsible for its “moral and physical welfare”; an unmistakeably “God’s Police” ideal of femininity. The institutional family was the sphere of her social power, and she was to wield it by educating her children in socialism, or “basic working-class principles”. In doing so, Gilmore’s maternal ideal was “morally inspiring and uplifting” and, in a reflection of the eugenicist preoccupation with “hygiene”, she would never be “dirty”. I will show in the next chapter how such invocations of “hygiene” signal the incipient eugenics movement. This was distinguished by dominant-cultural paranoia regarding a very broadly defined threat of “pollution”, against which women as maternal citizens were charged with a particular vigilance. While Gilmore’s eugenicist inclinations are consistent with her condemnation of miscegenation as a threat to “racial ‘purity’”, it will become clear in the next chapter how these inclinations in fact undermine Gilmore’s commitment to working-class women.

Faithful to working-class women’s experience, however, Gilmore represents marriage neither in idyllic nor romanticised terms. Vickery notes how Gilmore avows the difficulties of marriage in “The Housewife”, evincing “feelings of apprehension and, read against the grain, a state of over-dependency”. I read in this an unwitting reflection of the “over-dependency” exacted of women by marriage, in its structuring by the “separation of spheres” and its attendant economic implications. The speaker admits to “feelin’ anxious-like/For fear there’s something wrong” when her husband is home late. But the conclusion of this anxiety cements Gilmore’s aim “to convince the reader… of the reward of marriage through a

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152 Vickery, 18.
153 Ibid., 27.
154 Pearce, 92.
155 Ibid., 93.
156 Ibid.
158 Vickery, 21.
159 Gilmore, The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore, 1, B1.
highly sentimentalised script”:\textsuperscript{160}

\begin{verbatim}
An’ flushin’ all at once,
    An’ smilin’ just so sweet,
An’ feelin’ real proud
    The place is fresh an’ neat.\textsuperscript{161}
\end{verbatim}

Despite the anxiety it might cause a wife, the separation of spheres implicit in the dominant construction of gender and marriage is upheld. Mindful of her working-class audience, however, Gilmore neglected neither the hard work nor hardship attending marriage and motherhood. Unlike Henry Lawson, moreover, she recognised the “underdog” status of women subject to infidelity and other forms of abuse at the hands of their husbands.\textsuperscript{162} These women were met with sympathy in her writings, and their husbands with condemnation.\textsuperscript{163} Such was Gilmore’s faith in the institution of marriage that even in a difficult union she strongly advocated perseverance.\textsuperscript{164} Such a belief may well have rationalised, at least in part, her condemnation of Bertha Lawson following her separation from Henry.\textsuperscript{165} Though Gilmore’s apparently unquestioning commitment to the institution of marriage might be thought to reflect the dominant feminism of the time, many of the first-wave feminists did question the institution of marriage. Gilmore’s commitment to the institution of marriage might even be unexpected given her understanding of the financial dependence and attendant vulnerability exacted of wives and mothers, implicit in her campaigning against the Family Wage. Gilmore’s view of marriage as “indissoluble” was nevertheless rooted in both maternalism and nationalism; she claimed that “permanence [is] required for the best development of the child”, and ultimately “the race”.\textsuperscript{166} Again, we see the influence of William Lane.\textsuperscript{167} Gilmore had been brought to Cosme as a schoolteacher. There, she married her husband William Gilmore, where her only child, Billy, was born.\textsuperscript{168} Despite Gilmore’s apparently uncompromising attitude to the institution of marriage, she and William Gilmore eventually separated permanently a year after the publication of \textit{Marri’d}, well after their

\begin{thebibliography}{999}
\bibitem{160} Vickery, 21.
\bibitem{161} Gilmore, \textit{The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore}, 1, B1.
\bibitem{162} Pearce, 95.
\bibitem{163} Ibid.
\bibitem{164} Ibid.
\bibitem{165} Davies.
\bibitem{166} Pearce, 93.
\bibitem{167} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
return to Australia. Pearce acknowledges that their separation—without divorce—was not entirely inconsistent with her convictions on marriage, given her son had that year reached his teenage years and would leave for Queensland two years later to work with his father. Gilmore was nevertheless quiet regarding her “unorthodox family situation”, which would appear to belie her idealisation of marriage in her first collection.

Though apparently idealistic regarding marriage, the poem “In Poverty and Toil” embodies recognition of the unending domestic labour of rural working-class women, as a mother scolds her daughter, still in bed, for laziness, “Though it’s daylight near an hour!”

The children waiting to be dressed,
The table to be laid;
The floor to sweep, the beds to air,
The breakfast to be made.

In the second part of the diptych after “Anger”, “Contrition”, the speaking mother addresses the daughter she has scolded for laziness in the first:

It’s workin’ early, workin’ late,
Year in, year out, the same;
Until we seem but work-machines,
An’ women but in name.

I note here the curious conflation of labour with masculinity, given her acknowledgement of domestic labour as work. Gilmore nevertheless campaigned actively for the improvement of married women’s situation. In an article on “The Married Woman’s Death Rate” published in the Worker in 1914, she laments the number of married women dying “worn out, bled out, tired out”. As Pearce argues, despite the conservatism of many of Gilmore’s feminist convictions, in her “tireless urging” for increased state attention to maternal welfare “she predates some of the objectives of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s”. I would add that many of her concerns regarding the financial independence of mothers and the according recognition of maternal and domestic labour remain relevant today. Her feminism

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170 Pearce, 93.
171 Ibid.
172 Gilmore, The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore, 1, B30.
173 Ibid.
174 Gilmore, The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore, 1, B30.
175 Pearce, 101.
176 Ibid.
bears little resemblance to that of the second wave, which took women’s liberation through the dismantling of patriarchal institutions as its primary objective. Gilmore’s feminism is decidedly less radical, moreover, than that of many of her first-wave counterparts, to whose reputation for conservatism and puritanism Magarey offers a systematic challenge in view of the Woman Movement’s neglected historical context. I would note still that Gilmore does more to anticipate an intersectional feminist consciousness than some other more prominent figures in the Woman Movement. This is evident in her particular concern with working-class women, and the particular material realities attending the intersection of a female and working-class subject position. Undermining this intersectional consciousness, however, is the unambiguous racism Gilmore shared with the dominant current of the Woman Movement. For Gilmore’s advocacy for working-class woman was also motivated by racism directly related to her maternalism. In light of her “imperialist notions about racial superiority and racial continuity”, Gilmore held that to alleviate the burden of domesticity on white Australian women was to do so for the “rearer of the race”. In this way Gilmore professed a maternalism consistent with the dominant culture of Federation-era Australia, one which bore evidence, too, of its evolution towards the era of eugenics following the First World War.

I have suggested that, despite marriage figuring in Gilmore’s journalism as a natural state worthy of women’s aspiration, the financial dependence it imposed on women did not escape acknowledgement. Gilmore was accordingly, and as noted, an impassioned supporter of a state-supported Child Endowment Scheme or family pension as an alternative to the Family Wage model. That a man should be paid sufficiently to support himself, a wife, and two children—regardless of marital or paternal status—was enshrined into law by the 1908 Harvester judgment which distinguished Australia as a “workingman’s paradise” and defined Australian women “by implication, as dependents, non-workers. According to the Child Endowment model, by contrast, mothers would be accorded far greater financial control of the family, given that the allocation would be paid to the mother. Women and children’s poverty, which Gilmore represents as accordingly related, are among her debut collection’s principal themes, exemplified by poems such as “D’Children” and “Life’s Cry of Pain”. In

176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Magarey, 137.
“Down by the Sea” and “Portionless”, the consequences of maternal poverty are presented as tragic. In “Down by the Sea”, a woman’s desperate poverty induces her to leave her baby to drown in the rising ocean tide. In “Portionless”, the hunger of her children compels her to “the street”. Strauss counts this latter among a number of Gilmore’s “Victorian melodramas of prostitution”, but one which subverts their usual formula by marking the woman driven to prostitution not as a “bad mother” or “Damned Whore”.¹⁷⁹ This is in spite of Gilmore’s characterisation of any paid work as a degradation for women implying social injustice and disorder, perhaps an unwitting equation of women’s participation in paid work as akin to prostitution in keeping with a dominant patriarchal tendency. Magarey writes that it was a prevalent view between 1890 and 1930 that “women working in industry, or in shops, or in offices, were deemed ‘immoral’—either already in, or soon to join, the ranks of those who earned their livings by selling sex”.¹⁸⁰ Gilmore’s poem would seem, however, to recognise the circumstances surrounding the mother’s compulsion to prostitution as a structural consequence of her situation of economic dependency, rather than evidence of her inherent immorality. Gilmore’s support for state economic intervention in the family would, on the other hand, save women from the need to work in industry or resort to prostitution, and accord women due recognition for their domestic and maternal work.¹⁸¹ In such a vision of the nation, argued Gilmore, “the cradle will hold its own in every home”.¹⁸²

In a move Marilyn Lake attributes to women’s still-recent enfranchisement, the Maternal Allowance was introduced in 1912 by Andrew Fisher’s Labor government.¹⁸³ The Allowance differed from the Maternal or Child Endowment in that it consisted in a one-off payment to mothers to assist with the cost of childbirth. Resembling the Howard government’s Baby Bonus, implemented nearly a century later, it was colloquially referred to by the same name. While arguably a pronatalist measure in response to the 1903 Royal Commission, Lake

¹⁸¹ Vickery, 25.
¹⁸² Ibid.
argues that the payment’s lack of conditionality upon the births being live is evidence that the policy was motivated less by pronatalism than by the greater prominence of women’s concerns in the public sphere as a consequence of womanhood suffrage. This is supported by the fact that the same women excluded from receipt of the Allowance were those still denied the vote: both the vote, and the allowance, were accorded specifically to white women in keeping with the White Australia Policy. Moreover, that the Maternity Allowance was a one-off payment in recognition of the costs of childbearing did little to secure greater financial independence for mothers, and nothing to recognise domestic and maternal labour as such. Gilmore, by contrast, recognised private-sphere labour as equal to that conducted in the public sphere, but advocated that the private sphere be the sole site of women’s work. In Gilmore’s vision for the Child Endowment Scheme detailed in the Worker, women undertaking paid work outside the home would forfeit their right to state support. Despite the relative progressiveness of Gilmore’s support for maternal and child welfare, its basis was ultimately conservative and interested in “maintaining women in their traditional roles”. This would serve further political motives beyond the preservation of the institutional family, ensuring the nationalist goal of further propagating white Australia, whose children would be educated according to political ideals of socialism and eugenics. The eugenicist dimension of Gilmore’s ideal maternal citizenship is evidenced in her defence of Labor’s White Australia Policy in the Worker: “The instinct for purity is the root of all distinction of tribe, breed, or genus in the whole mothering world”. As Pearce points out, Gilmore’s simultaneous devotion to socialism and to the maintenance of women in the domestic sphere represents not a conflict, but a consistency, noting that the contemporary mainstream socialist ideology featured a “common Marxist agreement” that women’s work outside the home was a symptom of capitalism’s harms. Gilmore accordingly presents maternal hardship as structural, but the structure she blames is not patriarchy, but capitalism. Accordingly, in “Down by the Sea” Vickery notes a strong suggestion of wider “social culpability”, while “emphasising the silence of the mother and child”. Despite Gilmore’s ambivalent

184 Moore notes that “Asiatics” and “Aboriginal natives of Australia, Papua or the Islands of the Pacific” were excluded from eligibility for the new maternity allowance in “‘That Critical Juncture’: Maternalism in Anti-Colonial Feminist History,” Journal of Australian Studies 24, no. 66 (2000): 101.  
185 Pearce, 98.  
186 Ibid., 151.  
187 Mary Gilmore, quoted in Mary Gilmore in Vickery, 33.  
188 Pearce, 91.  
189 Vickery, 27.
relationship to the Woman Movement, Gilmore’s championing of working-class women would appear to acknowledge the interrelation of capitalism and patriarchy in its effect on women’s lives.

The “immense popularity” of Marri’d suggests Gilmore’s success in her primary mission to appeal to white working-class women, as in the “Women’s Page” of the Worker. Vickery characterises the poems as “thick” and “colloquial” in tone, suggesting the social position of their female speakers as “first or second generation, working-class migrants”. This “thickness” is apparent in a significant number of poems in the collection, such as “I Gang Na Mair” and “The Bairnie Rins Aboot the Hoose”, which are written in Lowland Scots dialect or Lallans, in what Strauss identifies as an effort to write as a colonial Robert Burns of sorts. While critics such as Vickery and Wilde have characterised such poems such as “Comin’” as enacting a kind of “blackface minstrelsy”, this interpretation resists full appreciation of its proper geohistorical context. More likely, as Les Murray suggests, such instances of her “dialect writing” imitate a working-class Irish accent. If this is the case, intended is likely an Ulster or Northern Irish dialect, though it should be noted that these constitute a minority within her dialect writing, which tends towards the Scots accent. These “dialect poems” he characterises as reflective of “the prevalence of Scots and Irish immigrants in her day” as well as her heritage: Scottish her father’s side, Ulster Irish on her mother’s. Despite her having written some of the nation’s “finest” poetry in his view, he argues that these poems “never escaped from a fatal staginess”. Strauss takes the collection’s encompassing of standard English and dialect as an attempt to establish herself specifically as a national poet in the way of Burns. Gilmore’s attempts in later collections such as The Wild Swan to integrate, or perhaps to assimilate or appropriate, Indigenous peoples into Australian national identity would appear to substantiate Strauss’ claim.

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190 Ibid., 26.
191 Ibid.
192 Strauss, 114.
193 Vickery, 21.
194 Murray, 27.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Strauss, 114.
Murray writes, however, that “It is sad that all of [Gilmore’s] poems on Aboriginal themes seem to be led by their very sympathy to an orotund diction which smothers them”. Murray writes, however, that “It is sad that all of [Gilmore’s] poems on Aboriginal themes seem to be led by their very sympathy to an orotund diction which smothers them”.199 The thematics are a more significant problem: in “Lament of the Lubra”, an Aboriginal woman mourns her child as an allegory for “the passing of the Aboriginal race”.200 In Marri’d, though, “working [white] women’s dreams and anxieties” would take centre stage.201 Predictably, however, Gilmore’s “domestic feminist”202 concerns would not secure her critical acclaim as a “high” literary figure.203 Strauss attributes Gilmore’s ultimately canonical status to a primary commitment to “literary nationalism”, rather than to literature itself.204 To this we might in part attribute Gilmore’s fortunes, a “consoling contradiction to a nagging suspicion”—even on her part—”that the life of the bush had been for its women at best harsh, at worst misogynist”.205

Nevertheless, by 1945, Gilmore found herself weary of being overlooked in the discussions of the Australian literary establishment. She would accord neglect of her work by such literary institutions as Southerly to her habitation of “the world” rather than “the atmosphere above it”.206 WH Wilde writes that Gilmore was

from the beginning, a passionate admirer of the toilers of the world; they were, in her eyes, the real people, to be valued and cherished above the impractical visionaries. As a child of eight when she first heard the biblical story of Martha and Mary she made her judgement, in defiance of biblical and parental authority, in favour of the utilitarian Martha over the visionary Mary.207

Gilmore emphasised her own alignment with Martha over Mary. Consistent with her view of marriage and motherhood as entailing “exceptionally hard graft”, she emphasised this aspect of herself over any identity as a poet.208 Strauss quotes a letter in which she writes, “Of

199 Murray, 27.
200 Vickery, 41.
201 Ibid., 25.
205 Strauss, “Mary Gilmore,” 133.
206 Strauss, 126.
207 Wilde, 6.
208 Pearce, 91.
course I know I am first a house-keeping mother-woman. I make jam with the same outward urge & sense of creation as I do everything else”.209 This is consistent with Gilmore’s account of Marri’d in an interview for Aussie as having been “written in snatched moments” while she undertook what she saw as her primary work: that of wife and mother.210 Wilde notes with ample evidence, however, that many are the examples of a tendency to embellishment and exaggeration, even in her personal letters.211 Such was Gilmore’s belief in the primacy of the domestic sphere as the site of a woman’s vocation that she believed her writing to be directly in conflict with her relational identity: “I didn’t contract when I married, to be a writer, I contracted to be a wife & mother”.212 The apparent primacy of her “contract” as wife is noteworthy in context, and in light of Miriam Johnson’s elaboration of the subordinate “wife” role.

Gilmore’s commitment to a relational identity is also inscribed in her work. Strauss writes that the gendering of Gilmore’s poetics imposed apparent limitations on subject matter as well as form.213 Gilmore was inclined to self-characterise as a “versifier”, with the accordingly gendered implication of foreclosing claims to artistry proper.214 Murray writes that

Coming from before modernism, she disliked everything about it and learned little from it; this would estrange her from literary interests that became dominant in her later life. There is an experimental impulse in her, though, as attested by the wide range of styles and moods in her writing.215

By contrast, Vickery argues that early in the twentieth century, a “prolific period” for women’s poetry, “women writers could also move between contrasting sensibilities and style”.216 Gilmore’s poetic attitudes might be explained in part by Vickery’s claim that “The figure of the woman poet—like that of the mother [poet]—was an alien concept” and that

209 Strauss, 126.
210 Vickery, 25.
211 Wilde notes, for example, Gilmore’s patent overestimation of her influence on Lawson in “Henry Lawson and I”, and her claim in a 1924 letter to Nettie Palmer that “The Drover’s Wife” was “our” story in Courage a Grace, 71-72.
212 Vickery, 22.
213 Strauss, 112.
214 Ibid., 111.
215 Murray, 27.
216 Vickery, 3.
women were precluded from the status of modernist poet until the late 1940s and 50s”.217 On this basis she challenges the dominant critical dichotomy, exemplified in Drusilla Modjeska’s *Exiles at Home*, between the “modernist” and the “domestic” in literature, a binary “structured around a necessarily gendered high and low opposition”.218 Instead Vickery situates Gilmore in “the transition from the Victorian to the ‘modern’ both in cultural attitude and formal experimentation”.219 Murray characterises much of Gilmore’s poetry as “marred”, nevertheless, “by lingering Victorian diction”.220 In this we might identify the formal inscription of Gilmore’s “angel in the house” ideal of womanhood. Strauss writes “If the narrowness of the form limited the range of ideas… this mattered less because ideas were not what the feminine was about, although a woman might have views”.221

Gilmore did have “views”, as has so far been demonstrated, and it would be facile to locate her construction of woman and mother purely in conservatism. Wilde concedes, however, that while “her recognition as a radical and deeply-committed social reformer [are] guaranteed”, more ambivalent is her feminist legacy.222 Wilde identifies, even so, “a considerable and well-deserved rise in feminist interest in her” at the time of writing in 1988.223 This is consistent with the critical reassessment of white-masculinist national narratives which occurred during that decade, which included the critical resurrection of neglected and dissident figures such as Barbara Baynton. While Gilmore’s representation of the mother is rooted in the institution of motherhood and, relatedly, a “God’s police” construction of white womanhood, it is never entirely predictable. In *Marri’d*, for example, the stanza-long poem “Bereft” characteristically essentialises all women as maternal. In this poem, Gilmore metaphorises the moon as “The silver lamp of Mary shining”, surrounded by “stars that are the eyes of women backward turned/Toward the earth—where children are”.224 Here, women are aligned with the Madonna, at once virginal and maternal according to patriarchal prescriptions precluding female sexuality. On an intriguing final note, however, Gilmore invokes a rather different figure in “Juno”, in an assertion of the foundational power

217 Ibid., 2.
218 Ibid., 16.
219 Ibid., 18.
220 Murray, 27.
221 Strauss, 112.
222 Wilde, 10.
223 Ibid.
of the maternal: “‘Thou art true mother of men,” said one./ As twining the thread of Life, she spun”.

225 Strauss notes that Juno is both “patroness of childbirth and sexual partner of Zeus”—or, to correspond with the Roman Juno, Jupiter.

226 Strauss interprets this to imply a “compatibility” between maternity and sexuality, a patriarchally constructed incompatibility which informs the institution of motherhood to this day.

227 The collection ends in the direct speech of the goddess: “‘Mother of men am I, yea; and true:/Yet am I mother of women too!”

228 This suggests a critique of the conflation of man and humanity informing the construction of citizenship, in line with the Woman Movement’s advocacy for women’s recognition as more than “the sex”.

229 Nevertheless, Gilmore’s work that followed in the wartime era suggested a reinforcement of women’s difference, and their conflation with the figure of the mother.

Gilmore’s second collection of poetry, *The Passionate Heart* (1918) marks both a shift in national periodicity and in her representation of the maternal. While cementing the white-masculinist Australian Legend according to the new demands of world history, the Great War arguably served to highlight the public relevance of women’s private and relational roles.

Gilmore’s poetic response reflects the prevalent maternalism of women’s discourse on the War to some popular and critical success. For example, despite the prevalent neglect of women’s writing in Australian anthologies of war poetry “Gallipoli” was the only poem written by a woman included in Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Peter Pierce’s anthology *Clubbing of the Gunfire: 101 Australian War Poems*.

230 The “primacy of the battlefield” so central to wartime mythology, marginalised women’s experiences of the war and their indispensable contributions to it.

231 Indispensable, if only for the fact that the dead are universally “the seed of women born”, as Gilmore reminds the reader in “The Corn”.

232 Adrienne Rich would write decades later in *Of Woman Born* that women under the institution of motherhood have no choice but to “travailler pour l’armée”: to submit their children to dominant institutions in

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225 Ibid.
226 This appears in Strauss’ notes on “Juno” in ibid., B137.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
231 Stout in ibid., 65.
the service of dominant interests. Indeed in “Gallipoli”, Gilmore writes from the maternal subject position, “Since he was born, he never was mine”. War may not have been understood by Australia’s first-wave feminists as an outworking of patriarchy, as it has been by feminist scholars such as Sara Ruddick, who sets the “preservative love” of the mother in opposition to a dominant paradigm of “military destruction”. But, as maternalist activists seemed to realise, the introduction of conscription (though it did not eventuate) would force mothers to “work for the army”: if implemented the evidence of their maternal labour would be lost to a war they had little to no public power to influence. This is in spite of the maternal citizenship white women had secured, and a testament to its relative impotence. Women nevertheless leveraged their citizenship as “mothers of the race” to rationalise their public-sphere intervention for or against conscription and the War. That they did not go entirely unheard is suggested by the banning of a song sung by women at anti-war rallies, beginning “I didn’t raise my son to be a soldier/I brought him up to be my pride and joy.” Under the 1915 War Precautions Act, such maternalist pacifism was deemed unpatriotic.

Despite maternalist claims to the public relevance of their concerns, Australian women were not granted the level of public-sphere participation permitted to British women during the war. Following their relatively early enfranchisement, Australian women were subject to numerous measures to curtail their claims to full citizenship, including their relegation to the maternal as a “subcategory of ‘human’”. Michael McKernan has suggested that women’s subjection to the gendered “Australian ideal” restricted women’s paid employment during

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236 Sheridan, “‘Mothers of the Race’ or ‘Working for the Army’? : Women and the Worker, 1908–1931,” 111-12.
237 Ibid., 103.
238 Summers, 203.
241 Magarey, Passions of the First-Wave Feminists, 8-9.
the war to areas “long held to be appropriate for females”.242 We might thus contextualise the emphasis on women’s “little” contributions to the war effort, such as writing letters and knitting socks; neither of these challenged the spatial dichotomy of gender which, if anything, had deepened in a new era of national identity formation.243 Despite the emphasis on women’s “little” contributions, maternal sacrifice was frequently glorified by women supporting conscription and the war itself, invoking shame at the prospect of being mother to a “shirker”.244 Summers cites a 1914 letter to a Brisbane newspaper signed “Sister of Soldiers” stating that “If we fail in our duty by wanting to keep our men at home then we do not deserve the name of British women”.245 This latter characterisation of white Australian women, still classified at this time as British subjects, evidences Schaffer’s observation that cultural-nationalist ideals were readily realigned with the “conservative, Anglophile, imperialist demands of Empire”.246 The redefinition of national identity according to the needs of Empire permitted the identification of Gallipoli as the birthplace of Australian national identity, where the bushman had proved himself “in the figure of the digger as the archetypal Australian”.247 This Lawson prophesied, as David McKee Wright has suggested, in “The Star of Australasia”, where the national type at last solidifies in response to foreign threat: “I tell you the Star of the South shall rise – in the lurid clouds of war”.248 Lawson correspondingly envisioned women’s role in global conflict as firmly restricted to the private sphere: “As a mother or wife in the years to come, will kneel, wild-eyed and white,/And pray to God in her darkened home for the ‘men in the fort to-night”’.249 The homosociality of “the fort” is represented as a site of aspiration beyond the domestic realm, “Where children run to the doors and cry: “Oh, mother, the troops are come!””.250 Confrontation with “skies aflame” is represented as an antidote to a man’s fixation “with an absent woman’s shame”.251 The war would indeed compound the privilege of manhood through the homosociality of mateship.

242 Lake and Damousi, 6.
245 Ibid.
246 Schaffer, 115.
247 Ibid.
249 Ibid.
250 Ibid.
251 Ibid.
an inevitably gendered ideal crystallised in the mythology of Gallipoli and of the nation. This remains unchallenged by Gilmore’s ideal of white womanhood, whose designated battlefield is the reproduction of the Australian “race”. But if motherhood constitutes “the fullness of a woman’s worth”, as she claims in “Life and Thought”, to marginalise the enormity of maternal sacrifice in war could only constitute an injustice.\footnote{Gilmore, \textit{The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore}, 1, E51.}

Despite her emphasis on traditionalism and domesticity, Gilmore resisted a hegemonic construction of women’s role in the war, either as “ministering angels” or as sacrificial mothers.\footnote{Carmel Shute explores the apparently contradictory roles of “ministering angel” and sacrificial mother. See “Heroines and Heroes”, 33, in which she explores the apparently contradictory roles of “ministering angel” and sacrificial mother accorded to women in wartime.} These dominant tropes hardly feature in \textit{The Passionate Heart}, despite its publication in 1918. Instead, Gilmore invokes a resistant maternalism in a number of uncollected poems from the era, however, such as “The March of Surry Hills” and “War”, referred to in Vickery’s analysis by an alternative title, “The Mother”.\footnote{Vickery, 36.} The latter opens with an uncharacteristically abject image:

\begin{quote}
Out in the dust he lies  
Flies in his mouth  
Ants in his eyes…\footnote{Gilmore, \textit{The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore}, 1, C30.}
\end{quote}

Though what follows is the speaker’s son departing for the front, a “Full grown man/Ruddy and stout”, the opening image in fact refers to a dead dog on the street near the house of the speaker.\footnote{Ibid.} This places the memory of the living son in paratactic relation to the dead dog, as the speaker meets with the news of his death, herself displaying a “deadened, almost abject response”.\footnote{Vickery, 37.} The return in the final stanza to the image of the dead dog makes an irony of the following lines, which reference a dominant construction of the fallen ANZAC:

\begin{quote}
He died a hero’s death  
They said  
When they came to tell me  
My boy was dead;\footnote{Gilmore, \textit{The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore}, 1.} 
\end{quote}
But Gilmore’s return to the image of the dead dog rejects the dominant narrative of sacrificial motherhood, resisting the elision of death’s corporeality by nationalist and militaristic constructions of death in conflict. Gilmore thereby challenges the purportedly consolatory character of such constructions of untimely death and maternal sacrifice. Strauss writes that Gilmore was persuaded by her publisher to remove the latter poem from *The Passionate Heart*, given this qualification of the “glory” of the “hero’s death”.\(^{259}\) Apparently Gilmore’s maternalism, too, was insufficiently patriotic for her publisher during the war. Though published in the *Worker* in 1917, the poem did not appear in a collection of Gilmore’s until 1932, when *Under the Wilgas* was published. “War” is perhaps the most forceful example of Gilmore’s maternalist resistance.

I have shown that maternalism can never remain unproblematised. Summers condemns wartime maternalist activism as functioning to re-entrench oppressive gender roles and women’s subordination within the institutional family.\(^{260}\) Maternalism fails to resist institutional motherhood in its implicit, essentialist conflation of the categories “woman” and “mother”. As I have suggested, despite the strategic value of maternalism for white women in this context, this re-entrenched the relationality of white women’s citizenship. As Susan Magarey reminds us, this was inimical to the aims of first-wave feminism. Gilmore arguably resists the subordination of maternal citizenship, however, in foregrounding the suffering and sacrifice of women on the home front against a dominant discourse which relentlessly privileged—and continues to privilege—the battlefield.\(^{261}\) Against a dominant discourse which minimised the suffering and sacrifice of women on the home front, in “The March of Surry Hills”, an uncollected poem written after the war, Gilmore suggests the compounding of maternal loss by material impoverishment:

\begin{center}
Came by the march of Surry Hills,
Of mothers of the dead—
The cash they gave has paid their bills
Whatever else be said!\(^{262}\)
\end{center}

\(^{259}\) Strauss, 130.
\(^{261}\) Sharkey, 64-65.
\(^{262}\) Gilmore, *The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore*, 1, F19.
The latter two of these lines evoke a bitter irony similar to that in “War”, suggesting that these women have mothered only to see their sons commodified by war. The sentiment is echoed in “Songs of the People [XII]: The Woman’s Part” where Gilmore decries the devaluation of the maternal labour which is women’s “part”: “Are they but sandbags in a trench?/But carcasses the war may flench?” She rephrases the title as a question: “The Woman’s Part?” The speaker accuses, “Nay, yours the shame/ Talk not of women when you blame”. Her accusation would appear less to be an expression of frustration regarding women’s relative preclusion from public decision-making, than a maternalist claim against military destruction—not simply of soldiers, but of mothers’ sons. Though typically of Gilmore’s work, while upholding women’s equality in difference she reinforces the essentialist and Victorian construction of white women as guardians of societal virtue. Summers similarly characterises the activism of Vida Goldstein and other members of the Women’s Peace Army as self-undermining, “brave, determined fighters” though they were. In its implicit reinforcement of women’s relational, dependent role within the family, Summers characterised their activism as ultimately “anti-feminist”, “reactionary”, and “conservative”, promising none of the independence and equality which she takes to be the goals of feminism, let alone liberation. Instead, it functioned to uphold women’s patriarchally-designated role as “God’s Police”. In Shute’s words, the war “crystallised and consummated the Victorian doctrine of ‘separate spheres’, which had been slowly undermining the ideological foundation of the women’s movement from the 1890s”. Summers suggests that this undermining came from within feminism as well as without.

With Federation came the birth of Australian citizenship, with some of the nation’s earliest legislation functioning to define it according to dominant interests. I have emphasised the subordination of women’s citizenship in the early days of the new nation and the relevance of cultural-nationalist discourse to this subordination, particularly as evidenced in Henry Lawson. Yet precluding many others from citizenship entirely was the White Australia Policy

263 Ibid., F45.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
266 Summers, Damned Whores and God’s Police: The Colonisation of Women in Australia, 231.
267 Ibid., 231-32.
268 Camel Shute, quoted in ibid.
which, in defining Australia as a white nation, would have far-reaching implications for the maternal and its representation. Gilmore herself was an emphatic supporter of the policy and, despite her championing the cause of the maternal citizen, held attitudes which anticipated the interwar eugenics movement. As I will show in the following chapter, Gilmore’s eugenicist leanings would ultimately undermine her support of working-class women. Both authors demonstrate in their respective ways how women’s claim to citizenship in a white-masculinist nation would be secondary at best. Despite the nation’s establishment in the disavowal of Indigenous presence, Indigenous mothers stood to suffer particularly as child removals quietly began in the interest of assimilating “half-caste” children into white society, their descendants imagined one day to fulfil an ideal of citizenship which had now been enshrined in law.
Works Cited


2. The Good Modern Mother?

Eleanor Dark’s *Prelude to Christopher* (1932), and Ruth Park’s *Harp in the South* (1948) and *Poor Man’s Orange* (1949)

I have suggested the flux of both national identity and maternal ideology according to history and the dominant interests it produces. The importance of the World Wars in the process of national identity formation are a matter of orthodoxy, and certainly they were marked by the definition of the nation in relation to global forces. While the Federation era demanded the new nation’s self-distinction from the imperial mother, war demanded its realignment with her.\(^1\) Relevant in this context is that the homosocial spaces of Gallipoli and the trenches continue to be remembered as Australian identity’s birthplace.\(^2\) I note the appropriation by which an all-male space is characterised as a “birthplace”, and the according insinuation that national identity was born not in Australia, but overseas.

The global eugenics movement is less often considered in Australia’s self-definitive reorientation with Empire. Reaching its zenith in the interwar period, the global popularity of eugenics’ underpinning ideology attained a specifically national inflection in Australia. This would have a corresponding, nationally specific impact on the construction of the maternal. It would have serious material and psychological consequences for Australian women, particularly for those Aboriginal mothers whose “half-caste” children were subject to the removals which had gathered pace, abetted by eugenicist thinking.\(^3\) At this point, their ability to respond—particularly through literature—remained subject to near-complete suppression by institutional powers, the mothers’ experiences largely related decades later through the eyes of their adult children, whom they likely never saw again. While white women were important participants in the removal and exploitation of Aboriginal women and children, they too were subject in specific ways to the global ascendancy of eugenicist ideology, the effects of which were far-reaching and transcendent of race and class. In Australia, the

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\(^2\) Ibid., 156.

dominant current of eugenist ideology in fact concerned itself specifically with whiteness, and the “improvement” of the white Australian “race”. The result was increased discursive and legislative regulation of female reproductivity, with the intention of encouraging “eugenic” reproduction and discouraging the “dysgenic”.

I show in this chapter the influence of eugenics on the representation of maternal citizenship through an analysis Eleanor Dark’s Prelude to Christopher and Ruth Park’s postwar Surry Hills novels, The Harp in the South and Poor Man’s Orange. The authors’ respective works demonstrate in specific ways the impact of the eugenics movement on white women, particularly with regard to their maternity. The limited availability of family planning methods left intact the construction of white women as compulsorily maternal until well after the Second World War. This was unless they were designated “dysgenic” by virtue of disability or class status: these are at issue in Prelude to Christopher and the postwar Harp in the South novels respectively, and function to define women under eugenicist ideology as anti-maternal. I have established that constructions of “good” and “bad womanhood are premised in part on maternity in opposition to sexuality. I would add that this illustrates the ultimate impossibility of irreproachable womanhood such as that embodied in the paradoxically virginal and maternal Madonna. Like national identity, however, the patriarchal construction of the “good” woman and “good” mother are readily adapted to the demands of the dominant culture, subject itself to historical change.

