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FACT AND FICTION
FORM AND FANTASY

THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH JOLLEY

Harold Hort

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy

Department of English
University of Sydney

1993
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Elizabeth Jolley has also been supportive and generous in encouragement.
ABBREVIATIONS

ABR  Australian Book Review

CF  E. Jolley. Cabin Fever (1990)

CM  E. Jolley. Central Mischief ed C Lurie (1992)

EJF  P. Salzman. Elizabeth Jolley's Fiction: Helplessly Tangled in Female Arms and Legs (1993)

FACP  Fremantle Arts Centre Press

FAV  E. Jolley. Five Acre Virgin (1976)

FB  E. Jolley. Foxybaby (1985)


ML  Mitchell Library

MPI  E. Jolley. Miss Peabody's Inheritance (1983)

MS  K. Grenville and S. Woolfe (Eds). Making Stories: How ten Australian novels were written (1993)

MSR  E. Jolley. Mr. Scobie's Riddle (1983)


NGS  E. Jolley. The Newspaper of Claremont Street (1981)


RTO  J. Ellison Rooms of Their Own (1986)

SM  E. Jolley. The Sugar Mother (1988)

SMH  The Sydney Morning Herald

TE  E. Jolley. The Travelling Entertainer (1979)
TGW  E. Jolley The Georges' Wife (1993)
TOM  P. White. The Tree of Man (1955)
UQP  University of Queensland Press
WEL  E. Jolley. The Well (1986)
WIL  E. Jolley. Woman in a Lampshade (1983)
YFS  Yale French Studies
OVERTURE

Elizabeth Jolley is one of the best known of all Australian writers. Her work is very popular not only in Australia, but also internationally. She is published both in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. A number of books are now available in translation into various European languages. With her French translator, Francoise Cartano, she is the winner of the inaugural France-Australia Award for Literary Translation for the novel The Sugar Mother translated as Tombe du ciel (SMH 24 Jun 1993: 22). This success comes only after a long delayed recognition and a great deal of difficulty in achieving publication. She is an author with a history of continuous almost compulsive writing from childhood onwards, closely resembling Miss Hailey in her 1983 novel, Mr Scobie's Riddle, who also writes unceasingly without the encouragement of publication, having accumulated some forty two rejections for her novel (ASPR 218).

When Jolley eventually won acceptance it was complete and rapid. Ten novels were published from 1980 to 1990, the eleventh The Georges' Wife following in 1993. Apart from the novels, there are three collections of short stories: Five Acre Virgin (1976), The Travelling Entertainer (1979) and Woman in a Lampshade (1983) and before that sporadic short stories appeared such as "A Hedge of Rosemary" in Westerly in 1967 and "Talking Bricks" in Summer Tales 2 (1985) edited by Kylie Tennant. There were also some broadcasts of plays and stories by both the BBC and ABC.
This high degree of general acceptance seems to be in no small measure due to the originality of her style, which combines a strange quirky humour with a deep concern for the tragic condition of many lives. Jolley's narrative also breaks away from generally accepted modes and adopts a mixture of genres such as the gothic and the romantic, the comic and the tragic. The postmodern flavour of fantasy and an insecure floating reality seems to be very appealing at a time when public taste seeks escape from so much in a world which is brutal and unpleasant.

Even in writing about the "facts" of her own life Elizabeth Jolley finds it difficult to avoid slipping from fact to fiction or indeed making it hard to determine whether it is fact or fiction. In the "Self Portrait: A Child Went Forth", not only does Clytemnestra offer advice to Electra (and to us) about the desirability of knowing the facts before developing attitudes, but we also are faced with problems like that confronting the lady passing the Jolley home observing the two little girls with the short "shingled" hair cuts who asks a simple question to determine sex:

"Are you two girls or boys?"
"I'm Monica Elizabeth," I explained, "she's Madelaine Winifred. We're boys." (FAV 131)

But ascertainable facts are that Elizabeth Jolley's date of birth was 1923 and that this birth took place in the industrial Midlands in England where her father was a schoolteacher. This father -- who, according to the account in "What Sins to Me Unknown Dipped Me in Ink?", invented heat and light when Jolley was eight years old (CM 1) -- converted to the Quaker faith and was gaoled as a conscientious objector in World War I. Then as a Quaker relief worker in Vienna immediately
after the war he chanced to first behold the girl destined to be the author's mother caring for refugees. Elizabeth Jolley could not fail to be impressed by the resemblance of this first meeting of her parents with "Goethe's Werther first observing the youthful and charming Lotte distributing slices of bread at dusk to small children in her care" (CM 2). As Jolley comments, in the same context, it was "a deeply moving scene but not a good guide to marriage". The charming Viennese relief worker was the daughter of an Austrian General so there were considerable problems when the young couple married and returned home to post war England. The young Austrian bride never fully recovered from her home sickness and was never really accepted by the English people of the Midlands towns where the new family lived.

Jolley was educated mainly at a Quaker boarding school and then trained as a nurse in an English wartime hospital where among the patients she met her husband -- a librarian. He had arthritis very badly but they fell in love even though they could not marry for some years as he too was a Quaker and was already married. As she told David Headon in a broadcast in 1984 (Meanjin 44-1:43), their first child was born before they were able to marry so that Jolley knew at first hand some of the problems confronting the unmarried mother, Vera, in My Father's Moon. After living in various centres in England and Scotland Jolley, her husband and their three children emigrated to Australia in 1959 to settle in Perth where Leonard (to whom all her books are dedicated) took up his appointment as University librarian.

Settling in Australia for Jolley was almost as difficult as it had been for her mother, so recently an enemy alien, settling in England.
Part time work in such occupations as itinerant house cleaner, door-to-door salesman and estate agent were some of the jobs she undertook to help pay for typing the manuscripts she wrote with pen and ink. Jolley's interest in land and its ownership is not just a fantasy. She looks after the geese and fruit trees on her own "Five Acre Virgin" out of Perth where she grows oranges, lemons, plums, quinces and apples. She worked as English tutor in prisons and at the Fremantle Arts Centre; she continues to teach still at the Curtin University of Technology, formerly the Western Australian Institute of Technology. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from this institution in 1987. She is in demand all over Australia as a speaker and is familiar to students at many Australian universities.

Further acclaim of Jolley is reflected in awards such as the Order of Australia for services to Australian Literature (1988) and literary honours including two Age Books of the Year for *Mr Scobie's Riddle* in 1982 and *The Georges' Wife* in 1993, the Miles Franklin Award for *The Well* (1986), and the NSW Premier's Prize for *Milk and Honey* in 1984. *Palomino*, the first published novel, also won the Con Weickhart Award in 1975 in spite of which its actual appearance in print was not until 1980, perhaps because of the perceived public attitude to lesbianism and incest. Many of the short stories and novels are the bases of plays for radio and the theatre. For example in 1993 a play by John Senczuk derived from combination of the novel *The Sugar Mother* and the short story "Woman in a Lampshade" was performed at the Sydney Opera House Playhouse during February and in September/October, Marian Street Theatre produced *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. 
There is a basic set of ideas, concepts, problems and images which Elizabeth Jolley uses repeatedly. These are often recast in different situations or in varying combinations as they are re-deployed to throw further light on favourite topics. One example is the reaction of individuals whose lives are transformed by immigration. The way these people cope with the loss of their old life and its associations of cultural and family background and their adaptation to the new life, in the often strange, physical, climatic and cultural environment to which they are transported, is a subject of enduring interest which re-appears often in the novels and short stories. No doubt Jolley's interest evolves from her own experience of immigration. On the fact is built the fantasy and the fiction. The form and structure of her writing is greatly influenced by her love of music. This is pursued particularly in Chapter Five on Milk and Honey, a novel centred on the life of a would-be musician in a household of migrants who fail to adapt to the new.

Similarly there are characters who appear and re-appear both in the novels and stories, mostly under different names and guises. Elizabeth Jolley acknowledges this re-appearance and re-examination of people, places and ideas. She does not consider that she re-uses them in a repetitive way, but that she further analyses their or its possibilities in differing circumstances and conditions. It is specially appropriate that Caroline Lurie in editing and introducing Central Mischief should give the heading "Themes and Variations" to what might be called a table of contents in other circumstances. Elizabeth Jolley herself provides a similar table at the beginning of Mr Scobie's Riddle although this is more specifically titled as "A Guide to the Perplexed". Jolley's support
is acknowledged as a positive factor in the inclusion of this helpful guide to Central Mischief. (CM xiv). She is also conscious of the importance of music and musical forms in the construction of her stories and novels, for example the role of the Brahms Requiem in Mr Scobie's Riddle even if she "hasn't been clever enough to actually divide the book into the divisions that the Requiem is in." (MS 165).

However, in assembling this collection of essays Caroline Lurie is at pains to try to avoid redundancies and unplanned duplications which may arise from putting together writing originally meant for separate publication in journals, anthologies etc:

There are only so many things a person can genuinely say about the very same topic, and though Elizabeth has written many times of Thomas Hardy, Ibeen, her parents, ... and what makes a writer write, I have tried to eliminate some of these repetitions without destroying the fabric of any individual piece (CM xiv).

Most of the essays and articles in Central Mischief are not fictional and offer less scope for the play of themes and variations which seem to be so frequent a part of the Jolley fictions. Yet even here they abound. In the fiction especially, the characters and their continuous recycling emerge from a curiosity, a desire to enquire into the contingencies and aspects of the human condition based very much on life experience. But as well as this Elizabeth Jolley's interest in music which appears in nearly all the novels and many of the short stories involves a purposeful use of musical forms adapted to literary constructs as the most appropriate way in which the basic facts of experience and observation can be developed through the Jolley fantasy. In recognition this introductory chapter is headed "Overture".
Theme and variation is a frequent form of writing, where the central theme is restated and adapted as it would be in music with often elaborate and florid treatments of inversion, ornamentation and mood (or key in music) change. Being very aware of this Caroline Lurie deliberately retains some duplications:

Naturally some [repetitions] remain. Readers of Elizabeth's fiction will be familiar with her kinship to music, and will forgive or enjoy variations on a theme. Like the third movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 8 in C Major, what appears to be a little mistake and correction is not, it is intentional (CM xiv).

Musical form is of course, not restricted to theme and variation and Tom Tausky in "This Possible Closeness": Music in the Fiction of Elizabeth Jolley" (NCE 191-206) points to the possible use of other forms of musical composition as a model for the structure of the literary form of the novel. In particular he discusses Helen Daniel's theory that the whole of Elizabeth Jolley's output might be considered as a kind of fugue and he quotes from her book Liars (270):

Elizabeth Jolley's literary offering composed for the reader is one large fugue, made up of component literary fugues and canons each one a fiction in itself, and the whole a graceful totality (NCE 203/4)

In Foxybaby the fugal form is tempting for Tausky in spite of a measure of reservation about the validity of the comparison of musical and literary methods. He is attracted to the way in which the concluding scene "returns to the setting, the action and the characterisation of the opening, as a fugue returns to its opening subject" (NCE 205). As well, the two plots (the action of tutors and pupils at Trinity College
and that of the Alma Porch "novel in progress") are overlapping and intertwined. In a stretto-like movement the characters of the play emerging from the Porch novel, almost complete a fusion with the Summer School personalities just before the final dream dénouement which brings the book to an end. (FB 258/261).

_Milk and Honey_ begins with a prologue which outlines the novel’s theme or themes with fragments of motifs which are not at this stage understood by the reader but which unfold later through the course of the novel. It might equally compare with the form of an operatic overture hinting at, or foreshadowing the action to follow. But Tausky considers for the rest, apart from this opening, that the novel more closely resembles the structure of theme and variation:

_Milk and Honey_ is much more repetitive than any other novel of Jolley’s... the use of repetition, often with some degree of variation, in statements about music in a novel dealing largely with music, cannot fail to remind the reader of the importance of repetition (and of the theme and variations form) in music (NCE 203).

In the same collection of essays, edited by Delys Bird and Brenda Walker, A P Riemer, whose article is entitled "_Du Holde Kunst_: Music and Musical Form in Elizabeth Jolley’s Fiction" (NCE 206/218) considers that Jolley’s writing reveals a close resemblance to features of musical construction. Given Jolley’s own interest in music and her intentional use of both its form and content there is no surprise in the extensive... practice of variation (the transformation of themes) and counterpoint, [and] the interplay of independent themes or melodic fragments. Variations on a theme may, indeed, be the distinguishing feature of several groups of short stories and of the novels which seem to have grown out of them (NCE 209.
Riemer goes on to deal with the set of the first five stories in the collection *Five Acre Virgin* and the novel *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* with which they are linked. The sixth of this collection of stories has affinities to the hospice of St Christopher and St Jude in *Mr Scobie's Riddle* and with some of the novel's lesser characters while Mother of these stories (Mrs Morgan) and her family again feature in the final story of *Woman in a Lampshade* "The Last Crop" which any way is a variation of "A Gentleman's Agreement" in the collection, *Five Acre Virgin*.

There are also frequent cross references between novels. *My Father's Moon, Cabin Fever* and *The Georges' Wife*, published in October 1993, form a trilogy which share characters and situations in the style of theme and variation. Vera Wright is the narrator throughout and the plight of single parents and unmarried mothers, of independence and loneliness, of desire and love merge and combine in a fugal counterpoint of motif marked memories, of themes reworked, of diversified and re-moulded events, places and people. The sadness of loneliness while surrounded by many, culminates in Vera's isolation in the overheated American hotel room of *Cabin Fever* and as the carer for the Alzheimer afflicted Mr George in *The Georges' Wife*. This develops out of a musing on the memories of the individual lost in large organizations though surrounded by many people, as happens in hospitals, schools, hotels or conferences.

Perhaps this is part of Elizabeth Jolley's own upbringing beginning with her father's experience as a conscientious objector — "his father... turning him out of the house in front of the gathered neighbours, because of his beliefs and the disgrace of being in prison" (CM 4).
Then, returning from Vienna after the war, with a wife, daughter of an impoverished aristocratic Austrian ex-general, both he and his bride are condemned to live as traitor or foreigner from an enemy country. The children in the German speaking home, Elizabeth and her sister, suffer similar isolation especially with their home education by frequently changing governesses, themselves French or Austrian. Being at a Quaker boarding school, but not born as a Quaker, a trainee nurse without the "good" family background all add to the sense of exile, the loneliness of the outsider (CM 2/5).

Perhaps most novelists work from a stock of experience which leads them to deal similarly with topics and people emerging from their background and life experience. Especially when the output is large, there is a common tendency to return to favoured themes and similar characters. Then too, varying circumstances surrounding the new settings disguise the repetition. In fact this reiteration of the quintessential characteristics is a marker which makes the work of each writer differ from all others and renders them individually recognisable. But the reworking of so many of the themes and the numerous recapitulations in both stories and novels make the role of repetition in Elizabeth Jolley's writing a very obvious characteristic in itself and she is herself quite conscious of this. She describes this repeated use and re-use as a question of "further exploration" but there is also the deliberate employment of an image as a motif, or perhaps as a fugal subject to manipulate and develop as if it were a musical theme. Although this motif is a literary device, Elizabeth Jolley is quite consciously evoking the emotions or images which she wants to emphasise.
in a way she derives from music as a form ideally suited to the expression of emotion, even if she does not always remember the earlier use of the motif at the time of writing.

In the essay "Strange Regions There Are" in _Central Mischief_ she recounts the impression of the flapping sheet -- white against the green of foliage -- as she looks out of her window. She uses "this image to help create the character of Edwin Page in ... The Sugar Mother ... enchanted by ... the green and white ... the chosen colours of the Elizabethan court" (CM 112). Then as Vera is in labour she sees a billowing sheet against a green background -- the gentle rhythm in contrast with her own pains (CF 110). "When using an image for a second or third time I do not, as a rule, remember using it before. It is only after the works are finished that I see this repetition."

(CM 113). Nevertheless objections from editors calling for the removal of repetitions such as that of the billowing sheet would not succeed in worrying Jolley, confident of achieving the equivalent of a musical recapitulation with the emphasis and the renewal of a desired thematic reaction even though earlier these methods were criticised. She says in another essay "Living on one Leg like a Bird":

I know now that an image can be repeated often as a phrase of music can be repeated, perhaps with slight changes of rhythm or key or it can be written again in its original form. An example being the white sheet moving lazily in a damp wind against a dark green background. In this repetition the style of the musician, or the writer, is formed (CM 114).

Musical works often make use of recapitulation, perhaps in exactly the same form so that a large section of a work may simply be repeated. In hearing this music there is no suggestion of monotony, however there
is an understandable fear such repetition may evoke a reaction against a
tautology if an author repeats a section of a novel or a story. So
that editors usually desire to eliminate these repetitions. Yet
Elizabeth Jolley freely uses reprise with virtually no change as well as
recapitulation where there are variations, even if small. Perhaps this
is equivalent to the modulation of key or to ornamentation in a musical
composition. Some reiterations, considerably larger than simply a phrase
of music, are much more like a development section or a movement in a
larger musical work. The novel The Newspaper of Claremont Street
provides an illustration in the account of the acquisition of the so
long desired land, planting of the pear tree and Weekly's dance around
it as it is planted. Most of this is in the story "The Pear Tree Dance"
(WIL 1/9). Many passages are repeated word for word. Perhaps because the
pear tree itself is a metaphor for life -- the new life of the young
tree, the pear blossoms of hope -- Elizabeth Jolley describes the
relationship of this story and novel as the "Pear Tree Dance" being the
idyll of the novel, lacking any of the darker side of life reflected in
various aspects of the novel omitted from the story, especially the
death of Nastasya.

There is another metaphor in this novel -- that of clay -- perhaps
signifying impermanence, death and ambiguously, the source of life. The
clay is barren and useless for growing a crop. This also is reflected in
a short story where the events of the profitable disposal of this clay
are duplicated. This is "Uncle Bernard's Proposal" where the infertile
land can yet supply that "building material which does not endure for
ever" in the form of high quality building bricks. (WIL 71/81).
This story was first published in _Landfall_ in 1973 and then in the anthology _New Country_ edited by Bruce Bennett, in 1976. The same idea is put to Weekly by her neighbour over a cup of tea. This is the best way to make effective use of land which would otherwise be unproductive, "even [though] the best bricks crumble to dust in the end . . . nothing lasts for ever" (NCS 118).

There is a cheerful optimistic outlook in these short stories compared with the more sombre view of the novel in both the themes of clay and pear trees. _The Newspaper of Claremont Street_ is an expanded version of the short stories though with additional episodes and characters. Alternatively the stories might be regarded as condensed versions of the novel. At all events there is a considerable interchange between novel and stories in the usual Jolley style. This is discussed further in Chapter Two which deals with this novel.

This interlacing of people and ideas from stories to novels (or vice versa) is what leads Helen Daniel to regard the whole of Elizabeth Jolley's output as something comparable to Bach's _Musical Offering_ with the "constant and varying parts" building up a configuration of the whole, where "each new voice supplants the previous one, [and] the inner movements constantly change the distribution of patterns" (_Liars_ 270). Brian Dibble makes a similar analogy about the interweaving and repetition of basic themes although his analogy is spatial rather than temporal and visual rather than musical:

... as if it were a tapestry rather than a story which is supposed to have a beginning, middle and end. (one is reminded of the 34 brown herring-bone rows (_Newspaper's_) main character ultimately has sewn onto her skirts.) (_ABR_ May 1982: 29)
But there seems no doubt that Elizabeth Jolley herself is particularly interested in music. There are references to music in most of the novels and she remarks herself on her interest in using music to illustrate aspects of character:

Music can be used to show a great deal about a character. Some phrases of music belong so much to some of my characters that when I hear them it is as if I am still writing about the specific character concerned and all kind of detail, finished with years ago, comes back to me all over again (CM 116)

This seems to suggest the Wagnerian leitmotif where a theme is associated with a particular person. Jolley does not quite do this but in a more general way associates a particular type of music with a person. Examples are Laura's enjoyment of Beethoven, especially the "Ode to Joy", Arabella Thorne's love of Wagner, notably Die Walküre or the Rock and Roll so enthusiastically embraced by Frankie and Robyn.

Sometimes music is used as a metaphor and a good example of this occurs in The Sugar Mother, as Caroline Lurie notes (see p 7 above), where Daphne tries to gently suggest to Edwin that he may be making a big mistake in his life with an illustration from the Mozart Concerto No 8 in C Major K246. Edwin's understanding of a part of this concerto gives the impression that the performer goes off the track and has to start over again (even though as Daphne points out, this is actually the way the music is written). Daphne goes on to suggest that though this recurrence is Mozart's deliberate intention, it might be possible to correct mistakes in life by going back and reliving an episode. It is nostalgic and remorseful, much easier in music than in life. Chapter Eight on The Sugar Mother further considers this possibility.
Thus music in the fiction of Elizabeth Jolley is not simply one of the themes she uses in her writing but perhaps an actual model, a basis, to structure the writing in a way which allows for the alternation of realism and fantasy through form -- fact and fiction woven into a fugue. It allows for a fluidity which gives free play to imagination and creativity and is a vehicle for the contemplation of life's events with a gentle possibility of change so that the real and the imagined converge. But this is also a form of realism -- the way in which people do contemplate the events of their lives with that imaginative touch which allows them to gradually build up an account of events which is satisfying to them, even though it may have drifted away from the actuality. This permits a more satisfactory outcome where episodes themselves may have been displeasing or distressing. It allows the blurring of truth and fiction in such a way that, eventually, the fiction comes to be the truth and actuality is lost in a counterpoint of discourse which seeks some logical pattern in the interpretation of life's events. Maybe it is a variant of Molly's lengthy meditation at the end of Ulysses where life occurrences, hopes and regrets, past and future mix in pastiche which defies questions of reality and fantasy.