I have noted the eugenicist suggestions in Mary Gilmore’s construction of the “good” mother. In the interwar period, eugenics would bear on maternal ideology as never before. The origin of the term eugenics in the notion of being “well born” binds it inextricably to the maternal, despite ideologically motivated suppressions of this link, exemplified by the definition of Gallipoli as the nation’s

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5 For the purposes of this study I exclude Missus, a prequel to The Harp in the South written in 1985, detailing how the Darcy family came to live in Surry Hills. This is due to the vastly different historical context in which Missus was written.
Both Prelude to Christopher and the Harp in the South novels evince, in their different ways, an awareness of the mutual implication of eugenicist and maternal ideology. This is demonstrated in their respective representations of women subject to eugenicist discourse, and its production of specific ideals of the maternal and feminine.

Touted as a “solution to white pathologies”, eugenics was a “transnational system”. Gisela Kaplan characterises the movement, however, as “quintessentially European” in such a way as to align it with white middle-class respectability in Australia. The term was introduced by Sir Francis Galton, a relative of Charles Darwin, in 1883. Galton championed the ideology’s global popularisation in a way so evangelistic as to invite comparisons to religion which, as I will show, corresponds with Nigel’s eugenicist attitudes in Prelude to Christopher. “If Nigel had a religion, this was as near as he could come to it”. By the 1930s, the decade of Prelude to Christopher’s publication, eugenics had proponents in over twenty countries. Neither fringe nor extreme in reputation, eugenics’ attractiveness to the “ambitious, race conscious, middle classes” secured its hold on the mainstream. As doctors returned to Australia after World War I, having seen for themselves the implementation of eugenicist public-health policies in Europe, eugenics rose to prevalence in Australia. Despite its British foundations, Diana Wyndham argues for the national specificity of the Australian eugenics movement. In the new nation-state, the ideology was mobilised in the interest of nation-building projects which were both raced, and classed. The objective was namely the cultivation of a white Australian race distinct from the British, which would be “larger and fitter”, more robust. Eleanor Dark appeared to recognize a dimension of

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10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Eleanor Dark, Prelude to Christopher (1932) (Rushcutters Bay: Halstead Press, 1999), 22.
15 Ibid.
16 Carson, 127. See also: Wyndham.
17 Diana Wyndham, quoted in Carson, 127.
eugenics which, though seemingly obvious, is less frequently discussed: that these nation building projects were also gendered. Philippa Mein Smith identifies a particular interrelation of eugenics and the maternal in Australia, arguing that both of these wore “colonial and imperial as well as national colours”.18 Carson notes on the other hand that while women’s maternal role in eugenics was prominent in European discussions, women went largely unmentioned in Australia’s eugenicist texts.19 The curious construction of Australian eugenics as “men’s business” reflects the argument of Patricia Grimshaw et al. for the construction of Australian nation-building as a male domain.20 This despite its resting on the “appropriation”—and, I would add, regulation—of female reproductivity in the service of its white, masculinist, and middle-class ends.21

Popular desire for Australia’s “improvement” as a nation, writes Wyndham, accounted for eugenics’ initial popularity.22 It was also a function of Australia’s anxiety to avoid “the poverty and unrest of the industrialised northern hemisphere”, suggesting the centrality of class to eugenicist ideology.23 In view of the far-reaching consequences attributable to a “dysgenic” society according to eugenicist thought, a striking breadth of causes were pursued in its name. A proliferation of organisations were established to eugenicist ends, many of them by and for middle-class white women. Among these were the Racial Hygiene Association, which to this day endures under the name of Family Planning New South Wales, which counted among its founding members Dark’s aunt, Marion Piddington.24 Early in Prelude to Christopher, Nigel meditates accordingly upon:

Clubs for the Promotion of this and that; societies for the Prevention of something else; Guilds, Institutions, Committees, Charities, Cults. All pulling and picking with feverish industry at the middle of the tangle, while the end hung in plain view and they dared not see it.25

18 Smith, 306.
19 Lisa Featherstone, cited in Carson, 127.
20 Featherstone, quoted in ibid.
21 Patricia Grimshaw; Marilyn Lake; Ann McGrath; Marian Quartly, Creating a Nation (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 4.
22 Wyndham, 2-3.
23 Ibid.
25 Dark, 22.
We might wonder what precisely this “end” is, given the failure of his eugenicist colony in the Pacific, on the island of Ti-Noon. Modelled on the New Australia project in Paraguay, it is historically situated, importantly, for collapse at the outbreak of the First World War. The colony is premised upon the reproduction only of “eugenic” stock, and so on a eugenicist view is fatally flawed from the beginning due to the spectre of purportedly hereditary madness in Nigel’s wife Linda’s bloodline. To Nigel’s dismay, she conceals this until the night of their wedding. His response is consistent with his eugenicist ideals: the eugenicist “end” of reproductive restriction would apply equally to the couple, implying their outright abstinence from intercourse. Linda is profoundly distressed by the deprivation of intimacy, and the denial of her long-held desire for a child of her own. Her response is to pursue affairs with other men on the island, most notably with the artist D’Aubert, who paints her likeness in an Edenic garden. As in “The Drover’s Wife”, according to Kay Schaffer’s interpretation, Eve and the Snake figure the “the threat of (feminine) otherness”. Linda becomes pregnant as a result of her affair with him, only to miscarry when the colonists revolt. It also results in permanent physical disability, the injury to her foot in the incident leaving her with a permanent limp. There remains no option for Nigel and Linda but to leave the island with the other colonists, where Nigel’s failed project is lambasted in the media, leaving him disgraced in the public eye and forcing the couple’s relocation from Sydney to the New South Wales town of Moondoona. The euphonic correspondence between Moondoona and Ti-Noon invites consideration of Linda’s social exclusion in the two locations. During Nigel’s absence in World War I, Linda pursues numerous affairs in Moondoona, and is subject—relatedly—to a reputation for madness.

In characteristically modernist style, however, the novel’s present is compressed into four days and narrated polyphonically in the third person according to the subjectivity of Nigel, Linda, Nigel’s mother Mrs Hendon, Dr Marlow, and the young nurse Kay. As Nigel lies in hospital following a car accident at the opening of the novel his initial encounter with Linda

27 Melinda Joy Cooper, “Middlebrow Modernism: Negotiating Colonial Modernity, Regional Cosmopolitanism and Liberal Humanism in the Interwar Fiction of Eleanor Dark” (Doctor of Philosophy The University of Sydney, 2019), 124.
28 Schaffer, 119.
and their subsequent marriage are recounted analeptically. So too are the island colony’s establishment and failure, and Nigel’s consequent disappointment with his life is such that he expresses indifference as to the possibility of imminent death. In Nigel’s absence, Linda mentally unravels, as has always been presented to her as an inevitability. She becomes aware, moreover, of twenty-two-year-old Kay’s romantic feelings toward her husband, which he appears to reciprocate. Linda ultimately dies by suicide as Kay imagines bearing a child to Nigel, whose name will be Christopher. Linda’s life is reduced to a “prelude” to the birth of a “eugenic” baby such as that Linda has longed for since childhood. The title, moreover, corresponds with the novel’s epigraph, appearing in the form of musical notation, the opening bars to the piano score of Tchaikovsky’s Symphonie Pathétique. Melinda Cooper takes this to evidence the novel’s “experimentation and internationalism”, and a reference to a piece Dark played herself while writing the novel. Tchaikovsky’s 6th Symphony was not written for keyboard; that Dark opens with bars of a piano score may be taken to allude to a point of connection between Dark and her mother. I will discuss the potential significance of this at a later point.

The novel’s cosmopolitanism is not to the exclusion of the national in its concerns. As Cooper demonstrates, Dark’s thematic concerns represent a time of heightened dialogue between the national and international. Cooper also accounts for the dialogic dimension of Dark’s work as a reflection of her interest in experimental modernism. She indicates a dominant critical tendency to situate Dark’s work within a “largely national framework”, a tendency generally applicable to Australian literary studies until the 1980s. A particularly important example where Cooper identifies this tendency is Exiles at Home, in which Drusilla Modjeska dichotomises the national and the cosmopolitan. In doing so, she places Dark on the national side of a binary defined against the cosmopolitanism of authors such as Christina Stead. While acknowledging the importance of Modjeska’s recuperation of midcentury Australian women writers in Exiles at Home, Cooper critiques her assumption of

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29 Cooper, 95.
30 Ibid.
32 Cooper, 48-9.
33 Ibid., 48-49.
Australia’s insulation from the global in the first half of the twentieth century. Modjeska contends that only expatriate Australian novelists demonstrate “the shift into an idiom and aesthetic of modernism”. Cooper suggests in opposition that Modjeska’s neglect of the increasing cosmopolitanism of midcentury Australia has resulted in an according neglect of Dark’s own cosmopolitanism, despite the author having left the country only once during her lifetime.

Nevertheless, Prelude to Christopher has been credited as Australia’s first modernist novel, and its modernity was acknowledged in the immediate wake of publication. Nettie Palmer identified modernity in Dark’s ability to “[squeeze] all the inwardness out of the subject”, and Barnard Eldershaw applied the term “stream of consciousness” in such a way as to align Dark’s work with internationally recognized modernists such as Virginia Woolf. But the novel’s thematic reflection of the modern is noteworthy, too, and relevant to the construction of maternal citizenship and femininity within its historical context. In Eugenics and Modernism, Donald Childs characterises the relationship between eugenics and modernism by a certain ambivalence. He suggests an alignment of the two through a common “fear of and contempt for the masses”. As a eugenicist, Nigel embodies these in such instances as when he considers a homeless man on Sydney’s streets, who “under-nourished, meagre both mentally and physically still must have his wife, his child, his long, shadowy, dreadful line of foredoomed posterity”. Eugenics and modernism are mutually implicated through the eugenicist discourse applied to modern culture with its reputation for “degeneracy and deviancy”. This is in contrast to the “progressiveness” of a “scientific” and “rational” approach to reproduction, such as that espoused by Nigel with his “island solution”.

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34 Ibid., 48-9.
35 Modjeska, quoted in ibid., 129.
36 Ibid.
38 Cooper, 96.
39 Ibid., 18.
40 Dark, 22.
41 Cooper, 18.
42 Attewell, 47-66.
language can be found in AE Pearse’s “Modernist Poetry: The Case Contra” (1935). Cooper writes aptly that Pearse “diagnosed modernism as ‘obscure’, ‘unbalanced’ and ‘morbid’” (my emphasis). Pearse claimed moreover that modernist literature “was written by ‘yahoos and degenerates’ and had ‘infested’ English literature”. At once Pearse suggests a prevalent association between the modern, the pathological and the abject, the latter suggested by his appeal to the idea of infestation. Cooper points to this as exemplifying cultural conservatives’ recourse to “the language of disease and ‘racial hygiene’”—that is, eugenicist language—”to describe the dangerous influence of modern styles”.

The pathologisation of modernism is an important point of interface between form and theme in Prelude to Christopher. Subject to similar pathologisation as a symptom of the modern is Linda’s peculiar femininity. As Cooper points out, Linda’s embodiment of the cinematic “femme fatale” exemplifies Dark’s borrowing from a variety of cultural forms, both “high” and “low”. Mark Hearn’s characterisation of the New Woman as a femme fatale suggests the status of this latter figure as a point of articulation between the New Woman and the flapper. Certainly a number of visual cues suggests Linda’s correspondence with an internationally recognised stock type:

There on the broad arm of the mammoth chair, she looked slight but strong as steel. Her green dress reminded him vaguely of water-weeds, her black hair might have been wet, so smoothly and flatly shining it lay round her head and ears. Only her body and perfect skin told of her youth; about everything else there clung something that vaguely insisted on experience, sophistication, the ageless maturity of knowledge. The smile left her face as he watched her, but her eyes remained fixed on him. In repose her face seemed thin, almost gaunt, with high cheekbones, and pointed chin. Her mouth and whatever it told of were hidden defiantly behind the painted bow of her lips; above a straight nose, her green eyes watched, strangely brilliant, strangely restless.

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43 Cooper, 91.
44 AE Pearse, quoted in ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Cooper, 91.
47 Ibid., 94.
49 Dark, 16.
In Linda, Dark imagines a “modern woman” at odds with the dominant Victorian ideal of femininity.\textsuperscript{50} The latter of these is embodied by the blonde and blue-eyed Kay, while Linda is characterised visually as exotic, to the point of being racialised. We might take her “slightly Asian”\textsuperscript{51} features to be reflective of dominant anxieties regarding Australia’s invasion from the north by neighbouring Asian nations, against which eugenics was advanced as a safeguard in its promise of a race of “the best whites”.\textsuperscript{52} The racialised dimension to ideals of femininity is demonstrated through Linda’s opposition to Kay, at once an image of Victorian femininity and Aryan whiteness, characterised from the beginning and insistently by her eugenic “normality”. The modern woman, by contrast, is characterised by her deviation from (particularly Victorian) feminine norms: Linda is characterised by strength over delicacy, experience over innocence, knowledge over instinct.\textsuperscript{53} Her appearance is characterised as “disturbing”, implicitly by contrast to Kay’s own mother who, only slightly older than Linda, is “plump” and “jolly” in contrast to Linda’s youthfulness, implied by contrast to be anti-maternal.\textsuperscript{54} Paradoxically, the image of wet hair and the image of her surrounding by “water weeds” evokes the famous Victorian image of Shakespeare’s Ophelia, as painted by John Everett Millais: significantly with regard to the theme of eugenics, the modern “femme fatale” is also a figure of tragedy.

Linda is also insistently aligned with the related figures of the snake and the witch, both replete with literary meaning. The very meaning of the name Linda is in fact snake. In the previous chapter, the snake appears as a challenge to hegemonic maternal femininity, which the Drover’s Wife is charged with upholding. Aligned with the snake, Linda is indeed “disturbing” to these. It is consistent with Nigel’s mother, Mrs Hendon’s, longstanding antipathy to Linda that she conceives of sex as “displayed… so blatantly and regarded so

\textsuperscript{50} This is the term Susan Carson uses in “Finding Hy-Brazil”, 130. I use “modern woman” to situate Linda within a gendered type evolved from, but not to be conflated with, the New Woman.
\textsuperscript{51} Carson, 130.
\textsuperscript{52} Jane Carey, “‘Not Only a White Race, but a Race of the Best Whites’: The Women’s Movement, White Australia and Eugenics between the Wars” (Melbourne, 2007).
\textsuperscript{54} Dark, 25.
“little” by “this new generation”. Sexually liberated behaviour, particularly, marks both Linda and the modern woman as anti-maternal. This, despite Linda’s pregnancy on the island which, given Nigel’s refusal of sexual intimacy, stands as incontrovertible evidence of her affairs with men there, particularly D’Aubert. Linda’s pregnancy thus evidences her liberated sexuality in such a way as to challenge the dichotomy of maternity and sexuality structuring hegemonic femininity. Amongst the possibilities as to what Linda’s ultimate miscarriage suggests is the “impossibility” of her pregnancy. But the image of the pregnant yet anti-maternal woman may moreover suggest the phallic maternal, with its yet stronger association with horror and the Gothic. We might imagine the snake to refer not only to Eve, then, but to Lilith, whom Peter Kirkpatrick has characterised as “erotically maternal”. These two latter terms are of course held to be contradictory according to dominant constructions of femininity. Under either interpretation, the feminine other represented by the snake threatens the patriarchal gender order, as does Linda, particularly in her maternity.

Linda’s persistent likening to a witch similarly signals her disturbance of the institutional maternal and feminine. She stands particularly in contrast to the Victorian feminine ideal of the “angel in the house” or the wartime “ministering angel” as represented by Kay. Linda’s contrasting characterisation signals the tension between the Victorian ideal of femininity being re-entrenched through eugenics, and the emergence of “modern” womanhood as the West self-consciously modernised. Informing the dominant feminine ideal of 1930s Australia was not only a Victorian ideal of domestic and maternal femininity, but of a “eugenic” womanhood associated both with whiteness and middle-class respectability. Challenging this dominant ideal is the unruly female subject, embodied by the 1920s flapper figure. As Miriam Johnson writes, “Whatever else the ‘emancipated’ flapper image might connote, one thing was certain: the flapper was not a mother figure and she was very, very interested in

55 Ibid., 140.
56 Kaplan, 62.
59 Nicole Moore discusses the gendered and classed notion of “respectability” in “Cliché”, 79-80. Anne Maxwell, moreover, identifies in eugenics a particular appeal to the “ambitious, race-conscious, middle classes” in Maxwell, 79.
men and sex”. Linda is characterised to anticipate this interwar figure, even at her and Nigel’s first meeting well before the First World War. Susan Carson describes Linda as characterised by “all the tropes of the dangerous modern woman” with “her drinking, smoking and modishly bobbed hair”. It was hoped by those defenders of traditional femininity such as Ethel Turner that her predecessor, the “New Woman”, would be domesticated by the reinforcement of gender roles characterising wartime Australia. In her response to the War, Linda represents a dominant hope unfulfilled. Linda’s contempt for the renewed emphasis on women’s domestic and maternal roles is obvious, however: “If you were a man you put on a uniform and you marched… And if you were a woman you cried and were proud, and knitted socks”. While Linda pursues factory work during the war, she finds herself alienated by “a room full of smug matrons who didn’t sit any nearer than they could help. Who said: ‘My son’, ‘My son’, ‘My son’”. Their insistent references to their sons evoke the maternalism to which so many women appealed in their political claims regarding the war. They function moreover to differentiate Linda from themselves, in her pathologically “modern” femininity, by their appeal to a primarily maternal role in accordance with dominant prescriptions for “normal” femininity. “Normal” is a term used frequently in the novel, as the standard by which both the “eugenic” and the normal are measured.

The contrasting models of femininity embodied by “modern” Linda and “normal” Kay are commonly represented, as E Ann Kaplan writes, according to opposing tropes of “witch” and “angel”. Premised on the maternal and anti-maternal respectively, the conflict between the two underpins the maternal melodrama. Given Linda and Kay’s oppositional characterisation, the novel is readily approached as melodramatic. Linda and Kay enact, in their opposition, what Peter Brooks refers to as the “moral occult”. This refers to “the domain of operative

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61 Carson, 130.
62 Shute, 33.
63 Dark, 108.
64 Ibid.
65 Kaplan, 9.
spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality”.

The “moral occult” might therefore be understood as the dominant ideology, in its self-concealing character. In melodrama, the moral occult is illustrated by the struggle of good over evil enacted through exaggerated “heroes” and “villains”. “Within an apparent context of ‘realism’ and the ordinary,” Brooks writes, melodramatic characters stage “a heightened and hyperbolic drama, making reference to pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation”.

Associated respectively with imagery of darkness and light, Linda and Kay embody such a moral occult. With her dark hair and otherwise racialised appearance, her limp aligning her with villainy in a common melodramatic troping of disability, Linda is the melodramatic evil to be vanquished. Associated with health and the otherwise “normal”, Kay is her “good” counterpart and aware of this, convinced of the rightness that she prevail over Linda’s “evil” by supplanting her as Nigel’s wife. But it is precisely Kay’s interactions with Linda that complicate the novel’s melodramatic character in a way we might call modernist. While eugenics produces its own moral binary, it complicates the values of the established value system. Nigel and the “evil” Linda’s marriage is considered violable, for example, when disrupted by Kay as an embodiment of the eugenic and “good”. Just as the Australian maternal ideal was reformulated according to the eugenicist demands of the period, eugenics gave rise to its own moral occult. Kay’s condemnations and ultimate cruelty towards Linda reflect the dominant demonisation of the “dysgenic” as a “social evil”.

There is an increasing tendency over the course of the novel to privilege Linda’s perspective over those of other characters, particularly as her mental health deteriorates. In certain instances, the narratorial perspective shifts into the second person, as though Linda is addressing herself. Ultimately, this suggests her establishment as the novel’s primary protagonist, despite her characterisation according to the tropes of a villain to be vanquished.

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., ix.
70 Susan Sheridan, Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing, 1880s–1930s (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 112.
And vanquished she is at the novel’s conclusion, albeit by her own agency. Importantly, however, this is not without the final “victory” by which she pollutes Kay’s future relationship with Nigel, by disclosing her suicidal intentions to the young nurse.\(^7^1\) In doing so, she knows Kay will not compromise the possibility of a future with Nigel. Against melodramatic convention, Linda places Kay in a villainous position, one of culpability for failing to intervene in Linda’s ultimate suicide: “no better than a murderess!”\(^7^2\) Kay invokes eugenicist morality to justify her tacit encouragement of Linda’s suicide, which functions at the novel’s conclusion to call the eugenicist “moral occult” into question. According to the moral logic of eugenics, Kay’s psychological violence against Linda is justified, with Linda’s suicide a “vanquishing” of evil. The reason for Dark’s privileging of Linda’s perspective through the novel’s modernist structure would, however, remain both ambiguous and inimical to melodramatic convention. I suggest that Dark draws on the melodramatic to cast doubt on a doctrine which had effectively become the gospel of the dominant culture. The likening of eugenics to religion is a constant in the novel, particularly where eugenics is represented from Nigel’s perspective. Readerly empathy with Linda in her eventual fate is also consistent with melodramatic convention, according to which we are to take Linda’s suicide as a vanquishing of evil.\(^7^3\) We might consider Prelude to Christopher as exemplary of Dark’s tendency to the dialogic, in its application of modernist irony to melodrama. In so doing, Dark unsettles both readerly expectations and the dominant eugenicist assumptions of the moment.

I suggest that in Prelude to Christopher, modernism and melodrama are mutually illuminative of eugenicist ideology and its gendered implications. Cooper accordingly argues for a dialogic approach to Dark in her thesis on the author, showing how Dark draws from a variety of cultural forms in such a way as to distinguish her as a “middlebrow modernist.”\(^7^4\) That the two terms do not contradict each other suggests the potential in approaching Prelude to Christopher as a modernist melodrama. Certainly, as Kaplan argues, melodrama illuminates the dichotomous representation of women—particularly mothers—in the

\(^7^1\) Dark, 184.

\(^7^2\) Ibid., 180.

\(^7^3\) For a discussion of readerly empathy and Prelude to Christopher, see Anne Maxwell, “Education, Literature and the Emotions: A Salute to Eleanor Dark’s Prelude to Christopher,” JASAL 12, no. 1 (2012).

\(^7^4\) Cooper, 9.
dominant culture. In Kaplan’s analysis, in the modern maternal melodrama the Madonna and whore are replaced by the “angel” and the “witch”. 75 I have already indicated that these opposing categories represent the maternal and anti-maternal respectively, but again we should interrogate what these mean in view of the novel’s historical context. In the Federation era, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the “good” white mother was defined by her ability to uphold the national mythology by which the new nation sought to distinguish itself from the imperial mother. The eugenics’ movement exacted a revision of this role: a white woman’s role was no longer simply to reproduce whiteness, but to “improve” it, and the “good” mother was refigured according to her ability to do so. This would depend on “eugenic” reproduction with a “fit” partner, within wedlock, and with limitations on the number of children in a family. 76 As I will discuss further in the second part of this chapter, “eugenic” mothering practices were emphasised in such a way as to align the “good” mother with the middle class. In this way the interwar maternal ideal is distinguished from that of the Federation era, with its demonstrated tendency to idealise the rural working class, evidenced for example by the status of “The Drover’s Wife” in the national iconography. 77 Eugenicists emphasised “environment” in their definition of “good” mothering, and frequently conflated “nature” with “nurture” in the definition of the “eugenic” and “dysgenic”. 78 Consequently, both poverty and alcoholism, two preoccupations of the movement, were identified with the “dysgenic” regardless of their implication within broader social structures. 79 In the eugenicist imaginary, those designated “dysgenic” are the social ill, rather than the oppressive social structures underpinning poverty and the related problem of alcoholism. This scapegoating is apparent, for example, when Nigel considers Sydney, with its “glittering harbour. A lovely city…”, the ellipsis suggesting the qualification of its loveliness by such as an “undersized, hollow-eyed man” busking in the street beside his “weary, sagging” wife and their “unprotesting baby”. 80

75 Kaplan, 9.
79 Ibid.
80 Dark, 21.
The family is given as an example of a blight on the city, an icon of modernity in the interwar years, aligned in the subsequent passage with “the standardisation of machinery, the cataloguing of libraries, the miraculous precision of science”. Nigel feels isolated, however, in his vision for modernising humanity through eugenics: “if he had a religion, this he supposed was as near as he could come to it: that the business of human life should be decently ordered”. The very existence of the young family he fixates on here are metonymic of a society in which “A man who bred his sheep with infinite care would marry a tuberculous wife and rear an infected family; a man who grew his fruit trees undeviatingly true to type would beget a brood of half-caste children”. Such is an example of the conflation of genetics and environment, which certainly applied to the child removal policies enabling the Stolen Generations. In this way, this one of the novel’s three references to Indigeneity is illustrative of eugenics’ operation, in a context where the “Aboriginal problem” was to be “solved” under child removal policies through the assimilation of “half-caste” children into white society, to the end of their eventual “biological absorption” into the white population. This demonstrates an emphasis on environment as on genetics, though it rests on an interesting elision of eugenicist concerns regarding miscegenation. With her many proto-eugenicist attitudes, for example, Mary Gilmore abhorred miscegenation as a threat to the nation’s future. But Gilmore shared with eugenicist orthodoxy a similar vision for Indigenous peoples’ ultimate fate: eventual extinction. While Gilmore cast this as a tragic inevitability, however, the eugenics movement saw this end as one to be pursued actively, particularly through the acceleration of forced child removals. Nevertheless, Prelude to Christopher reflects the fact that the vast majority of eugenicist policy and discourse was aimed at “shoring up the whiteness of white Australia”. To discourage the “unfit”, such as Linda, from reproducing is a matter of “racial improvement”, as is the intent of the indefinite

81 Ibid., 22.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Carey, 166.
87 Jacobs, 149-92.
88 Attewell, 12.
number of organisations which Nigel bemoans. To secure an environment conducive to “national fitness” was similarly bound up, however, in promoting a dominant ideal of femininity and the maternal consistent with white, middle-class and patriarchal ideals.⁹⁰

These are precisely what the modern woman contravenes, in her espousal of a distinctly anti-domestic and anti-maternal femininity, aligning her with the “witch” figure of the maternal melodrama. As Barbara Brooks writes, “Linda is compared to women who were burnt at the stake as scapegoats because they were dangerous, and refused to conform”.⁹¹ Linda’s embodiment of this patriarchal trope of anti-maternity, too, bespeaks the eugenicist conflation of nature and nurture. Patriarchy construes femininity as innate in such a way as to cast all deviations from hegemonic femininity as failure. Relatedly, the institution of motherhood casts all deviations from its prescriptions—inextricable from hegemonic femininity—as failure. The qualities of the “good mother” are, according to the institution of motherhood, inherent rather than constructed. In this way, the figuration of Linda’s “insanity” illuminates the construction of maternal femininity. Throughout her upbringing, Linda has been subject to her uncle Hamlin’s psychoemotional abuse, concomitantly with constant reminders of a family history of “insanity”. Her attempts to identify and resist his abusive behaviours are met with his casting doubt on her mental soundness. This is a form of abuse readily identified as gaslighting, by which an abuser causes his victim to doubt her own perception, and therefore her own sanity. The term is taken from George Cukor’s 1944 film Gaslight, based on a play by Patrick Hamilton, which Sarah Arnold situates within the female Gothic.⁹² Brooks draws our attention to the common preoccupations of melodrama and the Gothic novel, characterising both as “equally preoccupied with nightmare states, with claustration and thwarted escape, with innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claims to recognition”.⁹³ All of these are applicable to Linda, who is subject to the doubt which has all her life been cast on her mental soundness, despite her at-times frantic efforts to demonstrate the contrary. This, particularly when she and Nigel revisit the matter of their

⁸⁹ The Centre for Racial Hygiene was established initially as the Race Improvement Society of New South Wales. See Carey, 164.
⁹⁰ Wyndham, 5.
⁹¹ Brooks, 189.
⁹³ Brooks, 19-20.
childlessness. In an interesting alignment with patriarchal motherhood, Dark represents maternity not only as natural to a woman but as a woman’s birthright. Linda also regards maternity as redemptive of her purported insanity, assuming an attitude consistent with the pathologisation of the anti-maternal modern woman: “You haven’t the right to deprive me of any hold I have on—on normality”, she says to Nigel.94 “If I were climbing a cliff, you wouldn’t knock away my footholds”.95

This is a matter that personally troubled Eleanor Dark. Eric Dark, her husband, was a general practitioner who opposed eugenics, as evidenced by his book, Medicine and the Social Order (1942). He nevertheless expressed apprehension regarding Eleanor’s suitability for motherhood before the birth of their first child due to her “recurrent kidney disorder”.96 Eleanor’s mother, also named Eleanor, was herself subject to a form of abuse not unlike that to which Linda is subject in Prelude to Christopher. As in Dark’s novel, Eleanor O’Reilly’s abuse and depressive decline calls into question the debate regarding nature and nurture, certainly relevant to the eugenics movement.97 Evidently the deterioration of the elder Eleanor’s mental health was subject to “nurture” by her husband Dowell O’Reilly’s prolific affairs. These he conducted on the basis that for periods of months she “refused to be faithful to her marriage vow”, an ironic characterisation of her denying him his “conjugal rights” in light of his sustained infidelity.98 This was, of course, long before the institution of marital rape laws. It is also a biographical detail which exposes the double standard represented by Nigel’s certainty in his right—and of course, due to the nature of consent, it is his right—to withhold intimacy. It is moreover made explicit that they both pursue extramarital affairs after the failure of the island colony, but only one of them is pathologised on this basis. Dark’s mother, Eleanor O’Reilly, was institutionalised for a “nervous breakdown”, eventually dying of an ambiguous cause.99 After his wife’s death, Dowell O’Reilly wrote to Mary Gilmore, “She has passed through it all, and surely it is better for her to be on the other

94 Dark, 91.
95 Ibid.
96 Brooks, 187.
98 Ibid.
side”. While her pathology was likely characterised as innate and inevitable, like Linda’s, the probable aetiology of her mental illness is apparent in her biography, as it is in Linda’s. Dark thus calls into question the conflation of nature and nurture characterising the eugenics movement, particularly insofar as it leaves structures of oppression unquestioned. These are the structures underpinning conditions such as poverty, alcoholism and “insanity” said to render citizens unfit for reproduction. As the representative of eugenics’ many “true believers”, Nigel’s condemnation of “dysgenic” reproduction does not imply recognition of any service to society implicit in reproductive abstinence. While Nigel prides himself above all else for his “normality”, valuing it as a virtue above all others, this is precisely what he denies Linda by denying her a “saving maternity”. Whether Linda’s insanity is a function of heredity or interpellation constitutes a productive ambiguity throughout the novel.

By denying Linda the “normality” of maternity, Nigel leaves her with no alternative and legitimate social role in a patriarchal culture of compulsory motherhood. Where the still-limited availability of contraception made avoiding pregnancy a difficult matter for married women, it is worth considering that the only stock national type inhabitable by a woman was that of the Australian Girl, characterised by a refreshing independence. A Federation figure, she is frequently compared to the New Woman and frequently construed as her Australian counterpart; that she is a “girl” suggests her ultimate redeemability through motherhood. In this light we might understand the particular perversity of the modern flapper in an Australian context. Her perversity relative to the New Woman of the Federation years should be understood in the context of global anxieties regarding sociocultural degeneration. This includes the degeneration of the institutional family represented by the modern woman’s resistance to restriction by Victorian domesticity. It is difficult to see what else but social abjection remains to Linda, given a context in which women are instrumentalised for their capacity to provide the nation with “eugenic” stock. As I have shown in Chapter 1, only through motherhood could a woman’s citizenship be fully realised.

100 Dowell O’Reilly in ibid., 27.
101 Dark, 91.
102 Anne Summers uses the term “compulsory motherhood” to denote the effect of women’s deprivation of abortion rights in Summers, 291.
104 Ibid.
Nigel’s citizenship is not contingent on his fatherhood, however, leaving him at far greater liberty to abstain from reproduction. It is strongly suggested, however, that he ultimately does not: his incipient relationship with Kay stands to resolve his preoccupation with posterity. Before the failure of his island colony, Nigel is availed of the possibility of creating a scientific legacy, though he ultimately fails to do so. Though Linda is a scientist herself, it is not her but Dr Penleigh—referred to throughout the novel as Pen—whom Nigel takes as his partner in this eugenicist enterprise. Linda, on the other hand, suffers on the island an exaggerated form of her inferiorised Australian citizenship as a non-reproductive, “dysgenic” woman. Far from assuming a leading role beside her husband in the establishment of the colony, she is keenly aware that her presence there is “on sufferance”.105 Her position on the island is perhaps not dissimilar to the status of the non-reproductive woman in Australia, for whatever reason she remains without children. By contrast, Nigel—despite being forty-six—is accorded a new opportunity for posterity through “eugenic” reproduction with Kay, herself young enough to be his daughter. No such possibility remains to Linda as she nears the end of her reproductive years.