This of course suggests the possibility or probability that there may be substantial autobiographical contributions to the Elizabeth Jolley fictions (just as it does with most novelists) and she deals with this quite explicitly herself in the first article of Central Mischief: "What sins to me unknown dipped me in Ink" (CM 1/12).
The game which her father describes, while making cocoa, is one he and his sister play together. It comes back to Elizabeth Jolley (aged five or six at the time of the telling) later on to be used in the short story "Two Men Running" (WIL 47/70) The story is of dream-like quality where the real and the imagined are merged. The game is one of horses and carts, played on the kitchen table with an assortment of screws and nails and small nuts and bolts (representing the horses and carts). There is a pervasive a rhythm tapped out as the pieces are moved from place to place. Elizabeth Jolley long afterwards recalling this game and the rhythm uses it when writing the story of gaol prisoners in a fantasized run:

We're running still, lightly now, one foot -- two foot -- one foot -- two foot -- foot -- foot -- breathe in breathe out breathe in...  
"What about the kitchen table?" he asks me. "Where did you put your nuts and bolts?" his breathing's easier.  
"Where'd you put yer horses and carts of a night time?" (WIL 59)

Elizabeth Jolley recalls other childhood memories which find a place in her writing. Her parents, after an evening of Schubert lieder incongruously enjoy songs, popular at the time, such as:

How do you feel when you marry your ideal  
Ever so goosey goosey goosey. (CM 8)

"The Wedding of the Painted Doll" remains a memory of the same evening.

Childhood memories seem to be particularly vivid but the inspiration for Miss Hailey in Mr Scobie's Riddle according to Jolley herself is from a chance glimpse in passing, of a woman in the street. She wears an unusual straw hat and Jolley thinks "how pleased the woman in the hat would be to be able to tell someone the way" (CM 9).
For Jolley the impressions of long drives through the endless plains of the Western Australian wheat country are lasting and deep, particularly on stopping and walking away from the car to feel the loneliness and the great distances of the vast landscape of "these empty roads [under] the great dome of the familiar sky above" (CM 10). No doubt the contrasts with the English countryside for an immigrant are involved in making such an impression.

This experience is given to Hester Harper as she walks to town after running out of fuel in her vehicle in The Well. Miss Porch on the way to the distant and remote Cheatham East feels the same mixture of elation and loneliness on the long drive at the beginning of Foxybaby as does the narrator of the short story "Long Distant Lecture". Although in this case the sensation of awe is combined with considerable alarm as he becomes anxious that he is lost. Only the comfort of finding people calms the panic fear arising from the vast and lonely distances (TE 75/78).

Miss Porch experiences some of the variations on this theme of driving through the Murnane-like plains when she has been mesmerised by the drive through the endless wheatfields; her sensibilities have been heightened by this experience of the vastness of the land, like the endless sea. She sees strange things like "old, grey, bent men and women [who] wait indefinitely on green misleading corners", only to disappear and become bushes when the motorist investigates (FB 13). The long distance lecturer also feels the solitude of the wheat fields and mistakes a mist of rain cloud coming "purple across the wide land" for an escarpment leading him off into a deep valley (TE 72). So the mystery
of the endless Australian landscape is another of the Jolley themes to be woven in the tapestry or played as a second subject in the fugue.

In a more general way the experience of boarding school, its initial loneliness and the homesickness, an affliction for the eleven year old Jolley, becomes another of those enduring, possibly formative, occurrences providing other themes and traits for the make up of the personality of characters in her subsequent fictions. The loneliness is not far away much of the time for such as Laura in Palomino, Vera in Cabin Fever, My Father's Moon, The Georges' Wife and the eventually solitary Weekly in The Newspaper of Claremont Street.

The organizational background also seems prominent in the treatment of such characters as Miss Thorne and Miss Edgely, Gwenda and Debbie in Miss Peabody's Inheritance, and Miss Peycroft and Miss Paisley in Foxybaby. For these it is not so much the loneliness of an isolated individual as the moulding influence on their characters of the organization itself which makes them the jolly (or Jolley) schoolmistress, secretary or pupil. They are able to submerge themselves in the stereotypes of the roles, while Vera and Laura in the hospital and school, as conference delegate and newly arrived migrant, resist and so remain outsiders. In My Father's Moon episodes such as the journey to school, (MFM 30 ff) the bullying by the older girls in the initiation rag, (MFM 34) the sick bay with Bulge, (MFM 38) Miss Palmer (Patch), headmistress of Fairfields School and Miss Myles (MFM 7 ff) and others owe much to the Quaker Boarding School.
The many hospital scenes in *My Father's Moon*, the Hilda Street Maternity Hospital in *Cabin Fever*, the nursing home of St Christopher and St Jude in *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, perhaps some of the medical background in *Palomino* (where Laura is a doctor, her father and her uncles, Mr Glass and Mr Fort, are surgeons and Esmé is a fellow gynaecologist) and short stories like "Hilda's Wedding" (*WIL 39/46*) and '"Surprise! Surprise!' from *Matron* (*FAV 57/67*), all depend on the nursing training and experience from the age of seventeen years in orthopaedics at St Thomas' hospital in London in 1940 (*CM 40*).

No doubt the characteristic Jolley "black humour" grows out of this initial experience of being suddenly confronted with badly crippled children and wounded and burnt men from a bombed aircraft factory which provokes such a reaction for relief from the pain and suffering. Worst of all is the wounded young soldier infested with maggots. Gas gangrene, typhoid, diphtheria and dying babies all contribute to that need for relief often found in humour, even when it is quite crude.

Besides this there is the impact made by humour on the reader:

Sometimes the writer is only able to make his or her point about human behaviour (suffering or joy) in what is often called black comedy. The black comedy makes the reader laugh aloud while at the same time he is biting out his heart (*CM 48*).

Elizabeth Jolley quotes the dreadful night nurse Mrs Gamp in Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit* but could as easily use examples from her own *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, where Matron Price seems much more concerned with obtaining the patients' money than caring for them or their illnesses. Miss Peycroft offering courses of no educational value to lonely people while permitting Miles' extortions in *Foxybaby* is similar.
The style of writing is often sardonic, sarcastic and telling because of its insights but it is balanced and with an understanding which succeeds in letting us know that some of the most detestable characters are not entirely devoid of all traces of worthiness. For instance it is understandable that Matron Price acts in such a grasping materialistic way with her helpless elderly patients as she tries to keep her hospital going in the face of her brother's uncontrollable gambling folly. Miss Peycroft displays originality and adventurous imagination in spite of her domineering ways. Eventually Vera comes to like school and nursing even though there are still the uncorrected wrongs which are part of life anyway.

Perhaps it is not always possible for an author to tell what influences there are which lead to the work he or she does. It is obvious that hospital experience is very significant in Elizabeth Jolley's life and in what she writes. No doubt the same is true of the understanding of migrant experience. There is a contradictory mixture of regret for the friends, family and familiar ways and places left behind and yet hope for a better life, even though many of the impressions of the new land are strange, unfamiliar and unfriendly. Stories of Uncle Bernard (WIL 71 PAV 83 TE 51) or novels like Milk and Honey exemplify such emotions. Some also incorporate great knowledge of the feelings of the door-to-door salesman while itinerant house cleaning (both short term occupations for Jolley) contribute to the insights of Weekly in The Newspaper of Claremont Street and "The Pear Tree Dance" as well as in the short stories at the beginning of the Five Acre Virgin. So that while it may be accepted that not every fictional episode represents or
depicts an actual episode in life the experience does supply a background of understanding.

Similarly while each character may be not be a depiction of friend, enemy or relative yet each is based on knowledge -- an actual person or combined aspects of people met or observed and their desires expressed or repressed. The nature of love between individuals is frequently explored and re-explored. This love may be selfless devotion such as the cleaning lady of Claremont Street feels for her brother (whom she inadvertently betrays), incestuous love such as exists between Louise and her half witted brother Waldemar in *Milk and Honey*, lesbian love as in *Palomino* between Laura and Andrea, or heterosexual love as in Vera's experience with Dr. Metcalf and Mr. George. Clearly it is a subject of inexhaustable interest for Elizabeth Jolley, though of course, without any implication that all she writes about is actually first hand experience for the author. Perhaps it is not even a reflection of repressed desires!

Jolley's own statements about the way in which her experience is reflected in her fiction are a clear expression of the situation:

I cannot explain why I am a fiction writer unless the explanation comes in part from a response to my experience of the world in which I grew up and to the strange new world in which we exist today. I do not maintain that a writer should conceal her private life. What must come first are the words which must not be twisted to fit some preconceived image of the writer. Sometimes what is most important after infancy is the experience which finds expression only in writing.

... Writing fiction is not easy for me; to write facts almost impossible (CM 6)

It is the originality of invention which weaves the enchantment of the fantasy to highlight the underlying truth in the ultimate fiction,
contrasting symbol and reality. This imaginative treatment contributes much to the appeal of Jolley's writing. Facts alone could not achieve such effects. Certainly there is an interest in the ancient questions of what life is about, why are we here, what happens when we are no longer here? How should life be lived and how should we relate to others? In one form or another such questions are the basic concerns of many authors. Elizabeth Jolley does not claim that her intentions in writing are to find the hidden answers to the enigmas of creation but she does mention her interest in people:

There is an excitement in exploring character and seeing how they react with each other in different situations (CM 6).
Over the years it has become clear to me that I am deeply interested in people. I am curious about their motives, their feelings, their ambitions and their hopes and disappointments (CM 11).

She expresses the hope that something more may someday emerge which leads to an enlightenment, some "deeper understanding":

... I seem to start from one word, from one little picture, a few more words, ideas so slender they hardly seem to matter and then, suddenly, I am exploring human feelings and reasons. Perhaps one day in this exploration I shall step across a hitherto unknown threshold into some deeper understanding (CM 174).

Or again she recognises that the "exploration" is not just a wandering around but a purposeful search:

... the exploration of human feelings and reasons and circumstances perhaps... is an attempt to penetrate into the human heart and to recognise our own inner being (CM 175). ... perhaps I am continuing as unselfconsciously as all people do as a "temporary resident" in the search for an abiding dwelling (CM 179).
The searching and the exploration continue through all the novels with increasing earnestness over the years of publication becoming more intense, especially with the elements of personal experience which seem so important in *My Father's Moon, Cabin Fever* and *The Georges' Wife*.

This thesis is divided into chapters each of which is devoted to one of the novels, except for the group of those concerning Vera and her experiences and these are dealt with together -- as parts of the "Vera" trilogy. In these chapters interesting changes both in style and in content are examined in some detail -- to bring out further and develop some of those points mentioned in this introduction. Publication dates alone are insufficient to trace Elizabeth Jolley's development as a writer, since many of the books are the result of writing over a period of many years. They may also incorporate material from different Jolley sources. For instance *Mr Scobie's Riddle* evolved over some twenty years beginning as a "lament" into which Jolley later injects the humour which now enlivens it. The characters and their relationships grow during this time. *Miss Hailey*, originally the *Mrs Hailey* of the "lament", where she simply stands in the hall asking for her blind to be fixed, is transformed via the lady in a large hat seen in the street (who would enjoy telling people the way to go, if somebody asked her) into the successful, though unpublished, author. There are related short stories and a radio play wholly or partly incorporated into the novel eventually emerging to the public gaze, like the butterfly from the chrysalis, in 1983 (MS 156-7).
In the Mitchell Library there are some forty seven boxes and three folders of literary papers acquired from Elizabeth Jolley in 1987 and a considerable quantity of later material awaiting collation. This material provides an interesting insight into the way the novels come into being. Kate Greenvile and Sue Woolfe, using these sources as well as an interview with Jolley combine to give an excellent account of the making of *Mr Scobie’s Riddle*. (*MS 154-183*). Delys Bird in “Now for the Real Thing; Elizabeth Jolley’s Manuscripts”, gives a brief description of the collection and some details of the material on *Palomino, My Father’s Noon* and *Miss Peabody’s Inheritance*. (*NCE 168-179*). Of special interest is a set of notebooks in Box ML MSS 4880/3 which may well be the primary source for the last three novels. These are dealt with in Chapter Nine in general, as they relate to *My Father’s Noon, Cabin Fever* and *The Georges’ Wife*. The latter no doubt derives its title from that source which is dated from 1950 to 1965. It also carries a name close to that of the latest novel — in the manuscripts this is “George’s Wife and the Feast”.

The aim of the thesis is to examine Jolley’s writing, her methods, her underlying values, and the association of some of the writing to life events. There is considerable attention to the form particularly the very close relationship to musical form. Her fantasy is enlivened by the vivid Jolley imagination possibly encouraged and nurtured by the similarities between her early circumstances and those of the Brontë sisters. This is considered in Chapter Six as a factor, anyway as a stimulus, in the development of the very fertile powers of invention which Jolley displays.
PALOMINO

The first of Elizabeth Jolley's novels to be published, Palomino, is the product of writing over a long period with a great deal of revision and re-writing. Elizabeth Jolley's literary papers in the Mitchell Library disclose much of the painstaking work involved. This collection covers material from 1939 onwards and consists of typed texts, handwritten drafts, and brief notes, an essential part of her way of working.

Candida Baker reports a conversation with Jolley about her writing methods:

... I work all the time, in my head -- on scraps of paper because I can't remember anything. ... You see, I was a housewife with three children ... I used to write late at night when everybody had gone to bed. I couldn't have written if I hadn't made little notes during the day. ... I had masses of little bits of paper in folders. If anybody had asked to see a work in progress it would have been lots of bits of paper with scribbles on. (Yacker 1986: 217/9)

In the Mitchell Library material on Palomino there are two bound diaries, one of them precisely as described in Part 3 of the published novel which is itself called "The Cardboard Diary":

I bought this book the other day in town, it was reduced in price because of the year being half gone. I shall have to write the date at the top of every page as it is already the seventeenth of April and this first page is dated January the first, New Year's Day. This book has cardboard covers, that is why I have written The Cardboard Diary on the front. (PAL 132)

It is a Collins Diary for 1962, quarto size, but there is also a larger foolscap revised version, a manuscript in ink in a similar book.
Angus and Robertson would not accept the novel in 1963 partly because of its shortness but also the readers' reports consider it neurotic and "not lifelike". Publication by Outback Press was not until 1980. Even then there was still a long delay as publishers anguished over the complete typed copy dated 1975 which incorporated the various drafts in the Mitchell Library papers, though with changes.

The first section is "The Gentle Lark", at one time the overall title, though other alternatives include: "The Star of David" and Vita Nova, Altera Viva. There are comments to a Mr. Alfred Migron, presumably a publisher's editor, in response to his editing suggestions. Jolley seems very clear in her mind about what she intends and does not accept changes simply to avoid repetition, for instance. She uses repetition quite deliberately as part of her "theme and variation" technique and is firm about unwarranted changes.

Characteristically the archive on Palomino also includes a reminder of Jolley's double life -- in the shopping lists alongside notes about the characters. Delys Bird, after going through this Mitchell Library material, draws attention to this mixture of Jolley's two lives:

"Granita/Milk/Meat/Bones/Bacon/We have no choice/Eva is protected first by stupidity and then by the stroke..." (MCR 168/173)

"Motifs" or "resonances" function like the Wagnerian leitmotif as a key to character or mood in Palomino and in much of Jolley's writing often double as fugal themes. For example the sound of the car on a gravel drive slowly turning is a recurring intimation of the coming or going of the lover and a haven of safety. There are a number of instances. Andrea awaits Laura's return after her day in the city:
Last night I must have been half asleep when I heard the noise of the car approaching. In the quietness the car pauses on the bend in the track, the tyres turning slowly grip the gravel and it is as if there is a moment of hesitation and then, it is always the same, the car comes on down and the dogs start up at Murphy's place (PAL 187).

In very similar words Andrea describes her awakening at the Gasthaus Berghof on the first morning after her arrival there:

I wake early while it is still dark. When I am half asleep I hear the noise of an approaching car. In the quietness the car pauses on the bend in the track, the tyres turning slowly grip the gravel and there is a moment of hesitation before the car comes on down over the gravel (PAL 234.)

There are no dogs to bark at the Berghof -- only the stone goddess in the lily pond. And there is no Laura to receive as when she returns to the farm. Again in "The Libation" Andrea, now "Lois" writes:

"... In front of the Berghof is a wide gravel drive which encircles a white stone goddess seated in her water lily fountain. A car turning slowly here sounds like a car on the track at Helena's [the renamed Laura] ... . " Hearing the familiar sound in an unfamiliar place fills Lois with longing and sadness (WIL 110).

In "Grasshoppers" the same motif appears at the beginning of the story signalling the arrival of Peg, Bettina and the children: "The old woman, surprised to hear a car turning slowly on the gravel peered through the window to see who was coming" (TE 143).

Elizabeth Jolley values the effect of such resonances not only in phrases and sentences but also with ideas and characters. Perhaps this is part of the construction of the novel or story in pseudo musical form with a return to a character or idea previously treated.
Palomino is primarily a narrative of a relationship of deep involvement between two women. There is a considerable age difference in this central relationship though not as extreme as that between the older man and the boy in Thomas Mann's Death in Venice. Reference to the seminal nature of Mann's novella for Elizabeth Jolley occurs early in Palomino. Laura intends the shipboard screening of the film of Death in Venice to be the catalyst for the initiation of her friendship with Andrea (PAL 16).

It fails to fulfil this expectation and formal acquaintance is deferred and, just as in Mann's story, the development of the association between the protagonists is slow and frustrating. Laura and Andrea see each other as they walk around the deck of the homeward-bound ship. Their placement in the dining saloon, though at different tables, is nevertheless close enough for them to be able to converse -- but they never do. Laura feels that their attraction is mutual and she admires a pendant with a gold chain and green jewel (which it later transpires she had given to Andrea's sister as a child). They still do not speak to each other. As the ship docks they stand side by side at the ship's rail and though Laura feels that this is the last opportunity to establish a continuing friendship, they fail to communicate. Fear of rejection is probably the cause of the frustration of the beginning of their friendship and it is not overcome. It is coincidence which eventually brings Laura and Andrea together at a party given by Rodney Glass (PAL 55 ff).
It is fear too, which brings this idealised lesbian love affair to an end, fear and the anticipation of the effect of old age and illness arising from Laura's experience in another association. This is with Esmé Gollanberg, a fellow gynaecologist and long time correspondent. Their ultimate meeting is a devastating disappointment to Laura when she discovers that Esmé is old and ill. She bears little resemblance to the image which Laura constructs over many years of letter writing.

In spite of these fears Andrea and Laura meet and plunge into an idyllic life together on Laura's farm where the Palomino horses constitute the only male symbols they need in their independent feminist existence. There are occasional meetings with men such as Michael Fort and Rodney Glass, both surgeons and former colleagues of Laura and her doctor father. These two men are at the dinner party where Andrea and Laura finally acknowledge their attraction to each other. Laura's tenant, Murphy supplies some brute strength on the rare occasions when this is needed -- for example closing the barn doors in a storm (PAL 45) -- but in the main it is a man-free menage.

Laura is the first person narrator in Part 1, "The Gentle Lark" but the narrative is carried forward in a variety of styles. In Part 2, entitled "Palomino", there is an alternation in the narrative form. First Andrea begins and then Laura takes up the account, both in the first person. "The Cardboard Diary", the third part consists of dated diary entries. The short parts 4 and 5 are narrated by Andrea in the first person. Part 6 is named "Sunday and another Sunday" and reverts to the alternation of voices as in Part 2 while the last part with Andrea as narrator is "A Postcard from Irma".
The relationship between two women so central to *Palomino* takes on another perspective in *The Well* and yet another in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. *Palomino* is intensely concerned with the love between Laura and Andrea. Jolley mentions her involvement with these characters:

> It's like this. I've made two half women, together they make a kind of perfection. They are so equal and so happy together. I've fallen in love I suppose you could call it that, love with one of them... (ML MSS 4880/2-15).

Perhaps the "Laura and Eva Poem" expresses this love—although it is about love between Laura and Eva. The poems seem to be indicative of the methods and the thoroughness of Jolley's creation of character:

> I looked into your eyes
And thought I saw
All the light of the western skies
Reflected there.

> I wanted to ask you Eva
Would you smile if I kissed you
And touched you in the secret places
Eva, would you smile,

> In the softness of your lips, Eva
Is there an unexpected coolness?
I thought if I followed desire
I could never come to emptiness.

"From Laura, no longer laughing to Eva" (ML MSS 4880/23)

Laura continues with the imagery of the fleshy stalks of the sea pinks.

> Let's go together hand in hand.
Colour of love you said
Tawney in the golden morning.
Come here, you said, come here and sit beside me,
Sit close and even closer. Closer
Behold the monstrous human beast! you said
And on the sprawling sea pinks
Their fleshy stalks protesting
We sank together laughing
Sighing. Oh aromatic moment!

"Song from Eva, Thought by Laura and written by Laura as Eva does not think or write." (ML MSS 4880/23)
In sombre vein Laura mourns the loss of Eva to her husband and family.

The theme of unrequited love (or at least the inequality of the response between partners) is one of the strands of the *Palomino* fugue.

... I find I cannot forget you
It is so quiet and so dark
Everything reminds me of you.
An emotional storm yields no rain
Only a devastation
Against the devastation of the seasons
I must endure to know new things.

"From Laura (while she is alone in a wild place)"
(ML MSS 4880/23)

There are also poems of the love of the land, another of Jolley's favourite themes, expressed through Laura and her farm in *Palomino* but also recurring in short stories like those of Uncle Bernard such as "The Agent in Travelling" (TE 58/65) and in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*.

You sit alone under your olive tree
Your voice sings on the wind.
My song is in the earth
And from the earth is an explanation.

In this shade of leaves and petals and soft earth yielding
Unsettled happiness
Soft touching of fingers and gentle murmuring of voices
Quietness
Gratitude and a winable acquiesence.

"Song from Laura -- translation and explanation from the earth" (ML MSS 4889/23) -- in part.

Another expression of the love of the land and nature and its creatures is in the "Weekend Farmer":

**Forrester**

All night I felt I would live for ever
While you slept against my side
I listened to the rain
Thinking of the places where water collects and flows
All day I worked carrying earth and bark
Making islands
In the rushing flood of the rising stream
To hold the roots of the tender young trees.

All night I felt I would live forever
While you slept the frogs filled the dark
Night pillows with their music
Under the pale green cradles of the willows.

This morning tawny flocks of doves
Are flying up into the light
Sudden dropping of golden dust from the rising sun.
A soft clapping of wings and a tiny scattered applause.
All night I felt I would live for ever
This morning I know I will not see the trees when they are old.

"Weekend Farmer: Forrester. Verses 1,2,3,5. (ML MSS 4880/23)

In part 2 of the novel, with the title "Palomino", there is an echoing
of stanzas three and four (one stanza, the fourth, is omitted from the
quotation of the poem) in the description of the land after rain:

frogs on their mud bank pillows . . . croaking
down there under the willows . . . the little birds,
wagtails, robins and wrens dart back and come closer in
apparent freedom . . . the blue tails of the wrens are upright
and so small. Little birds, busy and shy and bold. (PAL 66)

Then there is the practical explanation of what the loquat fruit
actually is for someone who hasn't seen a loquat (and Eva hasn't):

I wanted to ask you Eva
Would you let me give you
Fruit when it comes
Yellow, shaped like plums
With four round brown seeds
Shining inside.
Would you, Eva, share my harvest?

From Laura, laughing to Eva. (ML MSS 4889/23)

The poems in general illustrate Jolley's involvement with character even
though the poetry is not subsequently used in the novel. Loquat fruit
seems more of a sacrament offered by Laura to the unthinking Eva.
A.P. Riemer is troubled about the intention of *Palomino*, regarding it as the "least successful of Mrs Jolley's works". He writes "I find its purposes curious and puzzling . . . the mixture of elevated prose and melodramatic material unfortunate" (*Southerly* 32/2 1983: 242). Critics disagree more about *Palomino* than any other Jolley novel. It is thought to be the least characteristic of her books. Its most prominent difference from the rest of her writing being a lesser emphasis on, even an absence of, that sense of humour which gives a special appeal to so much of Jolley's fiction.

There is an ambiguity in the contrast of the attraction to European culture represented by Laura's absorption in the Beethoven Symphonies and the late quartets on the one hand with the earthiness of the hard life of subsistence farming and the poverty of the Murphy family on the other. Perhaps there is something ironic in the cultured gynaecologist whose love of Beethoven and Schiller masks a much baser sensual nature, obsessed by lesbian sexuality. Laura is capable of intellectual correspondence on an elevated level with Dr Gollanberg. She creates a fantasy (perhaps in the image of herself) of Esmé Gollanberg's personality and appearance, yet lacks the slightest sympathy (in fact is appalled and revolted) when facing the reality on their meeting at the airport (*PAL* 178). Then in jealousy and disappointment Laura commits a crime of horror and deception -- murder in the guise of assistance. (*PAL* 182/3). The innocent delight in nature and the simple life on the land may represent a higher and nobler set of values than that of the European culture which nurtures this treacherous violence. Perhaps there
is an ironic intention in the melodrama of the murder of Esmé and Laura's deregistration and imprisonment to emphasise the virtue of sloughing off the encrusted, outworn customs and values of the old world and the desirability of embracing the simple life of subsistence farming and the aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty in the new world which unfolds to the eyes of the immigrant or returning native. But it is equivocal. Maybe the fulfilment of sexual desire, in whatever form, is in contrast to the onanistic enjoyment of the derivative culture of Europe replayed from vinyl discs:

... just as in Europe there was no real music; concerts and recitals of course, but not music to listen to alone ... I was studying carefully this possible closeness [in sonata performance] ... something more than the perfect sexual relationship. (PAL 10)

There is also the preference of sensual love between Laura and Andrea rather than the reserve between the two proponents in Newspaper and The Well. Maybe inhibition is dispelled by the belief that ageing will bring illness, disillusionment and rejection (PAL 253). Even more extreme is the brother/sister incest of Christopher and Andrea. Perhaps this contributes to the puzzlement which A.P. Riemer mentions about the intention of the novel. Is it to promote free sex?

Helen Garner in an article "Elizabeth Jolley: An Appreciation" mentions the "humourlessness" of Palomino:

The novel Palomino is the only one of her six books which is devoid of her weird humour, and this is one of the reasons for its failure. (Meanjin 42.2:154)

But Garner's view in this quotation of June 1983 is not her final judgement and she recants in a review in January 1985 on the re-issue of Palomino in hardcover with University of Queensland Press:
I passed over *Palomino* in a high-handed fashion, saying that it was a "failure" because it was "devoid of her weird humour".

I would now like publicly to withdraw this remark. Re-reading *Palomino* I take my hat off to Elizabeth Jolley once again... Jolley is one of our older women writers at whose feet I would willingly cast myself. (*SMH* 19 Jan 1985:41)

In this recantation of her initial condemnation of *Palomino* Garner does not make it clear whether she now sees humour in the novel. Perhaps there are still not as many funny episodes in *Palomino* as in some of Jolley's other writing, where the humour is used as a deliberate device to "sugar coat the pill" to gain greater acceptance of an underlying serious programme. It is this humour, for instance, which greatly reinforces the pathos of the nursing home and its sorely afflicted inhabitants in Mr. Scobie's *Riddle* and the related short story "'Surprise! Surprise!' from Matron" (*FAV* 57). The Jolley humour is often quite brutal, perhaps even cruel, but there is a characteristic dry, matter of fact presentation with the juxtaposition of extreme incongruities. This produces a whimsical tone which is very acceptable and attractive to most readers. Perhaps, indeed, this is one of the main factors contributing to the remarkable popularity of Elizabeth Jolley's writing.

In *Palomino* there are some strange, tasteless and unfunny attempts at jokes which seem to be quite out of character with the novel as a whole. For instance Mrs Murphy's reference to her husband's dullness:

"I tell 'im," she said to me, "if he lay down on the ground the white ants would make straight for his 'ead. . . . Wooden head! The ants'll get him," she said "straight up the leg of his bed and into his head . . . " (*PAL* 33).
Michael Port's repulsive story about a snoring patient who swallows pig intestines laid on his pillow as a joke to stop that unsociable sleep habit is another example. A toothbrush is used to assist in the restoration of what the patient believes is his own viscera. (PAL 59)

Even worse is young Peter Glass' riddle at Laura's luncheon:

"What is brown and crawls up your leg?"
... "A homesick shit." (PAL 214)

These instances, particularly the last, seem quite incongruous and strained but may indicate an awareness of the need for some comic relief even though the context does not seem to demand such a contrasting device. Andrea is unhappy about the visit of her family and perhaps particularly her brother, but it would not seem to be an occasion urgently requiring "light relief".

There is also the arrival of Dr. Gollanberg in Australia where the mixture of the grotesque and the tragic are in evidence. The well groomed, sophisticated, thoughtful doctor, a construct of Laura's imagination, does not materialise in the airport arrival lounge. In sharp and anomalous contrast is the tubby, short sighted, thick set, and disorganized Esmé of reality. Yet it is a meeting not without a touch of that strange wry Jolley humour. Laura waiting until the arrival lounge is almost empty, reluctantly concludes the unattractive figure remaining must be Dr Gollanberg. Helen Daniel in Liars 1988:276, concurs in comic aspects of this scene. Esmé is surrounded by many small untidy packages, her baggage, in a circle around her like "an animal stranded from its hole in the night". "Tonight I am bride" [she says] (PAL 178/9) in view of the unexpected and newly acquired husband.
Hastily married en route in Rome, Matthew is also old (PAL 179, 181). When they finally arrive at Laura’s house, there is the weird picture of the unlikely bride kicking and screaming, carried over the threshold of Laura’s house by the feeble groom, collapsing under the weight and then requiring revival by the application of smelling salts (PAL 179). This episode is nearer the Jolley humour we expect complete with the blacker side of the tremendous shock and disappointment Laura feels.

Palomino’s publication was marked by lengthy delays -- perhaps mainly because of the above mentioned doubts on the acceptability of some of the material. It is the first of the Jolley “sappho-erotic” novels (from Joan Kirkby’s title in Meanjin of Dec 1984:484). The greatest difficulty for publication in the 1970s or earlier is probably the frank description of physical aspects of lesbian love. Delineations of nudity, such as in the shared shower scene when Andrea washes tractor oil off Laura (PAL 98) and others, such as Andrea’s account of the naked sunbakers on the beach. (PAL 241) might offer problems for conservative publishers. Especially as in the latter scene there is the suggestion of paedophilia:

A tall golden-haired young man came running, passing us, very lightly along the sand and about twenty little schoolboys were running behind him and he collected them round him on the sands. He must have been a teacher with his class but it wasn’t quite so straightforward d’you see, because just above that part of the beach was the car park overlooking the sands and the sea. We walked up there and in every car there was a man sitting and all of them were looking intently down to the bronzed school master and his class. It was as if the little boys were being paraded for these men. It was really possible to feel a sort of excitement of desire and to feel excluded from it at the same time . . . (PAL 241/2)
Obvious sexual symbolism like Andrea's undoing of Laura's belt as
the indication of the wish for sexual closeness might be less of an
obstacle. Similarly the symbolism of the dreams of Laura as a child
where sexual penetration is depicted in Freudian symbols of "burrowing
in leaves" (PAL 36), holding back the flaps at the tent entrance (PAL
26) and delaying entry (as in the delayed introduction to Andrea) might
not be so difficult for such a publisher. The discussion of abortion
requests by Eva and Andrea might also not be so serious, especially as
their rejection is clear although the non-disparagement of incest --
between Andrea and her brother -- might still make cautious publishers a
little uneasy in a country where even in the 1990s expensive judgements
against publishers can still occur for trivial transgressions of some
sexual code. The instance of damages of $350,000 being awarded against
a magazine publishing a nude photograph of a footballer in the shower
allegedly displaying his penis (in shadowy obscurity) is a recent
example. (SMH 11.2.93:1).

Elizabeth Jolley seemed to think this was the likely cause of her
long period as an unpublished author. In an interview with Stephanie
Trigg in (Scripsi 1 1986) she comments:

... one of the troubles with writing the
things I was writing was that quite a lot of the
material was unacceptable. ... It's interesting
though, the climate has changed completely in what's
acceptable. Well, I think a great number of people
receiving our work were perhaps older people and were
still putting a colour on Australian writing that had
existed for the previous years.
A.P. Riemer may be nearer the truth when he comments on the general tone and style of Elizabeth Jolley's writing. In "Displaced Persons -- Some Preoccupations in Elizabeth Jolley's Fiction" he writes:

... we were not ready, until relatively recently, to acknowledge a voice as individual as hers, or literary preoccupations emerging from a quite remarkable mixture of crossing of cultural allegiances. ... She seems, from the evidence of her books, to be a very individual and private artist (Westerly 2 1986:64).

Laura is deeply involved with women in her work as a gynaecologist as well as in her personal relationships. She says:

I have written several worthwhile contributions on obstetrics and gynaecology ... I studied the needs of women from ectopic gestation to the normal menstrual cycle and the gravid uterus ... I loved my work and the thoughtful correspondence with my colleague Dr. Esmé Gollanberg. "Let the orgasm come quickly whichever way it will", [written by Dr Gollanberg] I made the text of one of my more important chapters ... I believed it ... (PAL 15).

Laura goes on to describe her interest in women in love, women who neither love nor are loved, women who are lonely, women who come together from choice or necessity (PAL 15). In correspondence with Esmé Gollanberg she studies "the mature woman, intellectual, deep thinking and capable of great depths in friendship and in love" (PAL 175). Laura has a particular interest in the pregnant woman and admires her beauty: "her loveliness, sacred in its limitation, the soft rich skin of the breasts, the smooth white thighs and the tender expression in the eyes of the healthy young primipara" (PAL 175). The tone is serious and seems to indicate Jolley's own feeling for the need for respect for women and pregnancy: "You can't help having a message in your book if you're writing about human beings, because everything touches on different social things ... " (MS 167).
Eva is pregnant during the time of the holiday at Great West Bay and Laura persuades her to swim and sunbake naked on the beach:

I let myself look upon Eva, her pregnancy is advanced her breasts are full and heavy. The white skin of her breasts is delicately traced with fine blue veins in a strange design belonging only to Eva herself. (PAL 145)

Eva's daughter, Andrea is also pregnant -- bearing her brother Christopher's child all the time she is with Laura on the farm. Laura notes her tender breasts and that "her skin glows...[with] the radiance of the healthy primapara" (PAL 196). The special concern with pregnancy is of considerable interest. Joan Kirkby, in an article "The Call of the Mother in the Fiction of Elizabeth Jolley" regards this interest as an almost "obsessive concern" and Palomino as the "grand gynocentric novel in the Jolley canon" (Span 26 1988: 52). But with the especially female concern of pregnancy and the orgasm perhaps there is a statement of the rights of women constituting a threat to the patriarchy. There is however, a threat to women's individual integrity involved in pregnancy and Jolley plays on this ambiguity. This is brought about by the change in body shape and the awareness of the presence of another life, another person within (Kirkby SPAN 26:53).

The effect of this may be felt as endangering the individual under the pressure of the relentless progress of nature through the various stages of the baby's development. The individual is submerged as a person in the impersonality of the life forces. Eva and Andrea both seem to suffer from this pressure and both try to persuade Laura to perform an abortion to relieve them of the problems presented by their pregnancies. But Laura refuses.
Laura shows no interest in heterosexual activity although perhaps there is an Oedipal twist in her relationships with her father or equivalent father figures -- like her uncle. Her positive distaste for younger men -- or men of her own age -- is as strong as is her preference for women: "I hate Jake" and "I want to be with Eva ... without the bruising rudeness of Jake" (PAL 136). Laura is also repelled by the mature woman and the possessiveness of motherhood -- both for child and parent. She resents Eva’s mother and Eva’s children. The old and infirm, like Dr. Gollanberg on her arrival, are completely rejected. No doubt murder is the most extreme form of rejection.

Joan Kirkby suggests there is a further ambivalence involved in the exceptionally uninhibited exploration of the female, especially in sensual experience and in the extolling of pregnancy but the rejection of motherhood (SPAN 26:46). The father directed identification for Laura is strong. There is much more emphasis on male associates -- especially her uncle, and work colleagues who are men -- than on women, apart from those who are lovers. Laura’s mother is scarcely mentioned, Mrs. Platt rapidly dispensed with, Mrs. Murphy strongly disliked. No doubt this is part of a repression which leads to the murder of Dr Gollanberg.

For Jolley there are many recurring themes which seem to possess enduring interest. They are frequently re-examined, often from different points of view. The emphasis on Laura’s cultural background centres on her love of music and literature. Interestingly it is always European music and literature -- Australian culture is ignored. Australian writers or composers might just as well not exist. She frequently refers
to the Beethoven string quartets, especially the late quartets, and to the Ninth Symphony, particularly to the setting of Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in the last movement. She is delighted to find there is also a setting by Schubert. Laura also refers to other Beethoven symphonies. She sings the choral melody from the last movement of the 9th Symphony frequently. On the ship she longs for music: "the Beethoven Triple Concerto and for Brahms" (PAL 10). She recalls a performance of the Kreutzer Sonata and some Strauss which she thinks would be better if the performers were not visible (PAL 10). A.P. Riemer mentions that the reason for the high profile of music in Palomino is hard to find. Perhaps one reason for this explicit reference to European music is in order to contrast it to the Australian music of nature, the song of birds, the cooing of doves, "the harsh cry of the heron ... searching ... the creek bed" (PAL 24). On her return to Western Australia after her European tour Laura enjoys the unique sounds of Australia as well as its landscape: "I hear the silence and the noise of the country ... The marri trees are full of bees, their noise is like an organ playing in the branches" (PAL 30/1).

She compares the Australian scene to the landscape of Russia. Across the valley from her small farm are hay fields and paddocks where some of the palomino horses run. "It reminds me ... of the Russian countryside and I wanted to [see] ... this Tolstoy country ..." (PAL 24). Whilst in Europe she longs for her horses, Lucy and Charger, stabled with the Palomino horses in the adjoining property in "Tolstoy country, that's how I see it" (PAL 12). She yearns for "the dry hard earth" and "the intense heat of summer" (PAL 11). As she returns home
from her overseas journey Laura looks forward to the Australian bush and when she finally arrives, enjoys her drive back to her farm:

Again we turn to the east, the sun is blinding. The sun touches the folds of jarrah forest and lights up the tops of the trees and patches of the scrub... The great marri trees left standing in places along the edge of the road are covered in balls of creamy white flowers.

"Oh! the red gums!" I can't help exclaiming aloud. It really as if the country is alight with these big old trees. In all the years I have known the country I can't remember such a flowering...

When I step on the ground I feel lifted up in the light air and I hear the silence and the noise of the country and smell the warmth in the gentle wind (PAL 30).

The love of the land and the enjoyment of the Australian bush covers Laura's appreciation of the smells, sounds and silences but there is also a practical aspect to Laura's attachment to her land. Some of the enjoyment is in the knowledge that the farm belongs to her, is her own land and there is pleasure and satisfaction in working the land and improving it. But there is the ambivalence (mentioned above) in the aesthetic appreciation between European music and European scenery and that of Australia. The old world may be sophisticated and cultured, but it is worn, weary and no longer where Laura's heart dwells. The Australian environment seems new and raw but is purer and truer in the long run. There is an attraction to each but Laura feels "safe on my land". (PAL 259).

Another of these themes which appears and re-appears in the fugal arrangement of Palomino is that of the horses. These horses give the novel its title, while Andrea has herself palomino colouring. "She will love the Palomino, it will be her sort of horse, the same creamy gold colouring" (PAL 74). And Laura has a horse for her to ride, Dove,
while she herself rides Charger or Lucy. Dove is a little mare and she is pregnant -- reinforcing the pregnancy theme. A highly charged dramatic scene is involved in Andrea galloping her little horse around the "long paddock", possibly with suicidal intent. "The Dove is a sturdy brave horse and is galloping as if she had no rider. . . Lucy trembles . . . sensing the frantic gallop of the Dove." (PAL 119)

Inevitably Andrea is thrown as she tries to jump the fence, too high for the little horse but fortunately with little damage to Andrea and none to Dove whose pregnancy has several months to run (PAL 120/1).

The palomino horses in the adjoining property can be seen from Laura's house. "The little Palomino horses cross and recross the paddock in front of the placid shape and colour of the bay" (PAL 216). Andrea goes off to ride with her brother Christopher, even though Laura tries to discourage this especially as they are not dressed for riding. But Laura thinks this won't matter to Andrea. "Andrea is quite capable of taking off her dress and riding the Dove naked." (PAL 217)

Notwithstanding all ideas of sexual freedom the lesbian infatuations in Palomino lead to a tragic outcome. Eva and Laura, originally schoolmates, are parted by personality and responsibility. The relationship never develops to Laura's satisfaction and Eva is absorbed into her domestic life of child bearing and subjection to Jake. Her reward in the end is a stroke inducing semi-paralysis. Perhaps there is an unspoken assumption that sexual perversity will lead to unfortunate outcomes. With Esmé Gollanberg there is really no more than a fantasy of
physical relationship (*PAL* 180). Death nevertheless is the result when
Esme and Laura finally meet. For Laura the outcome is de-registration,
the collapse of her life as a doctor, imprisonment and disgrace.
Fearing that ageing and illness will lead to disillusionment between
them, Laura urges Andrea to make a new life for herself and her unborn
child far away. They part, agreeing it will be forever and Andrea goes
to Austria. The outcome is still tragic -- though this is not fully
disclosed in the novel but found in short story -- "The Libation",
practically a sequel to *Palomino* (*WIL* 105/117).

The punishment resulting from "unnatural sin" cannot be avoided.
Andrea and Laura both suicide dramatically within a few days of each
other in the same room of the Viennese pension. The names of the
protagonists are changed in this story. The facts are revealed in an
incomplete letter, (displaying knowledge only available to Andrea) used
as lining for drawers when the room is cleaned out after the previous
occupant (by implication, Andrea) suicides. The first person unnamed
narrator realizes that the letter (or the part of it) which she finds at
the Pension Heiligtum concerns a publisher's comments on a, so far
unaccepted, novel. This novel recounts, describes and comments on
Laura, Andrea (as Helena and Lois) and aspects of the life shared by
them. Elizabeth Jolley, or rather the narrator, also replies through
the letter to criticism of *Palomino* in the guise of an answer to an
editor or reader on the supposed, as yet unpublished, fictional novel.

No, I do not mention how the record player operates.
Does a novel have to contain every detail of a household?
... how many cupboards, how many wash basins, lavatories,
fireplaces, doors and windows. ... (*WIL* 113).
You say the discovery of Beethoven is tiresome because you discovered him on a wind-up gramophone in 1930. Your discovery does not mean that Beethoven has been discovered for ever. Every day Beethoven is a fresh discovery for someone. For Helena a repeated discovery and pleasure. . . (WIL 113/4).