Barbara Brooks characterises the book as the outworking of “an old internalised argument with her father”, particularly over his belief that it was “not possible for women to reconcile motherhood and creative work”.106 His attitudes regarding women’s citizenship reveal, however, that this is not a matter of reconciliation or choice. Frank Bongiorno suggests that the novel betrays a keen awareness of attitudes such as those of her father, who in a poem sent to his friend Bernard O’Dowd is unambiguous in his belief that “the basic purpose of woman is to breed”.107 On this view, becoming a writer could only signify failed citizenship in a woman. It is a matter of citizenship in that the nation had a more explicit stake than ever in women’s reproductivity. Bongiorno writes that O’Reilly and O’Dowd shared with “radical”, liberal and conservative men the view that “racial degeneracy” and “race suicide” should be avoided through increasing the birth rate.108 Similarly motivated, Australian women of the Woman Movement argued otherwise. As Mary Gilmore had advocated in her support for a Child Endowment, these women argued for “quality” over “quantity” in their
families. This implied a challenge to men’s “unrestrained access to their wives’ bodies”—essentially a challenge to institutionalised marital rape—in the interest that motherhood be “voluntary.” This challenge to the male sex right was the basis of O’Reilly’s withdrawal of support for the Woman Movement. For O’Reilly, a woman’s value lay purely in her reproductivity—which of course, depended on her sexual availability. Bongiorno writes,

Whereas true women were bound by their own bodies men, as intellectual and spiritual beings in possession of minds and souls, could transcend them. The intellectual woman and the militant suffragette were the products of “the abnormal condition of civilization”, which O’Reilly likened to the rabbit born and bred in a hutch which “is not a rabbit at all!”

O’Reilly here suggests not only that such women are signifiers of modern degeneracy; he makes the essentialist conclusion that they are by virtue of their suggested anti-maternality not women at all. With her intellectual leanings, Linda is readily classed among these “not-women”, and suffers from her lack of a role in the colony, and upon her return to Australia.

Linda’s suicide is illustrative of her situation, one of preclusion from motherhood in a culture of compulsory motherhood. This is not only the last act of agency likely to remain to her, particularly given the probability of her institutionalisation, but “the logical consequence of the implacable eugenic system Nigel subscribes to”.

Having failed in her designated social function—and not by her own will—Linda’s suicide would not simply be a neutral matter, but a happy end. As our melodramatic heroine Kay reassures herself, Linda’s suicide is “best—for everybody—yes, yes, really for everybody!” In making Kay aware of her intent to suicide, however, she saddles Kay with the moral culpability of failing to tell Nigel. Linda knows she will not, in the interest of their marriage and their imagined child, Christopher. The melodramatic polarities of good and evil are called into question more than ever in this scene: while Linda is by no means a likeable character, she demonstrates that despite her designation as “evil”, she displays none of Kay’s ultimate cruelty, self-interest and duplicity. In effect, Linda taints the relationship to come by

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110 Bongiorno, 47.
111 Dowell O’Reilly, quoted in ibid., 54.
113 Dark, 178.
ensuring Kay’s complicity in her death, which she knows Kay will conceal from Nigel. She thus ensures the relationship’s premise upon a falsity, and perhaps in doing so makes the same suggestion of eugenics. Clearly Nigel, oblivious to this episode, will marry a version of Kay which pretends to authenticity: an assemblage of “eugenic” and hegemonically feminine characteristics concealing the mendacious underside of her character. Dark suggests that eugenics constitutes a moral occult in itself, with its own constructed certainties regarding the nature of “good” and “evil”. The conclusion is therefore presented not simply as a final exercise of agency, or an illustration of eugenicist logic: Linda explicitly presents the circumstances of her death as “a message of victory, an assurance that in the end she had vindicated [Nigel’s] faith in the ultimate triumph of the normal”.114 Neither melodrama nor modernism secure predominance in Prelude to Christopher: instead, the novel is a peculiarly modernist interrogation of the ethical polarities of eugenics through melodrama, suggesting eugenics’ underpinning by its own “moral occult”. As Donald Childs writes, eugenics had ascended as a substitutive religion for many writers from the 1880s to the 1930s “to assume responsibility for a creation orphaned by the death of God”.115 By placing modernism in dialogue with melodrama, Dark exposes eugenics as another “God”, the worship of which was ultimately in contravention of the rights of women, with potentially fatal consequences.

Women such as Linda, however, were not the dominant target of the eugenics movement. Though racialised, Linda is white. More importantly, she is presented—at least, before the establishment of the island colony—as wealthy. This, moreso than Nigel, whose mother lives in a commodious and opulent apartment on Sydney’s Macquarie Street. Cooper is careful to note that despite Dark’s avowed concern for those less advantaged than herself, her representation of these—particularly Aboriginal people and the working class—functioned to perpetuate their oppression.116 We might say the same of her lack of attention to the compounded oppression the eugenics movement represented for working-class and racialised women, particularly Indigenous women. While less eugenicist policy than might popularly be imagined focused on race, eugenics served as a rationalising discourse for forced child removals on the basis of the “unfitness” of their mothers, defined against white and middle-
class maternal practices. As Attewell writes, advocates of such policies hoped to “breed ... the colour” out of the nation, and so advance their dream of a “White Australia.” The eugenicist preoccupation with “environment”, however, exposes a point of intersection between Indigenous Australia and the working class. This intersection is acknowledged, albeit not unproblematically, in Ruth Park’s *Harp in the South* novels. In *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man’s Orange*, Charlie marries into the proletarian Irish-Australian Darcy family, fathering two children with elder daughter Roie and ultimately marrying the younger Dolour years after Roie’s death. Though emphatically local in its scope, the novel is in many ways revelatory of a post-war history in which Australia was situating itself in a global context, the end of an era “before modernism coupled with post-war prosperity forever altered the religious, social, and political character of those communities”. Part of this was the transcendence of explicit eugenics, given the evidence of its catastrophic consequences, which were common knowledge after the Second World War. *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man’s Orange* celebrate the working-class mother in a post-war world, while condemning the conditions in which she must mother. We are made aware from the opening pages of Thady’s disappearance, the second Darcy child apparently having been snatched from the streets. This underpinning trauma suggests maternal resilience in circumstances hostile to mothering.

The social realism of Ruth Park’s *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man’s Orange* contrasts informatively with the bourgeois modernist melodrama of *Prelude to Christopher*. It is worth noting, however, that the latter was written “against the social realist grain of her times”, as Dorothy Hewett has indicated. Nevertheless, I suggest that, like *Prelude to Christopher*, the *Harp in the South* novels trouble such generic oppositions as modernism versus melodrama, and melodrama versus realism. The maternal is a fertile site for melodrama in both novels, and in contrasting ways the melodramatic elements of Dark and Park’s novels reflect a “moral occult” of the maternal. In a departure from conventional melodrama, and from the modernist melodrama of *Prelude to Christopher*, “evil” is embodied less in any of

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117 Smith, 5-6.
118 Cecil Cook in Attewell, 26.
the novel’s characters than in the “evils” of poverty. Against these, the virtuous working-class mother struggles to raise her children in the inner-Sydney slums. Park’s novels share with *Prelude to Christopher* an implicit condemnation of eugenicist ideology, one embodied in their protagonists who are deemed “dysgenic” by the dominant culture. As readers of the *Harp in the South* novels, our sympathies are directed towards the Darcy family. Working-class, Irish, and Catholic, they live with two lodgers in a dilapidated terrace at twelve-and-a-half Plymouth Street. The latter is likely to be based on Surry Hills’ Devonshire Street where Park lived with her husband, fellow author D’Arcy Niland, during the Second World War, with their young child.\textsuperscript{121} The novels are based on Park’s observations of life in the district and, alongside its erstwhile poverty, Park represents its strong community and cultural diversity.\textsuperscript{122} This is represented by neighbours such as the Siciliano family and the Chinese grocer next door, Lick Jimmy. Park wrote the novel while visiting family in her native New Zealand.\textsuperscript{123} Both she and Niland sought to make a living as writers, and as a young mother in need of money, Park wrote the novel specifically for entry into a contest held by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which she won.\textsuperscript{124} I will discuss this further at a later point. In addition to serialisation in the city’s flagship newspaper and a 2000-pound prize, the full novel would be published by Angus & Robertson both nationally and internationally.\textsuperscript{125} International circulation remained uncommon for Australian fiction, and both novels’ ultimate international readership would prove to be the object of significant national controversy within an Australia anxious about its place in the world in the wake of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{126}

*The Harp in the South* was released early in the wake of the Second World War. By this time, the genocidal implications of the eugenics movement could no longer elude global recognition, after their catastrophic realisation under the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{127} Nevertheless, and despite decreasing popularity from the early 1930s, eugenicist ideology maintained traction

\textsuperscript{121} Genoni, 120.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Genoni, 122.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Wyndham, 3.
within the dominant social-scientific discourse until the end of the Second World War. The movement’s largest institutional opponent, the Catholic Church, rejected eugenics as a “modern tendency” aligned with divorce and birth control, condemning it officially in the 1930 papal encyclical *Casti Connubii.* This secured the opposition of the substantial minority of Catholic Australians who, before the end of the Second World War, were overwhelmingly of Irish descent. This was before the mass Southern European migration following the Second World War, which would trouble Australia’s dominant self-identity as a “white” nation. Though the Irish had been “whitened” in Australia around the time of Federation, the dominant racialisation of the Irish as inferior to whiteness remained a feature of the popular imagination, and certainly the eugenicist imagination. I would suggest that this is not least due to the association of Irishness with the working class. Irish-Catholic Australians such as the Darcy family were therefore associated with the “degeneracy” eugenicists sought to eradicate. Comparison of Park’s novels with Eleanor Dark’s *Prelude to Christopher* evidences the ambivalence of the eugenics movement with regard to the modern. While modernism and degeneracy were associated in eugenicist discourse, “modernisation” was an important dimension of the eugenicist mission. The Darcys and their lives are represented as anathema to the modern. As Delia Falconer writes,

> Life here, Park wrote in [her autobiography] *Fishing in the Styx,* was “like a visit to some antique island where the nineteenth century still prevailed” (p. 138). The Surry Hills population’s shocking isolation in time and space is a striking feature of her novel. The cantankerous old coal-fuelled stove, Puffing Billy, is almost another character in Twelve-and-a-Half Plymouth Street. A trip to the beach is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and even a visit to Paddy’s Markets in town is an adventure.

It is strongly suggested in the *Harp in the South* novels that the dominant injunction to modernisation, associated with eugenics, is at least as compromising to mothers and their children as the conditions imposed by poverty.

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128 Ibid.
129 Childs, 7.
130 Ibid., 23-4.
131 Ibid.
133 Childs, 6-8.
134 Ibid., 8.
I have suggested that the series defies tidy classification within social realism. For example, against the conventions of the genre, both novels culminate in a happy ending, however equivocal. Paul Genoni’s solution to the problem of the novels’ generic classification is to describe them as examples of “Catholic Realism”. By this, he refers not simply to the religious faith of the characters, but to a broader sensibility pervading the novels. The term acknowledges the fact that the *Harp in the South* novels, in their uncompromising realism, lie somewhat beyond the scope of the “Catholic Novel” as accounted for by Gene Kellogg. Informed by elements of Catholic theology, the latter typically emphasises themes of “grace, conversion, redemption, and revelation”. These are readily opposed to the typical content of both realism and social realism, yet arguably feature in tempered form in *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man’s Orange*. Genoni identifies the novel’s “Catholic” traits in the novel’s characters, who are marked by a concomitant tendency to stoicism and fatalism, “an amalgam of a deeply entwined Irishism and Catholicism”. He suggests that the novels’ reviews have mistaken this sensibility for a “sentimentality” disqualifying the novel from classification as either broadly realist, or social realist. I suggest that the novels are distinguished as Catholic Realist particularly by their figuration of the maternal. Park’s representation of abortion and miscarriage in *The Harp in the South* deviates notably from social-realist conventions. It is also likely the reason for Miles Franklin’s dismissal of *The Harp in the South* as “R.C. [Roman Catholic] propaganda”. The biases underpinning representations of the maternal, which Nicole Moore characterises as distinctly “Catholic”, are unmistakable from the outset and prevail throughout both novels.

The *Harp in the South* novels betray a far less critical investment in the conflict between “good” and “bad” womanhood than in *Prelude to Christopher*. Mumma and the Darcy girls

136 Ibid., 26-7.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
are within the opening pages of the novel positioned as embodying “good” femininity against a feminine “evil” in their own home. This “evil” is embodied in lodger Miss Sheily, another anti-maternal “witch” figure bearing striking similarities to Eleanor Dark’s Linda. We are first introduced to Miss Sheily as she beats her disabled son Johnny, in a scene implied to instantiate regular abuse. This is not, however, what secures Miss Sheily’s position as a “bad” woman and mother in *The Harp in the South*. Nor does her stigmatised status as a single mother prevent Mumma Darcy from referring to her as a “lady”, despite Hughie Darcy’s derision of the notion.\(^{142}\) Cementing Miss Sheily’s status as an anti-maternal, “bad” mother is her son’s physical and intellectual disability, explicitly attributed to her attempts to “get rid of him before he was born”.\(^{143}\) The introduction of Miss Sheily establishes abortion and the maternal as central themes of *The Harp in the South*, and both are presented according to a distinctly Catholic morality, as Miles Franklin’s letter suggests. When Miss Sheily attests to a lack of regret regarding Johnny’s accidental death, “Mumma’s mother-heart burned for poor Johnny.”\(^{144}\) She is established in opposition to Miss Sheily as a “good” maternal woman against an anti-maternal “evil”. “Good” and “bad” womanhood are predicated on the “maternal” and “anti-maternal” respectively, categories both patriarchally constructed and inflected by Catholic prohibitions. This is made explicit not only by the Darcys’ attitudes to Miss Sheily, but by Park herself, as suggested by her third-person omniscient narration:

> And, indeed, Miss Sheily did look like a vulture standing there quaking with temper, her long white nose curved downwards and her blue lips as thin and bitter as a snake’s. Out of those lips came no words, only shrill birdlike sounds that spoke as no words could of the maelstrom of loathing in her soul…\(^{145}\)

Again, the image of the snake is used to characterise the anti-maternal woman, in a reference to foundational Judaeo-Christian constructions of femininity. Miss Sheily, like Linda, is characterised as ill-tempered and visually distinctive. Depicted with black hair and pale skin—and in this instance, even “blue lips”—her situation within the “angel/witch mother dichotomy” is unmistakable.\(^{146}\) It is also telling that Miss Sheily, like Linda, is likened to a snake. Mumma Darcy embodies, by contrast, the maternal ideal, the angel, the Madonna. That she is referred to exclusively as “Mumma” suggests the primacy of her relational,

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\(^{142}\) Ruth Park, *The Harp in the South* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984), 34.
\(^{143}\) Ibid.
\(^{144}\) Ibid., 35.
\(^{145}\) Ibid., 6-7.
\(^{146}\) Kaplan, 181.
maternal identity, particularly in opposition to the sexual. This is suggested by her opposition to Florentina, a prostituted woman among many in the district, upon whom Hughie comes to fixate in Poor Man’s Orange.

Roie eclipses Mumma as the embodiment of a maternal ideal in Poor Man’s Orange, having given birth to Moira—a name meaning fate—at the end of The Harp in the South, making Mumma a grandmother. Roie is nevertheless the subject of what Nicole Moore terms the novel’s “abortion plot”, a common trope of the social realist writing which had dominated the Australian literary landscape during the interwar period. This was a time of decline in the white birth rate, a cause of significant public consternation. Traceable in large part to the nation’s involvement in the Great War, the effect of this was paradoxical, as Philippa Mein Smith suggests. Despite the enormity of the death toll and injury exacted by both world wars, the cultural response was to emphasise the “sanctity of life”. This is, of course, the basis of the primary Christian objection to abortion. Moore notes that representations of abortion have, moreover, been inflected by class. The tendency has been to represent middle-class women’s abortions as inevitably traumatic, “a horrifying confrontation with the tyranny of their bodies that is enough to threaten their sanity”. For working-class women, abortions are significantly more likely to be represented as “banal, everyday occurrences”:

Novels like Eleanor Dark’s Waterway and Kylie Tennant’s Tiburon include matronly beasts of burden whose reproductivity is so far removed from their conscious sense of the world that abortion and pregnancy are mere dots in a spectrum of misery, rendering them passive instruments of nature or victims of poverty, held up for the edification or amusement of middle class reader and mediating protagonist.

Such class differentiated representations of abortion would endure in fiction until the arrival of second-wave feminism in Australia, which would bring with it more nuanced depictions. Park’s representation of working-class maternity largely resists the typical middle-class insistence upon such unabated misery and insensibility as Moore outlines. This

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147 Moore, “Me Operation,” 71.
148 Ibid.
149 Smith, 312-23.
150 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
is by questionable means, however, particularly through her emphasis on Roie’s distress and reluctance surrounding her attempt to procure an abortion at the shadowy Murphy Street Clinic: “‘it’s not sin for me,’ thought Roie desperately. ‘It’s the only thing I can do.’”

Identifiable here is the attribution of blame for social “ills” such as abortion on her working-class context. Despite Park’s apparent opposition to eugenics, such are moments where she unwittingly espouses views reminiscent of eugenicist ideology.

Moore argues that the abortion plot in *The Harp in the South* is predicated on patriarchal and bourgeois clichés regarding “good” and “bad” working-class womanhood. These are predicated on the familiar dichotomy of maternity and sexuality. The would-be abortion scene at the Murphy Street clinic instantiates this class-inflected dichotomy, evidenced by Roie’s flight in an example of the fairly melodramatic trope of “last minute terror and escape from the evil abortionist” as she hears the screams of the woman in the treatment room.

This is the woman with whom she converses earlier in the waiting room, a typical figure in the working-class abortion plot. Married and with several children already, she is represented as “oversexed” in her knowledge and experience of abortion: “Cripes, this is me fourth miss, if it comes off. Somehow I’m always falling in… But don’t you be afraid love. It only hurts for a little while”.

Whether she has the means to support further children is not considered, despite such situations rationalising the broadening availability of family planning methods and sex education during the period I discuss in this chapter. Moore characterises the woman in the waiting room as embodying one of two available attitudes for working-class women in the abortion plot: “evil, (or amusing) insouciance” or “passive suffering and death”. Roie represents the latter, though her death occurs several years after the “passive suffering” occasioned by the abortion. This passivity is heightened, however, by the fact that she ultimately miscarries after an assault by Dutch sailors instead of procuring an abortion by her own agency. This functions to exculpate Roie both from procuring an

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155 Park, 107.
156 Moore, “Cliche.”
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 142.
159 Park, 108.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
abortion and producing an illegitimate child to Tommy Mendel, villainised both by his visible
disability and his Jewishness, after he effectively rapes her.162

Roie’s first meeting with Tommy at Paddy’s Markets, and her subsequent intimacy with him
established after Johnny’s accidental death, trigger a long chain of interrelated traumas which
are causally related to slum life. In accordance with the novels’ melodramatic logic, Roie’s
death in childbirth in Poor Man’s Orange is foreshadowed on the night of her miscarriage,
when Mumma expresses uncertainty to Dolour regarding her survival. The suggested
causality is made explicit in Poor Man’s Orange, when Mumma voices her suspicion of the
role of the events of that night in her eventual death. It is strongly implied that Roie’s assault
would not have occurred if she had not sought an abortion. Park’s condemnation of abortion
is evident in her characterisation of the Murphy Street clinic, its staff, and the women seeking
their service:

> Sharp grey eyes looked at her, and then, as she was about to speak, a voice said with a
poisonous sympathy; “Feeling bad, dearie?”
> And then Roie knew she had come to the right place… There was a cold
darkness about the house, as though the sunshine had never crept within its secret
walls. A depression settled over Roie’s spirit, so that she felt dreary and fatigued.163

Despite abortion’s traditional status in Catholic morality particularly as a “great horror”,
Roie’s attempted recourse to it is not ultimately represented as damning.164 Falconer writes
that Park withholds “traditional narrative retribution” in the form of “death, barrenness, or
ostracism”.165 While eventually leading to Roie’s death, abortion is represented as a structural
ill, as in Mary Gilmore’s portrayal of infanticide in “Down by the Sea”. Redemption as a
theme of the “Catholic Novel” is in evidence here, and Roie is disqualified neither from
respectability nor, in the end, the status of “selfless” sacrificial mother.166 It would appear
that in giving birth to Moira, Roie is absolved of her purported sin, given that her prayers for
the unborn Moira’s survival—"let me make up for the wrong I did to my other baby"—have
been answered.167

162 “Effectively”, because it does not register as a rape in the novel, though it would be
understood as one by today’s standards.
163 Park, 103.
164 Moore, “Cliche,” 77.
165 Falconer.
166 Ibid.
167 Park, 206.
The circumstances of Roie’s third pregnancy in *Poor Man’s Orange* are particularly reflective of its historical situation in the wake of the eugenics movement. Increased public interest in maternal and particularly infant welfare was a consequence of the dominant eugenicist consciousness, and resulted in increased state intervention into maternity through perinatal care.\(^{168}\) This was primarily in the interest of counteracting infant mortality and falling birth rates, rather than maternal welfare; in the interwar years, birth became a matter for the hospital rather than the home and, importantly, for the doctor rather than the midwife.\(^{169}\) Despite evidence that midwife-assisted births were still safer for women than births in hospital, by 1939 home births were exceptional, rather than the norm.\(^{170}\) This amounts to a stark generational difference in Roie and Mumma’s maternal experience; though “Mumma knew everything about babies, but nothing according to the clinic”, it is Mumma who recommends she attend the nearby hospital for prenatal examination.\(^{171}\) Roie’s reluctance, and her obvious apprehension of such institutional environments, suggests that this has become a matter of course. This is explicitly attributed to class. Mumma, by contrast, still has “no idea of what went on in hospitals”.\(^{172}\) The examination is more traumatic than Roie fears when six male medical students are compulsorily in attendance, which the woman in the adjoining cubicle resists. With the characteristic paternalism of this development in institutionalised maternal and infant welfare movements, a doctor tells Roie’s neighbour that it is “for the good of the women”.\(^{173}\) This is an example of the paternalism Kerreen Reiger attributes to the “modernisation of confinement”, with its demonstrated tendency to demand that working-class women shape their domestic and maternal practices according to “middle-class norms”.\(^{174}\) To the doctor’s claim, the woman responds “Then why not use all women for guinea pigs, eh? Why only public hospitals?”\(^{175}\) The woman aptly raises the question as to whose interests are primarily served by increased government intervention into maternity. Given the emphasis on infant welfare in these interventions, what is meant by “the good of the women” invites further interrogation.

168 Smith, 313-4.
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
172 Ruth Park, *Poor Man’s Orange* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1985), 41.
173 Ibid., 43-4.
174 Ibid.
175 Park, *Orange*, 43.
Park suggests that reforms to perinatal care were passed not in the interest of maternal welfare, but of infant welfare.\textsuperscript{176} As the scene just discussed demonstrates, these did not always coincide. Advanced on eugenicist grounds, the infant welfare movement was successful in that it substantially reduced the white infant mortality rate: “From 74.8 deaths per thousand in 1910, [the infant mortality rate] fell to 69.1 in 1920 and then almost halved in the following twenty years.”\textsuperscript{177} The white birth rate, however, continued to decline during this period.\textsuperscript{178} The maternal mortality rate increased, however. In her 1930 report on Maternal and Child Welfare, Dame Janet Campbell, Senior Medical Officer for Maternity and Child Welfare in England,\textsuperscript{179} found that the maternal mortality rate in Australia, subject to increase since 1922, was “consistently higher than in England and Wales”.\textsuperscript{180} These fatalities included those due to abortion, to which the higher total maternal mortality rate was attributed. The higher incidence of maternal death in childbirth was, however, found attributable to the higher rate of births in hospital settings, resulting in higher rates of puerperal infection.\textsuperscript{181} The culpability of the medical establishment is implied in \textit{Poor Man’s Orange} when, as Roie undergoes the last rites, Hughie rages: “She coulda been saved… Rotten dirty doctors—”.\textsuperscript{182} The possibility of medical culpability in maternal mortality and suffering is established earlier in the novel when Suse Kilroy tells Dolour of being forced to bring a premature, stillborn baby to the nearby hospital in a tin dish—her mother’s revenge for having been denied medical assistance in her early labour. The anecdote of Dolour’s friend suggests, moreover, that such instances of crisis show how working-class women continue to suffer neglect at the hands of the medical establishment, despite increased intervention in their maternity. State-sanctioned medical intervention into Roie’s maternity is represented as a further trauma inflicted upon her. She flees the hospital to “hide her shock and shame” in the local church, where “she hid her eyes even from God”.\textsuperscript{183} She prays: “They took Your clothes

\textsuperscript{176} Patricia Grimshaw makes an historical argument for this claim in 235-54.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 235.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} England is specified, rather than the UK in ibid., 235.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Park, \textit{Orange}, 162.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 43-4.
off and hung You up where everybody could see You, but it’s worse for a girl. Let me forget it, soon. Please let me forget it”.

The implied causal relation between poverty and Roie’s death in childbirth is particularly significant in light of her role as the novels’ primary embodiment of a feminine and maternal ideal. We find the most explicit instance of this implication the night before she begins her ill-fated labour with her second child, when Moira (referred to throughout Poor Man’s Orange as Motty) is bitten in her bed by a rat. The uncharacteristic violence with which Roie turns on the rat, killing it after a protracted struggle, is represented explicitly as an expression of fury toward the hostile conditions in which she and so many working-class women are forced to mother: “If Motty had been younger, she might have died as other babies had died in that locality… For all those babies Roie was enraged to a savagery unknown to her gentle nature.” That she is left alone to defend her child against the rat is also suggested to be a reality of her social position, and one Park condemns through Charlie who considers their “very presence in a modern city [as] an affront and a disgrace”. When she calls for her father Hughie’s assistance, he cannot be roused from his “methylated sleep”. Hughie accordingly blames himself at her deathbed, saying, “Maybe it was that fright she got, and me lying down there stewed as a pig and not lifting a finger to help her.” In the novels and their historical context, alcoholism is strongly associated with the working class, an “evil” activists sought to eliminate on both feminist and eugenist bases. A favoured cause of both eugenist and white women’s organisations such as the influential Women’s Christian Temperance Union, temperance was among the “matters of social purity” predicated on the dominant Protestant morality, and its promotion was an example of a middle-class condemnation of activities associated with the working class, in turn associated with Catholicism. Jill Matthews argues that the class bias implicit in wowser rhetoric such as that surrounding temperance was “enmeshed in sectarian squabbles through the crude equation of working-class with Catholic, and the crude causal connection that Catholicism

184 Ibid.
185 Park, Orange, 154.
186 Ibid., 156.
187 Ibid., 154.
188 Ibid., 164.
produced poverty and crime”. It was on a maternalist basis, however, that many middle-
class women’s groups espoused temperance ideology. Despite the movement’s association
with eugenics, their tracing of significant suffering for working-class women and children to
men’s drinking is not inaccurate, as Park’s novels demonstrate. This episode, with its strongly
suggested causal relation to Roie’s death, is such an instance.

I suggest that The Harp in the South and Poor Man’s Orange constitute a maternalist critique
of the conditions to which inner-urban, working-class Australian mothers and children were
subject. These were exacerbated by global historical forces such as the two World Wars and
the Depression, and this might be understood as evidenced in the downturn in the national
birth rate. The detail in which Park represents the material realities of poverty has proved
memorable for many Australians, and the novels continue to be set for study in Australian
high schools. Park’s uncompromising depiction of inner-urban, working-class life approaches
abjection at times, as in the scene of the rat-bite. This was not uncontroversial, despite the
novels’ enduring popularity. This controversy is particularly significant in light of The Harp
in the South’s publicity as the winner of the inaugural Sydney Morning Herald novel contest,
which secured a similar level of public attention to the sequel. Park’s representation of the
conditions of the poor was the subject of significant controversies by readers of the paper
favoured by Sydney’s middle-class establishment, as evidenced by the letters from readers of
the two serialised novels. In fact, the novels only received marginally more praise than
condemnation. Park’s primary offence, to those readers writing to the Herald in complaint,
was the representation of poverty itself. Not only was this suggested to be subject matter
unbefitting of literature, but unbecoming of a woman writer.

I would characterise many of these epistolary condemnations of the novels as evincing a
middle-class maternalism in opposition to Park’s own. Park’s is a maternalism that largely
resists the middle-class hegemony bearing on the construction of the “good” mother. Letters
frequently invoked the potential readership of children and implied the impropriety of Park’s
corrupting influence as a woman writer: “If the story really was written by a woman, then I

191 Ibid.
192 Nicole Moore attributes to this much of the controversy regarding birth control in the
1930s in Nicole Moore, “Treasonous Sex: Birth Control Obscenity Censorship and White
193 Ibid.
194 Genoni, 122.
am very sorry, for it destroys all the nice things I have believed about women’s minds”.

The letter demonstrates a national tendency to appeal to the middle-class, Victorian “angel in
the house” ideal of femininity, which had been reemphasised particularly in Australia during
wartime. British women, by contrast, had been availed of an unprecedented level of public-
sphere participation. This was not, moreover, subject to nearly the same backlash as
Australian women’s modest entry into remunerated work during this time. Letters frequently
evoked abjection, with readers testifying to their “disgust” at the novels, which they called
“sordid”, “squalid”, “filth”, “bilge”, and “no better than an open sewer”. Those
readers who did not dispute the novel’s realism complained of its pretension to represent
Australia to the world at a time when Australian literature saw little international circulation.
On this point one (Miss) Margaret Anderson writes “To think that in a young clean country
(clean as compared with the older countries) such unadulterated filth should be given first
prize, and put out to the world as representing Australian life, makes my blood boil”. The
sentiment parallels the eugenicist impulse towards social “hygiene”, implying the
elimination—the abjection—of the “dirty”. In the context of Australia’s global reorientation
following the Second World War, Genoni characterises the letters to the Herald concerning
the novels as reflective of “a nation unsure of its place in an altered world”. He moreover
situates the novels’ publication at a moment of postwar reorientation by which “Australians
were first and foremost citizens of their own nation, rather than British”. Arguably
concomitant was women’s reorientation in Australian culture: given the changes to
Australian life and culture under debate, their role could not remain unaffected.

195 Ibid.
196 Marilyn Lake and Joy Damousi, “Introduction: Warfare, History and Gender,” in Gender
and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century, ed. Marilyn Lake and Joy Damousi
(New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995), 3.
197 “Another Critic”, “Where are the Censors?”, Sydney Morning Herald (NSW), 11 January
198 (Miss) Dorothy Courtney, “Sordid, Cheap,” ibid., 11 January.
199 AJ Dalziel, “It Will Do Great Good,” ibid.
201 Grace French, “Just Bilge,” ibid.
203 French.
204 Genoni, 124.
205 Ibid.
The abjection by which the novel is characterised by displeased readers is, moreover, taken as a marker of the novel’s “modernity”. HE Ellen of Cronulla situates Poor Man’s Orange within a “cult of ugliness”, part of “a pattern which appears also in modern painting and sculpture, and… in much modern music”.206 Again, we encounter the “degeneracy” with which modernism and modernity were associated according to eugenicist discourse.207 He asks, “why weight the scales so heavily on the side of ugliness and squalor?“208 On the date of The Harp in the South’s final instalment, however, an editorial had already admonished the tide of complaints regarding the novel’s subject matter:

It is a curious thing that, in this day and age, there are still those who regard realism as a bar to artistic perfection, and who cling to the Victorian doctrine that “there are some things better not talked about.” Such critics prefer to ignore the fact that the whole trend of modern literature has long been marked by an impatience with prudish restrictions on the portrayal of life.209

Mary Gilmore makes a similar suggestion, coming to Park’s defence in her response to Poor Man’s Orange, suggesting the call of post-war times for a new frankness in literature, necessitating a departure from Victorian squeamishness:

Sir,—The belated “spacious days” of Queen Bess are with us in parallel. Then it was sea and land were to be conquered, now it is science, life, air, and living conditions. Because of this the good round oath of the Elizabethan and the equal licence of tongue, pen, and drama are also with us.

This, however, is largely because of army life in two wars. The hidden of civilian conditions becomes the open of war. The result of all this is that ”life in the raw” is every man’s theme in writing and reading—man including women.210

At once, Gilmore calls for a return to the unvarnished subject matter and representation of Shakespeare’s time. Despite her rather loaded statement in her earlier life that a mother should never be “dirty”, she asserts Park’s equal claim as a woman to her uncompromising realism.211 She also suggests the novels’ potential role in the modernisation of living

207 Childs, 18.
208 Ellen.
conditions for Australia’s urban poor. This she does, however, by implicit appeal to eugenics through her emphasis on the modern—which includes the management of “life”—as a matter of conquest: “science, life, air, and living conditions”.212 This did in fact eventuate, the clearing of the Surry Hills slums having been attributed to increased public awareness generated by the wide circulation of The Harp in the South.213 Falconer attests to Park’s ambivalence on this matter, writing that “Park would officially open the first block of Devonshire Street flats, though she would later express ambivalence about the loss of community and street life this entailed”.214

A reader who signs off as a fellow “Aucklander” raises a pertinent issue relating to the representation of the maternal through Roie, which corresponds with Moore’s identification of a logic both bourgeois and patriarchal attending the representation of working-class femininity in the novels. She writes, “In my view, ‘Poor Man’s Orange’ [sic] represents the average middle-class New Zealander’s view of Surry Hills”.215 While the Harp in the South novels are based in Park’s experiences of living in the district during the Second World War, Park’s own background was, as Delia Falconer characterises it, “more genteel” if nonetheless working-class.216 Park perhaps betrays this in her characterisation of Roie in line with a middle-class feminine respectability, one which sets her apart from the novel’s other women. Her aspiration to a rather middle-class notion of “love” within the wife role is apparent very early in The Harp in the South: still a girl, she fantasises, “I’m married, and I’ve been doing the shopping and I’m going home to cook tea for my husband, and then we’re going to the pictures”.217 Moreover, she appears to seek love outside her immediate milieu: Tommy Mendel is suggested to be better off financially himself—Hughie refers to his “stinking Jew-money”—and Charlie works as a machinist at a printery.218 Given her suggested death as a result of poverty, however, it appears that that such an Victorian maternal femininity can flourish neither in the slum, nor in a modernising world. Roie’s maternity is suggested to be

212 Gilmore.
214 Falconer.
216 Falconer.
217 Park, Harp Novels, 304.
218 Ibid.
of a higher order than that usually seen amongst working-class women, as she tends to Motty in her cot:

Charlie… watched for the first fine tracery of the lines of irritation and disillusionment and monotony which mark like a seal the faces of slum women. But they did not appear. Roie had something which those other women had not, contentment and continued love.\(^{219}\)

Despite celebrating working-class motherhood in opposition to the middle-class hegemony reinforced by the eugenics movement, Park’s representation of the working-class mother is ultimately more ambivalent than it may at first appear.