Yes, the incestuous relationship with the brother is fact, so is the murder of the elderly doctor . . . (WIL 113).

It is interesting that these comments reply to criticisms of Palomino such as those A.P. Riemer makes in his Southerly article "Between Two Worlds -- An Approach to Elizabeth Jolley's Fiction". His criticism includes:

She (Laura) is obviously a keen student of the late Beethoven quartets (to which she listens on the gramophone in her farmhouse lacking the blessings of electricity). I am not clear in my mind what this has to do with the novel's overriding concern . . . (Southerly Sep 1983: 243).

Laura . . . is a deregistered doctor who had been imprisoned for murder, and Andrea . . . is bearing her brother's child. [on the melodramatic writing] (Southerly Sep 1983: 242).

"The Libation" also makes possible several general comments and denials through the unnamed author of both the supposed book and letter:

The views expressed on abortion and childbirth are not necessarily my own. No, I do not wish to enter into a correspondence with you about either (WIL 113).

I can't put my name or my opinion forward. I write but only for myself (WIL 113 as a quote from the rejected novel).

I do not use the novel to express my own views on any subject. I have not tried to write a thesis or a dissertation on pregnancy or on lesbianism (WIL 114).

The words "a deep spiritual and emotional experience . . ." do not mean an orgasm. If I want to write orgasm I will write it. The experience referred to means something else as described in the text (WIL 112).

All fiction springs from moments of human experience and truth. The writer of the story must have seen and observed and must have been completely aware of certain things about me and about my life. (WIL 109).
In "The Libation" both the unknown author of the secreted letter (but who may well be Andrea) and the re-christened Laura (Helen in the presumed novel and perhaps simultaneously the narrator in the short story) end the idyll of love in a libation of blood poured on the "oil-dark boards" of Pension Heiligtum, "a temporary stopping place" on their "long journey", a separately undertaken but similar pilgrimage. In this outcome there is an implied moral condemnation of the "unnatural" sex involved between the two women -- Laura and Andrea in *Palomino* -- but perhaps too by Andrea with her brother in their incestuous relationship. This diminishes the effectiveness of any revolt against the patriarchal authority just as Eva's stroke implies retribution for her failure to remain faithful to the rules of patriarchal "normality" by not confining herself to the sexual life of the marriage. Her stroke left her smiling "crookedly", a bit deaf, propped up by Christopher with cushions speaking slowly and with difficulty slurring words: "Laur-ah it's be-en a lo-ong ti-me!" (*PAL* 211). So even in *Palomino* the protest against the established order is a little hesitant and by the time of "The Libation" it is further weakened. At best Jolley's dissent is equivocal perhaps giving way under the continued pressure, either of public or publisher opinion or perhaps both. Even at the beginning of her acquaintance with Andrea, Laura allows the lesbian appeal to be blunted by her absorption with the love between the older man and the youth in *Death in Venice*. Her attraction to Andrea seems to depend, at least partly, on her resemblance to a young male with her "light boyish step" (*PAL* 6).
"The Libation" goes beyond *Palomino* to explore further the characters and ideas using many of the features of the subconscious revealed by Jacques Lacan in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter" (TFS 48(1972): 38/72). The Heiligtum letter possesses the same equivocal quality as a unit of signification — resembling and revealing "a memory trace", or as an epistle with similar doubts about ownership as in the Poe story. Is the letter the narrator's? Does it belong to the Heiligtum and its lady vegetarian owners, or does the mysterious or partly revealed author, presumably Andrea, have prior claim to ownership? The writer (or perhaps sender), just as in the Poe story, might retain some proprietorial rights and so might the addressee. But to whom is it addressed? From the contents it might be assumed to be a literary editor or publisher who is reluctant to publish the elusive presumed book — but as the letter is found still in the Pension it may never have been sent. It may be a copy — but it is on good clean paper and does not seem to have alterations as may have taken place on a draft so it may be the original unsent letter.

Additionally this letter has some metaphysical characteristics: "the letter has no beginning and no end" (*WIL* 108). Though the hiding place of the letter is not exposed between the "legs" or "cheeks" of the fireplace as with the Poe letter the nature of the container, the drawer or "box", could still be interpreted as sexual in nature and the insertion into this secreted hidden "box" by the vegetarian ladies with the neat folding (instead of crumpling) as being lesbian in character. There is a similar recapitulation of events, especially if *Palomino* and "The Libation" are linked. There are the lesbian episodes which occur
between Laura and Eva and Laura and Andrea in *Palomino* and between the narrator and Ainsley in "The Libation". The letter (or letters), but of course, not the same one, is the basis of the relationship between Laura and Émée, just as it is the key to the completion of the liaison between Laura and Andrea (as Helena and Lois) in "The Libation". In fact *Palomino* begins with a letter which is not only unsent but is actually labelled as unwritten. And the novel ends with another letter, also "unwritten" and unsent, which quotes the optimistic if enigmatic message from Irma (one of the vegetarian ladies of the Heiligtum):

>If not happens what we want
Then will happen something better (*PAL* 258).

Just as the Prefect recounts events in "The Purloined Letter" of Poe, thus repeating them, so the letter concealed as the lining of the drawers of Pension Ligetum in "The Libation" recounts and repeats the events in *Palomino*. Verbal ambiguities abound and the themes of sexuality are prominent in both texts -- though perhaps more obviously revealed in Elizabeth Jolley's writing than is the case with Edgar Allan Poe as the Jolley text places great and unmistakable emphasis on lesbian sex. Where there is heterosexual activity it is either without love (as between Jake and Eva) or incestuous (with Andrea and Christopher). This is quite as threatening to the authoritarian order of society as homosexuality.

The patriarchal system reliant on sexual "normality" and male ownership of a submissive female partner is subverted by Jolley in *Palomino*. However in the long run there seems doubt about the
maintenance of this subversion as indicated above by the suggestion that righteousness and the patriarchy overtake the "wrong doing" of the rebellious lesbian lovers. The Palomino ending at least may be open to question. It is certainly not triumphant, as Laura and Andrea part forever for fear that age will wither their love. But the way in which the Jolley short story "Libation" and the novel relate seems to make the ultimate punishment for deviance more extreme -- death, each by her own hand, is now the penalty. Nevertheless, and though Jolley might not like to be considered as a feminist, Palomino does constitute a powerful challenge to the patriarchal establishment. It is critical of the egocentric husband (as with Jake), the possessive mother, both with Eva's mother and with Laura's own mother, and the demanding children. It presents the alternative of a complete family unit, Laura and Andrea, who need no male to satisfy sexual drives, or anything else.

The only external aid to assist the women is perhaps, with the Palomino horses. These horses might be regarded as symbols of male substitution. If this is so it only provides a further challenge to male domination. This could be the theme proclaimed by the novel's title and in the novel itself the concept seems satisfactorily maintained to closure, even though the ending might be typified as failing in confidence -- a separation of Andrea and Laura induced by fear of future possible consequences of the natural process of ageing. Again there is the contradiction of the acceptance of the natural process of sexual attraction and desire but a denial of the equally natural process of growing old:
As the years go by age will add to age and make old age... Loneliness sits in art galleries, concert halls, museums, churches and most of all in the hotel bedrooms... And what about the loveless time when the loving comes to an end and there will be only the expected bored enquiries about the qualities of separated sleep and the concern and discussion about the functioning of each other's bowels or whether the tea or the soup is hot enough. (PAL 222)

The protest, if indeed a protest is intended, is then undermined by the outcome in "Libation". Or is this simply Jolley's way of playing with ambiguity, another of her chosen methods? These ambiguous alternatives avoid a firm conclusion. They provide the means of interpretation in different ways, perhaps adding a richness to the work as a whole as well as "postmodern" uncertainty. The threat to the patriarchy remains even if there is none intended. There is also a retreat from the lesbian alternative of sexual independence from the male system and the tacit acknowledgement that sexual satisfaction in relationships of two women is unlikely to be complete and lasting. Furthermore the prohibitions against incest cannot be ignored with impunity. This incest is not only between Andrea and her brother but there is also a suggestion of something incestuous in the relationship of Andrea and Laura, going back to the earlier affair between Laura and Andrea's mother Eva. It almost seems as if the ambiguity is inherent in the basic conservatism of Jolley's writing where the deviations from sexual "normality" are regarded as having elements of humour, but which are not really, deep down, acceptable. In fact, Elizabeth Jolley in an interview with Jennifer Ellison makes her position clear:

... I don't intend to write about sexual perversion at all. It just is that certain things drive people to certain relationships, or they snatch at certain relationships. It seems to me that there's a sort of
It would seem, particularly in the light of Jolley's own implied description of lesbian and other "deviant" sexual practices, as "perversions", that Jolley writes from a heterosexual point of view and claims for her feminist status are difficult to support, especially in the face of her own denials of any such allegiance.

In *Palomino* there is an interesting experiment in the alternation of viewpoint which the first person narrators supply as the narrative continues from first Andrea and then Laura and in diary excerpts and letters. This not only contributes to elusive meaning but in itself imposes a form comparable to the fugue -- one voice introduces the subject then the other follows with an alternative and both the themes develop. Laura's lesbian theme threads its way through with Eva and Andrea and even with "Sweet Dora", the good natured servant who looks after Laura after Mrs Platt's death. Laura resists the temptation to make sexual advances to Dora, though only after a great struggle. Dora is now married to a "bullet-shaped little monkey of a man" and living in Port Hedland (*PAL 27/29*). There is the theme of loneliness which afflicts Laura, driving her home from her European tour and finally leaving Andrea isolated in Vienna. There are variants of the recurring themes woven in musical form, yet the key to *Palomino* (especially with "The Libation") may well be in the Author's Note at the beginning of *Five Acre Virgin*: "it might be more satisfactory to discard the complacent acceptance of the values of our society and education and the repeats on television [than to] discard each other."
THE NEWSPAPER OF CLAREMONT STREET

Like Palomino, The Newspaper of Claremont Street is very much concerned with a relationship between two women although, unlike Palomino, this relationship is not based on mutual love but on an uneasy interaction of dependence and exploitation on the one hand, and pity and a reluctant sense of obligation and duty on the other. While Palomino celebrates the physical enjoyment of love and rejects all considerations of illness and ageing, The Newspaper of Claremont Street ignores considerations of love, especially of a sexual nature, and explores the idea of becoming old and retiring to your own "five-acre virgin".

In fact, it could well be that the most prominent theme of desire in The Newspaper of Claremont Street is the love of the land, or rather the love of one's own land and the importance of such ownership. This is paralleled by the migrant experience of exile from the homeland and the need to find acceptance and a true place in the new land.

"Weekly" (Margaret Morris), a refugee from England's "Black Country", possesses an obsessive drive to secure this assurance. Her land hunger is powerful and patiently and perseveringly pursued. European born Nastasya Torben is unable to come to terms with the new country and remains lost in the limbo of her aristocratic European past:

"My Fazere, Weekly, had country Es-state with gardens and lawn and orchards, and every summer I ran wild there. You can have no idea of hot houses full with grapes and the fruit trees so laden . . . (MCS 61)

Elizabeth Jolley's literary papers in the Mitchell Library include a set of eight notebooks, a mine and source for much of her later writing.
These notebooks contain material similar to the "Self Portrait: A Child Went Forth" (ABR Nov 1983 and FAV 127/135) or "What Sins to Me Unknown Dipped Me in Ink" (CM 1/12). They are a record of what seems to be personal experience, particularly of early life, school and nursing; often they are from the point of view of the outsider -- the exile. They are labelled "Manuscripts of Georges Wife and the Feast" dated 1950 to 1965 (ML MSS 4880/3).

In the "Self Portrait", Elizabeth Jolley considers the theme of exile one of the most important for her (FAV 129). Jolley experiences herself, either directly or by observation, the same kind of exile which is the lot of both Weekly and Nastasya. Jolley, like Weekly, is from the Black Country. Nastasya is from Russia but could as easily be from Austria, homeland of Jolley's mother. Elizabeth Jolley is at pains in the "Portrait" to point out that all authors must write from experience but that this does not mean the author takes part in all events described or recounted.

The experience from which I write is created by things seen or heard or read about or imagined. I use small fragments, hints, suggestions of experience. . . . a particular aspect of a tree or a paddock . . . . my hopeful prayers written in my diaries during the first real miseries of boarding school life . . . . (FAV 133)

Many of the ideas and characters in The Newspaper of Claremont Street are subject to separate development or re-examination in other novels or stories, as almost obsessive themes. Short stories may arise out of the novel or they may precede the novel, or the same themes may be used again in other novels. The land hunger of Weekly appears in short stories and is not dissimilar to Laura's love of land.
The original title for *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* in the Mitchell Library papers, "Clever and Pretty", is now that of a short story with the theme of betrayal, a theme still dominant in the novel. For both story and novel the betrayal arises in apparent innocence. Weekly betrays her brother, Victor, to his five "friends" (*MCS* 10, 36, 82, 97/99) and Clever leads the Redcaps to the landlady's son, deserter and child molester. (*WIL* 193/5).

Another story "Pear Tree Dance" follows closely the theme of Weekly's land lust, but of course with subtle changes (and some not so subtle). This provides a good example of those thematic repetitions with variations owing more to musical than literary structure. The re-examination of the themes of intense desire for land and inadvertent betrayal are subject to further and more concentrated treatment in the later stories even though they already recur throughout the novel itself. Elizabeth Jolley explains to Candida Baker:

> By crafting short fiction from the material in a novel it is possible to find out more about the character. . . . "Pear Tree Dance" is the idyll of the novel *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. It is the rustic picturesque scene and the ambition realised without the sinister aspect that is in the novel. In *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* Weekly does realise her ambition and the idyll is present in the novel, but of course there is the sinister problem of Nastasya who feeds on Weekly while she, Weekly, is trying to achieve her life-long dream (*Yacker* 1986: 220).

Characters as well as themes often appear in different contexts in much of the Jolley fiction, mostly with name changes, but nevertheless clearly recognisable so that idiosyncracies and traits are open to further examination and fresh aspects of their personalities appear in different stories and novels.
Weekly's brother Victor, in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*, as Brian Dibble points out, first emerges in short stories in *Five Acre Virgin*. He is the Doll in "The Wedding of the Painted Doll" or the Prince in "Another Holiday for the Prince"... (*ABR* 40 1982: 29). The same character gets another outing displaying his literary accomplishments in the story "The Play Reading" (*WIL* 101/4). He is also a sinister night time figure in *Mr Scobie's Riddle* where, under the pseudonym Mr Boxer Morgan, and in association with Mr Rob Shady, no doubt his double, he wins ownership of St Christopher and St Jude hospital from Lt Col I. Price (retired) in a poker game.

Weekly herself seems a reincarnation of the narrator, Maise or Mary, in the first six stories of *Five Acre Virgin*, which Elizabeth Jolley explains is the first group of a collection of twelve stories

... in which I have tried to present the human being overcoming the perplexities and difficulties of living. The collection is called "The Discarders". The characters appear to inhabit a crazy world. I think it is our world. (*FAV* 9).

These stories are about the Morgan family where Mother is the cleaning woman, Mary, her daughter the neophyte cleaner and Donald, also the Doll, is Mrs Morgan's son and the pre-cursor of Victor. He is spoiled and pampered by his female relatives while they support him by cleaning other people's houses. The daughter who is narrator in these stories not only develops into Weekly but also becomes Night Sister Shady (unregistered) in *Mr Scobie's Riddle*. Mother (Mrs Morgan) in her old age celebrates her 100th birthday at a very similar nursing home in "Surprise! Surprise! from Matron" (*FAV* 57).
Some of this novel's themes, such as the importance of the ownership of the land, the importance of the place of residence, and the changes involved in migrating from one country to another, are now familiar motifs or strands some of them prominent in Palomino. The same themes can be found in stories like those about other land loving immigrants such as Uncle Bernard including: "The Outworks of the Kingdom" (TE 40), "Uncle Bernard's Proposal" (WIL 71) and "Outink to Uncle's Place" (FAV 83).

The love of land and the hunger for its possession, which is a motivating force in The Newspaper of Claremont Street, is a dominant concept in Elizabeth Jolley's writing. "Five Acre Virgin", the title of the short story dealing with the stabilising virtues to be expected from land ownership (and also the title of the collection of stories published by the Fremantle Arts Centre Press in 1976) is the basis for one of the poems in the series called "The Orchard":

For sale five acres virgin bush partly cleared and fenced with round poles one acre lucerne abundant water power available tin shed for tools septic system possible pig license suitable stone fruits goats and almonds G.P.O. thirty six miles.
ALL LAND IS SOME ONE'S LAND YOU SAID AND THIS LAND IS OUR LAND.

This is the first of the seven poems, "Country Towns and Properties" in "The Orchard". They are in Box ML MSS. 4880/23 in the Mitchell Library Jolley Papers and have been published in Westerly (3 1973: 42/4) and in Quarry (1981), edited by Fay Zwicky also recently included in Diary of a Weekend Farmer FAC (1993). Maybe a little less commercially oriented, with aesthetic appreciation replacing possessiveness, is the second poem in this same collection, titled "The Land":


Sun stroked slopes
Waist high wild oats
Shadow splashed.
Light gravel loam
White with frost,
Summer warmed
Winter washed.

No 7 in this collection, relevant to *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* is "Pear Tree Dance":

All day the sun wrapped colour
On bleeding bark and polished stone
These old great trees were growing
Before men made this place their home.
The light is fading from the northern hills
All day it was the second planting,
Kind feet stepping on soft earth dancing
Firming the fresh soil's hopeful face.
In a shower of promised leaf and flower
Will stand a bride blossomed in living lace.
And from the tinfoil label
Comes a fragile music
For the pear tree dance.
Winter nourished
Summer cherished
The secret flesh of sweet fruit whitening
Beneath the glow of fragrant ripening.
Just now, the hungry heron flies alone.

The poems and the short story "Pear Tree Dance" are part of the Jolley dream, a fantasy, not just of the pear tree but of the fascination with the land, the seasons, of man's part in the scheme of growth, of ownership and the personal involvement in nature's processes. It is not just an appreciation of the beauty of the country, but an expression of the personal commitment of ownership. This feeling is strong in *Palomino* but Laura could buy the land without difficulty from her own resources. For Weekly a long hard life of stinting herself and endless saving is necessary to fulfil her desire to establish her roots in the soil -- to own part of the new land. The saving has been unremitting and self
sacrificing. As she works at her house cleaning each day Weekly is comforted by the thought of how her shining mountain of money is growing:

The growing sum danced before her every morning, every morning growing a little more. ... She used the sky as a blackboard, and in her mind wrote the figures on the clouds of the morning. (NCS 8) ... the cone of coins stretched higher ... its sides glittered. (NCS 100)

She wears second hand clothes, cast off by those whose houses she cleans, calculates savings from the non-buying of non-winning lottery tickets, cleans in lieu of cash payment for the rent of her room and devotes long hours to her cleaning tasks to realise her fantasy of the mountain of money, the exquisite cone with shining slopes (NCS 31).

Weekly plays off the people of Claremont Street against each other using their concerns for their reputations with surprising cunning. In this way she furthers her aim of the five acre block with the little weather board house by first acquiring a free car, complete with overhaul and all repairs plus driving lessons. So she goes to more distant country where the land and house are within her means. And her dream is eventually within reach. Maybe it is rocky, hard and barren -- cold in winter, hot in summer -- but it is the permanent home. The ideal of land ownership is fulfilled. This is also the central theme of other associated short stories such as "Bill Sprockett's Land" (FAV 92), "Five Acre Virgin" (FAV 18) and "A Gentleman's Agreement" (FAV 26). But in none of these stories is there the same struggle to achieve as that which drives Weekly on. Bill Sprockett never did own his land anyway and just goes on wishing. Chicanery is Mother's weapon in "A Gentleman's
Agreement", and also "The Last Crop" another variant of the same story (WIL 208), to see one last crop through to maturity before leaving --- but it is a jarrah forest!

There is another sense in which the actual soil is important and is regarded as a commodity. In the last resort Weekly's land is not very productive in itself but the clay may be sold to make bricks and at least part of the "five acre" property can be turned to profitable use. One part where the pear tree still struggles (so far unsuccessfully) for a fruitful life and where there is the mound which is the tomb of Nastasya, cannot be so used:

Next to the pear tree was a curious earth covered mound about the size of a man bent double. It was fenced roughly with pieces of old pipe and bits of wood and bark, some tin cans had been hammered flat and stuck into the clay.

. . . "I should like this left as it is . . . In a couple hundred years there should be a interesting fossil here. In the interests of science, you see."  (NCS 119)

This is the way Newspaper explains the need to spare the pear tree and Nastasya's last resting place to her neighbour. His proposal to amalgamate their clay deposits for the manufacture of bricks instead of trying to farm such infertile land immediately appeals to Weekly even when linked to life's transitoriness:

"This clay makes special bricks, but" he sighed, "even the best bricks crumble to dust in the end," he sighed again. "nothing lasts for ever"  (NCS 118)

The apparently destructive and discouraging criticism of the woman at the post office provides the origin for a new vision of land as the basic clay. As she says the Dutchman up the road is already selling his bricks:
"You could go up the road and see what the Dutchman's done at his place. Where the clay pits are, you'll know the place when you see it. You never saw such a mess. Seems to me all your place is good for is the same as what they're doing there."

(NCS 116)

This Dutchman bears a very strong resemblance to Uncle Bernard Ouns in the short story, "Uncle Bernard's Proposal" (WIL 71). He also makes a very similar proposal to the widow next door. His nephew Claus is in fear and trepidation that Uncle Bernard's ambition to become a vigneron will stop at nothing short of a fusion of the adjoining properties procured by nephew Claus' marriage to the aged widow neighbour and Uncle Bernard relishes his anxiety right up to the sticking point:

"Our properties adjoin one another, our fences are in very poor shape. What say you Madam," Uncle Bernard leaned forward. "What say you Madam if we tear out our old fences and join our two properties and together we start an amalgamated company and sell our terrible soil to be made into clay fire bricks. In very short time we shall all be rich!" (WIL 80).

It is rather difficult to determine how many of the stories preceded The Newspaper of Claremont Street and thus may be seminal, producing ideas, characters, themes which are then used in the novel, and how many followed it and came to further develop characters and ideas. Manuscript dates do give priority to "Bill Sprocket's Land" (1966) and "Outink to Uncle's Place" (1967) with "A Hedge of Rosemary" first of all (c 1960). All are concerned with migration and land hunger. "The Discarders" and "Another Holiday for the Prince" manuscripts are both dated 1970, introducing the characters of Weekly's family. The Newspaper of Claremont Street shows 1981 as the date of publication but the manuscripts in Elizabeth Jolley's literary papers in the Mitchell Library for this novel indicate a start in September 1971.
A rewrite from February 1 to 6 March 1972, precedes versions of
"Clever and Pretty" (WIL 182/200), being a "shortened story" with the
date July/Aug 1980. Overall dates of *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*
mss in these papers are from 1971 to 1980. Jolley's own arrival in
Australia as a migrant with husband and three children was in 1959.

The large number of stories linking with the major themes of *The
Newspaper of Claremont Street* either as preliminary "explorations" or as
sequels are indicative of the strength of Jolley's interest in the
problems concerned with the experience of the migrant, whether from the
point of benefits to be gained from the new ways or in rejection. The
theme is developed further in *Milk and Honey* (published in 1980 but the
notes are from the early 1970s), especially with regard to those who can
accept and those who reject the transplantation. It would thus seem
possible that the two novels are parallel expressions of aspects of life
for the "new Australian" while connected stories were being written at
the same time. So the actual precedence of story or novel is of lesser
importance than the obvious emphasis on Jolley's almost obsessive
involvement with the experience of immigration where land hunger is only
one of the questions arising.

It seems likely that much of the writing is exploratory, trying
ideas in one form or another, constantly expanding or contracting, being
embellished or concentrated to meet anticipated markets or to satisfy
the life long urge simply to write to examine and clarify which
Elizabeth Jolley explains in the "Author's Note" to *Five Acre Virgin* as
something beginning from an early age:
I saw Mr. Hodgetts (lowly hospital worker but would-be surgeon lodger in "Five Acre Virgin") when I was five... I wrote in a Boots Diary before I knew the alphabet. I loved smooth paper, I still do.
In trying to write I start with one little picture, a few words, an idea so slender it hardly matters and then, suddenly, I am exploring human feelings and reasons. (FAV 9)

The poems, appearing in Westerly, although not published in book form until 1993 in the Diary of a Weekend Farmer, are filed in the Mitchell Library papers, as noted above, chronologically beginning in 1969. The earliest writing in Australia is from 1960:

The first story I wrote in Western Australia was "A Hedge of Rosemary", about 1960. I suppose it contains things I had left behind... and things which were new to me but known already by people who had always lived here, but it is more a re-enactment of the reality of transplantation and chosen exile... (FAV 9)

In this story the old man goes back to his old family house and land (now sold) to smoke his after dinner pipe. He misses the Black Country with its noise and dirt (FAV 103) just as Jolley does and just as Weekly does (NCS 6). He is nostalgic for the old country and the chain makers factory. He imagines the "heave and roar of the blast furnace... the friendly screech of trams... the women... [with] muscles like the men [as] they worked side by side with their men..." (FAV 104) Weekly too thinks of the the Black Country:

... the dark lane alongside the pit mounds...
the strange old woman who kept fowls in a yard right up against the brick-kilns... the coal mine...
... part of her early childhood which remained with her all her life (NCS 6)

As a child growing up Jolley misses an identical Black Country, its smelly "bone and glue factory and the heave and roar of the blast furnaces..." Perhaps she still lingers over the same memories (CM 3).
The clay itself is another of those basic essential values in both the short story and the novel. It carries suggestions of Biblical references going back to Jolley's Quaker upbringing:

Remember that you moulded me like clay. Job 10.9
(NCS 2)
I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from the clay. Job 33.6

Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? Isaiah 45.9
(NCS 26)

The quotations from Job and Isaiah are to the clay as a source of life, the material of our origins, the substance from which man is created. But for Weekly the clay of her land is sterile and unproductive -- it symbolises death rather than life -- will grow no crops and as her neighbour says, it is hard and dry in summer and in winter "this clay is wet and deep and sticky. It's too soft for anything in winter" (NCS 118). Weekly knows this full well as she recalls Nastasya's final cries for help, freezing, stuck in the winter clay and she replies: "Yerse. I know." (NCS 118)

The mound under which the "interesting fossil" is developing marks the spot and must also be built from the same clay. So for Weekly, for her neighbour and for Uncle Bernard Ooms, clay is heavy, barren, good for nothing except for bricks and perhaps tombs. With Mr Kingston she talks of its impermanence and its propensity to return to dust:

"I think that word should be clay. C.L.A.Y. . . . Let's see, what was that clue again?" She read it aloud, Universal building material which does not endure for ever. (NCS 2)
Her neighbour expresses the same sentiment to Weekly when he puts forward his proposal about the sale of their clay for brick making:

"This clay makes special bricks, but," he sighed, "even the best bricks crumble to dust in the end," he sighed again. "Nothing lasts for ever." (NCS 118)

Mr. Kingston purposely does not finish the crossword. He enjoys talking to Weekly and recalling their mutual memories of past Sundays:

He took pleasure in the discovery that he shared with this uneducated woman a background of long Sunday afternoons which had been devoted to getting by heart long passages from the Bible... .

*Remember that thou hast made me as the clay and wilt bring me into dust again*

Weekly reminds him and Mr Kingston chimes in with:

*He remembereth His own who lie in the dust.* (NCS 2)

Betrayal is a persistent, worrying, unpleasant idea which runs through The Newspaper of Claremont Street. Weekly suffers from painful remorse over what appears to be the innocent betrayal of her brother when she gives away Victor's whereabouts to his enemies:

That afternoon was the last time she ever saw Victor. Every time she thought about it all the years later, and she did think often, she wished she could have the afternoon again and somehow do things differently and somehow un-say some of the things she had said (NCS 82).

But she goes on to recover from her remorse quite quickly, thinking about her money, "glittering in the sun" or with

... the total changing as if on a little gilt-edged board, like a plaything on the side of the cradle she thought, and the thought comforted her (NCS 83).

On recall of the afternoon in question, her consciousness of Victor's demand for the urgent supply of £100 is now completely suppressed.
The relief following the thought that these "friends" might be the people to help him seems absent from her thoughts as she contemplates her money. Her mother's warning then is clear and explicit:

"Remember," her mother said, "you must never give him your money. He'll take everything and he'll have you in the poor house." (NCS 53).

So a motive exists for Victor's betrayal. And it is not as if this demand for money is unusual. The experience of gaol for her mother and the remand home for Weekly is the direct result of stealing money for Victor to be equipped as he thinks necessary to join a Natural History camp. In addition to the appropriate clothes a pair of binoculars to identify birds require funds only obtainable by pawning the employer's silver (as well as some stolen money):

"I'll need binoculars too," he said that night. "All the others will have binoculars, you can't identify birds without them." He stood, well-dressed and indignant, in the middle of the warm kitchen (NCS 15).

Just as in "Another Holiday for the Prince", the first story from "The Discarders", the family from whom Mother "borrows", comes back from their holiday sooner than expected and official retribution overtakes the family. But neither Victor, nor Donald are the main sufferers.

Weekly shows herself quite capable of heroic action when the occasion demands for example in the disposal of the unwanted kittens. The mother cat, Crazy, a tabby, is able to give birth to the kittens in Weekly's room, indeed on Weekly's bed. Seven kittens in need of homes present some difficulty. And of course, even Weekly could not succeed with all of them, though she chose carefully amongst her clientele.
"Mrs Lacey. See I've brought yer kiddies a little gift"
(NUC 22)
There was nothing else for it. Weekly had not been able to
find homes for all the kittens. While Crazy lapped greedily
on the verandah, Weekly put the remaining kittens in a
piece of cloth and carried them through to the backyard
where she swiftly, without noise, drowned them in a bucket.
She straightened up, pulled a few half-dry garments from
the clothes-line and went indoors to eat her food, closing
the door so that she was not able to hear Crazy's cries.
(NUC 42)

When Nastasya threatens her independence and enjoyment of her hard
earned "five acres virgin", Weekly attempts to be equally decisive. She
tries to arrange for Nastasya's admission to hospital but in the end
cannot bring herself to the point of action. The party for the doctor,
lawyer, bank manager and friends fails and Weekly is "deeply sorry for
Nastasya" leading to a moment of "unaccustomed tenderness":

Weekly cradled Nastasya's grey head against
her own hard flat chest. And then Weekly sang to
Nastasya to soothe her.

"There is a fountain filled with blood" (NUC 95).

But her original decisiveness is ready when the pear tree is planted
and the song of the pear tree is danced. Weekly is deaf to all pleas as
she goes off leaving Nastasya to freeze to death in the coming night,
trapped in the clay, unable to move in Weekly's tight gumboots:

"Weekly! help me! You cannot leave me. Tonight
it will freeze! . . . It is so lonely here and no one can
hear me except you. Help me! . . . " (NUC 114)

In the light of Nastasya's abandonment and the death of Crazy's kittens,
it is difficult to rule out the possibility that there could be
something sinister in the the betrayal of Victor. Indeed Weekly's
remorse could well be stimulated by a guilty conscience. Perhaps there
is an element of bravado in her work song:
"... the bells of hell going a little a little
for you and not for me..." (NCS 1).

Another strange aspect of The Newspaper of Claremont Street is the absence of sex, especially when it is considered in relation to Jolley's first novel Palomino where there is such an emphasis on lesbianism. The scene mentioned above where Weekly comforts Nastasya after "no doctor, no lawyer, no bank manager and of course, no friends" (NCS 95) arrive at the party is one of the few moments of tenderness. But it is scarcely highly charged sexually. Nastasya is dressed in a "garland of paper flowers" cut from a newspaper and a makeshift dress of some thin gauzy material: "Nasty take of those clothes this minute. Yo' can't wear them things. Yo' can see right through them!" (NCS 94).

This is not sexually stimulating to Weekly, and there is nobody else there. In fact Weekly is repelled by Nastasya's nakedness on a previous occasion when she returns from inspecting what could become her land and Nastasya is bathing. She is naked, her body is brownish and leathery, breasts withered and drooping and she complains she is old and wrinkled. She says she has hairy legs and flabby thighs. Weekly's "distaste spread from Nastasya to the food" she tries to eat. "Weekly sat... with her back to the leathery nakedness and the dripping sponge. She did not want to look at Nastasya" (NCS 67/9).

In her cleaning work Weekly is expected to go to every room in the house but nothing could upset her "not even the Seducer's Cook Book":

She took no notice if there was a woman in bed tranquil with a Red Setter beside her, his head delicately on the pillow. ... If she surprised people in their nakedness that was their affair. ... If at the time of cleaning, various sexual or alcoholic activities of the householders were in the way, she simply cleaned around them. (NCS 13)
Weekly is interested in her body to the extent that its aches and pains, its weariness from so much hard physical work prevents her from increasing the mount of silver as rapidly as she would like. She would be tired at the end of the day and darkness would bring relief from work because the cost of lighting for sewing might reduce the savings of the day. As a girl she notices that her breasts are uneven:

"Mum! one of my titties is bigger than the other" she had called.
"Oh never you mind!", her mother's weary voice had called from the wash-house. "Just you wait a bit and some man'll knock 'em into shape for you." (NCS 6)

Weekly, is usually so hard working doing things for other people that she is too busy to worry about the configuration of her breasts again or the fact that she seems not so graceful and well made as other young people though perhaps she never has the chance to find out. Joan Kirkby points out that Jolley's women reject the maternal and repress their femininity. They repudiate their sexuality and "jouissance": "Their rejection of the maternal impels them at times to a violent rejection of other women, the murder or sacrifice of another who is in reality the self" (SPAN 26 1988: 46/7).

Whatever the situation with some of the women in the later novels there certainly seems to be a strong possibility that Weekly's sexual repression and denial may lead her to the betrayal of some of those around her. This early repression is the basis of the rejection of Victor as well as Nastasya and it may even be a factor in the death of her mother. This seems to be accidental, just as the betrayal of Victor seems to be innocent. But there is a shadowy doubt about it all. Though details of her mother's death are scanty, it would seem that while
waiting together to cross the road, her mother recklessly, carelessly or absentmindedly, walks into the path of a car, while Weekly, making no effort to stop her, survives, still standing on the kerb. Nastasia is certainly betrayed and left to die of exposure quite wilfully, Weekly as deaf to her cries as to Crazy's. Crazy and her kittens are betrayed, Victor is betrayed with growing doubt as to whether this could actually be innocent or inadvertent at all.

The experience of migration to a country far away from family, friends and all the old associations, the compensating love of one's own land, perhaps as part of this process and the further investigation of possible relationships, especially for women are the predominant themes of *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. Motifs, like the significance of the clay, the pear tree, the love of cleaning for its own sake, of betrayal and the supreme importance of individual integrity run through the novel, appearing and re-appearing in the fugue like method which is so typical of Elizabeth Jolley's writing.

The question of betrayal is also persistent. At first sight it would seem that Weekly's life is spent at the beck and call of others. She sacrifices for Victor, as her Mother demands, she is constantly cleaning up the mess that others make, cleaning others houses, exploited and despised by Torben and Nastasia. But Weekly has her secret resources, which she does not disclose. There never is time for love or for sex. But Weekly, either subconsciously or deliberately exacts her price for the impositions she suffers. Weekly is patient in the pursuit
of her ambition for the house on the five acre block and this patience earns its proper reward. She suffers the demands of others patiently but the point eventually comes when she must call a halt. So, having acquired the five acre virgin she leaves her ladies and their "curtains" and stoves, she drowns the unwanted kittens, shutting out their mother's cries, she abandons Nastasya when her interference with her aims becomes intolerable, and perhaps it is the same situation with Victor and maybe even for her mother.

The intertwining of these themes between the novel and the various short stories connected with them is much more complex than is the case with Palomina where "The Libation" is more like an actual sequel to the novel than the series of connected stories in which various parts of the components of Newspaper are experimentally subject to exploration and examination or review in the theme and variation type of treatment. In the novel itself the counterpoint of the various "subjects" may be considered to be fugal. But if the novel and related short stories are thought of as a separate conglomeration there is a strange intricate complex of themes which Helen Daniels aptly likens, in regard to Jolley's output as a whole, to Bach's "Musical Offering" where multi-part fugue, canon and sonata forms are involved ending in a harmonious work overall (Liars 1988:270/1). The migration aggregation of exile and loneliness in opposition to the great adventure and the new chance, combine with the altogether different aspect of the particular relationship between the women represented by that of Nastasya and Weekly make up a different kind of "offering" of thoughts and musings developing around the central themes of desire and longing.
MISS PEABODY'S INHERITANCE

Miss Peabody's Inheritance is, at least in part, the product of the period of Elizabeth Jolley's appointment as Writer in Residence at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, as she acknowledges in a note at the beginning of the book. The material in the Jolley Literary Papers in the Mitchell Library for this book is for the period 1981 to 1983 (the date of publication). It would seem to be the first time Jolley could write almost full time instead of her more usual method of making brief notes during the busy day and doing her writing while the family sleeps. At least the final draft appears to be the outcome of this luxury, though it is difficult to escape the thought with Elizabeth Jolley that "the nights belong to the novelist!"

In fact it is with such words that the novel begins as the first pronouncement of the omniscient narrator who goes on to report on the correspondence between Miss Peabody, the admiring reader, and the novelist Diana Hopewell who describes her work in progress. The novel is not really epistolatory since it continues throughout with the third person narrator relating and commenting on the letter exchange between the author in Australia and her special reader in England.

Diana Hopewell's new novel concerns the headmistrress of a school for girls called Pine Heights. Her name is Dr Arabella Thorne, and of course to her old school friend, Miss Snowdon, now a hospital matron, she is still known as Prickles. During the vacation they are visiting Europe, taking with them school secretary, the mistake-prone,
Miss Edgely and schoolgirl Gwendaline Manners, whose father, a sole parent, is newly remarried and in his absorption with his new young wife is in danger of forgetting his daughter.

For her part Miss Peabody shares with Miss Edgely the capacity to make plentiful mistakes in the office, but unlike the school secretary is not free to travel abroad because of the need to care for her invalid mother. So between the demands of her mother and her typing and mis-filing for Fortress Enterprises, Miss Peabody is bound to the routine of catching her regular train to the city each morning, vacuuming the house, hanging out the washing, changing the sheets and dusting the shelves every Saturday (MPI 12).

Life for Diana Hopewell is imagined, at least by her devoted reader, Miss Peabody, as being very different. The life of the mistress of the property is wide ranging and free -- hand feeding the horses, riding back from inspecting the fence posts, watching for the gap in the tall trees to indicate the approach to the homestead. "Diana, the Goddess of the Hunt . . . a tall woman graceful and shapely about the neck and breast . . . [wearing] tall riding boots" (MPI 8).

Any reticence about references to sex evident in The Newspaper of Claremont Street disappears from this novel. From the first page Edgely's Freudian typing lapses set the tone -- (a "c" substituted for a "p" and an "l" and "e" left out) proclaims on her memo for the notice board "... copulation in the pubic schools is increasing at an alarming rat" (MPI 1). Still on the first page, the new girl, Debble enters:
... in her clinging jersey dress, her hair cut long over her eyes ... with a jerky swinging of her extraordinarily suggestive but childish hips, first to one side, then to the other. ... (MPI 1/2)

She is just beginning at the school and Miss Thorne, favourably impressed, invites her father, Mr. Frome, to stay on for the "bra burning ceremony", reminiscing about the first year of this exotic ceremony when "... we all got carried away. Hurling everything on to the fire -- stockings, singlets, petticoats, pantyhose, pants -- one girl even burned her nightie" (MPI 3). It is all too much for Mr. Frome and he declines the invitation though Debbie almost succeeds in seducing Miss Thorne shortly after the beginning of the term. Caught dancing in the corridor near midnight, Debbie Frome, clad only in a domestic science apron wrapped around her seductive young body is sent to the headmistress' room to be disciplined. Debbie starts to dance again, the apron slips to disclose her long straight strong legs. She sings:

Come on Miss Thorne. Miss Arabella Thorne, I can teach you. I can teach you a lot of things. I can teach you what to do with your hands ... you turn me on I'll have to come ... (MPI 39)

Miss Peabody is impressed by the water fight in the motel shower between the Misses Thorne and Snowdon, both rather formidable, who have discarded their clothing for this daring rite. "Oh wicked! Prickles! Shall I soap you?" (MPI 11) As she reads and re-reads Diana's letter describing the scene, Miss Peabody contemplates the rather ridiculous sight of naked bodies, the difficulty of re-enactment and the mess it would make of the bathroom.
The progress of the party through Europe leaves a trail of wrecked beds as the participants in the lesbian sex scenes, including schoolgirl Gwenda, are all substantially built. These activities are conducted with cheerful abandon and with occasional episodes of nudity, like the water fight staged by Snow and Prickles: "Oh indecently exquisite" (MPI 11). Or when Gwenda reports to Miss Thorne to say goodnight (or that she is moving to the Prom's hotel), neither she nor Arabella Thorne seems greatly disturbed by the nakedness of the headmistress and her secretary lying together on Miss Thorne's bed (MPI 139/40).

The inhibitions which restrict reference to sex in The Newspaper of Claremont Street no longer limit descriptions of sexual wishes and activity, which is almost exclusively lesbian, in Miss Peabody's Inheritance. This emphasis is quite as pronounced as in the description of Laura's love for Eva and Andrea in Palomino. Physical expressions of affection with Laura, however seem to arise from what is a more enduring love than is the case with Miss Thorne, though descriptions are similar. The comic aspect of these scenes is enhanced by the commentry. In the water fight Miss Thorne and Miss Snowden express their appreciation "Mmm yes. Erotic. Rather. My dear this is madness!" (MPI 11). Miss Thorne abandons any pretension to membership of the "academic litterati" by her invitation to Edgely to come to bed. "Come away to bed swee-sweedle... I'm absooey bonkers over you Edge deah. No more silliness, eh? eh? Sweedle?" (MPI 139)

The frankness of description extends to the detailed account of the unfortunate "monatsfluss" which overtakes Gwenda. She goes exploring alone in Vienna, resulting in the need for Miss Thorne to rescue her
from the police cell where, almost simultaneously, Miss Edgely is being detained for drunkeness after being shaken by Miss Thorne for allowing Gwenda to stray from Pension Eppelsheimer. The scene is dramatic with Miss Thorne seeking an explanation for Gwenda's bloodstained dress. The Viennese police woman pats her own pubic region to reinforce her struggling English: "is ihre -- her. ihre Monatsfluss ..." while Miss Thorne's adds an unspoken commentary from Macbeth misquoting "... who would have thought there could be so much blood ..." (MPI 94).