It is noteworthy that the letters to the _Herald_ evidence minimal complaint about the Darcy sisters’ consecutive marriages to Charlie Rothe, an Aboriginal man. As Genoni points out, this constitutes one of the first representations in Australian fiction of a relationship between an Indigenous man and a “non-Indigenous” woman.\(^{220}\) Absent in Mary Gilmore’s letter, moreover, is her vehement condemnation of miscegenation, to which I have referred in the previous chapter. Charlie’s marriages to Roie and to Dolour—the latter marriage occurring several years after Roie’s death—warrant further consideration in light of the still-recent predominance of eugenicist ideology. I would suggest a certain ambivalence in the representation of Charlie’s Aboriginality. Expediently, Charlie has no apparent ties to kin in _The Harp in the South_, allowing his ready assimilation into the Darcy family. This resembles the goals of eugenicist policies regarding Aboriginal people sufficiently white-passing to be dissolved into white society. In other words, the ultimate objective is Indigenous extinction. That Charlie is welcomed into the Darcy family might also be thought to reflect a weakening of late colonial white supremacy in light of Australia’s greater cosmopolitanism in the wake of the Second World War, what with the waves of migration it triggered, particularly from Southern Europe. Importantly, however, Indigenous child removal policies were still in full force at the time, and there is little question of his children with Roie sharing his Aboriginality. An exception to this is when Mumma, commenting on Motty’s unruly behaviour in _Poor Man’s Orange_, says “It’s the black blood in her… making the child into a

\(^{219}\) Park, _Harp_, 218.
\(^{220}\) Genoni, 121.
savage”. Today we would recognise his children with Roie as unqualifiedly Aboriginal, in recognition of child removal policies designed to “breed out the colour”, on a eugenist and genocidal basis.

There is certainly a case for Charlie’s representation being understood not only as assimilationist, but as an exploitation of Aboriginality with the aim of indigenising the Darcys, who are introduced in Harp’s opening line as Irish. The Darcy family saga ends, importantly, at La Perouse: the location of the initial landing of Arthur Philip and the First Fleet, but also a Sydney site of particular and ongoing significance to Indigenous Australia. This is due not only to its history as an Aboriginal reserve, established by the Aborigines’ Protection Board—executor of numerous eugenist policies and particularly forced child removals—in the interest of segregating Aboriginal people from the white population. La Perouse had already been a favoured location for Aboriginal people moving to Sydney in search of work, according to The Dictionary of Sydney, due in part to its quality as a fishing site. Of course, the connection of local Kameygal people to the site is many thousands of years older, and there remain Aboriginal inhabitants of La Perouse whose known family history predates first contact. Fleeing twelve-and-a-half Plymouth Street, despairing in the wake of Roie’s death, Charlie meets an Aboriginal man fishing. His reconnection to culture in Poor Man’s Orange figures as pivotal, allowing him to overcome his grief and recognise his affection for Dolour, who has effectively become mother to his children in the intervening years. It is rather the area’s convict history which is emphasised when he returns to La Perouse with Dolour in the saga’s final scene, as they gaze over Botany Bay. Charlie’s Aboriginality is largely minimised in The Harp in the South, despite his subjection to Hughie and Mumma’s racism, which is represented as benign. While Charlie’s Aboriginality assumes greater significance in Poor Man’s Orange, it would seem to be in the service of the Darcys’ claim to an Indigeneity of their own, given he marries twice into the family. This is despite the Darcys’ strong identification with their Irish heritage. At La Perouse, Dolour has an imaginative encounter with transported convicts, with ancestors of her own suggested to be among them. We might understand this as an appropriation, given the Indigenous significance of the location, as she hears “the cry of the convicts… the weeping of women

221 Park, Orange, 313.
223 Ibid.
who had stolen food for their children and would never see those children again”. 224 She also celebrates their survival, without considering its cost in Indigenous dispossession: “It’s all right! It’s all right! Sydney wouldn’t be the same if it hadn’t been for you!” 225 Through Dolour’s final reflections, Park elides the Indigenous dispossession and survival signified by the site, despite the immediate evidence to the contrary embodied in Charlie Rothe.

The final scene at La Perouse—in this instance, referred to tellingly as “Botany Bay”—also accounts for the final novel’s title. Poor Man’s Orange refers to the bitter oranges that are more accessible to the urban poor, but which are to Dolour’s taste. This final episode contextualises the poor man’s orange as a motif throughout the novel. Having agreed to marry Charlie, Dolour believes her lot in life to be the “poor man’s orange”. 226 She suggests herself to be an inferior yet worthy substitute to her deceased sister, “second-best”, but to have the bitter toughness needed to survive mothering in poverty. 227 While Roie is the model of maternal femininity, it is almost suggested that Dolour’s mothering of the children necessitates her marriage to Charlie. This conclusion also functions to uphold the nuclear family, broadly acknowledged as a middle-class institution. This is suggested by Father Cooley who, when giving his blessing to a marriage requiring special dispensation from the Church, says to Charlie, “Perhaps that’s what the little one wants, a mother of her own, and not the feeling that there’s no one in the world to belong to”, apparently discounting the paternal role in child care. 228 Moreover, Dolour is cast according to the Victorian ideal as a civilising influence: “I suppose…you could forget all these bad days and leave the grog alone if you had such a woman to think of.” 229 Their marriage resolves the Darcys deviation from the nuclear family, a deviation which is clearly a function of poverty: Miss Sheily leaves to marry at the end of The Harp in the South, Patrick Diamond dies at the beginning of Poor Man’s Orange, and Charlie will marry Dolour and leave with the children. Hughie and Mumma will be left with an empty nest, soon to relocate to a new social housing block in the wake of the imminent slum clearance. In this light we might understand the broader significance of Roie’s death, and Dolour’s survival, by contrast, as the “poor man’s orange”.

224 Park, Harp Novels, 682.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid., 684.
227 Ibid., 683.
228 Ibid., 325.
229 Ibid., 326.
Both Eleanor Dark’s *Prelude to Christopher* and Ruth Park’s *Harp in the South* novels, embody a recognition of the influence of eugenics on the construction of the “good” Australian mother, as Australia sought to assume its position on the world stage during, between, and after the two world wars. While it is apparent that the novels of both authors are written in resistance to the eugenics movement with its far-reaching influence on Australian life, both authors betray a certain compliance with the middle-class hegemony of the movement. This is particularly so in their respective constructions of white women—whether realised or frustrated in their maternity—as its primary victims. It remains unacknowledged that the local incarnation of the global eugenics movement had as its consequence the mass deprivation of Indigenous women of their right to mother their own children. While the Stolen Generations are broadly accepted to have ended in the late 1960s, the application of eugenics not simply to birth, but to mothering, supports the characterisation of ongoing Indigenous child removals by the state as a contemporary vestige of eugenics into the present day. The Australian-historical significance of resistant mothering practices will be further explored in the coming chapter. This includes those by Indigenous women, and in for the first time in this thesis, from an Indigenous subject position.
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3. Mothers and Lovers
Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip* (1977) and Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988)

Before the 1970s, writes Shari Thurer, the “maternal voice” in literature was altogether absent.¹ In the Australian context, this claim is somewhat problematised by Mary Gilmore’s first-person verse accounts of mothering, despite her hegemonic attitude. The “matrifocal voice”, however, has been an absence until this point, in its potential to “unmask” motherhood for its ambivalent realities.² “This ‘unmasking’, writes Elisabeth Podnieks, “implicates mothers as ‘bad’ not only for what they write but also for the act of writing itself”.³ This is not least in the act’s contravention of ideal feminine passivity. Such ideals were what the women’s liberation movement sought to challenge in the 1970s, in a movement seeking to privilege women’s hitherto stifled voices. In its implication of resistance to the subordinated wife role, “matrifocal” is an accurate descriptor of the respective subjectivities rendered in Helen Garner’s novel *Monkey Grip* (1977), and Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* (1988).⁴ Both texts represent maternalities prior to the wife role, and the quest for autonomy as mothers and as subjects.

I argue, therefore, that both are landmarks as literary representations of maternal subjectivity.⁵ Both narrate maternal experience from outside the sanctioned sphere of the nuclear family. Seen together, they concomitantly embody the gulf between white settler and

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³ Podnieks, 277.
⁴ In this chapter, the terms “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” are used, but differentiated: I use the term “Aboriginal” when applicable to the specific maternalities under discussion. I use “Indigenous” where statements are generalisable also to Torres Strait Islander people, in such a way as to avoid further marginalising their Indigeneity.
⁵ This is not to suggest these are the first of their kind. Helen Hodgman’s *Blue Skies* is another significant intervention in the representation of maternal subjectivity, and preceded *Monkey Grip* with its publication in 1976. Elsie Labumore Roughsey’s *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* was released in 1984. *Monkey Grip* and *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* were more significant works from the period, however, with regard to their critical and popular reception.
Indigenous maternalities, both as experienced and as constructed by the dominant culture. The two works evidence the relevance of standpoint theories in the representation of the maternal. By the term standpoint theories, I refer to discourses that position the marginalised as the subject of discourse, rather than its object, as has traditionally been the case under dominant power structures. The two major power structures informing maternal experience as represented in the two works discussed in this chapter are patriarchy and colonialism respectively, as I will show. As Petra Bueskens writes, “standpoint theorists problematise the subjugation of knowledge held by subordinate groups, locating it as another component of institutionalised oppression”. Accordingly, comparison of Garner and Langford Ginibi’s respective works evidences the impact of structural factors on maternal experience, and the operation of intersecting axes of oppression in the determination of maternal subjectivity. Despite the qualitative and quantitative differences of the two mother-narrators I discuss, Nora and Ruby, both novels render marginalised maternal subjectivities which had hitherto been effectively circumscribed from the literary.

Arriving belatedly in Australia at the turn of the 1970s, second-wave feminism or the women’s liberation movement was of particular promise to mothers, who were “among the first to join its ranks”. Isobel Barrett-Meyering cites Sheila Rowbotham in her claim that feminism proved appealing to two main groups of mothers in particular: young, middle class, educated mothers, who resented their sense of domestic confinement; and single mothers, both middle class and working class, who were reacting against economic hardship and state harassment.

Nora, the autobiographical protagonist of Monkey Grip, falls largely into the latter category as a separated sole mother. Nora’s middle-class status may have seen her belonging to the former category only a few years before the novel’s setting in 1975, before the Whitlam government’s introduction of the Supporting Mother’s Pension in 1973. This allows Nora unprecedented freedom in her mothering of five-year-old Gracie, who is raised in sharehouse environments, where beds, drugs, housework and mothering duties are to varying degrees

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8 Ibid.
communal affairs. Though the circumstances of Nora’s mothering are remarkable even by the norms of today, the novel turns instead on the love affair between Nora and Javo. Already part of her countercultural milieu, Javo is an actor, a decade younger than thirty-three-year-old Nora, and addicted to heroin. In the novel’s opening pages she becomes conscious of having fallen in love with Javo, and despite difficulties owing to his addiction presenting themselves immediately, she pursues a romantic and sexual relationship with him. It goes almost unmentioned that lacking a stable home of his own, Javo effectively moves in with Nora, sleeping in her bed each night. It does not take long for his relationship with heroin to complicate her life at home, as well as their own relationship. Though their dysfunction as a couple causes them to attempt parting ways on a trip to Sydney, and despite Nora’s seeking involvement with other men, the relationship maintains the hold which gives the novel its title. This is until it becomes apparent that Javo has fallen in love with another friend of theirs, Claire. Given the liberal approach to love and sex prevailing throughout the novel, one which bears the unmistakable mark of the sexual revolution, Nora accepts this with both sadness and equanimity. Javo pursues a new relationship in significantly better health, seeming to have broken the hold of his addiction with Nora’s help, while Nora is left “simply facing the prospect of a continuing and arbitrary future”.9

In form and theme, *Monkey Grip* is perhaps more immediately a product of its time than any of the texts I consider in this thesis. Bernadette Brennan notes that the novel is set in 1975, International Women’s Year, a historical moment which saw the proliferation of “writing that privileged female experience”.10 “So too”, Brennan adds, “did feminist literary theory”.11 She notes the publication that year of Cixous’ *Le Rire de La Meduse*, translated the following year as *The Laugh of the Medusa*, in which Cixous exhorts women to write their sexuality, desires and bodies, to show that, like language, they too “overflow” the patriarchal signifier.12 A similar suggestion is made by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*, also published in 1976. Rich challenges the inscription of patriarchy in language by theorising the distinction

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
between “motherhood” as experience, and as institution. She argues that the term operates according to patriarchal interests, given the conflation of the “two meanings of motherhood”, in which women’s lived experience of motherhood is subordinated to its institutional form. This is precisely what Garner resists in *Monkey Grip*, narrated in the first person by a maternal protagonist. Brennan notes that though Nora and Garner herself were likely unfamiliar with Cixous or Rich at the time of the novel’s publication, the seventies provided the social conditions under which Garner could imagine her story as “big enough” to be the subject of a novel. And Brennan writes that Garner does credit the women’s liberation movement for “giving her licence to write about ‘what goes on in people’s houses’ rather than politics or history”, as though these were opposed to one another. Rather than politics remaining restricted in the popular consciousness to “the [Vietnam] War or that kind of thing”, the women’s liberation movement embodied a consciousness of its catch-cry, that “the personal is political”. Even Lever, however, situates the novel outside of “grand politics” and within “the politics of sexual liberation”. The novel shows the freedoms afforded by the sexual revolution and the related—but too frequently conflated—women’s liberation movement as often incongruent with women’s desires, however. As Susan Lever writes, “Nora, deliberately adopting a pattern of casual sex with men, cannot escape the desire for exclusive, romantic love”. Accordingly, among the novel’s overarching concerns is “the glaring gap between feminist theoretical positions and her lived experience”.

Brennan cites Kerryn Goldsworthy in her observation that the novel would have been impossible a short five years later, that *Monkey Grip* was written in a “golden window”, the timespan between the advent of the Pill and the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. The cultural consequences of both were far-reaching, and *Monkey Grip* illustrates the incipient decoupling of sex and maternity attending the availability of oral contraception in Australia from 1961

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14 Ibid., 13.
15 Brennan, 42.
16 Ibid., 72.
17 Ibid.
18 Susan Lever, quoted in ibid., 42.
19 Lever, 108.
20 Brennan, 42.
21 Kerryn Goldsworthy, cited in ibid., 43.
and the attendant sexual revolution of the 1960s. Female sexuality could more than ever be a site of pleasure, rather than solely procreation, disturbing the dichotomy of maternity and sexuality underpinning patriarchal constructions of femininity and motherhood. Despite the establishment both of the sexual revolution and the subsequent women’s liberation, Garner’s presentation of a protagonist both maternal and sexual in *Monkey Grip* was far from uncontroversial. In fact, only a few years earlier the novel’s “frank” depiction of female sexuality (as well as drug use) would have been against Australian law. Reforms to censorship laws originally championed by Liberal minister Don Chipp passed under the Whitlam government were among the enabling conditions for the novel’s publication. Prior to this, such significant novels as *Ulysses, Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *Lolita* could not be procured legally in Australia. Given the pervasively gendered tenor of criticism against the novel, it seems relevant also that the novel was first published by McPhee Gribble. This was a publishing house established by two women in the same year as Garner began to write the novel, and was among the increasing number of independent publishing houses established in the wake of doubled funding to the Australia Council for the Arts under Whitlam. The very subject matter of the novel is made possible by the fact that Nora has been accorded financial independence by the Supporting Mother’s Benefit, which recognised mothers raising children outside the nuclear family: as mothers foremost, rather than wives. Unlike any maternal welfare model before it, the benefit was not underpinned by the assumption of the patriarchal breadwinner model. For the first time, mothering was recognised under the welfare system as an exercise of social citizenship without presuming a woman’s dependence on a male partner. Moreover, this permits Nora to enact numerous forms of social citizenship—


25 Brennan, 44.

26 Ibid.

27 Lever, 108.

28 Brennan, 33.


30 For a discussion of Garner’s depiction of the various forms of social citizenship beyond mothering which Nora practices throughout *Monkey Grip*, see Kristin Natalier, “Reimagining
including her mothering—throughout the novel. Instead of balancing taxi driving with mothering, Garner was enabled to write her first novel.\textsuperscript{31}

It is not least the de-centred role of Nora’s daughter, Gracie, that accounts for \textit{Monkey Grip}’s significance as a representation of Australian maternity. Gracie’s role is constant, but rarely foregrounded; contrary to dominant expectations, she is part of life, rather than life itself. This manifests an important break with dominant representations of motherhood which cast the latter as “the child’s drama”, in which the mother herself is restricted to a “supporting role”.\textsuperscript{32} The rise of the matricentric standpoint from the 1970s constitutes a resistance to the “cultural amnesia for the personhood of mothers”.\textsuperscript{33} Nora’s narration embodies resistance to this in a central implication of Sara Ruddick’s \textit{Maternal Thinking}, “the obvious: Mothers think”.\textsuperscript{34} The cultural neglect of this apparently self-evident yet significant claim is reflected in the exponential proliferation of child-care manuals during this period. The best known of these is Dr Benjamin Spock’s \textit{Baby and Child Care} which, at the time of writing, was the “all-time best-selling book in American history after the Bible”, enjoying significant global success.\textsuperscript{35} Despite Nora’s distinctly unconventional approach to child-rearing, dominant prescriptions for mothering remain a background presence in \textit{Monkey Grip}, exemplified in the way Gracie (to occupy herself while Nora recovers from a short illness) reads aloud from \textit{Baby and Child Care}. Nora has clearly not been exempted from the global reach of such “mother-rearing” guides. Despite her intermittent expressions of worry for her daughter’s “irregular life”, Nora’s alternative approach to motherhood is an alternative embraced, a refusal to be subsumed by the maternal role.\textsuperscript{36} But this “irregularity” and the consistent positioning of the mother as object, rather than subject, is de-emphasised as well. We might take this as an example of the “poetic” strategies of the novel, whereby passing ideas and

\begin{tabular}{l}
31 Ibid., 418.
32 Thurer, 335.
33 Ibid., 336.
35 Thurer, 336.
\end{tabular}
images function as subtle indicators of Nora’s circumstances and emotional states. Lever takes as an example Nora’s encounter with a “frightened fieldmouse” which assumes unstated significance in the following pages as an “objective correlative” for Nora’s sense of being left “stranded” by Javo that night when he falls asleep, leaving her sexually unsatisfied. This constitutes part of Lever’s argument against Garner’s detractors for the discipline of her art.

The terms in which these early reviews characterise the novel and its author were pervasively gendered, as Kevin Brophy shows. While upholding patriarchy is by no means solely the remit of men, the proliferation of contemptuous assessments of the novel by male reviewers is difficult to ignore, and assessment of the novel in patriarchal terms is apparent. Ronald Conway writing in Quadrant describes Garner’s representation as “porny”, as though it had been written expressly for male sexual titillation. He would not appear to entertain the notion Lever advances, that “Where Moorhouse or Wilding’s accounts of sex retained some of the masculine hubris of conventional pornography, Garner managed to recreate the vulnerability of a female sexual perspective”. A guest speaker at the 1986 Adelaide Writers’ Week, Gerard Windsor claimed that Garner’s concern with a woman’s “domestic pain” restricted its potential readership to other women, the only demographic to which her subject matter could possibly be of interest. Peter Corris wrote in the Australian that “Garner has published her private journal rather than written a novel”, the basis of the accusation being that the novel’s narrator seemed indistinguishable from Garner herself. On this same basis, numerous critics cited the “undisciplined” character of a book whose claim to the status of a novel was frequently denied.

The crux of the discussion would appear less to be the matter of whether Monkey Grip is a novel, but whether it is literature. Brophy attributes this to these reviewers’ failure to recognise evidence of formal innovation within the novel, ironically a marker of the “literary

37 Lever, 111.
39 Lever, 108.
40 Brophy, 270.
41 Ibid., 274.
42 Ibid.
artistry” they claim is absent. This includes Garner’s efforts to render female and maternal subjectivity, and “the explicit physical and sexual language given from a female point of view”. These latter, writes Brophy, are “among the devices that throw over standard fictional conventions and define the work as literary in the traditions of modernism”. We have seen in earlier chapters, however, how modernist innovation has been constructed as the remit of men. It is perhaps for this reason that the significant challenge Monkey Grip posed to the “conventional architecture” of Australian realist fiction remained unrecognised by any reviewer at the time. As Lever writes, the “classic realist text” presumes the liberal humanist subject. Its premise, she suggests, is the same as that of capitalism in Western democracies: “Such texts depend on the notion of a free individual or “autonomous subject” who can choose a series of actions in order to achieve a narrative goal”, and thus be responsible for her fate, whatever it may be. She argues for the interrelation of radical form and radical politics, warning against the possibility for women writers to “risk endorsing a liberal humanist value system which may be inherently patriarchal in its assumption that all individuals have the same potential for free actualisation”. Lever suggests that the countercultural products of realist writers in the early 1970s who “flouted censorship laws” remained somewhat self-undermining in their “restructuring” of culture according to a “white, middle-class, urban and male” subjectivity. As ever, these writers “promoted a masculine world view in which women subjects remained as subservient to artist figures as they had been in the nineteenth century”. The challenge Garner presents to this masculinist literary culture through her representation of female subjectivity, Lever suggests, is ample evidence of its literary significance.

Lever further counters claims against Monkey Grip’s literary value by drawing on Kerryn Goldworthy’s indication of Nora’s voluminous reading of literature, much of which privileges female subjectivity in such a way as to suggest Garner’s intent. Lever identifies

43 Ibid.
44 Lever, 274.
45 Brophy, 275.
46 Ibid.
47 Lever, 8.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
Jean Rhys as a particularly important example, in that she “insists on allowing the usually silent and objectified sexual woman to speak”. 52 Goldsworthy raises the possibility that the autobiographical protagonist’s name refers to the protagonist of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, in its exploration of “women’s emancipation and female selfhood in modern society”. 53 This has also been speculated of Jessica Anderson’s *Tirra Lirra by the River* which, despite its far older female protagonist, explores a female subjectivity tied to female embodiment. 54 Accordingly, *Monkey Grip* depicts a subjectivity informed by female embodiment, implying a radically different experience of the 1970s counterculture than the white, middle-class men who had thus far dominated its representation. Lever writes,

Garner’s women characters share with the urban characters in Moorhouse’s short stories a commitment to questioning prevalent sexual attitudes, but the sexual revolution makes more complex demands on them because sex cannot be disentangled from its implications for the female body, including maternity, abortion, and menstruation. 55

In doing so, Garner “demonstrated that there was another way to write about sex—carefully and explicitly, weighing the act’s emotional significance from a woman’s point of view”. 56 But while the significance of Garner’s representation of sex in *Monkey Grip* has frequently been discussed, strikingly little attention has been given to her representation of the maternal. I contend that it is on considering this dimension of the text that the literariness of *Monkey Grip* seems incontrovertible, given how the maternal is a site of a striking interplay between form and theme.

I have shown that *Monkey Grip* has been reviewed as of a lower form than “literature” due both to its formal and thematic features. The conditions of the novel’s production and reception, as well as its autobiographical origin, indicate the relevance of a problematic suggested by Elaine Tuttle Hansen, “the question of whether mothers can write, or whether

52 Lever, 109.
54 Ibid.
55 Lever, 108.
56 Ibid.
writers can be mothers”.\textsuperscript{57} This is a multidimensional problem, consisting not least of “The theoretical obstacles—especially the position of the mother in dominant theories of language, as highlighted by French feminist thought—as well as the practical constraints on a mother’s time, energy, and creative powers”.\textsuperscript{58} The aforementioned critical condemnations of \textit{Monkey Grip}, as Brophy suggests, might therefore be understood not only as a function of straightforward misogyny, but of unfamiliarity with the literary rendering of the matrifocal voice. Among the practical obstacles to which Tuttle Hansen refers is the dominant conflation of the institutional and experiential meanings of the word \textit{motherhood}, which are frequently in opposition to one another. Inscribed in Garner’s novel are also the practical constraints to which Tuttle Hansen refers. In striking evidence are Nora’s efforts to circumvent these constraints through a community-based care in resistance to the nuclear-family model, in which care is privatised to the single-family household and constructed primarily as the domain of women. Though based in the breadwinner model, which was reinforced as the dominant ideal in the wake of the Second World War, this remains the case whether or not a mother undertakes remunerated employment. As Kristin Natalier indicates, Nora is depicted writing for long hours at the Women’s Centre, which she reads as one of numerous enactments of social citizenship.\textsuperscript{59}

Though motherhood is a de-centred element of Nora’s narration, as I have indicated, it insistently informs the subject position from which she narrates. Despite Javo’s apparent lack of interest in the maternal dimension of Nora’s life, her relationship with Javo is—for good and ill—informed by her maternity; Brennan, after Lever, has characterised Nora’s relation to Javo as that of “both mother and lover”.\textsuperscript{60} Despite her maternal responsibilities both to Gracie and to housemates’ children (namely Juliet and the Roaster), Nora appears to recognise and embrace her maternal role towards Javo. It is an asymmetrical relationship informed by what Ruddick theorises as “maternal thinking”, distinguished by an interest in the preservation, growth and acceptability of a child.\textsuperscript{61} The practice of “preservative love” is

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Natalier, 414.
\textsuperscript{60} Brennan, 41.
\textsuperscript{61} Ruddick, 98.
the foremost of these “interests”, and is applicable to Javo in light of his addiction.62 A reader might even speculate that Javo’s youth and vulnerability, at the age of twenty-three, are what draws Nora to him in a maternal attitude. But Javo is by no means a child, and critics such as Pam Gilbert have pointed out the exploitation with which Javo reciprocates Nora’s maternally informed care.63 Despite how he benefits from this, he is disparaging of Nora’s maternity. Effectively taking up residence in her household, to which he makes no effort to contribute, he dismisses the house as “too homely” despite it being “the only place he could go for a proper looking after”.64 Writing within the context of second-wave feminism, Rich describes “the common equation of man with child”—specifically in relation to female partners—as exacting “a trapping of female energy which can hardly be calculated”.65 But Nora identifies no such “trapping” when she realises that she has fallen for Javo, asking herself “if I had enough to spare, why not share it?”66 The disruption he brings to her life and her progressive personal depletion make an irony of this question over the course of the novel.

This is not to say that Nora necessarily has nothing to gain through sharing with him what she has to spare. “People like Javo”, she narrates, “need people like me, steadier, to circle round for a while; and from my centre, held there by children’s needs, I stare longingly outwards at his rootlessness”.67 Though acknowledging the stability both required of her and afforded to her by maternal responsibility, Nora’s intimacy with Javo appears to answer a longing for freedom from the demands of maternal care. In this way, the relationship evidences an ambivalence which, though common to mothers, is a taboo underpinned by the institution of motherhood.68 While her love for Javo is arguably an expression of maternal ambivalence, it is a love which has in common the maternal thought she practices with Gracie. Nora implies a separation between her life as mother and as lover, however: “I slept and woke when they did, served them out of my dream; and lived a short, intense hour of every night in the dark

62 Ibid.
64 Garner, 61.
65 Rich, 213.
66 Garner, 17.
67 Ibid., 11.
68 Rich discusses the expectation of “unconditional” love and the dominant prohibition on maternal anger in Rich, 23-24.
with Javo, living privately in the sleeping house”. But in providing Javo with love, in nursing him through withdrawals and tolerating his relapses into heroin use, she arguably exercises maternal thinking towards Javo as well as to the house’s children. In describing her nights with Javo as enabling her to live “privately”, she suggests the affordance of a momentary return to living as an unencumbered individual. Maternal thinking in his regard is nonetheless inescapable, as evidenced by one of her numerous dream records: “I fell asleep and dreamed about the sea: my children drowning, beyond my help, my screams unheard”. Though unremarked, it appears that Javo has been condensed into “my children”, given we know Nora has only one child to refer to as her own. Against the institution of motherhood, Nora’s dream resists the distinction she attempts to maintain between her maternal and sexual selves.

In turn, Garner invites us to read Nora’s maternity as inextricable from her subjectivity. Regardless of Gracie’s presence or absence, maternal experience informs Nora’s stream of consciousness. As demonstrated by her dream, this is apparent particularly in her anxieties regarding both Javo and Gracie. In a moment both analeptic and proleptic, for example, she narrates upon finding a fix in a drawer in her home,

The part of my brain which constantly and forever observes myself was reduced by shock to a very tiny pinpoint in the back of my head, as it had been when I was in labour. I heard myself gasp, and sob, and groan. The thought flicked across the black screen: one day I will find that treasure in Gracie’s drawer.

As I have suggested, however, maternity figures not only thematically, but formally in *Monkey Grip*. Though among the principal reasons for which reviewers sought to disqualify the novel as literature, the novel’s structure reflects Nora’s experience of time. Importantly, it is an experience of time radically different to Javo’s. Brennan has characterised the novel’s lack of conventional narrative arc and relative absence of plot as reflective of the “ebb and flow of relationships and the endless cycle of dependency on drugs or love”. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, Garner might be thought to imitate what Lisa Baraitser terms

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70 Ibid., 197.
71 Ibid., 27.
72 Brennan, 39.
“maternal time”.\textsuperscript{73} This latter is based on Julia Kristeva’s account of “women’s time” as distinguishing female temporality, imitative of feminine cycles such as menstruation. This, as distinct from the dominant masculine experience of time, forward-moving and characterised by “project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival”.\textsuperscript{74} Such theories are associated with the “cultural feminism” which partook of the women’s liberation movement, and Nora’s maternal experience of time further exemplifies the myriad ways her narration bespeaks the times more generally, despite what may be read as a limitation in focus.\textsuperscript{75} Anne Summers accordingly reviewed Garner’s subsequent book \textit{Honour and Other People’s Children}, writing “you think… she had never left Fitzroy”.\textsuperscript{76}

Garner’s representation of maternal time transcends this limitation, however. As Nancy Chodorow writes, “Women’s mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour”.\textsuperscript{77} This is among the primary reasons for the distinction between the words \textit{mothering, fathering}, and \textit{parenting}, for which Ruddick accounts. It is precisely the mother’s primary-carer role and the distinct subjectivity it engenders that underpin maternal time, which is calibrated by the demands of maternal and related forms of care, particularly in response to the demands of dependent children. Nora refers to sleeping and waking as the children of the house do, her time “ruled by the children’s demands, [her] ears tuned to the tones of their voices”.\textsuperscript{78} Javo, meanwhile, continues to sleep in her bed well into the day. His apparent experience of time provides an important counterpoint to Nora’s. Karen Davies’ accounts for men’s time as “forward-moving, acquisitive, and punctuated by time ‘out’”, whereas women’s time spirals, continuous and cyclical, and we see this in the cyclicity of the demands of care and domestic work upon Nora’s time.\textsuperscript{79} In this way Nora’s experience of time is opposed to Javo’s, which we might imagine as oriented towards his next fix, and the “time out” it implies. I therefore read the novel’s circular, anti-teleological

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\textsuperscript{73} Lisa Baraitser, \textit{Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption} (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2008).
\textsuperscript{74} Kristeva in ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{76} Brennan, 59.
\textsuperscript{78} Garner, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{79} Karen Davies, cited in Baraitser, 64-65.
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narrative as mimetic of maternal temporality. At both ends of the novel Nora is a single 
woman whose only true constant is her relationship to Gracie, and it is back to her that she is 
drawn at the novel’s close. Such alternative models of time, Alison Bartlett writes, offer 
“forms of agency which are compatible or incompatible with other institutions”, making of 
the maternal “a radical alternative to standard life trajectories”. The formal rendering of a 
temporality based in gendered difference accounts in part for the novel’s contravention of 
readerly expectations, while literature remains dominated by patriarchal-capitalist 
temporalities.

Though Nora’s holiday with friends in Anglesea at the novel’s conclusion might be 
considered “time out”, it is by anxiety due to Gracie’s absence that she is drawn home to the 
domestic sphere where the novel begins. Ruddick counts such anxiety as among the 
vulnerabilities to which the maternal thinker is subject, in her efforts towards the 
preservation, growth, and training of the child. Nora’s unbalanced mental state in the wake 
of her relationship with Javo is evident as we see the ordinary preoccupation of the caring 
role tip over into irrationality as she worries that “Gracie will get sick and die” in her 
absence. Clearly there is no reprieve from preservative love for the maternal protagonist, in 
whatever form it may take. Though having acquired nothing in the novel’s four-hundred 
pages, Nora has succeeded, albeit not by any conventional liberal-humanist measure. She has 
succeeded in the tasks of preservation and nurturance that amount to success in Ruddick’s 
paradigm of maternal thinking. Over the year-long span of the novel—its own implying 
cyclicity—Nora has succeeded in preservative love not only for Gracie but for Javo, whose 
initiation of a new relationship is implicitly compared to a grown child’s leaving home. 
Through an arguably maternal practice, Nora succeeds in loving and nurturing Javo without 
“seizing or using”. She is ultimately able to achieve the “letting go” which the discipline of 
maternal thinking demands, when he initiates a new relationship with Claire. This stands in 
important contrast with Javo’s modus operandi, whose “seizing and using” of heroin brings

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81 Ruddick, 98.
82 Garner, 371.
83 Ruddick, 99
84 Ibid., 106.
85 Ibid.
him in perhaps closer alignment with the patriarchal-capitalist paradigm of acquisition, as opposed to the provisional “holding” of maternal thinking.86

The novel also represents the “relentlessness” of maternal time as a source of ambivalence.87 Baraitser argues that interruption in particular “constitutes the ground of maternal experience”.88 Frequently this frustrates Nora’s desire to live as an unencumbered individual. She narrates in one instance, for example, “If Gracie hadn’t been there I would have dreamed all day”.89 But interruption, as Baraitser conceives of it, has a significance exceeding encumbrance upon maternal subjectivity. She argues for its value in Levinasian terms, accounting for interruption as placing the subject in ethical relation to the other, a relation by which we are called “into a new relation with ourselves”.90 It is arguably the caring responsibilities drawing Nora home that underpin the neutral, if not hopeful, note upon which the novel concludes. This is perhaps a reflection of the way in which Nora’s mothering disrupts dominant hierarchies; Gracie calls her by her first name, and is frequently an unassuming source of insight, arguably serving a somewhat choric function in the novel. Throughout the narrative she comments on love and heteroromantic relations, claiming for example, “I hate love! I’m never going to be in love!”91 A note found in one of Gracie’s exercise books, “written at her dictation”, might even be thought to comment on one of the novel’s central themes, the gulf between practice and theory in the wake of second-wave feminism’s ascendancy:

NOTHING IS TRUE EXCEPT THE WORLD.
DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING THAT IS TRUE?
NO.92

Despite Javo’s replication of the exploitative relations between men and women, which women’s liberationists rightly protested, Garner suggests through her inclusion of Gracie’s

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86 I align this with what Ruddick calls the “instrumentalism of technocracy” in “Maternal Thinking”, 100.
87 Baraitser, 59-64.
88 Ibid., 65.
89 Garner, 219.
90 Baraitser, 76-7.
92 Ibid., 83-84.
note that her relationship with Javo may have its own “truth”. But given how Javo uses, neglects, and disdains Nora, the notion may be at least as harmful as it may be true to life.