Miss Thorne, like Laura, is a music lover and part of the objective of the visit to Europe is to renew her own musical spirits and to introduce the enjoyment of music to her proteges. Miss Edgely and Gwenda are both in this category, although Edgely seems much more interested in alcoholic festivals than musical ones. And even Gwenda develops a rival interest as Mr Frome ousts Wagner without too much trouble. Still in Vienna a visit to the cemetery is mandatory:

... to see the graves of Beethoven and Brahms, Schubert, Johann Strauss, Von Suppe and Hugo Wolf -- all these famous musicians are buried close to one another. And, nearby is a memorial to Mozart! (MPI 76)

Wagner, his life, and Bayreuth are an inspiration to Miss Thorne. "Tell me how you feel about Wagner and his music. Did you like his music? Did you Gwenda?" (MPI 61) The Siegfried Idyll is something Gwenda knows from Miss Thorne's illustrated school lectures. She is prepared for that

... but not for Die Walküre, not at all ... Perhaps the gel has odd private pictures in her mind about Die Walküre. The full rich voices in the electrifying "Ride of the Valkyries" at the opening of the third act do perhaps suggest to the unmusical that they, the Valkyries, are wearing big warm fleecy lined knickers for their aerial flight (MPI 53).
The Wagner Festival in Munich is the reason for the visit to that city:

[Die Walküre] was first performed at the Munich Opera on 25 June 1870, over a hundred years ago. Miss Thorne . . . briefly told the story to Gwendaline, . . . and the Magic Fire Scene when the circle of fire slowly envelops the sleeping Brünnhilde bringing the music drama to its close (MPI 54).

Miss Thorne's absorption in Wagner is only matched by her interest in Othello and its production especially the scene ending: "All's well now sweeting: come away to bed" (MPI 54). Miss Thorne delights in rehearsing for school performances with the girls, arousing new emotions in innocent breasts. "The irony of the play," she writes, "is that the audience know before Othello himself knows what is happening to him" (MPI 37). She comforts herself when Edgely's jealousy is troublesome with thoughts from Shakespeare:

But jealous souls will not be answered so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they are jealous . . . (MPI 83)

Miss Thorne's literary interests, like her musical ones are wide ranging. She quotes from Goethe as she tries to rescue Gwendaline from what she regards as Mr Frome's untimely attentions:

And she on the torrent's edge in childish simplicity
In a little hut in a little alpine field,
And all her household things
Gathered in that small world (MPI 138).

She takes great pleasure in the "energy", the "majesty" and the "rumbling phrases" of Rasselas, reading aloud to herself (MPI 36). She is confused between what Samuel Johnson said and what Boswell about the comparison of the flesh of "cooped up" animals compared to that of those who "feed excursively" (MPI 1).
Developing in parallel with Miss Thorne's attempts to educate Gwenda and Debbie, arousing "hitherto unknown passions" in their breasts (MPI 35), is the powerful influence which Diana Hopewell is exercising over Miss Peabody, opening for her new horizons but new passions too. From her very restricted existence incarcerated in Fortress Enterprises and the dull routine of her domestic life caring for her mother, Miss Peabody glimpses the possibilities of freedom. The freedom of the wide spreading Australian landscape and the "strange, erotic, nocturnal adventures" of the Angels on Horseback is appealing (MPI 46).

Miss Thorne's erotic lesbian episodes arouse Miss Peabody's curiosity. These scenes don't seem to her "ridiculous", "shameful", "perversions", nor can she view them as "horrible sights" (MPI 140, 143).

Miss Thorne does not really think so herself either, there is only a temporary reaction to the public exposure she unnecessarily fears following Gwenda's discovery of her night with Edgely.

All sorts of new possibilities open up for Miss Peabody from the fantasy of Diana's novel and her encouraging letters. This is not so much in a fugal type of construction in which the two fictions leap frog each other, as an alternation with one narrative running in parallel to the other. But the two areas are both substantial and equally imaginative and fantastic; perhaps it is a construction more like the Bartok concerto for orchestra where two twin orchestras play against each other in a constant debate, an antiphonal interchange.

As Gwenda's experience is enlarged by the life education to which her tour with Miss Thorne exposes her, so too does Miss Peabody's under the influence of Diana Hopewell's letters. Miss Peabody's taste in
music, however, is not elevated to anything like the same level as that of Miss Thorne. After Mr. Bains assists her to break into her own house, in the mistaken belief that the key is lost, muffled shrieks and singing emerge from within:

I'm a little prairie flower,  
Growing wilder every hour (MPI 125 and 129).

Diana's correspondence also stimulates Miss Peabody's reading:

"'When the church came to itself . . . '" she said,  
"'I was seated on a high tombstone' -- that's Dickens,"  
she said. She laughed. "Have you read Pip?" she asked.  
"You know Pip in the marshes when the convict picks him up -- it's literally years and years since I read that book." (MPI 127)

Miss Peabody is diligent looking up references in the library for subjects which Miss Hopewell's letters raise in her mind though The Ring of the Nibelung becomes rather confusing:

The individual tragedy of one is related to the tragedy of another and both are subordinated to the tragedy of the world that is their undoing;"  
. . . "So many rings," she said, "it confuses me. I'll read it another time," (MPI 97)

The public library also provides copious details about Diana, not simply the Huntress but a goddess of manifold parts, some of her aspects rather puzzlingly contradictory:

Folk Goddess of the Grecians/ Daughter of Zeus.  
. . . Goddess of Fertility . . . Goddess of Virgins and the Goddess of Birth./She is the sister of Apollo/She is Goddess of the Moon (MPI 73).

By her contradictory qualities Diana, Goddess of Virgins is also Goddess of Birth -- "The Lord of Free Nature" and Goddess of the Hunt yet living in "the grove and in the paddock". She incorporates in her person both the life of nature and the cultivation of society. She is representative
of the novel which could well be dedicated to her. Above all she personifies freedom, hunting in the mountains with her maidens (MPI 136).

For Edgely Miss Thorne is the all powerful goddess though Edgely shares with Peabody the ignomy of the constant routine -- the dull drill which contributes to those mistakes -- which imprisons them both. But Dorothy Peabody is escaping. Diana leads her to a realization of nature -- of her own nature, of her sexual propensity and the possibility of freedom. After learning of the water fight in the motel (from Diana's letter) Dotty, realizing the problems of re-enactment, is nevertheless moved to take a bath. This uses up all the hot water and it is not bath night. As she bathes so daringly she sings joyfully in the steam of her identity with the prairie flower:

Growing wilder every hour -- flower -- hour --
Nobody cares to cultivate me -- mee -- mee -- mee
So-o I'm as wild as wild can bee -- bee -- be. (MPI 20)

Dorothy's awareness is conscious and deliberate. "Being liberated was what people called it now. In the office there was quite a lot of talk about liberation" (MPI 20). But the battle is not over any more than when as a nine year old she is defiant, wearing her lovely new frock embroidered in pink and blue flowers, without any panties underneath, at her birthday party: "Well Dotty it was cold and I was afraid you would catch cold and you wouldn't wear your panties and you tore them up" (MPI 23).

Mother still tries to enforce the strict order of social habit:

"Dotty! Dotty! her mother called and called. "Are you ill Dotty?" Dorothy Peabody coming out of the bathroom heard the distress in her mother's voice.
"Dotty! Oh Dotty, oh my head! Dotty." She, unaccustomed to hearing the bath water so late at night and on the wrong night too, was sure Dorothy was ill. Not realizing that her daughter was singing, she thought the sounds coming from the bathroom were screams. (MPI 20)

To attain the freedom from the rigid order which binds her, not just by harsh duty, but also by tenderness, is a struggle for Miss Peabody.

Dorothy... remembered her own childhood earache and she remembered her mother's gentle hands, hovering in candlelight, putting something warm in her ear. It was somehow softening to remember this; it made it easy not to be impatient however selfish and tiresome her mother might be now. (MPI 20/1)

Ultimately for true freedom it is necessary for the guardians of society to be vanquished. This is achieved only when Dorothy's mother dies and as a consequence the influence of Mrs Brewer is withdrawn. Dorothy is freed from the bonds of affection and duty which care of her mother imposed but the domination of Fortress Enterprises remains and Mr. Bains helps to demolish this remaining tie by his despairing offer to release her on sick leave convinced that she must be suffering from some madness which imposes an almost unbearable burden on him, torn as he is by his allegiance to his wife and the demands of his office lover, Pam Truscott.

It was one thing to tolerate Miss Peabody in the office making mistakes daily at a safe distance from him, but to be asked to go along like a relative, or worse like a friend to fetch her [from the police lock up] was quite different. (MPI 134)

So Mr. Bains feels justified in making the proposition that Miss Peabody should have some time off:
... we, those of us in charge here at Fortress, feel you need, I mean, deserve, yes deserve, a long holiday. I am suggesting that you take three months off and er, your er, position will be reviewed after that. (MPI 135)

Unfortunately the effort involved in assisting with the cost of the rail fare to Brighton or some similar place proves to be more difficult when Miss Peabody tells Mr. Bains about her travel plans:

"I'll go to Australia," Miss Peabody said. "I have a friend there. She is a Goddess you know. Diana. Artemis... She is the sister of Apollo... also the Goddess of the Moon." (MPI 136)

The real world and the world of fiction and fantasy are merging for Dorothy while the world of the reader and the writer are also undergoing change. As Diana says in one of her letters:

There is too a thin line between truth and fiction and there are moments in the writing of fantasy and imagination where truth is suddenly revealed. (MPI 15)

She believes that it is a great satisfaction to introduce the untutored to new experience and writes: "It is a tremendous pleasure to initiate a person whom one believes to be innocent." (MPI 34). She is very pleased to tell Miss Peabody about so many new ideas and freedoms. For her part Miss Thorne delights in the arousal of new emotion as she rehearses Othello or introduces her "gels" to the joys of music, especially the music of Richard Wagner and his mighty work Der Ring des Nibelungen. She introduces first Miss Edgely and then Gwenda to the delights of these complex opera and "incomprehensible paintings".

Indeed Diana launches Dorothy into the world of imagination so realistically that she expects that she may find Miss Thorne and her entourage in Oxford Street or Piccadilly Circus as they visit London.
This blurring of the edges of reality and the fictional continues with Dorothy's Australian venture disclosing that Diana herself is a construct and in fact the crippled resident of a nursing home who dies before Dorothy can meet her. No stately Diana exists galloping through the Australian landscape into the sunset searching for her homecoming landmarks in the sky, "graceful and shapely about the neck and breast". Miss Peabody and the author of the pornographic Angels on Horseback can never meet. Dorothy understands after all the excitement of the long journey

... she would never be able to see Diana, never speak with her. She would not miss that since she had never been able to meet and speak. The sudden and strange bereavement was of not being able to think about and compose and write the letters to Diana... And then too there were the letters from Diana. She had looked forward to them with eagerness. Because of the letters Miss Peabody had known happiness (MPI 146/7).

The author may be dead but Dorothy is able to accept her inheritance. She realises this as she looks at Diana's table and chair still on the verandah in their customary place. "The verandah and the bare table and the empty chair all looked serene and peaceful" (MPI 147). Miss Peabody expects that Miss Flourish, the kindly matron of "Flowermead", would be able to help in finding a typewriter. Miss Peabody, though she made atysmal typing errors, knew she could type well enough. All she really needed to enter into her inheritance was a title" (MPI 157).

Of course, Miss Thorne knows Roland Barthes' message about the death of the author even if she may be troubled about structuralism. She valiantly strives to follow the discourse on this in the magazine on
literary criticism which the young man lent her on the long flight back from London (MPI 150/1). She would understand that the reader is now the author and, though she is perplexed by the unusual language, would no doubt be resigned to the take over by the former reader, Miss Peabody, who will have to deal ". . . on semantic levels, [with] surfaces built on insoluble conflicts . . . with an ideological solution to the contradictions in the mode of discourse, the angle of narration and the symbolic structure of a culture . . ." (MPI 151).

For her part Miss Peabody begins to think about the way things are to develop. Diana's gift to her is really only an outline. There is considerably more than the title to think about. In particular Dorothy wonders if jealousy is to develop and colour the relationship between Gwenda and Debbie. "People, until they experienced jealousy, had no knowledge of what it felt like to be jealous" (MPI 157). Why did Mr. Frome want to buy Miss Thorne's paddock? What would he do with it? Miss Peabody too, may conjure up the picture of the suburban Wotan penetrating the ring of fire at the bra burning to awaken (or to farewell) his schoolgirl Brunnhilde, Gwenda (MPI 149, 155, 156, 157). Then there is the future development of the headmistress. Miss Thorne wonders about this too. She is puzzled by her lack of comprehension. She is used to understanding what she reads. She remembers that "being a character in a novel is apparently not being a character at all" (MPI 151). Miss Thorne knows that a "lower level of expectation" is sometimes acceptable in life. ". . . it interests me very much that people can and do change their level of expectation" (MPI 148/9). Miss Thorne hopes
this will not be the case with Gwenda; she wonders if she "is returning to school as Gwendaline Manners or Gwendaline Frome" (MPI 149). It is all very elusive but there is no doubt that there is a playful challenge to the systems of authority -- especially to the authority of the patriarchal style of society. Perhaps too to the Academy and particularly to the post modern critical discourse.

Men are not prominent in Miss Peabody's Inheritance and those who do appear are quite shadowy characters. Mr. Frome serves a somewhat dubious role in endangering Gwenda's expectations -- at least so Miss Thorne thinks. His sources of wealth in trucking and oil seem only marginally respectable. And what is he going to do when he buys Miss Thorne's paddock? Mr. Bains is scarcely much better. His divided loyalties are a dilemma for him as he struggles to choose between Pam Truscott and his wife, Margaret. "Pam, like Margaret, was predictable but not quite as boring. Both said the same things but Pam said hers with a kind of vulgarity which would have made Margaret blush" (MPI 135). Though second in command at Fortress Enterprises Mr Bains is concerned about how to deal with Miss Peabody after he rescues her from the police station. "Second in command in a large organization often had these minor responsibilities" (MPI 134). After consultation with Miss Truscott he does not sack Miss Peabody (as he would like to do) but instead offers her a period of sick leave after which her "position will be reviewed" (MPI 135). Poor Mr Bains, a character so much lacking in strength, so indefinite that Miss Peabody then cannot remember his name and says: "Oh thank you Mr Barrington" (MPI 135).
If Mr Bains and Mr Frome are a little sketchy with characters which are delineated only in broad outline, at least they are somewhat clearer than the invisible surgeon who is the cause of Diana becoming a cripple. This doctor who operates so unsuccessfully does not appear at all. In fact it is difficult for Diana herself to succeed in meeting him. "I would like to say here that you are never available, because of holidays ... either on your yacht or somewhere in Europe" (MPI 87/8). But in a series of operations on hip, knee and feet he has succeeded in seriously disabling Diana now unable to dress herself or drive a car.

I want you to know that after every operation which you tell me I must have, and I expect there are others in the same predicament, I am older and frailer and less able to do anything for myself. I am considerably poorer too. Congratulate yourself, dear sir, on increasing the number of helpless cripples in our community (MPI 88).

Although the doctor is not given the opportunity to defend himself, he does not seem to present the impression of a worthy or desirable representative of the male of the species or of his profession.

The women, on the other hand, especially the Misses Thorne, Snowdon and Diana herself are all characters of some gusto and vitality, quite independent, and in no need of any support from men. Debbie Frome's sexuality may not be not quite clear -- she has considerable lesbian understanding -- but, in whichever way, she is sexually aware. She may well be bi-sexual and be capable of enjoying the love of a man as much as she does the possibility of a lesbian affair even with the redoubtable Dr. Thorne. This is the case with Gwenda who enjoys her experiences with her headmistress, at risk to the endangered beds, but is still eager for marriage and motherhood. We are not in a position to
know more about Miss Edgely's sexual preferences but she clearly takes part in the lesbian love scenes with Dr Thorne with enthusiasm even though Mr Frome arouses her interest.

The emphasis on lesbian sex, independent of the world of men, is strong throughout Miss Peabody's Inheritance but the declaration of independence from the patriarchal system is not as complete as in Palomino where Laura and Andrea seek to live a life free altogether from the interference of men. Though even here the assistance of neighbour Murphy in storms and times of crisis is welcome. Andrea also acknowledges to herself she misses Christopher (PAL 97). But generally Laura seeks to escape from the domination of men completely.

In Miss Peabody's Inheritance Miss Thorne recognises, even though unhappily, that Gwenda and Mr. Frome cannot be effectively opposed because they are fulfilling nature's grand plan -- the ultimate purpose of sex is the bearing of children which is a purpose joyfully embraced by Gwenda and reluctantly accepted by Miss Thorne. In fact Miss Thorne is herself attracted to Mr. Frome:

She finds herself thinking of Mr Frome. In his own way, though she does not like to admit it, she has to acknowledge that there is something very natural and nice about him. He is almost attractive and he almost certainly finds her attractive. Miss Thorne knows she would like to cultivate something in Mr. Frome (MPI 121/2).

Gwenda's choice of the present which Mr Frome wants to buy for her is indicative of her recognition of the central role of motherhood. A dress for herself is rejected in favour of a bag to carry a baby's nappies, feeding bottles and sundry accessories for baby care:

... there are pockets for two feeding bottles and the little bundle of napkins fits in here ...
and there's a tiny hair brush and a little towel and a special pocket for cotton wool and there's even a tube of baby cream (MP 110).

Miss Thorne feels that this expression of maternal feeling is a little premature and she warns the "gel" that she will need to be concerned with a career before motherhood. The mother's bag will need to be put aside for a long time. Nevertheless it is clear that Miss Thorne also understands the legitimacy of Gwenda's ambition, though surely with a younger man:

[Gwenda] will later on, meet a young man to match her in youth and in passionate love. She wants to tell her that she will have all she is wishing for. She will have her little alpine plot. (MP 138)

Miss Thorne remembers the quotation from Goethe as she thinks of the alpine plot and Gwenda in her small world with "all her household things". Back in the safe world of Pine Heights, even though with Miss Edgely mislaid in Rome, Miss Thorne still has reservations about the age difference between Gwenda and Mr Frome. "I suppose I really cannot tolerate the idea of Gwen -- of the gel being actually married to that man" (MP 150). But in her well ordered world with "an air of safety as a fortress" (MP 151) Miss Thorne does not question the correctness of marriage and the family as the proper place for sex. Then there's the honeymoon. "He, that man, is sure to want that" (MP 149).

So in Miss Peabody's Inheritance the challenge to the patriarchal system is inherent in the cheerful acceptance of lesbian love and the general attitude of disrespect for authority, as illustrated by Miss Peabody with Mr Bains, but it is compromised, even when compared with the relative iconoclasm of Palomino. There is the acknowledgement that
the legitimate purpose of sex is for procreation and that this, though unfortunate, is in order. This recognition is absent from *Palomino*.

Though Eva has children and Andrea is pregnant, Laura regrets it. Both facts mar the perfection possible in a truly lesbian world. But for Gwenda to desire motherhood and marriage is to endorse the "true" function of sex and even such an association as that between Mr Frome and Gwendaline, with a considerable age difference, is given priority over love between women.

However in spite of the message of the right of a free expression of love through sex being at a slightly more limited level, the challenge of *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* to the patriarchy may be more effective by virtue of the lighter touch especially through the deliberate use of humour. Furthermore in the age differences as between Miss Thorne and Gwenda (or Debbie) or between Mr. Frome and Gwenda there is also a suggestion of paedophile attraction -- though with gender inversions. This additional perversion may contribute to the challenge to the established order being still more unsettling, just as the incest (of Andrea with her brother) in *Palomino* is more unsettling than the lesbian relationships with which Laura is involved.

Elizabeth Jolley does overtly express the view that a lighter treatment with a touch of her delicate humour might contribute to the public acceptance of her writing (MS 156). The treatment of female homosexuality evident in *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* justifies this opinion. Of course there is also a change in the public perception of what is offensive and what acceptable as well. Certainly discussion on aspects of sex is much more open and free than formerly. Perhaps this
greater freedom is aided by the need to institute measures to safeguard the community as far as possible against the spread of sexually transmitted disease -- especially AIDS. Given that there is more tolerance of discussion of homosexuality, there remains some doubt whether this applies to all types of sex and perhaps the taboo against incest and paedophilia is not much changed. In fact the public acknowledgement of the incidence of child abuse probably makes even less tolerable or acceptable the treatment of incest than when *Palomino* was first published. In the same way public views on abortion and nudity are subject to reactionary changes, for example in the way in which the "Right to Life" movement is attempting to restrict abortions, the right to nude bathing is being questioned in the 1990s, and the number of nude bathing beaches reduced. The correlation between public policy and practice and fiction is unclear and it seems possible that there is simultaneously a move in the reverse direction for greater toleration in regard to film screenings. The release of such a film as the de Sade feature film by Piero Paolo Pasolini *Salo* is an indication of such change after being under prohibition for seventeen years in Australia. The contrast between the description of the earnest love making of Laura and Andrea and that between Miss Thorne and Gwenda or Miss Edgely is largely due to the prominence given to the ridiculous. Gwenda's seduction of Miss Thorne on the night of the thunderstorm is an example:

> The night was idyllic, tender, hilarious and ludicrous. There was laughing and trying not to laugh; ... After the storm the night was tranquil. Then suddenly the bed gave way ... all the springs fell, littering the oiled boards of the floor. Miss Thorne and Gwenda, their bodies sagging together ... were resting on the floor. (*MPi* 61)
Compared with the symbolic and solemn unbuckling of Laura's belt as the invitation to sexual activity between Laura and Andrea this lighter approach seems to succeed in blunting the objectors' complaints about descriptions of sex between women. Yet the effectiveness of the treatment of non-patriarchal sex remains a potent and destabilising challenge to the established order and feminists might understandably claim Elizabeth Jolley as one of their champions, even if in a modified way and even if she does not acknowledge any feminist status.

The protest, if it can be regarded as such, may be more veiled and indirect rather than what in effect is a blunter treatment in Palomino and this is perhaps in the interests of acceptability. But it is important to give due weight to Elizabeth Jolley's own views and this would imply that any such interpretation of an attempt to destabilize the patriarchy in general is not her intention. In the interview with Jennifer Ellison, Elizabeth Jolley makes it clear that she certainly does not regard herself as a feminist at all, though she is sympathetic to the problems often encountered by women in situations where there is incompatibility between sexual partners:

A woman married to the wrong man, submitting to sexual caresses that she doesn't like and that she wants to get away from but doesn't know how -- I think she needs liberating. But I don't know whether the feminist movement, as such, will ever reach that particular woman in a suburb. (RTO 187)

In the interview Jolley goes on to recognize that this is not a new problem or one concerning only women. In fact the institution of marriage itself and the expectation of society that marriage is the only acceptable state is responsible for much of the suffering where there
are sexual mismatches. But it is difficult to avoid these pressures from the society and this kind of expectation:

Not many people are brave enough to withstand marriage and children if they're under pressure for this conventional social behaviour, you see. I think it is better than it was, but it still does exist, and I don't know what the answer to that is. (RTO 188)

In writing about sex Jolley's interest is not in perversity but in the loneliness and stress that results from the demands of society especially for those people who do not conform neatly to the accepted norms. They become the people "on the fringe", "on the edge of something":

It has been said that I don't have any straight sex in my stories, that everything is bizarre and grotesque. I think that what I really see is the individual, and the particular aspect of loneliness or fear, that that individual has, which puts him immediately on a fringe of some sort. And I think people are like that, though they do have a little structure that keeps them going. If the structure is taken away then they really become very much on the fringe. And I don't intend to write about sexual perversion at all. It just is that certain things drive people to certain relationships, or they snatch at certain relationships. (RTO 175)

So Miss Peabody's Inheritance is not simply a protest against the patriarchy, but a more general acknowledgement of the problems and difficulties faced by many people, both men and women, in a community where the goals of individual satisfactions are placed above the welfare of the whole or of others. There is a criticism of the society which forces people into limited roles where they are unable to achieve the potential which is inherent in their natures, where they are frustrated and fail to find outlets -- sometimes sexual, sometimes creative.
Miss Peabody is one of those who, at the outset is caught in such a trap and who finds at least a measure of freedom with the aid of the -Australian writer Diana Hopewell. Certainly it is not society alone which is responsible for this state of affairs. There are those who seek their happiness at the expense of others and are so self centred and blind that they do not see how they are restricting others. No doubt Dorothy Peabody's mother is one of these people. But so too is the redoubtable Dr Thorne.

Arabella Thorne is one of Elizabeth Jolley's most remarkable characters. She is splendid in her ruthless vitality, she exploits all within reach, she is predatory in her sexual exploits and utterly selfish. Like Diana Hopewell herself -- her fictional creator -- she enjoys awakening new insights and new desires in the innocent. Diana's writing stimulates Dorothy Peabody sexually and Miss Thorne initiates the sixteen year old student Gwendaline Manners in the same way. But, while the initiation of the innocent is a great satisfaction, Miss Thorne also enjoys sexual adventures with her contemporaries like former school chum Miss Snowden with their erotic water fight in the motel shower (MPI 11). She takes up her downtrodden secretary Edgely when all other avenues are, at least temporarily, unavailable (MPI 139).

Elizabeth Jolley seems to be fascinated by the personality she creates in Miss Thorne and returns to examine again this type of character with Miss Peycroft in Foxybaby where Miss Paisley takes a role like that of Miss Edgely. A further review, more subdued in tone and some years later in time, occurs again with the frustrated author and former headmistress, Miss Hailey in Mr Scobie's Riddle. Matron
Hyacinth Price relives Matron Snowdon in a somewhat altered guise. In some ways, but not in all, Laura in *Palomino* is another of the dominating ladies and shares with Miss Thorne the dubious distinction of making use of her position to seek sexual gratification. The extent of this abuse by Laura is not disclosed, but the way in which she examines the pregnant Andrea suggests that it may not be the only time the examination of the pregnant patient carries overtones of sexual pleasure for Laura, the doctor:

> Once you asked me if I treated all my patients as I treated you and I laughed at you as you lay there on the sheets looking up at me. When I examined you how could my hands and fingers avoid caressing you when every time we touched each other, gently and slowly, we always touched each other more (*PAL* 1).

While Laura is gentle in her sexual touching, Miss Thorne is decidedly vigorous in her love making as the destruction of Gwenda's bed testifies. She is capable of cruel abuse and neglect as well. This occurred with another girl, Joan Lorne, who is in a similar position to Gwenda when deserted by her parents:

> The girl's mother ran off with an actor and the girl became deeply attached to her father. Holidays were spent with the father, the girl (like Gwenda) becoming more and more devoted to him. Then suddenly he appears at school bringing with him a pretty young bride. They have come to say "Goodbye" to Joan (*MPI* 118).

Miss Thorne, keeping Joan on at Pine Heights in the dual capacity of personal maid and student, neglects her; the girls ostracize her as servants should not be pupils; she is overworked, underfed and not paid at all. Joan "in an unheated, unventilated room in the attic" succumbs to illness and is taken away (*MPI* 119).
At least Miss Thorne feels guilty about Joan and the memory of her neglect worries her. Elizabeth Jolley, though unable to prevent Thorne's reappearance in the Peycroft, and Hailey characters, and perhaps Daphne too in Milk and Honey, is nevertheless also harassed by Miss Thorne as she lives on to chide every Jolley cliché at birth. There is also the possibility that the butch image of these ladies is not altogether to the liking of those seeking to improve the lot of women even though they do depict sturdy independent characters and though their sexual idiosyncrasies are no more ridiculous than the sexual behaviour of most people (as Elizabeth Jolley herself would say). At the same time their eccentric behaviour is a threat to the established order and disturbing to the due respect for authority in the patriarchal society. At least it is a blow for freedom of sexual and other forms of expression and good humoured support for the rights of women from a writer who, disliking labels, calls no one lesbian or gay and makes no claim to any feminist label herself: "I'm glad if women have their movement, and I'm sorry if I disappoint them by not being a feminist writer" (RTO 188).

If her support of the women's movement is unorthodox it does not prevent Jolley from thinking about postmodernism and it certainly does not inhibit the sarcastic comment on contemporary literary theory. In fact the essential elements of the Peabody plot involve the death of the author and the elevation of the reader to take the dead author's place. The language of deconstruction is parodied as Miss Thorne thinks about the magazine she reads on the homeward bound plane without understanding or comprehension, as if it were in a foreign language.
There are reflections on the distinctions between truth and fiction as well as on the relationship of author and reader for example when Dorothy responds to Diana's question about her love life. Dorothy considers the merits of two possible answers to Diana's letter:

"And are you in love? Tell me about your love for I am sure you are in love" (MPI 12). Dorothy at first contemplates emulating the mystery of Miss Truscott's association with Mr Bains but finally scraps this model in favour of the lost war hero -- the boy who never comes back. "I still have nightmares, she wrote, about his beautiful and innocent young body being blown to bits on the battlefield" (MPI 14).

But Diana as reader is not deceived: "There is too a thin line between truth and fiction and there are moments in the writing of fantasy and imagination where truth is suddenly revealed" (MPI 15). Just as there are also those moments, which accord with Barthes' theories and predictions when the fantasy overtakes reality and fiction becomes the truth. The antiphonal alternation between the two streams of plot come together in the coda. Perhaps the structure is more like the double concerto -- say the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra -- than the fugue where the framing narrative of the correspondence between Miss Peabody and Diana Hopewell become an equal fantasy to Diana's bequeathed tale of Pine Heights and Miss Thorne and her "gels". The death of the author allows Miss Peabody to come into her inheritance, the inheritance Diana planned for her -- only a title standing in the way. "All she really needed to enter into her inheritance was a title" (MPI 157).
MR SCOBIE'S RIDDLE

The exploration of the relationship between women which seems to be of such interest to Elizabeth Jolley in the three books so far discussed, (*Palomino*, *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* and *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*) is carried further in *Mr. Scobie's Riddle*. This theme is one of a number of topics treated in different ways in each of the books and in some of the short stories to which they are related. Often there are sexual aspects to the bonds which link the women and in *Mr Scobie's Riddle* there is such an association between Miss Hailey and Matron Price. A second lesbian friendship is introduced, that between the two young nurses, Frankie and Robyn, perhaps a precursor to the tragic infatuation of Peg for Bettina in the story "Grasshoppers" (*TE* 142-187) in which Peg returns from her disappointing journey to India with Bettina to find her daughter drowned and her mother dangerously ill. The Frankie and Robyn relationship though is quite devoid of the sombre atmosphere of the short story.

Matron Price and Miss Hailey are later developments of the characters and relationships of the Misses Thorné and Snowdon, though perhaps, including some elements of the liaisons between Miss Thorne and Miss Edgely. Miss Hailey is financially dependent on Matron Price who is the beneficiary of the misfortunes which overtake Miss Hailey following a relationship between Miss Hailey, then headmistress of White Cranes, and one of her pupils involving sexual impropriety. Miss Hailey is perhaps, an unlucky Dr. Thorne, unable to withstand the temptations
confronting headmistresses with lesbian tendencies. Suddenly she remembered that girl at her school White Cranes, and that girl's dreadful friend. She was the one who had worked on Eloise to bring about the terrible incident which changed everything and which was the reason for being buried in St Christopher and St Jude (MSR 205).

There is a, not very clearly explained, feeling that Miss Hailey's dependency may be due to a signature similar to the one which Matron Price tries to obtain, less successfully, from the dying Mr Scobie. However that may be the "incident" resulted in the "dreadful parents" and "indeed, the committee of parents" but "Hyacinth [Price] . . . had helped her to sell her school and her land, and had hidden her all these years . . . " (MSR 205/6). The Matron does not deny her awareness that the proceeds of this sale are not available to Miss Hailey: "Hyacinth . . . you should know I don't have anything. Not anything" (MSR 224). Miss Hailey remains destitute, unable even to send a return card to the greetings and invitation to join the commune which the former nurse, Frankie is running with her husband Mr. Briggs, with her nursing colleague and lesbian lover, Robyn and Mr. Scobie's nephew, Hartley, at Mr. Scobie's old house at Rosewood East (MSR 209). The relationship between the two women at the nursing home -- now as matron, and inmate, seems to evolve directly from the friendship of Miss Thorne and Miss Snowdon in Miss Peabody's Inheritance. This allows what Elizabeth Jolley would call "further exploration" of the characters (RT 174). It would seem to be several years later, and the characters are correspondingly older, than they were in the earlier book. The position of strength for the Matron and the powerlessness of Miss Hailey sometimes threatens but
does not destroy, the old friendship. The outcome seems quite cynical as Matron Price appears to exploit the defenceless and forever forgiving, Miss Hailey. And yet there are moments, apparently rare, of tenderness as occurs after Miss Hailey has thrown away her sponge bag in the oleander and hibiscus bushes below the edge of the verandah. Matron Price reminds Miss Hailey to avoid the use of Christian names (even though they were at school together):

"Miss Hailey," Matron Price said, "can I remind you about our little rule about Christian names."
"Oh Lord! Tin Tin I mean Matron I’m sorry but it’s pretty hard to see in the dark. . . ." (MSR 214)

Hyacinth relents, helps her old friend to find the discarded sponge bag, and more importantly the flask in it with its alcoholic contents which they then share on the damp bottom lawn before the matron takes Miss Hailey up to her tasteful room and warm bed. Miss Hailey yawned,

"Oh, how utterly comfortable that bed looks. Hyacinth, you are a Dear!" (MSR 223)

There is also an apparent reference to the absent Miss Edgely from Miss Peabody’s Inheritance during the same episode:

Well, What about my personal secretary? Do you remember her? Let’s toast her. I think she deserves our best wishes wherever she is . . .
She was very jealous of you! Think! She had a battered look. Even her underwear always seemed battered . . .
Surely Tin Tin you remember . . . (MSR 222/3)

Miss Edgely does not reincarnate with her former headmistress in Mr Scobie’s Riddle. Though interestingly, some of the old schoolgirl vocabulary reappears. When meditating on the prospect of the “revolting” nature of old age Miss Hailey says:
"It's a hideous thought . . . It's absocty awful"
"Let's not think on it," Matron gulped again.
"Oh Tin Tin, Shakespeare, of all things, from you,
Miss Hailey cried (MSP 215).

"Absocty" is a word frequently used by Miss Thorne. She consoles the
disconsolate Miss Edgely by joining her in a hot bath with the
fortification of prudentially placed double whiskies for herself and a
"substantial brandy" for Edgely then inviting her into bed:

"'Come away to bed swee-sweedle,'" . . . too warm for
nightdresses.
"I'm absocty bonkers over you Edge deah!" (MPI 139).

In rather more threatening mode the word is again used to warn the
"gels" against sending samples of the cold meat and beetroot home to
their parents through the mail:

"There is absocty nothing wrong with this meat . . .
I will not have any gel sending slices of this excellent meat
and gravy through the post to their parents" (MPI 153).

Both Miss Hailey and Dr Thorne are also inclined to make references
to literary sources and to recognise them in statements of others. Dr
Thorne often refers to, or quotes from Shakespeare, especially Othello.
Miss Hailey immediately recognises the source of the quotation above and
compliments Matron Price on her Shakespearean reference with a note of
surprise in their conversation about ungracious old age. Similarly both
ladies are very interested in music, especially the operas of Wagner. Dr
Thorne is ever eager to introduce neophytes to the glories of Bayreuth
and Miss Hailey's performance of Sentas's theme outside the gentleman's
public lavatory waiting for Mr Scobie is ample testimony. (MSP 115)
Matron Price and Dr Thorne also share some characteristics, though perhaps of a lesser standing culturally. The habit of hitching up their skirts above the knees to enjoy the warmth of the fire is one of them. In Matron Price's case it was a "valiant little gas fire" which soon resulted in mottling above the stocking tops -- "a pinkish purple marbling . . . on the white skin" allowing Miss Hailey to give "a quick handsome smile of recognition in the direction of the thighs" (MSR 221).

Miss Snowdon and Miss Thorne accustomed to luxuriate in their after dinner drinks similarly enjoy the radiant warmth:

"Down the hatch!" Both women stare pensively into the fire glow. Relaxed, they have hitched up their rather formal skirts and sit with their large knees apart. (MPI 155)

Miss Hailey is also a writer -- an unpublished writer to be sure and shares the disappointment of publisher rejections with Elizabeth Jolley herself whose first novel Palomino for long endured a very similar fate to Miss Hailey's novel. Though Elizabeth Jolley is at pains to deny that she writes of: ". . . people I have known or of a sequence of events I have witnessed . . ." (FAV 133).

At the same time she acknowledges a writer must write from experience and she recalls that the basis of the character of Miss Hailey was but a short glimpse of a stranger in the street:

[Miss Hailey] is based on the sight of a woman in an unusual straw hat. That is all I noticed about her as I passed her in the street. But as I passed I imagined how pleased she would be to be able to tell someone the way. (FAV 133)

Miss Hailey is just one of the writers appearing in Elizabeth Jolley's fiction but she has the distinction of being altogether unpublished even
though only one published work by Diana Hopewell, *Angels on Horseback*, is mentioned in *Miss Peabody’s Inheritance* and *Foxybaby’s Miss Porch* is dealing with a work in progress in her course at Cheatham East. Miss Hailey, though seems to hold the record number of rejections, or at least admits to the largest number -- forty five to date but this does not faze her in any way:

> I suppose I shall go on writing even if I have no success. I suppose a writer can really only write with the ever present thought that, like an orchard planted, he can only leave it behind for those coming after (MSR 221).

Although if there are any obvious deficiencies obstructing publication, perhaps these can be remedied. Maybe it is the lack of an idyll:

> "My novel lacks an idyll," Miss Hailey, alone on the verandah said, "tonight I shall write an idyll. It is not the easiest thing to write but I shall do it." (MSR 211)

The interest in the writer’s craft seems to emerge frequently in Elizabeth Jolley’s fiction. The short story "Woman in a Lampshade", (appearing first in *Westerly* in 1979) and then in the short story collection with the same title published by Penguin in 1983, concerns the writer Jasmine Treadwell and examines the author’s problems as she goes off on a cold wet night with typewriter and other essential equipment (including a bottle of “respectable” wine and her lampshade) to the farm to write. The young man can scarcely be seen in the heavy rain but Jasmine picks him up on the way, in spite of warnings about the dangers of hitchhikers, to help with "writer's block". He is so blurred that he seems almost a mirage, a creation of words: "It was as if he had come into existence simply because someone, hopelessly lost among words, had created him in thoughtful ink on blotting paper" (WIL 137).
When they arrive and are comfortably settled in, Jasmine consults the hitchhiker about the complications of the plot of her novel. He lies next to her in bed sleeping naked, "under a heap of old fur coats and several spoiled pages" while she sits up with the typewriter. His clothes are drying while she writes, his expectation of the prospect that they might "carry on in bed" fading. Whether this causes him relief or disappointment is not clear but the Muse eventually returns and the young man leaves while the author writes on.

Miss Peabody, in *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* is new to the writer's role. Naturally she is not yet published but with her inheritance, her first novel fully planned by Diana, the author of at least one published novel, she is in a position to "hopewell". Diana's *Angels on Horseback* evidently is helped by an erotic appeal which attracts Miss Peabody and perhaps influences the publisher favourably too. It succeeds in changing Miss Peabody's outlook and lifts her out of her humdrum life at Weybridge -- she writes: "the beautiful young schoolgirls and their strange and wild riding lessons brought something into my life" (*MPI 5*).

Alma Porch in *Foxybaby* is the most detailed study of the writer and her craft as both the writer and the work are still developing. In fact she also seems to be an unpublished writer. She indicates the way in which "writers can transform their self-searching exploration and their deep awareness of human feelings and lives into something which can be familiar to us all" (*FB 4*). In *Mr Scobie's Riddle* the problems of the writer seeking publication are constantly in Miss Hailey's mind in the circumstances which the loss of the school precipitates.
Mr Scobie’s Riddle is the first of Elizabeth Jolley’s novels to give a substantial place to men. The study of Mr. Scobie himself as an old man struggling in the dehumanized atmosphere of the nursing home of St Christopher and St Jude to regain his freedom, and retain his independence against the mercenary objectives of his family, especially nephew Hartley, and the rapacity of Matron Hyacinth Price, is in some ways pathetic though he never gives in and constantly strives to live his own life. He is a victim, at the mercy of events directed by others — and generally those who direct his affairs are women. Matron Price, his niece Joan, Mrs. Rawlings, even the would be author, Miss Hailey, and the young nurses Frankie and Robyn all play a part. His nephew Hartley, takes a hand in the ordering of the events of Mr Scobie’s life on some occasions (though only for Hartley’s own advantage) and is perhaps the only vigorous younger male in the novel. Little is actually seen of the card players and their game, though Night Sister Shady reports the arrival of Mr Boxer and Mr Rob (MSR 6) (who are also known as Mr Morgan and Mr Shady and are relatives of the hapless night sister). They are presumably young and their card playing certainly has some vigour as evidenced by the eventual winning of the hospital, though they want to be patients.

But the novel deals mainly with the old. The three eighty five year old victims of the multiple ambulance collision are the oldest men, but some of the women may be even older, especially “Mother” (Sister Shady’s mother Mrs Morgan who celebrates her 100th birthday in the short story “‘Surprise! Surprise! from Matron’” (FAV 57/67). Elizabeth Jolley writes about Mr Scobie’s Riddle in Central Mischief:
I have three characters all eighty five years old, three more in their sixties, a couple of young girls and a few more characters of all ages (CM 183).

The author, however, suggests the book is not about old age, nor is it a "thesis on nursing homes for the aged" rather it is a celebration of life in which the nursing home is simply the setting. Age and ageing is one of its themes, as it continues to explore the interaction between people especially through the love of women, young and old, for each other:

The nursing home in the book, which has two saints over the front door -- St Christopher who takes care of the wayfarer and St Jude who cares for all hopeless cases -- is simply a setting for a novel in which I am trying to examine the celebration of life. It is not simply a sad story of old age. The celebration is based on Psalm 39 verse 4: Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is that I may know how frail I am; and Verse 5: Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is nothing before thee (CM 183).

These biblical quotations seem to indicate the priority of the experience of ageing with the suggestion that the acceptance of being old is the desirable attitude to adopt, at least in the author's mind. In fact it is not just a matter of ageing but the acceptance of death. But the elderly inhabitants of the nursing home, without exception, seem to be unhappy about their plight. Reluctant acceptance is the best that can be managed by any of them. The old men all want to return to their homes and fail to recognise that these homes are no longer available. Mr Scobie plans and attempts as many escapes as the most courageous prisoners-of-war trying to outwit the commandants of their Stalags. None of these attempts succeeds and he confesses to himself that his plan to store up happy and beautiful memories for his old age is also a failure.
His thought was then, being in the presence of all which was ancient, immense and measureless, listening to Mozart's music, that he would preserve images of rapture somewhere inside him for those times ahead when he would need to be comforted. Now in Room One in the hospital of St Christopher and St Jude the only memories existing for him were the sad and painful. He could not recall anything from those treasures he once thought he was putting away safely for later (MSR 98).