The novel distinguishes itself, however, by Garner’s fidelity to experience over idealism or didacticism. This is particularly noteworthy given her representation of the maternal—a concept charged with an excess of meaning, as I have sought to show—in the 1970s, a period distinguished by the rise of countercultural ideals. Gracie’s comment regarding the “truth” of experience does not detract from the attempts of the novel’s women to enact feminist politics. Nora demonstrates involvement in feminist organising, narrating hours spent at the women’s centre typing their newsletter. Acts of sisterhood are also apparent between the novel’s women, such as when Nora takes her friend Angela to have an IUD fitted. Nora narrates after collecting her from the clinic, “Seeing her thus reduced, prey to the unpredictableness of her female organs, I felt for her nothing more complicated than total allegiance, love for one of my kind”.93 An important tenet of the women’s liberation movement, sisterhood refers to women’s forging of alliances and the mutual provision of support and aid. This is in resistance to the dominant expectation that women make such provisions for men, while men—as we have seen, particularly in Chapter 1—are burdened with no such expectation of reciprocity. They are, rather, free to enact mateship at the expense of women. An illustrative instance occurs when Javo confronts Nora on behalf of their friend Hank, claiming the latter’s greater need of Martin’s car, which he has lent to Nora. Despite the children of the house who “wail” behind her, Javo insists, “He can fix it when it breaks down. And he needs it”.94 Though not specific to Australian feminism, sisterhood might be considered a belated female counterpoint to the masculinist cultural institution of mateship. Female characters’ internalisation of patriarchal gender roles is apparent, however, with or without their recognition. In one instance, for example, Nora finds herself “crawling round” the ankles of a lover she takes after the initial break with Javo, “letting down his jeans”.95 Nora demonstrates awareness of this internalisation of gender roles, saying to him, “If anyone from the women’s centre saw me doing this… my reputation would be shot to pieces”.96 This occurs two days after a friend suggests “giving men a miss” entirely, recognising a masculine tendency to

93 Ibid., 241.
94 Ibid., 126-27.
95 Ibid., 83-84.
96 Ibid., 234.
embrace “radical” politics without extending their “radicalism” to the recognition of women as equals. This was the very basis upon which women had begun to organise autonomously in the late 1960s, birthing the women’s liberation movement.

Garner’s ambivalence toward feminism extends throughout her body of work. As Gabriella Coslovich suggests in response to Brophy, however, Nora’s “addiction” to Javo is among many indications that the novel’s women remain subject—even addicted—to patriarchal ideology and the gendered socialisation attending it: “Try as they might, the characters find it difficult to liberate themselves from this dominant ideology”. The word “masochism” is explicitly used in the novel regarding Nora’s affair with Javo, despite her tendency to rationalise masochistic or sacrificial behaviours, musing for example that “Women are nicer than men. Kinder, more open, less suspicious, more eager to love”. Meanwhile the novel’s men benefit by various means from their continued dominance. One sobering passage in Monkey Grip, when considered alongside attitudes expressed in other of her works, is an example of internalised patriarchal attitudes being inadequate to explain Garner’s ambivalence. Angela refuses to “fuck with” Willy while he maintains a relationship with another woman, justifying his apparent callousness towards her on the ideological grounds of free love. In her distress, she says to her female friends, “I’m scared he might… rape me… He’s really strong, you know”. She moreover whispers this “hopefully”. Nora’s response is laughter, on the basis that Willy is supposedly “the most unlikely rapist north of the Yarra”. I have no intention here to represent Garner as an apologist for rape. This instance of flippancy regarding male sexual violence might, however, be thought to foreshadow later attitudes expressed towards it. I refer particularly to those represented in The First Stone, which made Garner a figure of significant feminist controversy in the 1990s. As a result of her sympathy for “Colin Shepherd”, based on Alan Gregory who was charged with sexual

97 Ibid.
98 Marilyn Lake writes that women’s liberation arose from, and reacted against, the masculinist dynamics of the new left in Marilyn Lake, Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 221.
100 Garner, 156, 25.
101 Ibid., 292.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
assault in the high-profile Ormond Case, Garner has been situated within the postfeminist backlash which came to prominence in the late 1980s and prevailed throughout the 1990s and beyond.\textsuperscript{104} As I will discuss in the next chapter, the “failed feminism” narrative was both abetted by the Howard government and applied particularly to matters of the maternal.\textsuperscript{105} Now a grandmother living next door to her daughter’s own nuclear family, Garner’s life as evoked in her novels is more reflective of a traditional motherhood, as Robert Dessaix notes of \textit{The Spare Room}, published in 2008: “a proper Howardish family… with children and grandchildren you can go to Target with on Saturdays”.\textsuperscript{106}

For Ruby, narrator of \textit{Don’t Take Your Love to Town}, this is not a reality—actualised or potential—at any stage of her life as a mother and grandmother. Langford Ginibi’s memoir is the text to which I now turn. \textit{Monkey Grip}’s significance in the history of Australian literature is often attributed to its depiction of mothering amidst an “alternative” lifestyle, the blurb on the back of the Penguin Modern Classics edition describing “a community of friends who are living and loving in new ways”.\textsuperscript{107} We have already encountered an earlier depiction of mothering in households extending beyond the nuclear family in \textit{The Harp in the South} novels. Class, therefore, seems an important yet unspoken dimension of dominant readings of mothering in \textit{Monkey Grip}; thus contextualised, it seems that we read Nora’s mothering as “alternative” and “countercultural” \textit{because} she belongs to the middle-class. This raises the matter of race, a matter not once mentioned in \textit{Monkey Grip}. With the dominant current of the women’s liberation movement, the novel shares the assumption and presumption of a white subject position. Despite the importance of second-wave feminism in challenging numerous gender-based disparities functioning to subordinate the citizenship of Australian women, women’s liberation—to the extent that it occurred—was not equally distributed. In Australia, Indigenous women had only in the past decade been accorded official Australian citizenship when the movement came to prevalence. In common with women’s liberation, \textit{Monkey Grip} is replete with the evidence of uninterrogated whiteness. Like white women

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\footnote{Natasha Campo, “‘Feminism Failed Me’: Childcare, Maternity Leave and the Denigration of Motherhood,” \textit{Australian Feminist Studies} 24, no. 61 (2009): 326.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Garner.}
\end{footnotes}
who prevailed in the movement, its characters—and Garner herself—unwittingly enact the
privilege of imagining themselves unraced. The dominant current of the movement
functioned therefore to replicate the uninterrogated power structures upholding the construct
of the liberal humanist subject, challenging only its predication on a fantasy of being unsexed
and ungendered. The implications of this for the women’s liberation movement, cannot be
neglected. Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes, “As long as whiteness remains invisible in
[feminist] analyses “race” is the prison reserved for the ‘Other’.”108 This of course includes
feminist analyses, and accounts in large part for Indigenous women’s relative absence from
the feminist second wave.

It is therefore a telling element of Langford Ginibi’s Don’t Take Your Love to Town that
feminism is not once mentioned, despite the feminist significance of the maternography. A
term coined by Carla Pascoe Leahy, the genre foregrounds maternal memories in such a way
as to assert their significance against the patriarchal and feminist discourses which have
functioned to devalue maternal experience.109 This devaluation may consist either in the
conflation of maternal experience with institutional motherhood, or the emphasis on public-
sphere participation at the expense of “the intensely personal nature of mothering.”110 While
Pascoe-Leahy’s term refers generally to women’s maternal narratives, I suggest the
productive application of the term to literary texts. Langford Ginibi’s maternography
functions to challenge both patriarchal and dominant feminist assumptions regarding the
maternal, even the “personal” as invoked by Pascoe Leahy.111 Moreover, Langford Ginibi’s
maternography also challenges the autobiographical subject, as well as the universalised
“woman” underpinning the dominant women’s liberation movement.112 As Goenpul feminist
theorist Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes,

Indigenous women’s life writings are based on the collective memories of inter-
generational relationships between predominantly Indigenous women, extended
families and communities… These relationships are underpinned by connections with

108 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and
Feminism (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xix.
109 Carla Pascoe Leahy, “From the Little Wife to the Supermom? Maternographies of
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Moreton-Robinson, 32.
one’s country and the spirit world. In all of the life writings, Indigenous people are related either by descent, country or place or shared experiences. In this sense the life writings of Indigenous women are an extension of Indigenous relationality in that they express the self as others and others as part of the self within and across generations.113

Given how Langford Ginibi’s maternography transcends the personal in this way, Don’t Take Your Love to Town might also be considered to challenge the maternographical subject as theorised by Leahy.

Throughout and beyond second-wave feminism, Black women, Indigenous women, and women of colour have stressed the neglect of their specific situation at the intersection of race and gender. As Kimberlé Crenshaw stressed in her landmark theorisation of intersectionality, Huggins emphasises that these oppressions are experienced indivisibly from one another, foreclosing feminism’s legitimacy as a single-issue politics.114 The view that intersecting oppressions do not simply compound, but modify each other, is echoed by Moreton-Robinson in her challenges to the dominant white feminism from an Indigenous subject position. Similarly, Bidjara/Birri Gubba Juru historian Jackie Huggins has written extensively of Indigenous women’s relationship to the “white women’s movement”, condemning the movement’s perpetuation of Aboriginal women’s marginalisation.115 Both accuse the dominant women’s liberation movement as purporting to speak for Indigenous women from a white standpoint, assuming their experiences and needs in such a way as to deepen their complicity in the oppression of the women they seek to liberate.116 But as Huggins has argued, white women’s tendency to universalise their experiences as those of all women has accounted for their “missionary-style zeal” in recruiting Indigenous women to the women’s movement, on the assumption that “Aboriginal women need ‘raising up’ to their level of

115 See Jackie Huggins, Sister Girl: The Writings of Aboriginal Activist and Historian Jackie Huggins (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1998).
116 Ibid.; Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism.
feminist consciousness”.

This she characterises as the “lowest form of maternalism”. Huggins suggests that white feminists have ignored the instructive role that Indigenous women might play in women’s collective imagining of a post-patriarchal society, by situating themselves exclusively in the maternalistic role of educator. In doing so, they have enacted the colonising dynamic from which they continue to benefit in Australian society which, she reminds us, was established on the basis of colonial, not patriarchal, domination.

The legacy of this domination could hardly be more apparent than in Langford Ginibi’s representation of her maternal experience as a Bundjalung woman in Don’t Take Your Love to Town. The book functions, however, as less of an indictment of the conditions in which many Indigenous women have mothered than a celebration of Indigenous women’s tenacity and resilience in oppressive conditions, suggesting the collective significance of her narration of maternal memory. As Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith ask,

Given the colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial locales in which a writer produces an autobiographical text, what then does the speaker make of the autobiographical “I”? And what strategies drive, what meanings emerge from, what uses define her autobiographical project?

Langford Ginibi narrates a multiply marginalised subjectivity, accounted for neither by the “I” of the liberal-humanist subject, or that of the universalised “woman” underpinning the dominant feminist discourse. Her maternography evidences, moreover, that the problems of essentialism plaguing dominant feminisms apply similarly to maternal theory in its dominant tendency to neglect the bearing of race on maternal subjectivity. Moreton-Robinson notes Adrienne Rich’s use of the term “white solipsism” in 1979, in “perhaps the first piece to be written specifically on whiteness”. She challenges such “radical feminist” analyses as Of

118 Ibid., 74.
119 Ibid.
120 Huggins, 14.
122 Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism, xix.
Of similarly foundational importance to maternal studies is Ruddick’s *Maternal Thinking*, to which Patricia Hill Collins’ “Shifting the Centre” embodies a similar challenge. Challenges to the white subject position of *Maternal Thinking* are instructive when applied to an analysis of *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*. This is particularly so when we consider Langford Ginibi’s memoir alongside *Monkey Grip*. In her study of challenges to Ruddick’s ethnocentrism in *Maternal Thinking*, Jean Keller contends that there are universal elements to the practice of mothering. Preservative love is the foremost of these which, as Keller points out, ensures a maternal practice for discussion.

For a colonised people, however, preservation assumes the added dimension of cultural survival. But it is the heightened vulnerability of Black and Indigenous children which accounts for Keller’s emphasis on the preservative character of maternal love, which she suggests is at issue for a mother in proportion with her oppression, which she is likely to share with her children. Patricia Hill Collins accounts for preservative love as practiced by mothers who by virtue of race “can no longer assume that the surrounding community is, by and large, benevolently disposed (or at least not openly antagonistic) towards her child”. Such is Ruby’s situation as a Koori mother whose entry into motherhood, in the mid-twentieth century at the age of sixteen, precedes her adulthood. At this time, the nation’s First Peoples were yet to be counted as citizens or permitted to vote, with the exception of those who demonstrated their abandonment of all cultural ties. Langford Ginibi’s representation of Indigenous maternality maintains its contemporary relevance in a context where the culturally informed practices of Indigenous mothers continue to be taken by government institutions as grounds for the removal of their children. Hill Collins’ challenge to Ruddick’s theory of maternal thinking from an African American standpoint is applicable to the study of Indigenous maternity, and it is on the basis of extensive correspondence between the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, as well as Indigenous and Black

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123 Ibid., 40.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Keller, 845.
women globally. I will seek in my analysis to guard against the potential erasure of Indigenous identity through its subsumption into Blackness, in line with Judith Butler’s caution against the erasure of one category by another: as the category “woman” may marginalise the Black woman, the category of “Black woman” may marginalise the Aboriginal woman. To recognise correspondences between the experiences of people belonging to these categories, however, presents the possibility of “coalition work”; Aileen Moreton-Robinson illustratively advocates the application of this principle to feminist politics by citing Audre Lorde, who locates in the diversity of women “necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic”. The hostility of the settler-colonial state both to Indigenous children and their mothers evidences the relevance of Hill Collins’ revision of Ruddick. I note also that there is evidence in Don’t Take Your Love to Town of positive identification with global Blackness; in one instance, for example, Ruby narrates after singing Kenny Rogers’ “Ruby Don’t Take Your Love to Town”, “I turned on a high black mama voice and patted my chest. ‘I took my love to town too many times!’ and burst out laughing”. Ruby’s singing with friends is concomitantly an expression of Indigenous identity: Gay Breyley notes the persistence in the memoir of country songs challenging dominant white-settler preoccupations, evincing her identity as a “countersubject” to these dominant national themes. Gay Breyley writes that through references to Indigenous reappropriations of music, and particularly country music, “Langford Ginibi’s Australia emerges as one of colonisation and decolonisation”.

128 The writings of Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks are applied to Aboriginal experience in both Huggins and Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism. Moreover, Kim Anderson and Memee Lavell-Harvard discusses the extensive commonalities among Indigenous cultures globally in Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global Resistance, Reclaiming and Recovery (Bradford: Demeter Press, 2014).
129 Bueskens, 42.
130 Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism, 65.
131 Ruby Langford Ginibi, Don’t Take Your Love to Town (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 254.
133 Ibid., 11.
I have referred to the extensive interference to which Indigenous peoples have been subject in the service of colonial and genocidal ends; the significance of interference in mothering to these ends is evidenced in Australia by the Stolen Generations. There is ample evidence throughout Don’t Take Your Love to Town of the dominant white-settler culture’s indifference, if not hostility, to the survival of Ruby’s children. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Physical survival is assumed for children who are white and middle class”.

While in Monkey Grip Nora’s sudden anxiety for her child’s survival at the end of the novel appears irrational, we should identify no such irrationality in Ruby on the evidence of her maternal testimony. In numerous instances Ruby goes to extraordinary lengths to preserve the lives of her children: in one instance when her daughter Pearl takes ill, she walks all night to take her to hospital and returns immediately to work in a taxi. Preservative love also demands resistance to institutional neglect: in another instance, the local doctor refuses to attend to her two-year-old firstborn, Billy, until morning, when he suffers seizures during the night. Her “mother’s instinct” warning her of potential death, Ruby takes him to the hospital fifty kilometres away in Kyogle, where he is found to have meningitis.

Ruby comments, “I don’t know if the doctor would have roused up and come if it had been a white child sick, but I wondered”. In another instance, a doctor leaves her uninformed of his diagnosis of her baby Ellen’s near-fatal gastroenteritis, and therefore of the potential for treatment. Such neglect is arguably in the dominant interest of a nation-state predicated on the colonisation and genocide of its First Peoples. We are accordingly left to wonder as to the causal relation of institutional neglect by the health system on the deaths of two of Ruby’s sons, and of the impact of institutional racism on the life chances of her children.

Langford Ginibi’s maternography assumes particular significance in light of Ruby’s undermining as a subject, and as a mother, by the dominant power structures. Its political significance is not left implicit, as in Monkey Grip. The commencement of her memoir is among the events of her life which she narrates, and in the final chapter, she writes that her

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135 Ginibi, 66.
136 Ibid.
manuscript is “almost ready for the publisher”. This metatextual dimension of the novel culminates in an explicit statement of intent on the final page:

I knew when I finished this book a weight would be lifted from my mind, not only because I could examine my own life from it and know who I was, but because it may help better the relationship between the Aboriginal and white people. That it might give some idea of the difficulty we have surviving between two cultures, that we are here and will always be here.

Throughout Langford Ginibi’s maternography her concern with her children’s survival is in evidence, in what she evokes as an interstitial cultural space. In her stated anticipation in of white readership, she acknowledges the positioning of the novel in this liminal space. Maternography thereby parallels maternal thinking in this context. Hill Collins enumerates as a second dimension of maternal thinking the negotiation of conflict between instilling cultural identity, and equipping children with the skills necessary to survive in a dominant culture which marginalises their own. Living and mothering “between two cultures” is accordingly a foremost theme of Don’t Take Your Love to Town. This is not least because Langford Ginibi accounts for her own Aboriginality—and that of her children—as mediated by whiteness. She refers to living in a “half black half white world” as compared to the people of the Nginti community, still living traditionally, whom she meets on a trip with her mother to Uluru. Such terms as “half-caste”, however, are no longer in currency due to their implication in a history of colonial genocide, not least State interference in Indigenous mothering. Relatedly, such terms are implicated in dominant colonial constructions of Indigeneity which have functioned to deny connection to culture. It is therefore relevant that the novel, too, inhabits an interstitial cultural space.

Liminality is a thus prevalent formal and thematic element of Don’t Take Your Love to Town, particularly with regard to Langford Ginibi’s overarching project of preservation and survival. There are instances in which compliance with colonial hegemony are part of this project. This compliance notwithstanding, the liminality of living between cultures is no

137 Ibid., 269.
138 Ibid.
139 Keller, 842.
140 Ginibi, 235.
safeguard from the liminality of Australia’s societal margins. This is in evidence when Ruby moves to Green Valley, the offer of social housing promising reprieve from the urban overcrowding to which she and her large family are subject in inner Sydney. She narrates: “These homes were the government’s policy on integration. It means putting us in among whites to see if we could live together, but because there were too few black families there in 1972 we felt very isolated from our friends and our culture”.141 It quickly becomes clear that the social housing policies to which Ruby and her family are subject are informed less by an objective of integration than of assimilation:

I found out that you were not supposed to create a nuisance or disturb any of the neighbours. You also weren’t able to have anyone come and stay without permission from the Commission. It reminded me of the missions. The rule was useless in our culture, where survival often depended on being able to stay with friends and relatives.142

This is a theme apparent throughout the book, particularly following Ruby’s move from country to city. In Green Valley, though, Ruby’s quest for her family’s survival has left her unable to reciprocate the generosity of kin offering assistance to this end. Ruby therefore ultimately rejects these oppressive conditions, despite their apparent security. She suggests their inimicality to survival, implying a eugenicist dimension to policies such as those applying to social housing: “The government policy of assimilation by absorption meant splitting up the Aboriginal communities, and I understand what the policy meant as I had four daughters and only one married an Aboriginal”.143 Given that two of her own partners are described in her first chapter as “gubbs” (whites), it might appear that Ruby has internalised this hegemonic ideology premised on the possibility of “breeding out the colour”.144 It is clear throughout, however, that it is neither white partners nor white blood that threaten cultural survival, but dominant-cultural interference with the cross-generational cultural transmission enacted through mothering. The injunction to assimilate is an important dimension of this interference. Ruby’s move back towards the city, preferring the company of kin to housing security, demonstrates the dilemmas and compromises attending maternal thinking as a racialised mother. Ultimately, connection to culture and kin trumps housing

141 Ibid., 174.
142 Ibid., 216.
143 Ibid., 176.
144 Ibid., 1.
security in its necessity for survival, as she seeks to balance dominant-cultural compliance and resistance in mothering her children: “I always had a houseful wherever I went. It was a means of survival”.145

Throughout the novel, Ruby’s living and mothering arrangements challenge a number of dominant assumptions of the women’s liberation movement. I have indicated Indigenous women’s resistance to the oppressive second-wave tendency to posit a universalised female subject. The assumption of maternity’s inherent oppressiveness is an example of such universalism, resulting in feminist claims on this basis having

little applicability for Koorie women, who live within families which are neither white nor nuclear, the strengths of which are seldom recognised by the dominant culture. This non-recognition often results in Koorie families being seen as aberrant, increasing the risk of welfare intervention, which serves to destroy rather than strengthen the family unit.146

Concomitant with the imposition of an oppressive universalism is the neglect of how Indigenous understandings of family might inform feminism. Rather, the significant current of antinatalism amongst white women of the second wave, for example, functioned to disavow the cultural significance of the maternal as a site of empowerment.147 Calling on women to abstain from maternity in disruption of the patriarchal order, moreover, neglected the feminist significance of Indigenous matrifocality. This matrifocality, defined by Miriam Johnson as one in which a woman’s identity as mother has primacy over that of wife, is apparent in Don’t Take Your Love to Town.148 Ruby is the only constant in her family, the fathers of her children—both “Koori” and “gubb”, as she introduces them—standing in contrast to her in their inconstancy.149 The matrifocality of a culture does not imply the

145 Ibid., 158.
149 Ginibi, 1.
absence or subordination of men. It is quite clear throughout the narrative how Ruby suffers at their hands, among the “women living hard because it seemed like the men loved you for a while and then more kids came along and the men drank and gambled and disappeared”. Instead, matrifocality is determined by the relative cultural power and structural centrality of the mother.

Ruby’s life narration is readily characterised as itself a “matrifocal narrative”. Andrea O’Reilly writes that “A matrifocal narrative, borrowing from Johnson’s terminology, is one in which the mother plays a role of cultural and social significance and in which motherhood is thematically elaborated and valued, and is structurally central to the plot”. This is not to claim that the maternal subject of the matrifocal narrative is relationally defined. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch, Brenda Daly and Maureen Reddy, O’Reilly writes that matrifocal narratives “begin with the mother in her own right” and “hold fast to a maternal perspective”. The opening chapter, “Names”, accordingly opens with Ruby’s explanation of her own: “I was named after my great Aunt Ruby”, evoking an image of her great aunt “In the mission photo”. Not until the final two paragraphs of this introduction does she introduce her nine biological children, born to four men. It is only after this that she characterises the narrative as concerning “How I got to be Ruby Langford. Originally from the Bundjalung people”. As Tim Rowse points out, given the evident matrifocality of kin networks represented in Don’t Take Your Love to Town, “it is significant that Ruby Langford’s most problematic relationship, as a child, was that with her mother”. The impact of maternal loss is foregrounded in “Names”, as the second paragraph begins: “When I was six, Mum left us. My sisters were four and two. The person who took over our mothering was an Aboriginal clever man, Uncle Ernie Ord”. As a child, Ruby bears

150 Ibid., 96.
151 Miriam Johnson in O’Reilly, 54.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid., 55.
154 Ibid., 6.
155 Ginibi, 1.
156 Ibid., 2.
157 Ibid.
159 Ginibi, 1.
witness to Uncle Ernie’s healing powers as a cleverman when he relieves their neighbour Mrs Breckenridge from an illness from which she “didn’t seem to be getting any better”.\textsuperscript{160} That Ruby characterises Uncle Ernie’s relationship to her and her sisters as that of “mother” reflects Ruddick’s theorisation of the mother as defined by practice, made all the more salient by the fact that Uncle Ernie is a man. In Langford Ginibi’s maternography, the definition of the mother by practice rather than biology is reflective of the role of the “othermother” or “auntie” in Indigenous and Black cultures globally.\textsuperscript{161} These terms refer to the custom by which mothering duties are shared among a community, particularly amongst women. They are signalled on the Acknowledgements page, where Langford Ginibi lists eleven “adopted children I collected along the way”.\textsuperscript{162}

As Sue Atkinson and Shurlee Swain write: “The concept of multiple mothering and the positioning of women who are not biological mothers in an active mothering role both confirms Koorie culture in a position of difference and enables the community to perpetuate that difference”.\textsuperscript{163} Multiple mothering in \textit{Don’t Take Your Love to Town} is shown to be indispensable both in the care of children and in the support of the mother herself. Such examples of sisterhood in mothering are shown to predate that of \textit{Monkey Grip}’s communal counterculture, given their longstanding institution as a cultural practice. This sisterhood informs Ruby’s experience of the maternal from her earliest years, living on the Box Ridge Mission at Coraki, where she was born. Ruby recalls in the opening pages of \textit{Don’t Take Your Love to Town} witnessing her mother giving birth in the middle of the night. Having noticed the child Ruby awake, one of the women assisting her in birth tells her, “go ngudam”—go to sleep.\textsuperscript{164} The memory is forgotten, but remembered anew forty years later, by which time Ruby has become a grandmother. This is perhaps due to the resonance of this episode with her later experiences of mothering with the support of other Aboriginal women. Mothering is thus a foremost site of the enactment of sisterhood in the memoir. Ruby meets Nerida in a segregated labour ward, for example, and their mutual support in maternity

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{161} I specify Indigenous and Black, given that “othermother” is a term introduced by Patricia Hill Collins which has been applied also to Indigenous maternalities, as in Kim Anderson, “Giving Life to the People: An Indigenous Ideology of Motherhood,” 765.
\textsuperscript{162} Ginibi, i.
\textsuperscript{163} Atkinson and Swain, 226.
\textsuperscript{164} Ginibi, 3.
secures their longstanding friendship. This is but one of a great many examples of the “powerful network of female support”—the “sisterhood of [their] own”—accounting in part for the diminished relevance of the women’s liberation movement to Indigenous women. With Gertrude, whom Ruby refers to as her “titi”—her sister—she and Nerida form an inseparable trio called “The Three Musketeers”. In the absence of Ruby’s mother, other women intervene on her behalf, assuming the maternal role with regard to educating Ruby on her reproductivity. Aunty Nell, for example, with whom she lives to attend school, explains menarche to her when she is thirteen: “You’ll be getting these every month now. They’re called monthlies, you have to wear pads and a belt. Now Ruby, you’re not to mess around with the boys, or you’ll get in the family way”. The statement would appear to echo the memoir’s title, making explicit the implications of “taking one’s love to town”. It is similarly the mother of her first partner Sam who explains to a pregnant Ruby, aged sixteen, how she will “know when to go to hospital”. Her visit to Ruby after the birth precedes Sam’s who, by Ruby’s account, demonstrates little interest in, or involvement in the care of, his firstborn child. This “network of support” participated in by Aboriginal women is exemplary of the second-wave feminist ideal of sisterhood, despite the lack of attention given to their example.

I have noted Moreton-Robinson’s account of the “autobiographical subject” as incommensurable with the subjectivities of Indigenous women. This implies a necessary deviation from established autobiographical norms, in their assumption of white, male, middle-class subjectivity. I note that the assumption of the liberal-humanist subject functions to exclude all mothers from the autobiographical, but applies to Aboriginal women in specific ways. Unaccounted for by the assumptions underpinning the genre of

165 Huggins, 75.
166 Eve Fesl in Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism, 173.
167 Ginibi, 138.
168 Ibid., 23.
169 Ibid., 57.
170 Atkinson and Swain, 225.
autobiography is the relationality of Aboriginal subjectivities, and the way in which the relationships determining them are “underpinned by connections with one’s country and the spirit world”. Engagement with the cultural spiritual plane does emerge as a dimension of Ruby’s motherhood, following the accidental death of her son Bill during an epileptic seizure. Having lost her daughter, Pearl, to a pedestrian accident only a few months earlier, Ruby takes to her bed, able to care neither for herself, nor her children. “Bill’s spirit had me locked in”, she narrates. Her two best friends, Gertrude and Nerida, send for her estranged mother. Though suffering from a mysterious temporary deafness, Ruby is apparently unsurprised that she is able to hear her mother speak. She too attributes Ruby’s condition to Bill’s lingering spirit. Langford Ginibi writes, “She told me to go to the grave and talk to him, and tell him to leave me alone. I knew if I didn’t get out of bed it would be the end of me”. As her mother instructs, she descends with Gertrude to the bathroom downstairs, the site of his death. To Bill’s spirit, she addresses a maternal reproach: “I called to my son in the lingo, I told him to leave me alone, ‘What about the other kids? I have to look after them too. Do you hear me, Bill? Then I said over and over the words my mother had told me.” In doing so Ruby enacts a “letting go” perhaps unanticipated by Ruddick’s theory. The situation of this episode within a lifelong practice of maternal thinking is unmistakable, given Ruby’s explicitness regarding the necessity of banishing of Bill’s spirit for the sake of her other children.

This is but one instance where Ruby’s mothering troubles traditional divisions underpinning dominant constructions of motherhood by patriarchy, and within feminism. As well as breaching the divide between the physical and spirit worlds, Ruby’s mothering troubles that between public and private spheres. This is particularly relevant in light of the enforced separation between Indigenous mothers and children by the settler-colonial state. Ruby’s epistolary communications with her son Nobby, variously incarcerated in Boys’ Homes and adult prisons, exemplify this manner of maternal thinking. Even more specific to Black women’s maternal thinking is Ruby’s activism on behalf of incarcerated Indigenous people,

174 Ginibi, 160.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ruddick, 106.
which is consistent with Hill Collins’ account of maternal thinking as informed by the hostility of the dominant culture to Black children. In one instance her then partner Lance, whom she praises for having “taken on” all her children, refuses to assume responsibility for them for the length of a weekend. Ruby is consequently prevented from travelling to Sydney to represent the Aborigines’ Progressive Association at the World Conference of Women. The loss of this opportunity exemplifies male interference with a kind of work specific to racialised women, that of maternal thinking interested in the preservation of children in a white-supremacist society. In a settler-colonial society hostile to the flourishing of her children, and to the bonds of Indigenous mothers and their children, activism on behalf of Indigenous people is an exercise of preservative love, therefore of mothering. As part of her activist work with the Aborigines’ Progressive Association she is appointed editor of their newsletter, *Churringa* (Message Stick), in one of several instances where her talent for writing finds acknowledgement. In this instance, however, she is unable to exercise her gift, abandoning her political work with the APA when Lance asks her on returning from a meeting, “why don’t you stay home and look after the kids instead of running around to meetings?” In enforcing a patriarchal approach to family and the care of children, Lance would not appear to entertain the notion that through her political advocacy Ruby is “looking after the kids”.

At no point does Ruby’s maternal experience correspond to the dominant image of maternal domesticity. Domesticity, after all, presupposes a domicile, and for many years of her earlier motherhood Ruby is homeless, raising her family in a car and in tents. Meanwhile, she performs hard physical labour alongside her partner Gordon. That she does so even while heavily pregnant evidences her instrumentality in supporting her family through remunerated work. During a stint apple-picking with her husband Peter, Ruby narrates “I was like a permanent Eve, eating the apple and having babies and walking around the orchard in a daze of good smells and backache”. I have established the biblical image of the snake’s association with the anti-maternal Eve in my analysis of “The Drover’s Wife”, and it has arisen in other chapters as an image of the anti-maternal. It bespeaks the dominant-cultural

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178 Ginibi, 127.
179 Ibid., 117.
180 Ibid., 176.
assumption of Indigenous women’s inherent anti-maternity that she is able to embody the paradoxical image of the pregnant Eve in Eden. In one earlier instance, a pregnant Ruby is frightened by a snake, which she immediately sets out to kill to protect her children. This recalls the threat to the Drover’s Wife represented by this persistent image of the anti-maternal. That this becomes a humorous moment when the “snake” reveals itself to be a goanna might imply the absence of threat, in light of the challenge to the national institution of motherhood she represents in her pregnancy. Pat O’Shane relatedly observes, in an article for *Refactory Girl*, that “Aboriginality provided legal justification for the denial of Aboriginal women’s right to nurture and grow their own children and those of her community”.182 It is worth noting, however, that though Aboriginal women were “declared… unfit as mothers in their own right” there was no question as to Aboriginal women’s suitability to perform maternal work in the capacity of domestic servants for white households.183 In a yarning circle documented by Boni Robertson et al., a woman referred to as Connie notes, “We was allowed to take care of their kids but we wasn’t allowed to keep our own”.184 Such histories as those of Aboriginal women in domestic service account for the limited relevance of feminist critiques of the institutional family that universalise the breadwinner model.185 Belying such assumptions, Ruby’s male partners frequently abscond—sometimes for long periods of time, if not permanently—making an irrelevance of the division between “men’s” and “women’s” work in Ruby’s experience. Ruby’s “double burden” of labour has been typical of Indigenous women, the distinction between gendered “public” and “private” spheres not subject to the same policing as in the experience of white women, as evidenced by Ruby’s frequent labouring with children close at hand.186 This was long before Australian women entered *en masse* into the paid work force and found

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182 Pat O’Shane, quoted in Robertson, Demosthenous, and Demosthenous, 40.
183 Ibid.
184 “Connie”, quoted in ibid.
185 Jackie Huggins writes that “while many white women have won their fight to get out of their kitchens, Black women are still trying to get in, but this time tailored to our own specifications”. See: Jackie Huggins, ““Firing On in the Mind”: Aboriginal Women Domestic Servants in the Inter-War Years,” in *Sister Girl: The Writings of Aboriginal Activist and Historian Jackie Huggins*, ed. Jackie Huggins (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1998), 23. This corresponds with with bell hooks’ account of Black women’s specific and historically-informed relationships with the domestic sphere in “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,” in *Maternal Theory.*
186 Bueskens, 11.
themselves subject to the “role squeeze” from which Australian mothers continue to suffer today.187

Vulnerability to domestic abuse, though, has always been a point of commonality between Indigenous and white women. The increased vulnerability of Indigenous women and women who are mothers to domestic abuse is well established, however, situating Ruby at a dangerous intersection. Both Ruby’s maternity and her Aboriginality underpin her ambivalence regarding her subjection to domestic abuse, once again demonstrating the specificity of her subject position as an Aboriginal mother. In response to Sam’s sustained infidelity, for example, Ruby attests, “For some reason I had to defend Sam. I was still angry with him, but I wanted to make it work. I wanted the kids to have a father”.188 The same ambivalence compromises her physical safety, though, with later partners such as Lance. It is with Lance particularly that Ruby refers to “fighting”,189 reflecting women’s common lack of accurate language with which to bear witness to domestic abuse before the term “domestic violence” began to circulate in the 1970s “as a counter-discourse in opposition to contemporary understandings of the problem which framed domestic violence as a failure of women, or the aberrant conduct of individual men”.190 This is traceable in large part to women’s liberationists’ insistence on the political significance of the personal.191 The 1970s saw significantly greater public recognition of domestic abuse, with a Royal Commission on Human Relationships taking place between 1974 and 1977. 1974 also saw the implementation of change on a grassroots level, with Anne Summers establishing the first feminist women’s shelter, ELSIE, which saw a proliferation of such shelters in response to the need signalled by the number of women accessing the service.192 The impact of the refuge movement is evidenced in the younger generation in Don’t Take Your Love to Town. Ruby’s daughter Aileen, herself a young mother, is described at one point as living in a women’s refuge. This is mentioned after Aileen’s partner, Dennis Dean, has already been forgiven.

187 Ibid., 17.
188 Ginibi, 68.
189 Ibid., 120.
191 Ibid., 83.
192 Ibid., 85.
This follows an incident in which Ruby physically throws him from the house shouting, “I didn’t raise my daughter to be bashed and kicked by bastards like you”. She narrates immediately after, however, that “He really wasn’t such a bad bloke”, suggesting her own internalisation of dominant patriarchal discourses on domestic abuse.\textsuperscript{193} Though Aileen differs from Ruby in that she has stood to benefit from elements of the women’s liberation movement, culturally appropriate services remained a distant prospect. In the findings of the Royal Commission “the particular experiences of Indigenous women were downplayed”, standing to perpetuate Indigenous women’s particular vulnerability to the cycle of violence Ruby narrates in \textit{Don’t Take Your Love to Town}.\textsuperscript{194}

This is a vulnerability compounded by the specific vulnerability of Indigenous men, and it is in light of this that we should understand Ruby’s ambivalence. Totalising accounts of male dominance underpinning much of the women’s liberation movement neglected the greater vulnerability of Indigenous men than women to unemployment, incarceration, and early death.\textsuperscript{195} Huggins asserts in light of this that no feminist movement promises liberation for Aboriginal women if it involves compromising their communities through gender-based divisions which compromise Aboriginal men.\textsuperscript{196} Huggins warns, moreover, against feminism compromising activism on behalf of Indigenous peoples: “we have too many other barramundis to fry which concern our whole community and not just half”.\textsuperscript{197} We can thus contextualise Ruby’s response to the evidence of her son Nobby’s violence against his girlfriend, which is limited to an expression of “disgust”: “I didn’t bring any of my sons up to be women bashers. They’d seen me with black eyes and bruises and knew I didn’t approve of this”.\textsuperscript{198} What almost appears an apologism should be contextualised within Nobby’s history of incarceration since childhood, however: to encourage his girlfriend to seek redress through the police and the judiciary for this instance of gender-based oppression would involve complicity in his oppression at the hands of the settler-colonial state. When Lance is arrested and charged for his final act of violence against Ruby the judge asks her, “What do you want

\textsuperscript{193} Ginibi, 206.
\textsuperscript{194} Arrow, 91.
\textsuperscript{196} Huggins, 71.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{198} Ginibi, 179.
me to do with him?” 199 She replies, “I don’t want to see him in gaol, but I don’t want him to ever come near me or the kids again. I’ve had enough of bashings.” 200 The judge orders what today would be referred to in New South Wales as an Apprehended Violence Order, an “apprehended violence” substantiated by the fact that Lance attempts afterwards to intimidate Ruby by circling their home in his car for a week afterwards. His persistence suggests the dilemmas attending Indigenous women’s experience of violence. Eleanor Hogan notes, however, “the lack of politicisation of her daughters’ problems in contrast to her sons” 201. This she attributes to the “emerging topicality” of the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. 202 As with the Bringing Them Home report, however, which sought to address the multigenerational removal of Aboriginal children, the evidence of its limited impact remains today.

I propose we appreciate the role Ruby Langford Ginibi assumes as autobiographical writer and subject in light of these nuanced gender relations. I have referred to the traditional matrifocality of Indigenous societies, which has persisted in part due to the legacy of colonialism, and which has seen more Indigenous women become Elders in light of the relatively short lifespan of Indigenous men. 203 I suggest that Ruby’s accession to her senior role as Ruby Langford Ginibi, Bunjalung author, bears consideration in light of her maternality. As Atkinson and Swain write, “traditional patterns of mothering” partake in a powerful role in the broader Indigenous community, and it is in the extended family “in which resistance to assimilation is maintained and Koorie identity is nurtured”. 204 In view of the implications of Hill Collins’ account of Black women’s maternal thinking, Don’t Take Your Love to Town reveals itself as an enactment of Indigenous maternality. Hogan situates the narrative in the genre of the testimonio, which “represents an affirmation of the individual subject, even of individual growth and transformation, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalisation, oppression, and struggle”. 205 The term originates in

199 Ibid., 205.
200 Ibid.
202 Ibid.
203 Atkinson and Swain, 223.
204 Ibid., 224.
205 Hogan, 69.
Latin America, accounting for the witness-bearing role of the “plural subject” responding to social injustice as both an individual, and as part of a collective political identity. Unlike the conventional “heroic” autobiographical subject, moreover, the testimonio does not invite the reader’s personal identification with the narrator. It insists, rather, on the narratorial subjectivity as incommensurable with that of readers outside the political category for which it bears witness. Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo) has nevertheless attributed the popularity of Langford Ginibi’s life narrative to its “individualistic focus”, undermining its political significance as an Indigenous disruption of conventional autobiography. His own background, arguably consisting in an appropriation of Aboriginality, is relevant in light of his criticisms of Aboriginal memoirs as partaking predominantly in a white “battler” genre. I would contest Johnson’s claims regardless, on the basis of the narrative’s generic embodiment of maternography and testimonio.

As I have shown in this thesis, the individual subjectivity of the mother has been suppressed by the dominant culture, while the social significance of her role continues to be disavowed. The culmination of the maternography, with Ruby’s readiness to submit her manuscript to a publisher, suggests the status of her life writing as an act of communal nurturance concomitant with the maternal “self-empowerment” Alison Bailey counts as part of Black women’s maternal thinking, in addition to those principles enumerated by Patricia Hill Collins which I have outlined throughout this chapter. We might in this light understand Ruby’s inspiration by the cleverwomen Mary Cowlan and Aunt Millie Boyd on her return to Bundjalung Country, as “people who [carry] the culture and [keep] it strong” through their particular gifts (such as Cowlan’s ability to “talk to the wind”). Ruby is explicit in her narration regarding the political significance she identifies in this, which Janine Little

207 Sommer, 108.
208 Colin Johnson in Hogan, 66.
209 Keller, 845.
210 Ginibi, 157.
Nyoongah characterises as a kind of “political magic”.\textsuperscript{211} We might understand Ruby to enact this “carrying” through her own “magic”, as relief from the intensive demands of maternal care frees her at last to exercise her gift for writing, enacting a new form of care for the continent’s Indigenous peoples and their descendants.

The paradox attending Indigenous motherhood as represented in \textit{Don’t Take Your Love to Town} has been articulated by Hill Collins, who asserts the status of the maternal as a site of empowerment for Black mothers globally, while warning of the implications when Black mothers “carry their communities”.\textsuperscript{212} Of Indigenous women globally, Kim Anderson writes that

\begin{quote}
Taken uncritically, ideologies of Native mothering run the risk of heaping more responsibility on already overburdened mothers. With so many native mothers struggling to raise their children in poverty or in situations of abuse or neglect, we must question the logic of asking mothers to "carry the nations".\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

That the leadership role of the clever(wo)man has been associated with the maternal from the beginning of the narrative and of Ruby’s life, initially embodied in Uncle Ernie Ord, suggests hope for the future in this regard. As Rich writes, mothers “need selves of [their] own to return to” when their children are grown, and the intensive stage of maternal work is over.\textsuperscript{214} We might accordingly understand the significance of Ruby’s taking up residence, in the narrative’s final stages, at “an Aboriginal hostel in Granville for people who’d raised their families and didn’t want to become live-in baby-sitters for their kids… the first of its kind.”\textsuperscript{215} As was the case with the women’s shelters of the women’s liberation movement, its existence suggests its response to a need amongst elder Aboriginal people. It is Ruby’s retreat from constant care of others that enables her to bear witness to the hardships of an Aboriginal mother, and to the evidence of ongoing colonial oppression as it affects her, her children, and

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\textsuperscript{211} Janine Little Nyoongah, “Australian Cleverwoman: An Aboriginal Writer Beats the Blues,” \textit{Race & Class} 40, no. 1 (1998): 42. I note that Little Nyoongah assumed the latter of her surnames after her marriage to Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson), whose adoption of the surname Nyoongah was hotly contested as an appropriation by members of Nyoongah/Nyungar communities in the south-east of Western Australia.\textsuperscript{212} Hill Collins in Anderson, 775.\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 37.\textsuperscript{215} Rowse, 17.
\end{flushright}
her communities. As Ruby narrates, “That story of mine is not only mine. It’s every Aboriginal woman’s story that has ever had children to raise—I’m only one. So it’s not only my story, it’s their story as well.” It represents no detraction from this that the memoir celebrates the resilience of an Aboriginal mother against the prohibitions of the dominant culture against Indigenous maternalities. Rather, Langford Ginibi’s subject matter suggests the importance of a matrifocal standpoint in its representation.

While Joy Hooton characterises Australian women’s writing as anti-teleological, Tim Rowse points out how Langford Ginibi’s explicitness of intent contradicts this claim. Monkey Grip may lack a conventional teleology in this way, privileging a form mimetic of maternal subjectivity, but Langford Ginibi writes towards the assertion of herself as a subject within a matrifocal narrative. Both narratives resist institutional motherhood’s undermining of maternal subjectivity by foregrounding the maternal subject. The respective texts’ formal and thematic contrasts demonstrate, however, the incommensurability of the maternal subjectivities they represent. While Garner’s Nora is availed of significant independence and agency, her novel is a landmark in its assertion of maternal subjectivity as a basis for literature. Meanwhile, Langford Ginibi’s narrative embodies a maternal voice a further eleven years belated—that of the Aboriginal woman, multiply and differently subject to oppression on the axes of gender, race, and class. Both maternal narrators are subject to an institution of motherhood that is informed by the settler-colonial basis of the nation. This latter functions to regulate maternality in the interest of its own reproduction, whether by inducing white women to reproduce the dominant culture through the maternal, or through the genocidal limitation of cultural transmission between generations through state interference in Aboriginal women’s mothering. Against this institution, Garner and Langford Ginibi demonstrate what this institution has sought to deny: that mothers think, and therefore that they may resist their construction according to colonialist patriarchy. Despite the failures of second-wave feminism, its revaluation of the first-person perspective not only of women, but of mothers, has important implications for maternal citizenship in Australian history. The

216 Ginibi, 263.
217 Larissa Behrendt discusses these prohibitions in Robertson, Demosthenous, and Demosthenous, 39.
218 Rowse, 17.
ensuing backlash, however, promised little in the way of liberating women of any race from the intersecting oppressions attending their varied subject positions.

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4. Abject Relations

Whatever hope the women’s liberation movement presented for Australian women and mothers, by 2002 John Howard had situated the nation firmly in “the post-feminist stage of debate”.¹ Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007, Howard was hardly noteworthy for his analysis of the state of the feminist movement, as Sarah Maddison and Andrew Merrindahl note.² The Howard government’s decisive role in the nation’s history is difficult to understate for many reasons, and I will refer to a number of examples throughout this chapter. Among the most significant of the Howard government’s legacies, however, is the reinforcement of traditionalism in the Australian family. Howard’s discourse regarding the Australian family was strikingly effective in its mobilisation of feminist and post-feminist language in the interest of the profoundly anti-feminist goals of pronatalism and traditionalism in the Australian family.³ Though an unstable and contested concept, I will discuss postfeminism as a dominant ideology of the period, the ideological vestiges of which endure in the present. I suggest in line with Lisa Baraitser that postfeminism might be understood, not according to its opposition to feminism, but by a certain intimacy with it. This, given its predication on the view that the goals of the women’s liberation movement had been achieved and, perhaps more importantly, that many of its goals were not worth achieving to begin with.⁴ I argue that the individualist emphasis on choice and agency rather than the operation of patriarchal and related power structures characterises both postfeminism and the third-wave feminist movement. This aligns both postfeminism and the dominant current of third-wave feminism with the neoliberalism that ascended concomitantly with them both in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is an ideological compatibility mobilised by Howard and his Liberal-National Coalition government with significant and enduring implications for maternal citizenship in Australia.

² Ibid.
I have discussed the predication of Australian citizenship on the assumption of a liberal-individualist subjectivity entirely anathema to the maternal. The rights and freedoms secured for women by second-wave feminism were qualified by this basis of national citizenship. Not only did the liberal-individualist model of citizenship remain intact, it arguably assumed an elevated importance under neoliberalism in the Global North. The entry of middle-class women “en masse” into the workforce brought to light the difficulty of reconciling the demands of the respective roles of worker and mother. Fuelling the “failing feminism narrative” which came to prevalence in the 1990s, the apparent irreconcilability of mothers’ “dual identities” ensured popular support for policies such as the 2004 Baby Bonus in lieu of paid parental leave, a preference functioning to emphasise women’s domestic and maternal roles. This was at the expense of the viability of undertaking both mothering and paid work outside the home, as women’s caring roles remained naturalised and unrecognised for their public significance. Such is the reality for women, particularly mothers, under a paradigm Julie Stephens refers to as the “postmaternal”, produced by the confluence of postfeminism and neoliberalism in “advanced democracies” such as Australia. Characterised by the relegation of mothering to the private sphere, postmaternalism implies the abandonment of the maternal as an index of citizenship in favour of the “public” business of economic production. It is based on a neoliberal fiction of “unencumbered” self-sufficiency antithetical to “maternal forms of selfhood”. This, writes Stephens, has had “profound social and political consequences”, in addition to “a toll on the personal lives of women”. Such a toll was similarly exacted by a government committed to an ideal in which mothering, as well as the mother, are confined to the private sphere, in keeping with an unapologetic traditionalism regarding the Australian family. I suggest that the postmaternal, like the renewed traditionalism in Howard’s Australia, is predicated on an abjection of the maternal from public life, which leaves mothers vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and isolation. This is

6 Ibid., 167.
7 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 2.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.

In *The Slap*, John Howard’s Australia is embodied in the novel’s characters. Tsiolkas himself has situated the beginning of the novel after the 2001 “Tampa election” and before Howard’s loss of the prime-ministership. The very catalyst from which the novel takes its title occurs at a barbecue, evocative of the “relaxed and comfortable” suburban existence promoted by the Howard government. The attendees, however, are not necessarily the Australians for whom Howard imagines such a lifestyle. In this period of Australian history, the matter of work-family balance—a gender-neutralised question of maternal citizenship—has been referred to by the prime minister as a “barbecue stopper”. In this case, however, what stops an already-tense barbecue is the titular “slap”, which functions to expose deep fault lines underlying the diverse and loose-knit community of characters present. A white nuclear family, Rosie, Gary, and their son, Hugo, constitute a distinct minority in this microcosm of multicultural, cosmopolitan Australia. It is Hugo whom the Greek-Australian Harry—brother and brother-in-law respectively to hosts Hector and Aisha—“slaps” in response to an uncontrolled tantrum over a game of backyard cricket. Rosie and Gary react with rage and distress, calling Harry a “monster” and resolving to press charges. The matter is taken to court, where the case is ultimately dismissed. Effectively disgraced when the characters’ loyalties ultimately fall on Harry’s side due to family ties, Rosie and Gary move away with their son from Melbourne’s inner north to Daylesford, an alternative community in rural Victoria.

Discussions of the novel and the subsequent ABC miniseries have frequently concerned themselves with the ethics of slapping a child; the tagline of the miniseries asks, “Whose side are you on?” I contend, however, that to focus on this is to miss the central ambiguity represented by the act, the responses to which bespeak characters’ respective places in the

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Australian society of the Howard years. Over the course of the novel, moreover, the ambiguity of the act’s moral status is revealed through the narratives of the characters themselves. Rosie’s quest for redress is evidently of a significance far exceeding the “slap”, suggested by her excitably vengeful attitude in her pursuit of Harry. Through Aisha’s narration, we learn that unbeknownst to Rosie, Harry has a history of serious domestic abuse against his wife Sandi. Aisha arguably betrays her best friend Rosie in concealing this under pressure to maintain family loyalty, and arguably enables further violence on Harry’s part in the future. But as Jessica Gildersleeve points out, “The shifting perspective and voice of the novel’s structure means that the text refuses to provide a site of neutral or objective justice”. She moreover advances the idea that the “slap” “is perhaps most importantly seen as a consequence of a violent history and a cultural tension particular to twenty-first century Australia”. Furthermore, as Andrew McCann writes, it is “exceptional only by virtue of its visibility” in a narrative replete with contained and sublimated violence. The central maternal figure of the “slap”, Rosie is both subject and object of this quotidian violence. Though one among numerous maternal characters in the novel, Rosie’s maternality emerges as central to the plot’s progression, and constitutes a complex site where both privilege and oppression are lived and enacted. Andrea O’Reilly accounts for a specific dimension of structural, gendered oppression experienced by mothers but, given the idealisation and naturalisation upholding motherhood under patriarchy, maternal status may nonetheless be weaponised by middle-class white women such as Rosie. As we find in The Slap, though, success in doing so is by no means guaranteed. Rosie’s response to the “slap” exemplifies an attempt to mobilise her maternal status in combination with her whiteness, however un successfully, against Harry as an embodiment of the “immigrant Other”. The culturally ambivalent status of Rosie’s maternality aligns it with the “slap” itself in its indeterminate significance. For despite the advantage Rosie seeks to secure through her maternal status, her maternality emerges throughout the novel as a site of white, middle-class, and self-entitled

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Andrew McCann, Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique: Politics, Obscenity, Celebrity (London: Anthem Press, 2015), 86.
21 Ibid., 14.
22 Gildersleeve, 87.
ressentiment. This is concomitant with maternity’s emergence, however, as a site of gendered oppression. I will show that this is an oppression refigured, as Stephens suggests, for a postmaternal age.

I therefore contend that Rosie’s maternality is ambivalent with regard to these power structures. Though a site of oppression, it is also the means by which she seeks to deploy white privilege against racialised others. In twenty-first century Australia, with its cosmopolitan multiculturalism as represented in the novel, Rosie’s whiteness alone no longer promises automatic advantage over ethnically and culturally diverse others—neither for her, nor her son. This is particularly apparent in her conflict with Harry, whose migrant ancestry and working-class background have not precluded his family from economic prosperity, particularly compared to Rosie’s small family, which is reliant on Gary’s erratic income as a tradesman. Rosie however embodies the “Aryan” ideal of the “archetypal blonde Australian” which, with her singular devotion to mothering Hugo, suggests a Howard-era ideal of femininity. She also embodies the repressed aspects of this feminine ideal. Petra Bueskens shows how the difficulty of reconciling paid work and mothering encourages the financial dependence implicit in the breadwinner model, a reality for many mothers that the social policies of successive governments have done little to alleviate. Particularly in the Howard era, the breadwinner model reinforced a patriarchal and heteronormative ideal of the Australian family. This is not to say that Labor governments that followed were at particular pains to counter this through their own social policies, as I will later explain.

Also demonstrated by Rosie’s familial situation is the anachronism of the breadwinner model in view of both the dominant ideal of home ownership and the economic realities of the twenty-first century. Certainly, Gary’s income cannot support Rosie’s aspirations towards a house in Melbourne’s inner north, a setting to which she has become accustomed and where she feels entitled to live. “It was unfair”, she narrates, considering her inability to afford a

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23 McCann uses Richard Sennett’s term “ressentiment” to account for Rosie and Gary’s sense of white disenfranchisement in McCann, 103.
24 Gildersleeve, 84.
25 McCann, 100.
26 Petra Vueksens introduces this central concern in “Modern Motherhood”, 13.
of their conflict. Significant here is Harry’s Greek-Australian identity, given John Howard’s profession of “dislike” for “hyphenated Austrians” in the wake of the 2004 Cronulla Riots. To Rosie and Gary’s chagrin, these “hyphenated Austrians” nevertheless thrive in the Australia of The Slap. Rosie and Gary, on the other hand, embody the purportedly “forgotten” Australians in whom the Howard government encouraged a sense of grievance in response to the flourishing of multicultural Australia.

The latter is represented in the novel by Harry, Hector, and their multi-ethnic and multicultural extended family. It is also represented by Islamic converts Bilal and Shamira, Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian respectively, whose friendship Rosie seeks in the aftermath of the barbecue. It is in the context of Rosie’s subjective experience of “white abjection” that the disintegration of her friendship with Shamira is of central significance to the novel.

Here Tsiolkas’ “habitual interest in abjection” is renewed to reflect Howard-era anxieties. In contrast to Tsiolkas’ earlier works though, the abject is neither the queer nor the ethnic other, but the Anglo-Celtic Australian. Rosie and Gary embody a dominant-cultural anxiety concerning a sense of what Ghassan Hage has termed “Anglo decline”, in response to the challenge posed by multiculturalism to the central position occupied by the Anglo-Celtic white Australian. McCann suggests accordingly that the events following the slap allegorise Anglo-Australian anxieties, as they inform relationships between characters who metonymise broader identificatory categories.

Rosie and Gary are no exception to this, in their subjection to a belated consciousness of their own whiteness. As McCann writes, “The rejection of middle or Anglo-Australia marks a break (a slap) that seems to gesture toward a future that might be able to wriggle free of its debilitating entanglements with Australia’s colonial past”. He also suggests that the novel exposes the fragility of multicultural

28 Heard, 202.
29 Dyrenfurth, 217.
30 McCann, 107.
31 Ibid., 118.
32 Ibid., 85.
33 Ibid., 105.
34 Gildersleeve, 82-92.
35 McCann, 105.
coexistence in Howard’s Australia.\(^\text{36}\) In twenty-first century Melbourne, however, this fragility does not promise to privilege whiteness, and this is apparent in the ultimate social fate of Gary and Rosie. Their social networks collapse following the “slap”, and they ultimately appear to accept the inaccessibility of Melbourne’s housing market to a family of their income bracket. The consequence for Gary and Rosie arguably constitutes a kind of expulsion from the city, one which spatialises their social abjection. This is not least due to a racial abjection from which white Australia has historically been exempted, and against which it is accustomed since colonisation to being subject rather than object.\(^\text{37}\) In this light we might understand Harry’s invocation of “revenge”, which he trusts will be exacted by the future.\(^\text{38}\) The way in which Harry characterises Rosie and Gary can itself be read as vengeful, in that he draws on pathologising language evincing that of the eugenics movement; McCann notes Harry’s characterisation of the couple as “vermin” to be sterilised.\(^\text{39}\) In Harry, McCann identifies “a familiar sort of bourgeois aggression directed at an apparently feckless working class” which is compounded by an historically-informed “racialised intensity”.\(^\text{40}\) Rosie and Gary pursue redress in response to their new status as “waste products of demographic and economic changes that have left them in its wake”.\(^\text{41}\)

It is through her maternality that Rosie pursues redress for her subjection to this new demographic reality, pursuing Harry as an embodiment of her subjective disinheritance. After the conclusion of the case, she lies to Hugo regarding the outcome, “prompting” Gary, “Isn’t that right, Daddy? … The bad man has been punished, hasn’t he?” Oh, he must understand. He must understand that she was doing this for her son”.\(^\text{42}\) To believe this, however, is to reconcile the notion with her admission less than twenty pages earlier that Hugo “was her life, her whole life”.\(^\text{43}\) The sentiment indicates a very real site of disenfranchisement, upon which I will later expand. It nevertheless fuels what Lucy Hopkins refers to as a kind of

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 99.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
\(^{38}\) Christos Tsiolkas, quoted in ibid., 107.
\(^{39}\) Andrew McCann, “In the Suburbs of World Literature: From Dead Europe to The Slap,” in Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique, ed. Andrew McCann, Politics, Obscenity, Celebrity (Anthem Press, 2015), 107.
\(^{40}\) McCann, 107.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Tsiolkas, The Slap, 281.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 263
“borderwork” on Rosie’s part.\textsuperscript{44} Hopkins uses the word “borderwork” to refer to “a policing of boundaries”, accounting for the way in which Rosie mobilises the construct of childhood against Harry to protect her son from “difficult knowledge”.\textsuperscript{45} Cultural theorists Cristyn Davis and Kerry Robinson have employed this latter term to account for knowledge withheld from children to maintain the construct of childhood innocence, and in this case the difficult knowledge is the ambiguity and ambivalence surrounding the “slap”.\textsuperscript{46} I suggest that this “borderwork” parallels that enacted in the interest of “paranoid nationalism”, another concept advanced by Hage which McCann discusses in relation to \textit{The Slap}.\textsuperscript{47} It is this paranoid nationalism which underpins the “borderwork” memorably enacted by the Howard government in its management of the Tampa Crisis, inaugurating Australia’s notoriously punitive offshore detention system. It would also be enacted by a section of the Australian people during the 2004 Cronulla Riots, which Jon Stratton characterises as an attempt to police the border as represented by the beach in such a way as to replicate Australia’s immigration policy.\textsuperscript{48} The riots evidenced popular support for Australian government policies based in paranoid nationalism. This popular support was, nonetheless, underpinned by widespread economic disenfranchisement amongst rural and outer-suburban populations in particular.\textsuperscript{49} As McCann writes, “At stake is the way in which successive Australian governments have used notions of race and, relatedly, anxieties about immigration to manage the rapid neoliberal rationalisation of the economy”.\textsuperscript{50} I suggest that the difficult knowledge against which Rosie conducts her borderwork suggests her own resistance to such knowledge, the knowledge that her privileged citizenship as a white Australian may no longer be assured. The according suggestion is Hugo’s entitlement to believe that it is.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 180.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ghassan Hage, quoted in McCann, 102.
\textsuperscript{49} McCann, 102.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
I have alluded in the previous chapter to the “liabilities” of maternal thinking which Ruddick identifies. This includes the “maternal inauthenticity” by which maternal thinking is likely to operate in the service of the dominant culture, in keeping with dominant expectations placed on the mother. Ruddick characterises maternal thinking as beset by conflicts of interest; for example, “training” the child for social acceptability may often conflict with the maternal goals of “preservation” and “growth” for the child. In her refusal to acknowledge Hugo’s consistently poor behaviour, and her insistence on their unproblematised victimhood as a family, Rosie demonstrates “egocentric” and “frantic” maternal thinking. This corresponds, Ruddick writes, with the stifling effect on maternal autonomy of “competitive and hierarchical” societies. Rosie’s frustrated autonomy is evident in her “intensity of identification” with Hugo—purportedly in his interest—as she pursues Harry. These are elements of maternal practice that contravene attentive and preservative love, which Ruddick identifies as the goal of maternal thinking. Rosie’s intense identification with Hugo accordingly runs counter to the goal of attentive and preservative love in that she “uses” Hugo to pursue her own ends. These ends include an attempt to restore a sense of enfranchisement through favour at the hands of state institutions, and to maintain her sense of identity as a “good mother”. These matters are interrelated not least because her opponents—Harry, his brother Hector, and their father Manolis particularly—repeatedly condemn her maternal practices. All three profess revulsion in response to her breastfeeding, frequently in misogynistic terms. For example, in a moment of aggression towards Rosie, Harry refers—through the novel’s free indirect discourse—to “that little faggot you are breeding on your tittie there… He just wanted to belt the silly cow”. Manolis mirrors this aggression to both the subject and object of mothering in the new millennium, “monsters, they had bred monsters”, once again employing the language of abjection against the same society which has abjected him as the “immigrant Other”. Having referred to her twice as a “poutana”—a whore—in his narration immediately beforehand, Manolis explicitly refers to Rosie as a

51 Sara Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking,” in Maternal Theory, 103.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 100.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 116.
56 Ibid., 106.
57 Ibid.
58 Tsiolkas, The Slap, 129.
59 Gildersleeve, 90.
60 Ibid., 87.
“terrible mother” in conversation with Aisha, regarding the case and her division of loyalties between her husband’s family and her longstanding friend.\(^\text{61}\) Clearly Rosie is subject to a gendered abjection throughout the novel, which appears rather inextricable from her maternity. As I will show, however, Harry and his family are not the primary perpetrators of misogyny in Rosie’s life. Ruddick is careful to emphasise “degenerative” forms of maternal thought and practice as commensurate with the oppressiveness of a mother’s situation.\(^\text{62}\) I hold that Rosie is subject less to a genuine racial abjection than to a gendered and maternal abjection.

Ruddick argues that, in proportion with the oppressiveness of a mother’s circumstances, maternal thinking may become “possessive, frantic, and cruel” and, importantly, singularly interested in the survival and flourishing of one’s own children at the expense of others.\(^\text{63}\) I have suggested in line with McCann that Rosie’s “infantilising and overly protective” maternal practices suggest her sense of dispossession from which she seeks to defend her child.\(^\text{64}\) As in Chapter 2, the child once again emerges as a political signifier of futurity, but this time as a site of anxiety regarding “Anglo decline”.\(^\text{65}\) The extent that this is a “decline”, of course, is a function of whiteness no longer assuring privilege in relation to racialised others such as Harry. Another important example is Bilal, an Aboriginal man who, with Shamira, demonstrates greater prosperity than Gary and Rosie by buying a house in the middle-ring suburb of Thomastown. While modest, Rosie knows that it is far beyond what she and Gary can afford for themselves. Importantly, the “real” —if figurative— “slap” comes from Bilal.\(^\text{66}\) This time, it is levelled at Rosie herself, when Bilal banishes—abjects her—from his family’s life. This puts an end to Rosie and Shamira’s tenuous alliance in the wake of the “slap” administered by Harry. Their nascent friendship is significant given the correspondence between them both, which relates importantly to Rosie’s maternal identity. The following is narrated from Anouk’s perspective:

as an adolescent Rosie had been reckless and harsh; it came from having a

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\(^{62}\) Ruddick, 101.  
\(^{63}\) Ibid., 100.  
\(^{64}\) McCann, 100.  
\(^{66}\) Christos Tsiolkas in McCann, 101.
puritan mother and an alcoholic loser dad. It had made her suspicious of pieties. But since meeting Gary and especially since having Hugo she had slowly taken on a New Age moral code that retained elements of her mother’s religious ethics but which resisted the hardline dictates of her Calvinism.67

Rosie and Shamira have in common that, in their respective ways, they have “shed their pasts and grown new, vastly different skins”.68 While Shamira has achieved this through her conversion to Islam, made visible by her hijab, Rosie has done so by assuming an “inauthentic” maternal identity that embodies the values of the dominant culture.69

Rosie’s upholding of the dominant culture through “maternal inauthenticity” is significant in light of the “real” slap.70 Ruddick implies the social rewards of a mother’s “collu[sion] in her own subordination”, whatever the consequences to herself, to her children, and indeed to the children of others.71 It becomes apparent over the course of the novel that Rosie’s efforts to embody the “good” middle-class “earth mother” constitute a reaction to an abjected past reputation for sexual promiscuity.72 This accounts for much of the impact of Bilal’s “slap”. “She was what Bilal inferred. He had always seen through her, like her mother had. You’re dirty, Rosalind. You’re just trash, Rosalind, just rubbish. You’re a slut.”73 The terms in which Rosie’s mother and Bilal characterise Rosie are importantly evocative of the abjection she seeks to escape. The following line leaves no ambiguity regarding the function of Rosie’s recourse to maternal inauthenticity: “No. She was a mother”.74 That Rosie is a mother, however, does not redeem her from her status as an embodiment of a former life of alcoholism and violence that Bilal, in a very different context, has left behind. He too has abjected a former identity through his conversion and change of name; his repudiation of Rosie suggests that, unlike him, she has not been successful in doing so, and therefore continues to embody her abjection. The ultimate inescapability of this abjection is represented by Rosie’s sustained breastfeeding, in its disturbance of subject and object

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68 Ibid., 71.
69 Ruddick, 104.
70 Ibid., 103.
71 Ibid.
72 Tsiolkas, *The Slap*, 57.
73 Ibid., 289.
74 Ibid.
suggested in the way Hugo clings to her “as if clamouring to escape inside her”. Alvarez Bartlett refers also to the “leakiness” of the breastfeeding body which “tends towards anarchy”, its defiance of boundedness evoking the abject. Rosie’s sustained breastfeeding is a means by which she seeks to embody the “good mother” role. Hugo’s age, however, troubles the image of the “good” breastfeeding mother in her failure to adhere to conventional boundaries regarding maternal nurturance and childhood development. Rosie’s breastfeeding is cast as abject in its excessiveness to these boundaries. It also challenges the construction of breastfeeding as a unidirectional form of nurturance: “His body was separating from hers and she felt a twitch of need; wished he could be a baby again, a tiny thing that fit perfectly into her.” The indeterminate significance of Rosie’s breastfeeding reflects Bartlett’s argument for the potential of breastfeeding as a postmodern practice, not least “because it seriously disrupts the neoliberal autonomous unified western subject”. This maternal practice therefore reflects the novel’s overall postmodernity in its commitment to ambivalence, ambiguity, indeterminacy, and multiplicity.

I have suggested that Rosie’s maternal inauthenticity plays a functional role in The Slap, in that she uses her maternal “slap” against Harry and his family as ethnic “others”. This suggests the “blindness” of maternal inauthenticity to its impact on other women, and on children who are not one’s own, suggesting its compatibility with neoliberal individualism. Maternal inauthenticity is the means by which Rosie resolves the personal suffering attending the ongoing strictures of the institution of motherhood. She assumes her motherhood as a totalising identity at a critical point in her apparent postnatal depression, in which she struggles with the irrevocability of “matrescence” and her attendant maternal ambivalence:

For six months after the birth, she had continued to go to yoga, had kept wanting to meet regularly with Anouk and Aisha, had wanted to sleep, drink, take drugs, have

75 Ibid., 34.
77 Ibid.
78 Alison Bartlett discusses the multiplicity of possibilities for resistance to the construction of the “good” breastfeeding mother in ibid.
79 Tsiolkas, The Slap, 251.
80 Bartlett, 287.
81 Ruddick, 103.
sex, had wanted to be young. She did not want to be a mother. She’d felt as if she were about to break in two, that she was no longer Rosie but this strange, evil beast that could not feel love for the child it had brought into the world.\(^{82}\)

A term first used by anthropologist Dana Raphael, *matrescence* refers to a rite of passage consisting in physical changes experienced by a woman post-partum, changes to her “emotional life” and routines, her identity, her relationships and her standing within the community.\(^{83}\) It is a consequence of matrescence that a woman’s life is altered not only by mothering itself, but by her subjection to the institution of motherhood. Given the dichotomous relation between Madonna and whore, “good” and “bad” mother, the feeling Tsiolkas describes of being “about to break in two” is apt. She overcomes this internal conflict by assuming the institutional, “good” mother role, through her totalising and child-centred mothering. At the point of leaving the baby Hugo alone in the house to “cry it out”, she finally accepts motherhood by capitulating to its institutional form: “until he can walk away from you, your life means nothing—his life is all that matters”.\(^{84}\) Having escaped her own maternal ambivalence, the abject of institutional motherhood, the “real slap” is for Rosie all the more significant.\(^{85}\)

I have suggested that like the original “slap”, Rosie’s mothering bears an ambivalent status in the novel. I have also referred to Rosie’s misapprehension of the nature of her abjection: while she mobilises her maternal status against her *ressentiment* as a white woman, her maternal status also represents an oppression in which she colludes through her maternal inauthenticity. Theorising matricentric feminism, O’Reilly accounts for the naturalisation and essentialisation which account for the conflation of the categories “woman” and “mother” under patriarchy.\(^{86}\) This conflation of categories underpins a striking proportion of male expressions of sexism throughout the novel. Ruddick’s characterisation of the gendering of care is reflected in attitudes on behalf of the novel’s men which betray an essentialist assumption of inherent female maternity. In the first chapter, for example, Hector’s

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\(^{82}\) Tsiolkas, *The Slap*, 237.

\(^{83}\) Dana Raphael, “‘Matrescence, Becoming a Mother, A ‘New/Old’ Rite de Passage,’” in *Being Female: Reproduction, Power, and Change* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 66.

\(^{84}\) Tsiolkas, *The Slap*, 237.

\(^{85}\) Christos Tsiolkas, quoted in McCann, 101.

\(^{86}\) O’Reilly, 14.
The response to conflict between Hugo and the other children at the barbecue is to “let the women sort it out”. The “slap” cements Anouk’s desire to remain without children and abort her pregnancy, but even she would appear to have internalised the dominant essentialism. When reflecting on the life of her own late mother who “had been resentful, unable to submit to having no talent for anything but being a mother”, she resolves that the women of her family “should have been born men”. In this way Anouk demonstrates the persistent definitional conflation of maternity and womanhood in patriarchal discourse. Not being a mother, moreover, does not spare her from being defined in relation to the maternal. The image of the anti-maternal snake arises once again in this chapter, as Anouk is described from Hector’s perspective as “like Cleopatra and the asp rolled into one”. Her best friends Aisha and Rosie, moreover, disqualify her from her opinion about Rosie’s response to the “slap” on the basis that she is not a mother, nor does she behave maternally toward their children. But the basis of Anouk’s ultimate resolution to abort her pregnancy is important in the context of the novel’s socio-political context. These words of her interior monologue are addressed to Rosie and Aisha as mothers: “I’m not on your side, not in this. This is not the only way to be a parent but it is the only way this world now allows”. Her concern is less with the ethics of slapping a relative stranger’s child, than having recourse to institutional power to “fuck up Harry and Sandi’s lives just because… Gary always has to be the victim”. This, over an act which she notes is “not a crime”. Anouk’s accusation against Rosie demonstrates a certain awareness of a “degenerative” maternal thinking practiced individualistically, at the expense of others.

Manolis displays an intuition of this degenerative form of maternal thinking, which is both striking and instructive despite its basis in misogyny and essentialism. He muses, “Women were incapable of camaraderie: their own children would always come first… Women were mothers, and as mothers they were selfish, uninterested, unmoved by the world”.

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88 Ibid., 65.
89 Ibid., 33.
90 Ibid., 78.
91 Ibid., 77.
92 Ibid.
93 Ruddick, 101.
94 Ibid., 325.
question arises as to whether mothers such as Rosie are responding to a society unmoved by mothers. I have suggested the ambivalent status of maternity as a site of both power and oppression, and Rosie’s maternity does indeed function as well as a site of structural oppression. Bueskens notes that “Motherhood is itself an index of oppression as we can see in the career profiles and interrupted work histories, income, leisure (or lack thereof), and domestic inequality of mothers”.95 It should not be assumed, either, that the oppressive structures attending maternity have loosened their hold in the wake of the women’s liberation movement and subsequent feminist movements. As O’Reilly points out, “a cursory review of recent scholarship on mothers and paid employment reveals that although women have made significant gains over the last three decades, mothers have not”.96 That the maternal remains “the unfinished business of feminism” is apparent in Rosie’s postfeminist maternal situation in The Slap.97 Regarding an encounter with a group of ill-mannered young women when out for an evening together, Anouk says: “I think we feminists have helped create it. These little bitches think they have the right to do anything they want but they don’t care about consequences”.98 With regard to their attitude of “sneering indifference” she thinks, “It was individualistic, it was selfish”.99 Rosie defends them, saying “You’re forgetting we had it easy. Free education, social services, feminism. You name it”.100 This is an important instance of Tsiolkas’ association of postfeminism and neoliberalism, which have amounted to what Ann Orloff has called a “farewell to maternalism”.101 “Maternalism” in this case does not refer to the construction of maternity as the primary site of women’s political claims, but to recognition of the maternal and related forms of care undertaken in the private sphere as indices of social citizenship. As Bueskens explains, under state social policies mothers have been recast as “ostensibly genderless ‘individuals’” in advanced capitalist democracies such as Australia.102 The postmaternal paradigm is thus characterised by “policy

96 Ibid., 2.
97 Ibid.
98 Tsiolkas, The Slap, 68.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 70.
102 Ibid.
moves away from the political support for women’s caregiving roles as mothers to gender-neutral notions of recognising support only for economically “active” adults”.

I suggest that Rosie’s maternity is strongly indicative of the postmaternal context consequent of this “farewell to maternalism”. John Vasilikakos argues that the conflict between Rosie and Harry personalises the novel’s central conflict: that between the novel’s women, and the novel’s men. Whether or not we read this as the novel’s central conflict, this gendered conflict is a central dimension of the novel that hinges on the maternal. This is suggested from the outset, on the day of the “slap”. The first maternal figure we encounter in the novel is Hector’s wife Aisha, of Anglo-Indian heritage, who is characterised in contrast to Rosie as a “terrific” mother by the assessment of the novel’s men. As in Monkey Grip, the mother is associated with care and preservation beyond that of children; as Hector concedes with resentment in the novel’s opening pages, “He knew that without Aisha his life would fall apart”. We are already aware at this point of his affair with seventeen-year-old Connie.

Hector’s resentful acknowledgement of dependence on Aisha and active interference with the welfare of a child both suggest the gendering of care for which Ruddick argues. As is demonstrated in the novel’s opening chapter, the care with which women are overwhelmingly charged need not necessarily be for their own children, or for children at all. It is the erasure of societal dependence on women’s unremunerated care by which Stephens characterises the postmaternal. This erasure is effected both through the naturalisation of maternal forms of care and their public disavowal as a gendered form of labour. The naturalisation of gendered care is among the tenets upholding O’Reilly’s account of patriarchal motherhood, and is in evidence on the day of the “slap” at the outbreak of conflict between Hugo and the older children. When Anouk asks Gary, “shouldn’t you go in?” Hector is dismissive: “He was fucking sick of children. Let the women sort it out… Hector realised that Gary was exhausted, working at a shit job, not his own boss, raising a family. Anouk had no idea”.

103 Stephens, 3.
104 Tsiolkas, The Slap, 47.
105 Ibid., 11.
106 Stephens takes issue with the erasures inherent in the “degendering” of care, an issue she introduces in Postmaternal Thinking, 2-3.
107 Tsiolkas, The Slap, 35.
We might identify an irony in what Hector ignores, when he suggests that Rosie, as Gary’s wife, is her own boss.

Stephens accounts for the function of the postmaternal, like that of neoliberalism, as a predominant ideology. This suggests its inscription in political discourse and public policy. The Howard government is remembered for a simultaneous commitment to neoliberalism and to traditionalism, particularly regarding the Australian family. Howard’s success in advancing these political commitments owes in large part and importantly, as Nick Dyrenfurth writes, to a strategy by which neoliberal and conservative sentiments were couched in language more readily associated with the traditional left. The aim, Dyrenfurth suggests, was to appeal to a renewed aspirational image of the mythologised masculinist Australian “battler” by “defending middle or mainstream Australia from the cultural (conflated with material) threats posed to a highly resilient ‘Australian way’”. Tsiolkas writes that figures such as the “battler” have replaced “The language of class relations”, the battler being “a word imbued with the myth of colonial Australian nationhood, a word that only refers to the individual, never the collective”. Gary recognisably embodies this “battler” figure in The Slap, not least due to his sense of disenfranchisement and dispossession: such attitudes as those Howard successfully mobilised against multiculturalism, against immigration, and against women. In The End of Equality (2003) Anne Summers accounts comprehensively for the Howard era as characterised by a systematic curtailment of the rights and services for women secured during the women’s liberation movement. She suggests moreover that the central site of this “roll-back” of women’s rights was the family, as the Liberal government’s family policy functioned to reinforce the breadwinner model. This, despite the longstanding recognition of the breadwinner model’s reinforcement of mothers’ financial dependence on male partners—recall Mary Gilmore’s campaigning for a motherhood endowment system to replace the family wage model. As in the Federation era, the Howard years were

108 Stephens, 2.
110 Ibid., 216.
113 Ibid., 4.
characterised by falling birth rates, giving rise to a pronatalism encapsulated by Peter Costello’s famous exhortation to families that they have “One for the father, one for the mother, and one for the country”.\textsuperscript{114} This was upon the introduction of a “new maternity allowance” whose pronatalist end was barely concealed; Australian women were being called once again to “do their duty for the nation”.\textsuperscript{115} I would note, however, that this was primarily a call to white women within nuclear families. The Howard government’s infamously punitive immigration policy alone suggests that his concern is less with Australia’s population than with its white population.

Rosie’s conformity with a Howard-era ideal of motherhood emerges ultimately not as a site of privilege, but oppression. We might therefore locate the real site of Rosie’s grievance not in the public sphere of Howard’s Australia, but in the home. In the chapter narrated by Rosie, particularly, the extent of her subjection to Gary is increasingly clear. The chapter begins with an incident revelatory of the family dynamic, as Gary competes with Hugo for ownership of Rosie’s “boobies”.\textsuperscript{116} Rosie responds in a way suggestive of a compromised sense of autonomy, saying “They belong to all of us”.\textsuperscript{117} Gary proceeds to initiate a sex act in front of Hugo—to which he responds with “astounded horror” suggestive of the oedipal drama—before Rosie pushes him away.\textsuperscript{118} Tsiolkas’ imagining of the oedipal drama is characterised by a reversal, however. Despite Hugo’s “horror” in response to the evidence of Gary and Rosie’s sexual union, Gary’s jealousy of Hugo’s intimacy with Rosie determines the family dynamic: “Gary shook his head and got to his feet. She could hear him getting another beer out of the fridge”.\textsuperscript{119} Hugo tellingly responds with fear. We learn the extent of Gary’s drinking and abuse over the course of the novel, and one incident is particularly suggestive of Rosie’s postmaternal situation. In a rage following Rosie’s morning with Bilal and Shamira, inspecting the Thomastown house, Gary takes from Rosie’s wallet the money with which she “shop[s] for her son’s clothes at op shops and re[lies] on one-and two-dollar

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{115} McDonald in Marian Baird and Leanne Cutcher, “‘One for the Father, One for the Mother and One for the Country’: An Examination of the Construction of Motherhood Through the Prism of Paid Maternity Leave,” \textit{Hecate} 31, no. 2 (2005): 14.
\textsuperscript{116} Tsiolkas, \textit{The Slap}, 225.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Tsiolkas, \textit{The Slap}, 225.
coins to complete the end-of-week grocery shopping”. He takes this money back from her, however, on the basis that “I work for that money, that’s my money—you do shit-all”.

Demonstrated here are the ways the breadwinner model disadvantages mothers by reinforcing the dependent wife role, and the non-recognition of care work undertaken in the private sphere which characterises the postmaternal. It is at Gary’s discretion that he supports Rosie and Hugo, having the final say in the allocation of the family’s fairly meagre finances, despite his dependence on Rosie’s full-time caring for Hugo. The family’s relative poverty also appears to result from Gary’s underemployment, attributable to his casualised work, his drinking, and his enduring artistic pretensions. Gary begrudges the responsibilities of the breadwinner role, responding to Rosie’s desire for home ownership with “I’m not having a fucking mortgage round my neck. It’s bad enough with a kid. I won’t do it”. Gary embodies a fundamental flaw of the breadwinner model: the assumption that a father will be fair in his exercise of the breadwinner role, and well-disposed to it. The poverty disproportionately faced by lone mothers, which I will discuss shortly, also compromises Rosie’s freedom to leave.

It is evidently not a dimension of Rosie’s situation that the breadwinner model is predicated on a division of labour, given that her maternal labour is not recognised as such. This is the crux of the Howard government’s hypocrisy in its discourse and policy regarding the Australian family. While framing their policies as enabling “choice” for women, economic policies such as the “Baby Bonus” and the Family Tax Benefit actively disadvantaged women who chose to return to work after having a child. Mass privatisation of childcare services, moreover, made returning to work yet more difficult for women such as Rosie.

Against the condemnations of her mother, moreover, Rosie does recognise her mothering of Hugo as a form of embodied labour. Her financial dependence on an abusive husband calls into question the viability of this “choice”. Rosie’s breastfeeding is also indicative of the respective and related problematics of maternal labour and “choice” in a postmaternal age. On the phone, Rosie’s estranged mother says:

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120 Ibid., 245.
121 Ibid., 253.
122 Ibid., 241.
123 Heard, 16, 21.
“Are you working? Mothers always find the need to create problems for themselves when they’re not working.”
Yeah, Mother, I am fucking working. I’m raising my child. “I’ll find work next year when Hugo starts kinder.”
“Please don’t tell me you’re still breastfeeding.”
That could only be answered by another lie. “No.”
“Thank God for that. I don’t understand this obsession young women have to return to the days of being cows. I couldn’t bear breastfeeding.”
I bloody know.124

This last line suggests Rosie’s maternal practices as reactionary to those of her mother who, still in Perth, embodies a traumatic past. This is a past Rosie seeks to abject through “giving birth” to a “motherless self”, in line with a dominant postfeminist and postmaternal trope, as an inauthentic maternal persona.125 Rosie’s mother concomitantly represents the dominant postmaternal culture in its repudiation of “the materiality of embodied motherhood”.126 In Rosie’s estrangement from her mother, however, she concomitantly embodies the matrophobia which Stephens attributes to the postmaternal and its ambivalent relationship with the women’s liberation movement as an “embittered, puritanical mother”.127 Instead, under the postmaternal paradigm, “A new, unencumbered (motherless) self is celebrated and defined by its separateness, autonomy, and purported freedom of choice.”128 But Rosie’s circumstances, including her embodied maternal labour, complicate the matter of “choice”, the doctrine under which the Howard government advanced its distinctly patriarchal family policies.129 It is unclear how Rosie will manage Hugo’s transition to kindergarten in the absence of supportive working arrangements, for example. In the absence of an established career, we are led to wonder how Rosie’s employment will provide sufficiently for external childcare. Such is the way in which, in the postmaternal age, women are “free as individuals, yet constrained as mothers”.130

The dominant paradigm enables Gary’s dismissal of Rosie’s maternal practice as labour in support of the family. By this latter, I refer not only to Rosie’s own family, but the patriarchal family predicated on the nuclear, breadwinner model. This in turn upholds a social paradigm

125 Julie Stephens in Baraitser, 399.
126 Stephens, 16.
127 Astrid Henry in ibid., 54.
128 Ibid., 15.
129 Heard, 176.
130 Bueskens, Modern Motherhood, 6-8.
predicated on the narrative of the unencumbered, autonomous subject, a subjectivity entirely incompatible to Rosie’s as a mother. In Rosie’s chapter, we are repeatedly reminded of her encumbered, maternal subjectivity: “[Hugo] possessed her body, she lost herself in him”.131 But against dominant assumptions regarding the maternal, need is shown to be bidirectional in the filial relationship. This is not least due to Gary’s abusive tendencies: “With Hugo she could cry, she could let the tears fall”.132 That Rosie finds comfort in Hugo rather than in Gary, as she did during her postnatal depression, suggests the “sequestration” of the maternal to the private sphere.133 This is consistent with her internalisation of patriarchal prescriptions for “good” motherhood. The consolation of the child is insufficient, however, in the face of the oppressive social structures determining Rosie’s situation. Whatever its extremity, we might understand Rosie’s recourse to the judiciary over the “slap” as an attempt to transpose her suffering from the private to the public sphere through recourse to state institutions. That Harry substitutes in many ways for Gary as the object of Rosie’s rage is suggested by the many parallels between the two male characters, including through the correspondence of their respective names. Rosie’s crusade suggests her inability to articulate the nature of her suffering. Though the two are not unrelated, her subjective racial abjection takes precedence over her maternal abjection, suggesting an identification with Gary which maintains the abusive relationship. Ultimately, the case achieves little more than to reinforce Gary’s “truthful and unfair” taunts to Rosie, that she is “so fucking middle-class”.134 Instead it reinforces their sense of racial abjection in its demonstration of their disadvantage against Harry, representative of the racialised other, successfully defended by a lawyer who represents the institutional power that “money could buy”.135 Aisha’s loyalty to Hector’s side of the family, moreover, will ensure that Rosie never learns of the abuse Harry perpetrates against Sandi. While Rosie and Gary are ultimately disgraced by their social circle, Aisha agrees to attend a barbecue at Harry’s, signifying her “forgetting” of Harry’s past abuse of Sandi. At the barbecue, they learn that after years of difficulty conceiving, Sandi is pregnant with the couple’s second child. The significance of Sandi’s pregnancy lies in Rosie’s explicit longing for another child, in the face of Gary’s staunch refusal.

131 Tsiolkas, *The Slap*, 239.
132 Ibid., 255.
135 Ibid., 278.
The end of the novel is not only evidence of Richie’s observation that “some people walked away clean”. The Howard years are readily associated with an effort to maintain the white racial supremacy characterising Australia’s national history, and The Slap shows the reactionary character of Howard-era policy and discourse at a time where the supremacy of white Australia is less than ever assured. The correlative of Harry and Hector coming away “clean”—Harry despite his violence, and Hector despite his predation on the young Connie—is that Rosie and Gary come away dirty, abject. They have thus been interpellated as white Australia has historically interpellated migrant, racialised, and Indigenous “others”, finding themselves the object rather than subject of stigmatising discourses. McCann has discussed the novel’s postmodern interaction with popular Australian soap operas such as Neighbours and Home and Away in its replication of internationally recognisable “topoi” and the attendant presentation of the Australian family. Unlike The Slap, such popular forms have been marked by adherence to a dominant ideal of Australianness, representing the Australian suburbs as overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and structured by the nuclear family. McCann suggests The Slap’s character as a kind of perversion of these popular forms, reproducing the words of Kalinda Ashton:

the book suggests what Neighbours could be—if that show was populated with Aborigines who had redeemed themselves through Islam; if episodes featured bisexual AIDS-affected men being good parents; if the characters were Indian, Serbian, Greek, Jewish and Arabic [sic]. If they swallowed pills at backyard barbecues, experimented with the consolatory sexual excitements of shampoo bottles, and let their school kids experiment with ecstasy, anti-Bush posters and same-sex baths with no palpable ill-effects.

In The Slap, Tsiolkas represents a reality abjected by the world of Neighbours. Against the Howard government’s related vision for the nation, multiculturalism and alternative family arrangements thrive. Connie, having been orphaned by AIDS, is mothered by her aunt, and the lesbian mother of one of her friends is all but unremarked upon. The generation she and Richie embody are presented with an “optimism” for the future, as their adulthood fast approaches.

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136 Ibid., 471.
137 McCann, 92.
138 Kalinda Ashton, quoted in ibid., 126.
Given the structures that remain intact in *The Slap*, however, its conclusion embodies an overarching ambivalence. Male characters’ violence against women and children remains unchecked, either by the law or the social circle depicted in the novel. Despite the image of tolerance and diversity Tsiolkas critically paints of Australia, characters remain complicit in and subject to oppressive structures which remain unaccounted for by these values. As William Skidelsky writes in the *Guardian, The Slap* is “a novel about the failings of middle-class life” in its exposition of “the shallowness of contemporary liberalism”. In his essay “On The Concept of Tolerance”, Tsiolkas explains the relations of domination and exploitation unaccounted for by the valuing of cosmopolitanism such as we see in the novel. To congratulate a society on its embrace of cosmopolitan multiculturalism, Tsiolkas warns, is to ignore the dependence of that same society on “property, labour, land”. This is arguably what Rosie and Gary represent, a tradesman and a stay-at-home mother who embody middle Australia in contrast to their affluent friends. In a society characterised by the abjection of inevitable human interdependence, care constitutes an important and neglected dimension of this labour. While purporting to champion stay-at-home mothers as “Australia’s forgotten women”, the Howard government neither represented nor encouraged an understanding of mothering as labour. It is for this reason that I characterise such private sphere labour as “abjected”: precluded from the status of work, maternal forms of care are precisely what upholds the masculinised public sphere where “real” work is undertaken. It cannot be left unstated, however, that this was a paradigm that continued after the Liberal government’s downfall in 2007. On the same day Prime Minister Julia Gillard delivered her viral “misogyny speech”, she oversaw the replacement of the Parenting Payment (Single) for 150 000 Australian mothers with unemployment benefits. This was a continuation of policies inaugurated under the Howard government, which systematically functioned to disqualify mothering as an index of social citizenship.

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140 William Skidelsky, “The Slap, a Novel that is Bringing Out the Worst in the Middle Class,” ibid. (22/08/2010).
141 Tsiolkas, 19.
142 Campo, 328.
143 Stephens, 1-7.
145 Ibid.
This is the Australia Amelia (Essie Davis) inhabits as a mother in *The Babadook*, though the film’s historical and political significances might readily be missed on a first viewing. Amelia’s particular trials as a mother may immediately appear individualised and extraordinary, a question of misfortune. As a solution to Samuel’s severe behavioural problems, his school proposes extensive individual surveillance or expulsion. Soon we learn that this may be explained in part by his father’s death on the day of his birth; driving a labouring Amelia to hospital, Oskar (Benjamin Winspear) dies in the car accident Amelia relives in a dream in the film’s opening shots. Samuel’s seventh birthday is approaching, and due to her niece Ruby’s lack of interest in their usual shared birthday party, Amelia faces the prospect of celebrating Samuel’s birthday on the traumatic anniversary for the first time.

Following these revelations, Samuel asks that evening to be read a second bedtime story, producing an unfamiliar book from the shelf. The pop-up book, titled *Mister Babadook*, describes a monster in familiar storybook rhyme as “a friend of you and me”. Each page proves increasingly menacing: frightening to Samuel and uncanny to Amelia, who stops reading at the point where it threatens to visit the reader at night. She skips forward several pages to the words, “And once you see what’s underneath/You’re going to wish you were dead”. She is interrupted by Samuel’s characteristic cry of “Mummy!”, and cannot allay his fears of the monster and its threats. Already the central themes and tropes of the film are established through the book: monstrosity, haunting, language, and depression—all but the maternal. Consistent with the dominant representational tendency, the mother is marginalised: there is a child, a perverted paternal figure, but no mother. Yet the book’s invocation of suicidality, and later invitation to murder, are in address to Amelia, as she struggles increasingly to cope with her overburdened maternal isolation. This evening signals the beginning of the titular monster’s haunting of the house, and eventual possession of Amelia as she descends increasingly into depression. All Amelia’s attempts to destroy the book result in its unexplained reappearance and reassembly, as it continues apparently to write itself. Shifting images appear in black watercolour on the book’s pages, predicting that Amelia will kill the family dog Bugsy, then Samuel, and ultimately herself. Despite Amelia’s denials of the Babadook’s haunting and her increasing distress, the monster eventually enacts a possession by which Amelia becomes the film’s primary monster.\(^\text{146}\)

Amelia’s contravention of the institution of motherhood in the film is figured as monstrous, with Aviva Briefel characterising the film as “a cinematic manual for bad parenting”. E Ann Kaplan has shown that horror film is replete with “bad” mothers. She describes the “maternal melodrama” in opposition to the “maternal woman’s text”, defining the former by a tendency to compliance with maternal ideology. This is qualified by The Babadook’s ready classification as Gothic melodrama, Gothic in that it “foreground[s] what the social order forbids and represses about familial relations”. What is forbidden, in this instance, is maternal ambivalence. The marginalisation of maternal subjectivity, as Rich shows, has made a patriarchal taboo of maternal love which is not “continuous” and “unconditional”. But given the trauma of her husband’s death and son’s birth, a doubled abjection, we might wonder how ambivalence could be considered unreasonable. The institution of motherhood applies to women regardless of personal circumstances. These circumstances, moreover, are often at least as political as they are personal, while the patriarchal institution of motherhood functions to depoliticise the maternal. If Amelia’s “chief gratification” is not spending time with her child, and if her love is not “literally selfless” as the institution of motherhood dictates, to what else could we attribute Amelia’s personal suffering than her failure as a mother? O’Reilly reclaims “mother” as a political category in her theorisation of matricentric feminism, arguing that mothers are subject to a specific form of gendered oppression typically neglected in intersectional feminist considerations. My suggestion is that Amelia’s distress owes not solely to circumstances that appear individualised and extraordinary. Rather, we might take her descent into depression and later monstrosity as a reflection of the structural circumstances attending her maternity. To my analysis of Amelia’s maternal situation, I will apply Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection in such a way as to bear on Donald Winnicott’s object relations theory. The latter was first invoked in relation to The Babadook by Aviva Briefel. The interplay between object relations and the abject, I argue, parallels the interplay between subject and structure in the representation of maternal distress.

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147 Ibid., 12.
149 Peter Brooks qtd. in ibid., 62.
151 Ibid., 22-23.
152 O’Reilly, 2.
I have suggested the structural underpinning of this distress, attributable in part to a dominant model of mothering which rose to prevalence in the late 1980s, concomitantly with neoliberalism. Quigley characterises Amelia’s maternity as subject to a postfeminist and intensive model of institutional motherhood. O’Reilly notes that the dominant paradigm of intensive mothering rose to predominance “in its fully developed form” in the late 1980s early 1990s, and therefore concomitantly with postfeminism and neoliberalism. For Lisa Baraitser, postfeminism gestures “in one sense to the backlash against second-wave feminism, and in another to a permanent internal critique within feminist discourses, in an attempt, again, to clear that space, to unsettle assumptions about what ‘feminism’ signifies”. Not simply a matter of belief that the goals of second-wave feminism have been achieved, postfeminism might be understood to refer to a view of the second-wave women’s movement’s goals as misguided in their purported foreclosure of “choice”. I note the relative coincidence of postfeminism and neoliberalism’s respective ascendancies. Both ideologies assume the subject to be an “unencumbered, self-sufficient, rational, and freely choosing agent”, a construction incompatible with maternal subjectivity. Quigley draws on Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels’ account of the “new momism”, writing that to mother is in this context framed as a “liberated choice” which, if made, comes with the caveat that a mother devote a maximum of her personal resources to childrearing. Douglas and Michaels note that whereas the postwar maternal ideal was the image of the housewife devoted primarily to her husband as the head of the family, the proper object of a woman’s devotion in a culture of “intensive mothering” is the child. This individualised, postfeminist construction of the maternal in turn justifies decreasing social support for mothers, in line with the paradigm of the postmaternal. Quigley suggests that The Babadook presents us with an image of intensive mothering heightened by permanent paternal absence.

The Babadook sits uneasily within the Australian Gothic tradition in its apparent lack of concern with the nationally specific. This, writes Jessica Balanzategui, serves partially to explain the film’s initially limited local reception by contrast to its international success. The film’s Gothic character, however, reflects its political dimension:

*The Babadook’s* style and tone… accord with the Australian Gothic’s leaning towards domestic monstrosity and the horrors of the ordinary. The film also aligns with the general tendency of the Australian Gothic towards ambiguity, where the source of horror is not specifically pinpointed or explained, and a pervasive, sinister mood and uncanny aesthetic is prioritised over linear narrative progression.¹⁶¹

The abject emerges from the ordinary in *The Babadook*, particularly the domestic and “heimlich”. Balanzategui attributes the film’s initial neglect in Australia to its participation in the commercial horror genre. This, despite the significant overlap between horror and the Gothic, which have in common their potential to articulate the unsayable of women’s oppression. As Jonathan Rayner points out, among the characteristic preoccupations of the Gothic generally is “the peril and oppression of protagonists”, presented in such a way as to critique broader social structures.¹⁶² We might wonder then if Kent’s eschewal of the nationally specific situates it simply within the female or maternal Gothic. The film does not embody the preoccupation with the landscape characteristic of the mode’s national incarnation, and Kent has attested to a desire to “create a myth in a domestic setting” whose stage is only incidentally “some strange suburb in Australia somewhere”.¹⁶³ Aoife Dempsey reminds us, however, that “myths are deeply culturally inscribed and inherited”.¹⁶⁴ The way the domestic sphere is represented as a site of horror in *The Babadook* therefore provides a degree of insight into the film’s “Australianness”.

A shadowy terrace with an unkempt front yard, Amelia’s house is a far cry from the “white-picket-fence ideal” infamously espoused and endorsed by John Howard’s Liberal-National

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¹⁶² Jonathan Rayner in ibid., 23.


¹⁶⁴ qtd. in ibid.
Coalition government. The point exceeds architecture; the iconic image of the picket-fenced bungalow on a quarter-acre block is associated both with whiteness and the nuclear family in the Australian imaginary, metonymising an ideal of its inhabitants. Though John Howard’s term had been over seven years by the time of the film’s release, the impact of his interventions in family policy are felt to this day by Australian women. His policies concerning “families”, an example of the dominant-discursive “degendering” of maternal forms of care, embody the “cultural contradictions” attending contemporary motherhood in the global north. Howard had successfully mobilised post-feminist discourse—particularly that of unproblematised “choice”—to rationalise policy initiatives which reinforced the division of public and private spheres. The acknowledgement of women’s paid work outside the home, however, did not result in any policy initiatives towards more family-friendly workplaces. From the beginning, the aged care home in which Amelia works is evidently hostile to the flexibility she needs as a solitary mother to a troubled child. “The inconsistencies in government policies” writes Liz Van Acker, “are clearly reflected in the attempt to draw mothers into the public work force, while maintaining their role as carers in the private sphere”. This is paradigmatically postmaternal, in line with Howard’s neoliberalism, but is somewhat in conflict with his characteristic traditionalism. The latter is reflected, for example, in Howard’s decrying in 2003 of the number of boys in the sole care of their mothers, claiming that “far too many young boys are growing up without proper male role models”. The consistency between Howard’s neoliberalism and traditionalism lies, however, in his efforts to reinforce an institutional motherhood ensconced within a middle-class or affluent nuclear family. Amelia’s deviation from the contemporary Australian construction of the “good” mother is a site of significant social vulnerability, as I will show.

166 Summers, 140.
167 Stephens, 16.
170 Van Acker, 100.
171 Ibid.
172 Summers, 6.
173 Van Acker, 91.
I take Amelia’s depression and eventual monstrosity as the manifestation of her abjected social position. It is abjection that connects monstrosity, depression, death, and the maternal; these are all at issue and accordingly interconnected in *The Babadook*. Theorising abjection, Kristeva grounds abjection in the subjective relation to the psychic mother, and the violence of separation from which the subject originates. An “other” paradoxically reflective of the self, the abject is necessarily marginalised through repression, but never entirely repressible. Through its necessary exclusion, the abject upholds precisely what it threatens, as death paradoxically upholds life. Barbara Creed argues that women in horror are troped as monstrous and therefore abject “almost always” by reference to their reproductive and maternal functions.\(^{174}\) Rich’s theorisation of the maternal body as disruptive of the polarity between subject and object even precedes Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*.\(^{175}\) Being “of woman born”, she argues, is a significant source of patriarchal anxiety, to which she attributes the patriarchal regulation of the maternal.\(^{176}\) She also suggests that the acknowledgement of one’s birth carries with it the corresponding knowledge of death; the indivisibility of death from the maternal is literalised here in the coincidence of Oskar’s death and Samuel’s birth.\(^{177}\) The same day instantiates a subjective death for Amelia herself, one occasioned by traumatic grief and relatedly, matrescence. Rich writes moreover that the birth of the “good” mother into the institution of motherhood spells, in its subsumption of female identity, the death of the woman who lives “for herself”.\(^{178}\) This is suggested in Amelia’s mentioning that she “used to be” a writer, particularly of “kids’ stuff”, implying the origin of *Mister Babadook* in her own imagination.

I take Amelia’s distress as symptomatic of her abjected social position. This is consistent with Kristeva’s characterisation of depression as a state of abjection, a “living death”.\(^{179}\) Kristeva extends on Freud’s articulation of depression and grief to characterise depression as a condition by which abjection permeates the subject’s interior and exterior worlds. The implied disturbance of the border between subject and object marks depression as itself

\(^{175}\) Rich, 64.
\(^{176}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{177}\) Ibid., 188.
\(^{178}\) Ibid., 166.
abject, and accordingly abjects the depressed subject. It is by that abject mechanism that “death infect[s] life”, and that the titular monster “infects” the house, coming to possess the increasingly depressed Amelia.\(^{180}\) The Babadook’s haunting, too, is ultimately irrepressible. As Amelia’s distress and denial intensifies, the book continues to write itself: “The more you deny me,/The stronger I get”. The form the monster takes is also noteworthy, in that it functions both as ghost and monster, taking both ethereal and corporeal forms and inciting both terror and horror. He is both familiar and unfamiliar, wearing what appears to be an assemblage of Oskar’s clothes, thereby perverting the paternal through his apparent malevolence. When he enacts his “infectious” possession of Amelia by entering her mouth—an image of Freud’s melancholic “cannibalism” of the lost love-object—his movements across the ceiling are swift and erratic like those of a cockroach, and are accompanied by sound effects evocative of the insect.\(^{181}\) This invites us to read the Babadook as an embodiment of abjection, recalling an earlier scene in which Amelia hallucinates cockroaches spilling from a gynaecomorphic hole in the kitchen wall. Associated with filth and feeding on waste, “dropped” for its obsolescence and decay and therefore related to the “utmost of abjection” embodied in the corpse, the cockroach functions as a symbol of the abject in its refusal of containment and threat to encroach “upon everything”.\(^{182}\) Much has been made too, of The Babadook’s name, which Briefel notes is an anagram of “a bad book”.\(^{183}\) This interpretation suggests an uncanny defamiliarising of the familiar through a jumbling of letters. His nonsensical utterances, however, might be understood as the “shattered concatenation” by which Kristeva characterises the speech of the depressive whose very language is devitalised and drained of signification.\(^{184}\) It hardly seems coincidental that when the Babadook infects Amelia through his possession, she begins to talk in the monster’s rhythms, railing at Samuel from her bed for his “talk, talk, talking”.\(^{185}\)

Kristeva’s account of depression as a state of internalised abjection is consistent with DW Winnicott’s characterisation of depression as a subjective “deadening” transmissible from

\(^{180}\) Ibid.
\(^{181}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{183}\) Briefel, 12.
\(^{184}\) Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 33.
\(^{185}\) Briefel, 12.
mother to child.\textsuperscript{186} We might understand Amelia’s “deadening” by depression to be foreshadowed in an encounter with her elderly next-door neighbour, Mrs Roach. When commenting that Amelia appears tired, she responds ominously, “nothing five years of sleep wouldn’t fix”, suggesting the depressive’s readiness to “plunge into death”.\textsuperscript{187} Their neighbour constitutes an important exception to the dominant pattern of social abjection to which Amelia and Samuel are subject, and this is a point I will give further consideration. Mrs Roach stands in important contrast, for example, to Amelia’s sister Claire. By the middle of the film, Claire has withdrawn her support for Amelia entirely, claiming that she “can’t stand” Samuel. Accordingly, her daughter Ruby tells Samuel of Claire’s claim that the house is “too depressing” for them to visit. As Shelley Buerger writes, the traumatic circumstances of Samuel’s birth have designated the small family as abject, exacting their social isolation.\textsuperscript{188} The suggestion of the house’s “infection” by the abject is suggested not only of the expansion of the Babadook’s haunting from the basement, fitted with an exaggerated array of locks, but through the insistent darkness of the \textit{mise-en-scène}: black floorboards, dark blue walls, and a minimum of apparent natural light. At the outset, Amelia has clearly internalised the institutional maternal role. Her job in aged care suggests the constancy of her caring duties, her pink uniform suggestive of the hegemonic femininity she strives to embody as a mother, and evocative of her occupation of the “pink collar ghetto” whose interrelatedly gendered and underpaid character is paradigmatic of the postmaternal.\textsuperscript{189} In a wide shot of Amelia in uniform, her dress’s pale pink hue stands in jarring contrast with her black front door and is incongruous with her frowning face. The crushed pink fabric, moreover, contributes to a Gothic defamiliarisation of this exaggerated signifier of hegemonic femininity.

It is noteworthy that we only otherwise see Amelia dressed in pale nightgowns at home with Samuel, suggesting her definition according to the continuous enactment of care in both the public and private spheres. That white nightgowns are the costume associated with her maternal care reflects the “sequestration” of the maternal to the private sphere.\textsuperscript{190} Amelia’s white clothes and blonde hair evince the “delicate whiteness” of the disappearing girls of

\textsuperscript{187} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 4.
\textsuperscript{189} Probert & Wilson in Bueskens, \textit{Modern Motherhood}, 15.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 6.
Picnic at Hanging Rock—and indeed of The Slap’s Rosie—and partakes in an Australian tradition of the female Gothic by which a familiar hegemonic femininity unravels over the course of the film in such a way as to reveal the oppressiveness of its strictures.\textsuperscript{191} Balanzategui also notes how this reflects longstanding “colonial anxieties” regarding white femininity, and I would note that Amelia’s whiteness certainly stands to mitigate her regulation by institutional forces.\textsuperscript{192} Amelia’s monstrous transmogrification is, however, at once entirely incongruous with and entirely related to the gendered prescriptions to which she is subject. Her internalisation of the postmaternal paradigm is evidenced by her resistance to Mrs Roach’s assistance. In stark contrast to the rest of the community, her neighbour does not express judgment of Amelia’s mothering on the basis of Samuel’s behaviour. She is perhaps the only character we see enjoying Samuel’s company before the film’s final act, responding to his observations on her Parkinsonian tremors with good humour, telling Amelia, “he sees things as they are, that one”, foreshadowing his status in the film as a “wise innocent”.\textsuperscript{193} Samuel does appear to intuit Amelia’s depressive state before she registers it herself, responding to her denial of the monster by yelling “do you want to die?” Amelia’s enforcement of her own sequestration with her son in the house is rendered all the more poignant by a moment where she stands at the sink, looking out her kitchen window into Mrs Roach’s living room with a melancholy fondness, apparently registering the old woman’s own isolation. The sudden appearance of the monster behind her neighbour, however, suggests Amelia’s internalisation of abjection, which perpetuates her isolation in depression and in mothering. During the extended horror sequence, she actively repudiates Mrs Roach’s offers of assistance, to the point where she cuts the phone line—the physical means by which the domestic sphere might be penetrated by the outside world—after Samuel calls for her help. I take this as an evocation of the mother’s postmaternal relegation to the private sphere, a gendered prescription which becomes a site of horror when Amelia’s condition endangers her child.

I accordingly read Amelia’s enforcement of her sequestration with Samuel as an internalisation of her position as a “deject”, the subject “by whom the abject exists”.\textsuperscript{194} My argument, however, is that Amelia’s depression should not be considered individualised

\textsuperscript{191} Balanzategui, 28.  
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{193} Quigley, 194.  
\textsuperscript{194} Kristeva, Black Sun, 8.
despite immediate appearances, but instead as concordant with her abjected “depressive position” as a solitary mother abjected by a postmaternal Australia. This positioning is doubled by her repressed grief, the acknowledgement of which stands to contravene the institution of motherhood in its threat to maternal selflessness and implication of maternal ambivalence. I have invoked the concept of matrescence, suggesting that maternal ambivalence is inimical to the institution of motherhood. This constitutes a denial of the distinct social oppressions women encounter upon becoming mothers, the acknowledgement of which underpins matricentric feminism. This includes the mother’s subordination to the child as dictated by the institution of motherhood. Carole Pateman, moreover, characterises women and particularly mothers as subject to a secondary citizenship owing to their inadequate theorisation as individuals under the dominant liberal paradigm. Like the institution of motherhood, this is a “political form of social organisation [which] is rendered apolitical” [emphasis in original]. Repeatedly, Amelia is demeaned by association with her troubled son, and subordinated to him. Numerous institutions seek to intervene in Amelia’s mothering: the school excludes Samuel after she refuses the alienating appointment of a “monitor” for him; the social workers, interpreting Samuel’s absence from school and the disarray of her house as evidence of “bad” motherhood, appear to anticipate removing him; when in tears she requests a sleeping aid from a doctor, he downplays Samuel’s obvious distress and cites the reluctance of “most mothers” to medicate their children in such a way. In each case, none of these institutional representatives enquire as to Amelia’s welfare, despite evidence of her fast-declining mental health. Even her work colleague Robbie, a potential romantic interest who represents the possibility of relief from her isolation and of re-establishment within a more socially sanctioned model of family, abruptly deserts the house the moment Samuel reveals their fraught situation. The “disobedience” she attributes to Samuel in this scene, usually related to his fixation with the Babadook, would appear to relate to his refusal to collude in her denial of her grief and deepening depression. The compliance she demands in her depression suggests the relevance of Winnicott’s theories of infantile development to analysis of the film. If to divest Amelia’s grief of its power requires her to acknowledge it, then the path to redemption must be through “bad” motherhood, through abjection, as Buerger suggests.

195 Minsky, 131.
196 Bueskens, Modern Motherhood, 69.
197 Ibid., 75
198 Buerger, 34.
Samuel articulates the compliance Amelia demands of him with her depressive repression of loss, to the point where she “won’t let [him] have a dad”. This is also what he seeks to resist in his efforts to protect her from the monster she refuses to acknowledge. His resistance is also exemplified in his trespasses into the basement which, according to Gothic tradition, instantiates the “locked” or “forbidden” room of the haunted house.\(^{199}\) Containing an assemblage of Oskar’s clothes and belongings, it functions as a spatial image of the unconscious, a repository of the repressed. In one instance, we find Samuel demonstrating his amateur magic to an audience of “ladies and gentlemen, Mum and Dad” before a photo of the two of them, suggesting his own melancholic denial of loss. The basement is locked precisely because it functions similarly for Amelia. As Quigley writes, “the basement is a place where time is suspended in space, a frozen past that Amelia must incorporate into her personal narrative if she is to ‘move on’”.\(^{200}\) The traumatic is related to the abject in its resistance to total repression, assuming an extratemporal existence in the unconscious, which is spatially figured by the basement as the “dark entity” of the house.\(^{201}\) As Quigley points out, the basement is the site of the film’s most violent encounters: with Samuel, with Oskar, and with the monster.\(^{202}\) Perhaps the most chilling of these is when Oskar’s apparition embraces Amelia, weeping in relief, and says, “We can be together. You just have to bring me the boy”. These subterranean encounters uncannily manifest what Amelia represses, which she can only articulate in her perverted, monstrous form: “You don’t know how many times I’ve wished it was you, not him that died”. As the abject shows us what we repress “in order to live”, these encounters show us what Amelia represses so that she might still embody “good” motherhood.\(^{203}\) As Buerger points out, the basement is therefore the site of greatest horror, which paradoxically provides the conditions of possibility for Amelia’s redemption.

The violence Amelia inflicts on Samuel as the monstrous, “bad” mother arguably allegorises the “immemorial violence” attendant on the child’s individuation from the mother.\(^{204}\) This is an individuation apparently frustrated, as evidenced by Samuel’s separation anxiety and

\(^{199}\) Quigley, 69.
\(^{200}\) Quigley, 194.
\(^{202}\) Quigley, 193.
\(^{203}\) Kristeva, *Horror*, 3.
\(^{204}\) Ibid., 10.
frantic attempts to engage her attention, leaving Amelia exhausted and harried. I have indicated the compliance she demands of Samuel in her depressive denial of grief. This suggests the relevance of Winnicott’s account of infantile development, in which the “good enough” mother fosters the child’s sense of individuated “aliveness”, motivating him to live and thrive.\textsuperscript{205} I propose the opposition of this “aliveness” to the subject’s “deadening” through the abjection of depression. In her unconscious demand that Samuel speak and act only in correspondence with her own mental states, Amelia embodies the “monstrous-feminine” in her refusal to relinquish her hold on her child.\textsuperscript{206} This dominant trope which Creed identifies suggests maternal blame, but is subverted in \textit{The Babadook} by the bidirectional character of both mother and son’s necessary self-individuation. This is suggested, for example, by the intense physical closeness of the mother-child dyad frequently remarked upon by critics in the earlier scenes of the film. The suffering this causes Amelia is evidenced, for example, in a wide shot showing Samuel asleep next to her in the marital bed, with his hand at her throat. Similarly resistant to the institution of motherhood and the trope of the monstrous-feminine is Amelia’s ultimate redemption, despite the violence she and Samuel enact on each other in the basement. This violence is the object of Briefel’s analysis of the horror sequence by reference to Winnicott, in that she argues for Samuel and Amelia’s survival of their near-fatal struggle as mutual proof of each other’s constancy.\textsuperscript{207} And as Briefel writes, their struggle does reach the point of near annihilation: it is the moment when Samuel strokes Amelia’s face as she strangles him that appears to break the spell of her possession. At this point, as Samuel implores her to “get it out”, she vomits what appears to be black bile, aptly evocative of melancholia and reminiscent of the black ink from \textit{Mister Babadook}’s pages. We might take this as permission on Samuel’s part to acknowledge the abject ambivalence Amelia has sought to repress, and their embrace at the end of the act testifies to the strength of the mother-child bond to withstand the “assaults” to the relationship that maternal ambivalence might occasion.\textsuperscript{208}

A space of abjection, the basement is a space that facilitates Amelia and Samuel’s mutual proof of their “aliveness”, despite the threats to it posed by trauma and depression. The “good enough” mother proves her constancy by withstanding expressions of violence, and even of

\textsuperscript{205} Minsky, 111.
\textsuperscript{206} Creed, 12.
\textsuperscript{207} Briefel, 20.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 18.
hatred, by the child: “By surviving [the mother] develops her own autonomy and life with which the baby can identity [sic]...The proof of the mother’s resilience makes possible a shared reality with her in the external world.”209 The unlocking of the basement is arguably what makes possible this “shared reality”.210 This suggests the relevance of Winnicott’s concept of the “transitional space”, in that the basement may serve a mediating function between Amelia and Samuel’s interiority and external reality, much of which they share, but some of which is specific to themselves as individuals.211 This is the space the Babadook continues to inhabit, in manageable form, by the end of the film. Briefel convincingly supports her invocation of Winnicott in her analysis by reference to an earlier incarnation of the film, a short by Kent in which the monster takes the form of the paradigmatic transitional object, “a worn-looking stuffed doll”,212 which suggests the monster’s role as mediator of the child’s interior and exterior worlds.213 Troubling the distinction between subject and object, the transitional therefore functions similarly to the abject. The status of the space as transitional, bridging the objective and subjective, strongly suggests the location of the violence between mother and child in the realm of the imaginary.

While the film’s horror functions as a heightened expression of the “horrors” that might attend mothering under postmaternal patriarchy, horror also constitutes an enabling force by which Amelia overcomes her depression to become a “good enough” mother.214 In Winnicott, the depressed mother is opposed to the latter by her unreliable attention, apparent in Amelia’s disengagement from Samuel as he frantically tries to elicit a response from her with his magic tricks.215 This we might read as an attempt by Samuel to remediate his mother’s depression, by which the child

209 Minsky, 117.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid., 254.
212 Briefel, 21.
215 Minsky, 134.
unconsciously tries to nurse its mother’s needs into health so she can then care for it more adequately. This essentially amounts to the baby trying to keep the mother emotionally alive. The child may, at the same time, seek to make reparation to the mother for something it does not understand and has not done.216

While not a “baby”, Samuel is arrested in his individuation from the mother, not least due to Amelia’s grief and depression. Samuel is strikingly attuned to his mother’s mental states, telling her in the basement “I know you don’t love me. The Babadook won’t let you. But I love you, Mum. And I always will”. Samuel may not understand the circumstances that have abjected his mother into a “depressive position”, which I have outlined as both personal and structural. He is aware, however, of his own “depressive position”, by which Winnicott characterises the child of the depressed mother.217 The child in this position is correspondingly abjected, in that he may feel “infinitely dropped”, according to Winnicott, by the mother’s seeming unreliability.218 The word “dropped” distinguishes the child’s depressive position as an abject one, evoking the abject “wastes that drop”.219 Kristeva reminds us of the etymology of the term “cadaver” in the latin verb cadere: to fall.220 Winnicott’s account of the child in a “depressive position” is therefore consistent with Kristeva’s account of depression as an abjected “devitalised existence”,221 in that he refers to a “deadening” effect of maternal depression on a developing child’s sense of an “alive” self.222

It is central to my argument that Amelia’s depression reflects her abjected, depressive position in postmaternal Australia. I have also argued for the political potential of Kent’s representation of the maternal in the language of horror. Winnicott’s opposition of the “good enough” and the “depressed” mother therefore warrants questioning. This is an opposition resembling that of the institutional “good” mother and the implied remainder of “bad” mothers. The concept of the “good enough” mother has been deployed only recently by

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216 Ibid., 117.
217 Ibid., 131.
219 Kristeva, Horror, 3.
220 Ibid.
221 Kristeva, Black Sun, 33.
222 Minsky, 131.
Michael Leunig, in response to charges of misogyny garnered by his recent “Mummy was Busy” cartoon. To justify his condemnation of an apparently inattentive mother whose baby literally drops from the pram, he cites a fascination with maternal practice, referring to Winnicott’s accounts of attentive love as the “primary maternal occupation”.

Bueskens writes accordingly of the tendency of the mother to figure as object, rather than subject, in Winnicott’s object-relations theory. Winnicott’s accommodation of maternal ambivalence and fallibility distinguishes him importantly from dominant mid-century theories in the centrality he gives to the mother, with Minsky noting that “Unlike Klein, Winnicott makes the mother’s depression, and not the child’s ‘depressive position’ central to his approach”.

But as Bueskens suggests, this is insufficient if the mother’s welfare is instrumentalised in the service of the child. “The turn to the mother in psychoanalysis”, she writes, “was defined by an implicit conservatism; it came with a host of assumptions about how mothers should behave while remaining spectacularly interested in the intra-psychic or social worlds of mothers”.

Neglected is the potential social relevance of maternal subjectivity, despite Winnicott’s figuring of “the mother-infant dyad as the paradigmatic relationship upon which all others are based”. To recognise this social relevance would require a transcendence of the mother’s dominant figuration in psychoanalytic terms as “object” or “abject”, which as Bueskens writes, “seem to silence the mother just as she is on the cusp of being articulated”. These dominant-discursive accounts of the maternal, however, reflect the maternal subject’s continued suppression at a societal level.

Given the structural and historical factors I bring to bear on Amelia’s suffering as a mother, the question arises as to the implications of the film’s conclusion. I have outlined the resolution of depressive abjection as experienced by Amelia individually, and by the mother-child dyad. The final act suggests significant resolution: Amelia and Samuel are at last able to celebrate his birthday on the day, an overdue acknowledgement of his birth and therefore of the trauma attending it. The traumatic grief embodied in the Babadook remains in the

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224 Minsky, 111-13.
226 Ibid.
227 Lisa Baraitser, cited in ibid., 203.
228 Ibid.
transitional space or “limbo” of the basement, now acknowledged through a daily feeding of worms and dirt—a new ritual of which mother and son speak openly as a shared reality.\textsuperscript{229} Amelia’s recovery from her depressive inattentiveness is signalled by her contrasting delight in another of Samuel’s magic demonstrations, which this time produces a live white dove on a platter. But Buerger rightly refers to the outwardly happy conclusion as “equivocal”.\textsuperscript{230} Despite the resolution, albeit provisional, of the individualised dimension of maternal suffering, the bearing of structural factors on this latter remains. Rosalind Minsky notes that Winnicott’s account of maternal depression has been taken up by second-wave feminists such as Nancy Chodorow, Luise Eichenbaum, and Susie Orbach, who “locate needy and depressed mothers firmly at the centre of patriarchal societies”.\textsuperscript{231} As Stephens implies in her attribution of women’s suffering to the ascendancy of the postmaternal, such women still suffer, charged with upholding the very paradigm that oppresses them.

Kristeva characterises the depressive, the deject, or the abjected subject, as a “stray”.\textsuperscript{232} This substantiates Briefel’s claim that “bad” mothering in \textit{The Babadook} is “the only way to ensure survival”.\textsuperscript{233} I will therefore conclude by highlighting the significance of “straying” from the institution of motherhood in the context of the film. As death, which the abject embodies, upholds life, maternal labour and care are abjected for their indispensability at a societal level, yet expected of women as part of the institution of motherhood. Given the “depressive position” in which this situates the mother, it is little wonder that the feminist theorists mentioned above have characterised depression as “the inevitable outcome of women’s lives”.\textsuperscript{234} We might find some indication of what is at the root of their need in the film’s final scene. Here, we see Samuel waving to his mother from inside the window at Mrs Roach’s house, interrupting the domestic sequestration of mother and child in their own home. It is suggested that Amelia’s acceptance of the care Mrs Roach offers for them both is an important aspect of her recovery, and indeed the dominant current of feminist maternal studies proposes the espousal of more community-based forms of care to counter the institution of motherhood in the postmaternal age. While the institution of motherhood stands

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[229]{Briefel, 21. See also: Winnicott, “Transitional Objects.”}
\footnotetext[230]{Buerger, 34.}
\footnotetext[231]{Minsky, 131.}
\footnotetext[232]{Kristeva, \textit{Horror}, 8.}
\footnotetext[233]{Briefel, 12.}
\footnotetext[234]{Minsky, 131.}
\end{footnotes}
and the postmaternal prevails, the societal abjection of the maternal remains to the detriment of women like Amelia.

Stephens suggests this in her characterisation of the postmaternal as “a cultural distortion that reinforces unjust social relations, hides the significance of gendered care, and inhibits different ways of imagining social and political alternatives”. Maternal theorists have suggested that such an alternative might be a society characterised by an ethic of care, as an alternative to a dominant paradigm of dominance and subjection by which the margin and centre exist. A society characterised by an ethic of care would require both the depressive denial of otherness, and the dominant abjection of human interdependence, to be surmounted. Concluding Women as Australian Citizens, Patricia Crawford and Philippa Maddern propose “a more equal and inclusive form of citizenship”, one based on “an ethic of mutual care” (emphasis mine). They stress the importance of this precision in the context of a national history in which “past variants of citizenship have identified for subordinate groups the obligation to care for superiors… in return for ‘protection’”. “Protection” would become obsolete in a society where “the praxis of care would become a valued social contribution from the community’s members, rather than an obligation due from subordinate to dominant groups”.

This would correspond with a global society characterised by a “transformed” maternal thought, as Ruddick imagines it, one foreclosed for now by the postmaternal in its “privatisation of maternal ideas, ethics, and forms of selfhood”. To value children’s lives in an alternative society would be to value the lives of their mothers, and indeed their fathers, and all who facilitate the preservation and flourishing of others in the recognition that “we are all equally some mother’s child”. Hage argues for a scarcity of hope producing a “defensive” nation characterised by worry, becoming increasingly “less able to care for itself”.

235 Stephens, 2.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
239 Stephens, 2.
240 Ibid., 12.
In a global age, this relation of responsibility applies also to the nation’s others, whether they demand its ethical relationality to it from within or beyond national borders. Hope, I suggest, can be glimpsed in maternal practice and subjectivity in the present. Rich suggests that the concomitant unity and separateness of mother and child, figured for example in the pregnant body, figure the continuity of subject and object. “The child that I carry for nine months can be defined neither as me or as not-me”, and neither as “inner” or “outer”: such is the challenge of maternal subjectivity to the prevailing sociality governed by the “essential dichotomy” of dominance and subjection.²⁴²

²⁴¹ McCann, 102.
²⁴² Rich, 64.
Works Cited


Conclusion
Decolonising the Drover’s Wife

I remember how she came to me
In a vision of my mind
I remember how she said to me:
“Don’t ever look behind.” She said
“Look ahead”, and I would see
Someone always loving me

I began this thesis by considering the Drover’s Wife, who has in very recent years seen further resurrections. Her refusal to be relegated to the annals of Australian cultural history suggests that this foundational mother-protagonist has long harboured an unfinished business of her own. I refer particularly to Leah Purcell’s revision of Lawson’s short story for the stage, first performed at Sydney’s Belvoir St Theatre in 2016. The play’s success was such that Purcell’s novel adaptation has since been published in 2019 as The Drover’s Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson. A film of the same name is now in post-production, having been shot in the Snowy Mountains region in the months before its ravaging by the 2019-2020 bushfires. This is the land Purcell refigures according to her historically suppressed subject position as a mother, and as a Goa, Gungarri, Wakka Wakka Murri woman. Once a threatening other, the landscape promises shelter as Country by the end of the play.

As writer of The Drover’s Wife (2016) and embodiment of its titular figure, Purcell offers her audience direct encounter with the matrifocal voice. That this is the voice of an Indigenous woman accounts for the interventionary significance of her revision of this archaic mother of the Australian imaginary. This Drover’s Wife embodies a maternal reorientation from compliance to resistance, however—for her children’s survival, and for her own. At the opening of the play, protagonist Molly Johnson believes herself white, her hegemonic role unambiguous in the opening line: “Don’t you move, ya black bastard!” The line is addressed

1 This quotation is taken from the second half of this track, a coda to the traditional song written by Nina Simone and Emile Latimer to reflect its adaptation to reflect Black experiences. “Black is the Colour of My True Love’s Hair,” in Black Gold, (Sony Music Entertainment, 2011). Spotify.
to Yadaka, a revision of Lawson’s “stray blackfellow”. This time embodying a challenge to Molly’s internalised colonial prejudices, he has come to the homestead in an iron collar, a fugitive from his white captors. He immediately assists Molly in the birth and burial of her stillborn child, to whom she sings a rendition of *Black is the Colour of My True Love’s Hair*, a folk song with apocryphal origins in Scotland which has been reinvented and popularised by Nina Simone. This I read as a key to the play. Revisited several times throughout, the song exemplifies a traditional text through which Simone “refract[ed] her own meaning” as a Black woman. Purcell’s theatrical revision of Lawson’s short story for the stage is similarly refractory: when interviewed, Purcell recalls being read the story by her Indigenous mother, whom she characterises as a “Drover’s Wife” herself, in the absence of Purcell’s white father. As she read, she would echo the promise of the eldest son Tommy: “Ma, I won’t ever go a-droving” (sic). As Moorhouse writes, “his pledge—on behalf of all males, to all wives, mothers and lovers—is not to abuse the contracts of intimacy and domesticity”. We might take Purcell’s own repeated promise, from daughter to mother this time, as a promise to resist rather than uphold the dominant order, a national order characterised by the mutual implication of colonialism and patriarchy.

Through Yadaka, Molly discovers her own Aboriginality, passed down the maternal line, yet hidden by her Scottish father. She learns the “gin”, whom she sees in a vision holding two babies of hers who have died, is the spirit of “Black Mary”. In this revision, Mary is Molly’s mother, and her father’s remembered singing of “Black is the Colour of My True Love’s Hair” assumes renewed significance in this light, having been sung out of love for a Ngambri Walgalu woman. The song’s lyrics are also the words with which she confronts Yadaka’s death at the hands of stockmen Robert Parsen and John McPharlen—her rapists, and his killers—against whom she swears revenge at the end of the play. This is after she resolves to

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6 Ibid.
8 Purcell, 53.
leave the homestead, now subject to pursuit by colonial authorities. As Molly confesses to Danny, her longstanding abuser is indeed not absent but dead: she has killed him in self-defence, and he is buried under the woodheap, the snake’s chosen hiding place in Lawson’s original story. In an example of violent white maternalism, Miss Shirley has surrendered Molly’s children, while in her temporary care, to the local colonial authorities. Unlike Molly, she has apparently been aware of the children’s Indigeneity. Colonial authorities have also been informed of Molly’s illicit association with Yadaka by a Scottish peddler, dooming their relationship. Yadaka refers to him, Mr Merchant, as a “snake”, who despite his surface friendliness “speaks with forked tongue”. This time, the snake is no longer the marginalised “other”. It is the dominant culture which the Drover’s Wife must resist, rather than uphold, for her own sake, that of her children, and of her people.

As Ruby Langford Ginibi writes, “The land which looks after us is our mother”. Reconnection to culture, for Molly, is concomitant with reconnection to her mother, who died on the day of her birth. She resolves with her renamed eldest son, Danny, to leave the homestead, with the intention of freeing her children from the police lock-up in town on their way. This is suggested to require the “first kill” which Yadaka has taught him will signify his accession to manhood. Molly discloses her plan to Danny that they will take refuge in the mountains, as the winter’s first snowfall begins. “It’s here”, Molly says. “She’s speakin’ to us Danny”. In response to this apparition of her mother, Molly places faith in the protection and guidance of Country after she has recovered her children. In response to Danny’s rejoinder that they will freeze in the mountains, she says “There’s a cave, supplies, and in the spring… people”, alluding to the Snowy Mountains’ significance to numerous Koori nations. This significance was impermissible to the logic of imperialism, with colonisers motivated by “the acquisition of land to expand mother England” when they “declared the

9 Ibid., 52.
11 Purcell, 43.
12 Purcell, 74.
country no man’s land”\textsuperscript{14} This reorientation from England as imperial mother to the nurturance of Country is what promises Molly’s maternal emancipation.

That Purcell’s is a “postcolonial and feminist” reimagining of the canonical short story permits its matrifocality.\textsuperscript{15} Given the violence with which Molly resolves the years of abuse by her white husband, the ever-absent drover, the wife role is effectively made defunct. This is a process arguably completed by Molly’s reconnection to culture through the maternal line. This new version of The Drover’s Wife signifies what is long overdue, and what remains to be done. It is a story of intercultural identity and exchange. This is an exchange transcendent of space and chronological time, as evidenced by Yadaka’s apparent allusion to the Black Lives Matter Movement. Inaugurated in 2014 and subject to resurgence in 2020, he echoes the protests of Black people globally in saying “My only true charge, missus, is ‘Existin’ whilst black’.”\textsuperscript{16} The Black Lives Matter movement has had particular prominence in Australia in 2020, with Indigenous and settler Australians alike protesting institutional violence against Indigenous people. Purcell concomitantly characterises the play as an “Australian Western”, likely inspired in part by her role as Queenie in John Hillcoat’s The Proposition (2005).\textsuperscript{17} This time, the Drover’s Wife accordingly has a rifle of her own, in hand as she swears revenge against Parsen and McPharlen. At her side, Danny holds a spear, true to his promise never to “go droving”. The play is an embodiment of elaborate cultural exchange, one by which a global Blackness is invoked, and by which the colonising culture is appropriated, to refractory and resistant ends.

I have argued that women have been defined and regulated for their maternality in the service of the settler-colonial project of Australia; though differently and incommensurably, women’s reproductive autonomy and maternality have been subordinated to the settler-colonial order. Maternal citizenship in Australia has therefore been defined not only according to patriarchal purposes, but colonialist ones. The liberation of all women subject to a peculiarly Australian institution of motherhood therefore demands feminist and decolonial work. Liberated motherhood must therefore be informed by resistance to all structures of

\textsuperscript{14} Robertson, Demosthenous, and Demosthenous, 38.


\textsuperscript{16} Purcell, 52.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
oppression. Such a resistant mothering for settler mothers would abstain from its historically hegemonic role in colonial oppression. To do so would allow for a new receptiveness to the resistant potential of Indigenous maternalities, which has been suppressed by the dominant hierarchies which have structured the national institution of motherhood. For Indigenous women, the path to resistant motherhood may be a journey like Molly’s, whereby liberation as a mother is found in the reconnection with culture, kin, and Country. For settler women, liberation demands resistance to the colonialist hierarchisation of white over Indigenous maternalities. This necessarily involves receptiveness to the resistant potential of Indigenous maternal practices. For settler women, their value may at last be apparent in the era of COVID-19, which has both exposed the artificiality of the public–private divide, while compounding maternal isolation. I have shown how these are two dimensions of capitalist patriarchy which Indigenous women have resisted since colonisation.

It is on this basis that maternal values hold the potential to inspire an alternative sociality characterised by an “ethic of mutual care”. 18 This is not through a hierarchical maternalism, but by respectful interrelation as equals and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty over land, and relatedly, mothering. 19 It is perhaps an instructive parallel that all Australian women have to varying extents been deprived of sovereignty over their own reproductivity and mothering. I therefore end by affirming the political value and potential of those previously silenced voices of Indigenous mothers, and their stories of resistance. Where the nation is informed by Indigenous maternal values, there may be no Australia to speak of at all. Out of the decolonial work of its inhabitants may emerge the birth of new narratives for the continent and its mothers.

19 Ibid.
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