Miss Hailey does not enjoy her life, but knows that there can be no escape for her, trapped in the home where St Jude presides over the hopeless cases. She is not so old, presumably in her early sixties and repressed desire continues to trouble her. Frankie tells Robyn of Miss Hailey's passion for Miami (a predecessor as nurse in the hospital), her troubles as a Headmistress, and her growing desire for Robyn:

"What she do to Miami then?"
"Nuthin' 'swat what she tried to do. That's why Miami left. See. Matron went mad. . . ."
"Apparently Hailey was a teacher once?"
"A Headmistress."
"Yeah, well -- Teach or Head. She got tipped out."
"For the same reason?"
"Yeah s'pose."
"Funny old bag. I quite like her but."
"Well there y'are. See? She'll get you next" (MSR 102).

Miss Hailey finds consolation in Mr Scobie's music especially Mozart, though she is aware of the dangers:

It's what Mozart has put into the music . . .
It is this radiance in the music which stirs deep pools within the human being . . . It might, for example, make me offer a tenderness in an unlikely place and cause no end of trouble. . . . One cannot be too careful (MSR 99/100).

To avoid the threat of impossible consequences she thinks perhaps it would be safer to have the Brahms Requiem instead: "The holiness of the Brahms is purely intellectual. It is an intellectual and spiritual tenderness . . . and surely cannot harm anyone" (MSR 100).
The Brahms German Requiem influences Elizabeth Jolley in the writing of Mr Scobie's Riddle, especially the words of verses four and five of Psalm 39, quoted above: "I tried to show that old age could be approached with acceptance and that elderly people should not be regarded as them but as us" (CM 184).

She feels she wants to represent in our own lives the "Dignity, Composure and Tranquility" of our mothers and grandmothers (CM 184). But not many of the characters of Mr. Scobie's Riddle display this quiet dignity. In fact there are some who may well be the antithesis of it. The card players certainly show unmistakable signs of vivacity with the aid of the medicinal doses of brandy though no dignity or tranquility. Their game is just another opportunity for the extraction of funds from the unfortunates, even including Matron Price. She is not a player herself but through the agency of her brother Lt Col Iris Price (retired) and the nocturnal poker game, she manages to lose the nursing home to the would-be patients Messers Shady and Morgan.

Unfortunately most of the episodes in which he features are aligned with interests other than Mr Scobie's, whose pleas for rescue from his suffering confined in the hospital are ignored. Joan, his niece, does sometimes visit -- but she can't spare much time and her short skirts and low dresses alarm her Uncle and he has never seen a hair cut -- or lack of it -- quite like Joan's. He clearly sees she is built for child bearing (MSF 45).

When Hartley comes it is invariably to follow up plans for his own enrichment. Mr Scobie's memories and dreams and hopes must take second place to these elaborate plans even though Hartley often uses him.
Indeed the main reason for Hartley's visits is to pursue some "get rich quick idea" in which Mr Scobie may be helpful. Most spectacular of these schemes is the planned robbery of "The Rich Widow" after Hartley's "conversion": "Uncle Martin ... I want to come back to the Lord. I have seen the Light" (MSR 85). This conversion may well be profound but it seems closely associated with an attempt to persuade the widow she needs a lodger/companion as a pretext to give Hartley the chance to "case the joint" with a view to a lucrative burglary. "Mature Lady Bible Basher would like to meet similar opposite sex conversations and outings" (MSR 88). Perhaps Mr Scobie is not so innocent after all. He may well understand the true purpose in his nephew's mind, and he also knows the correct jargon:

"Oh, I see," Mr. Scobie said, "I suppose it is possible well, perhaps we should, as they say in the criminal world, perhaps we should case the joint." He gave a little laugh (MSR 88).

The old men who are admitted to the Hospital of St Christopher and St Jude after the triple ambulance crash, immediately become victims to the strict rule of Matron Hyacinth and the tyranny of the hospital for wayfarers and the perplexed, even if the men are not yet aware that they are also without hope. All seek their known former lives, and all like Mr Scobie are lost. Mr. Privett longs for Hep Duck and Hildegarde:

There's the poultry to see to, there's Hep Duck and Hildegarde. I usually have a bit of a smoke around about now -- down in the shed -- just about now (MSR 18). "Ambulances don't grow on trees you know" (MSR 16) Matron Hyacinth Price mentally admonishes, but it would be folly for her not to take advantage of the accident, though for the old men it would be quite otherwise.
Mr Hughes can only leave his bed when Mrs Rawlings has time to help him. His visits to the toilet, the shower and getting out to the verandah all require the busy Mrs Rawlings to haul him up while he lives in the past with his truck, hauling bricks, rubbish, empty bottles, small furniture and even livestock:

Once I had to take two live geese ... I had to put my wife, she's dead now, you know, in the back of the truck for the whole journey holding both geese ... by their [long strong] necks (MSR 32).

The whispering bricks return to comfort Mr Hughes in the ambulance after his collapse. He remembers the first load of bricks he had carried. They were new bricks; at first they were quiet "chittering and snittering" figetting and talking "like people whispering in church". He hears them again as he is dying:

On the way to the hospital he listened to the bricks talking very softly, whispering and muttering and chattering to themselves. So many bricks, clean and new and useful. They figitted and squeaked and laughed in little voices. As he listened he was reminded of his wife and her sisters, six sisters-in-law and how they would all gather in the kitchen or the bedroom or by the garden gate to talk and laugh, tell each other things and show things to each other. He thought he could hear them, all the time, talking talking talking (MSR 104).

Though Mr. Scobie shows a great deal of interest in literature, it is with a very serious taste, most of his quotations being biblical. Often they include references to death just as his riddle does:

"What is it that we all know is going to happen but we don't know when or how?" Mr. Scobie, looking up from his round basket chair, could not refrain from smiling. He smiled from one ear to the other and his lightly veined cheeks bulged (MSR 120).
Not long afterwards on one of his desperate escape attempts the police find him at a lonely wayside railway station. Unable to remember the name of the hospital or the street he sings the words of Schubert's setting of Wilhelm Müller's "Gute Nacht" from "Die Winterreise" to the police:

Fremd bin ich eingezogen
Fremd zieh' ich weider aus --
Ich Kann zu meiner Reise
nich Wählen mit der Zeit --

A stranger came I hither
A stranger I depart --
I cannot for my journey
Choose the appointed time
(MSR 182)

When Miss Hailey offers her manuscript to him he is embarrassed, partly because of the tearful effect on him of the music he is listening to on his cassette player: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am" (MSR 22) It is also partly because Miss Hailey disclaims having "intercourse with men . . . not with any men here . . . using intercourse in its older and more dignified meaning" (MSR 22). The sight of a lady in her dressing gown carrying intimate articles like a sponge bag and a towel shocks him and then there is the cover to the novel *Self Stoked Fires* with an illustration of "... a healthy but languid naked woman. Carefully Mr Scobie turned the whole thing over so that the title and the drawing did not show" (MSR 23). Is he reminded of Lina's Holy Pictures and his "shame"? (MSR 23/4) The cover remains turned over and Mr Scobie never reads any more than the title "in green and purple ink" even though it contains everything, as Miss Hailey says:

Birth, marriage, separation, bigamy, divorce, death -- several deaths, all kinds of human effort, memories, joy, pain, excitement, transfiguration, love and acceptance (MSR 23).
Packing to leave the hospital (as he hopes) Mr Scobie discovers this unrecognised bundle of papers with floppy cardboard covers tied with pieces of coloured tape and of course the naked lady adorning the outside again offends (or alarms) him.

He turned it over and placed it next to the cassette player on the bed. Of course, he remembered, it was that Miss, whatever was her name, the lady writer, it was her manuscript. It had never been returned to her. He wondered what to write on another piece of paper to put with the manuscript. He wrote,

I am sorry I do not read works of fiction.
Signed M. Scobie (MSR 187).

So much of the feeling of these old people is summed up by the title of Miss Hailey's novel *Stoked Fires*. It is frustration rather than acceptance which predominates at St Christopher and St Jude's hospital. Though everybody knows what the end is and nobody knows when or how, all would prefer it to be at some other time, and in some other place. But none of those trapped in the crazy world of the hospital is able to escape. Miss Hailey does not have the satisfaction of seeing her book made available to readers, even with the addition of the idyll. She does not share the hope offered to Miss Peabody through her inheritance from Diana Hopewell. The old ladies continue to fight with each other and the old men all die.

But though Mr Scobie himself cannot return to his old home at Rosewood East there is the revival of new life there in the commune which Robyn, Frankie and Hartley start at the house and on the land. Miss Hailey has the opportunity of joining with them in response to the invitation from Robyn and Frankie but she performs her dance celebrating new life, part of her idyll and remains faithful to her old lover.
While she only intermittently returns this love Matron Price herself does not escape frustration. She still loves Mr Rawlings, though he has left her. The hospital, always short of money is lost to her through her brother's improvidence in his compulsive gambling, but she still has no respite from her endless labours for the hospital. Though she tries to improve the financial situation by getting Mr Scofield's signature, he dies, not signing, but making his affirmation trying to write Blake's poem:

Where Mercy Love and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too

So the frustration, sometimes desperation, is balanced by hope and the horror of old age and sickness and the despair of the nursing home by faith in an ultimate providence which Mr Privett finds in his ducks and Mr Hughes in his talking bricks.

The many voices of the narration reflect the multi-faceted fantasy of all at the hospice of St Christopher and St Jude. Night Sister Shady belongs to the nights and the darkness as her name implies. She appears only in her weird reports which provide the opening of the novel. These receive a response from Matron Price usually recommending treatment of any ailment whatever with Epsom salts while Sister Shady prefers menthol camphor. But Matron Price does not approve:

MENTHOL CAMPHOR IS NOT THE ONLY REMEDY WE HAVE.
ON THE SHELF UNDER THE SINK IS A TIN OF EPSOM SALTS
IN AN EMERGENCY WHY DON'T YOU USE YOUR EYES (MSR 5).

These exchanges between the night sister and the matron set the tone of the whole novel -- bizarre, chaotic, alternating between pathetic sadness and absolute absurdity though sometimes with sinister overtones.
The poker game in which the hospital is lost by Lt Col Iris Price to Mr Boxer Morgan and Mr Rob Shady is foreshadowed in the story "Surprise! Surprise!" from Matron" (FAV 57/67). In this story the Doll and Fingertips win the Ferns Hospital for the Aged in a similar game of poker from Matron Shroud's brother, Reggie, also a lieutenant colonel. "Foreshadowed" may not really be correct. Although Mr Scobie's Riddle publication date is 1983 and Five Acre Virgin's date is 1977, the literary notes in the Mitchell Library indicate that it is probable that the precedence should be reversed. The date of notes for "Surprise Surprise from Matron" on the manuscript is Apr -- May 1976 (ML MSS 4880/22 iii) while for Mr Scobie's Riddle, originally entitled "The Great Discarders", the date is given as "196 -- c 1983" (ML MSS 4880/7 vii). The original title indicates the similarities with the first five stories in Five Acre Virgin (from the group which Mrs Jolley tells us was "The Discarders") and in the usual Jolley fugal fashion the characters as well as plot have close resemblances. Mother translates from these stories to Mrs Morgan, the "Prince" becomes Mr Boxer Morgan The narrator of the stories becomes Night Sister Shady (unregistered) in Mr Scobie's Riddle.

There are many other hospital scenes in the Jolley fiction, particularly in My Father's Moon. There is also the maternity home in Cabin Fever. There are also short stories with hospital settings or references like "The Bathroom Dance" (Overland 92 Aug 1983: 2/6) and subsequently part of My Father's Moon (45/59). "The Performance" and "Winter Mellis" (both in TE 11/50) are either in hospital or use medical references. "Night Report" is a story which includes the same strange
exchange of notes as that between Night Sister Shady and Matron Price at
the beginning of Mr Scobie's Riddle. This story is in Fictions: An
Anthology of Fiction by Women edited by Anna Gibbs and Alison Tilson,
18/25. "Hilda's Wedding" (WIL 39/47) is one of the most bizarre of the
hospital stories in which the narrator arranges for the marriage of a
rather plain wardsmaid in the last stages of pregnancy. It is to the
amiable Casualty Porter (who gets the flowers from outside the private
ward). The bride wears an X-ray gown with a veil made from gauze
dressings. The 1851 Cricketeriig Manual replaces the prayer book. Guests
include the cleaners Gordonpole and Smallhouse. Feegan the night
firewatchman conducts the ceremony:

"Dust to dust and ashes to ashes" he gabbled,
"I declare you man and wife." (WIL 44)

The marriage is completed just in time to legitimise the infant -- the
baby is delivered in the lift before Hilda reaches "maternity" (WIL 45).

So there is an extensive cross connection between much of the Jolley
corpus and Mr Scobie's Riddle. The weaving of the themes of the fugue
range freely over a quite large number of stories and other novels. The
mood is strangely mixed with humour strongly in evidence -- it is often
black comedy with mood swinging from cheerful comedy to depressive
sadness suddenly and frequently. The past comes very strongly into the
present as the old people are drawn back into the much more agreeable
past, away from the present of dull routine, indignity, frustration and
hopelessness. Institutional life in the nursing home is a parody as
Matron falls again and again over the dangerously placed cleaning bucket
and the milkman regularly trips over the broken step (always at 4 a.m.).
The pain and entrapment of the inmates of St Christopher and St Judes is inescapable but sometimes is lightened by the bright, cheerful, even if sometimes vulgar and obscene young nurses Frankie and Robyn:

Rock a Stop a hoola Baby Hilarious Hey Hey Hey
Huh Huh Huh
Flop me drop me
Turn me on
Flop me Top me
I'm turned on
Rock a Stop a hoola Baby
Yair Yair Yair (MSR 144)

Miss Hailey herself provides the epigraph to the novel in her own hand writing, translating and explaining Horace:

Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnes Angulus ridet.

Horace with an explanation:

One could say there is a corner of the world which smiles upon one but it is a little awkward what about --
No cosy spot on earth caresses me more -- or words to that effect.

But she has to refuse the invitation from Frankie and Robyn to go live with them in the "cosy spot" which might "smile" upon her -- the commune at Rosewood East. Nevertheless Miss Hailey enjoys a fleeting glimpse in the "pale-yellow light" of the sunrise of that "smiling corner of the world". "In her mind she saw the bright new tents, three of them clustered together near the door of Mr Scobie's old house ... probably Frankie and Robyn, Mr Briggs and Hartley ... would be seeing the same sunrise" (MSR 225). Matron Price leads her back into the stuffy darkness of Room 3 while the crashing of pots and pans echo from the kitchen and cook's voice may be heard in her usual tone of complaint rising over all.
Meantime Matron Hyacinth Price is no longer enjoying the fantasy of her vision of the unspellable archipelago: "... this bottom lawn, all by itself in this long finger of garden between the three roads... like a sort of peninsular... like the Greek Islands" (MSF 219).

It may seem that Matron Price is unscrupulous and grasping in the attempt to exploit the feeble condition of the patients like Mr Scobie who in contrast are innocent and pathetic. Perhaps even worse is the advantage she takes of her old school friend Heather Hailey who is now stripped of all money by signing her estate over to the Matron in exchange for the security of St Christopher and St Jude. Matron is one of the strong demanding characters in the Jolley novels who expect that their interests should come first and are completely self centred without any real consideration of others. Miss Thorne is demanding in a similar way and so is Miss Peycroft (of Miss Peabody's Inheritance and Foxybaby respectively) and these two are headmistresses just as Hyacinth Price is Matron of the hospital. All are women in charge. The impersonal institution is the environment in which such a personality thrives. In this microcosm of society they are able to order everything to suit their convenience. They dominate their respective establishments and take advantage of the position of those in a dependent situation to provide them with the satisfactions their egos crave. So for Miss Thorne there is always Edgely to order about, and for Peycroft there is Paisley to miss-type the notices and to feed her need for appreciation. In My Father's Moon "Patch" Palmer, the principal of Fairfield School, is favoured with the services of both Myles, the deputy principal and Tanya, art teacher who enjoys the bath with Patch.
Mr Scobie and the other old men are transparent in their innocent aim of escape from the institution which is their protection from what for many of them would be an even worse situation. They all imagine they can return to their old lives -- though this is not so. Perhaps worse than Matron Price are the relatives who seek to gain from the sale of the old men's land and houses -- making the retreat they all desire so impossible. Miss Hailey at least is aware that she cannot escape when she realises she is unable to accept the invitation of Frankie and Robyn to be godmother to baby Miriam and to go to live in the commune which the girls with their partners are setting up in Mr Scobie's old house (left to nephew Hartley) on his land at East Rosewood.

So Elizabeth Jolley is able to spare some sympathy for the position of the Matron as she strives to keep her hospital afloat against the odds -- made so much worse by her brother's unsuccessful efforts to gamble a way out of their financial plight. Matron Hyacinth is pathetic and vulnerable at times, for instance in the deep love she continues to feel for her unfaithful "spouse", the bigamist Mr Rawlings, for whom she continues to offer much needed sanctuary in the caravan.

There was too the recurring problem of accommodation for Mr Rawlings, which, when needed, was impossible to refuse. He was inclined to appear unexpectedly at intervals. When he came he was usually exhausted and in need of sanctuary. At the sight of the caravan she felt a curious pang somewhere beneath the covered buttons of the solid bodice of her uniform. It was hard to put into words, it was altogether too painful (NSR 19).

Or again when the Matron is confronted by the Health Inspector there are these moments of ingenuous attempts to cover up the deficiencies of St Christopher and St Jude (who also find the odds stacked against them).
Undoubtedly there are problems enough in the hospital but they are not improved by the kind of welcome extended to the Inspector by Frankie:

"She was only an undertaker's daughter but -- wow -- could she bury a stiff! -- wow --" Frankie, singing, danced down the hall. "Here's the Public Health to see you," she stopped in the doorway of the office. Matron Price stood up. Later she would have to have a word with the girl about answering the front door in such a filthy overall. There was simply no need, either, to go to the door carrying a wet, dripping wet, lavatory brush (MSR 14).

The Matron is vulnerable because of the hospital's many deficiencies and the man from the Health Department, unimpressed by the damp bathroom suggests that a new tap will be required which can be turned on and off by the elbow to permit scrubbing up for dressing wounds without contamination of the hands:

"Scrub up?" Matron said "We usually have to wash -- er -- scrub down . . . "
"I mean to scrub up for a dressing, . . . a surgical sterile procedure. Do you understand? The tap has to be turned on with the elbow" (MSR 15).

A new tap will be required which, of course, Matron cannot afford and when he returns to inspect the new tap further diversionary efforts are required to prevent the Inspector becoming aware that it is still not possible to undertake a surgically sterile dressing under the auspices of St Christopher and St Jude. The Matron plies the Health Department representative with hospitality:

"Let me pour you another," Matron held up the flagon.
"It will be my third!" the Inspector warned.
"I'm sorry our glasses are so huge!" Matron Price laughed, down the scale, sounding like two excited horses. Quite an achievement she thought (MSR 205).
Perhaps it is when a character is in a position of weakness that the reader's sympathy is aroused and this is the case not only with the patients in the hospital, especially the men -- Messrs Scobie, Privett and Hughes -- and Miss Hailey but even with Hyacinth Price as she tries to keep her hospital operational through such subterfuges. There is a tendency to think that she is human after all. Maybe she is not quite the monster she seems at first sight.

Indeed there is compassion which extends to nearly all the characters, even such sketchy characters as Boxer Morgan and Rob Shady, the would-be patients who are the big winners in the nightly poker game and the Night Sister -- the unregistered Sister Shady -- to whom they are related and whose report tells of their effort to be admitted:

"Really matron I think I need some help at night. Mr Boxer says he wants to be a patient if you will have him please also Mr Rob, he is Mr Shady. I am sorry matron we are related. Mr Boxer is also Mr Morgan so he is a relation too. I am sorry." (MSR 6).

There are others in the array of characters in *Mr Scobie's Riddle* who are mostly far from the highest expectations of virtue such as Hartley with his many schemes for getting rich quickly, his short lived conversion to Christianity and his inability to give up Sybilla, though she is quite prepared to do without him:

"Sybilla won't have me. She'll not have anything more to do with me. She's got the house and everything and yours truly got his marching orders."
"Leave her alone Hartley," Mr Scobie said "Evil can only bring about Evil."
"But I love her Uncle. How can I leave her, I want to live. It's not evil is it to want to live?" (MSR 67)

Another of these endearing people is Mr Scobie's niece, Joan, who shocks Mr Scobie with her daring dresses:
"I do wish, dear, that you would not wear such short dresses," Mr Scobie said. "Did you know, dear, that people can see all up your legs and down into your -- er -- lungs? That dress is cut very low for someone of your size and age."
"Breasts Uncle, Bassrooms, Boobs, not lungs," Joan laughed . . .
"Joan, I used to tell you years ago," Mr Scobie said, "you are built for child bearing . . ." (MSR 45).

But in spite of this daring, and of her hair cut ("It's all over your face.") she takes Mr Scobie out occasionally and even buys him an ice cream. Others of this ilk include Mrs Rawlings, always overworked but not unkind, or not very unkind or even resentful under the duress of Matron's threat to disclose Rawlings' bigamy. It is a pity she is ignorant of literature and music. When Mr Scobie tells her that death is not evil she thinks he is talking rubbish:

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. Epistle to the Hebrews, Mrs Rawlings, chapter thirteen verse fourteen . . . I can play the music for you. Beautiful music."

But Mrs Rawlings response is less than appreciative:

"Oh you and your Bible rubbish," Mrs Rawlings said, her mouth set in a thin line. She picked up her mop and bucket and marched out of the room saying, "I've no time for music. There's something about your urine, Mr Scobie, that would ruin everything it came in contact with" (MSR 111). The cook by definition is a person of influence. Though almost never seen she is clearly audible with the clashing of pots and pans, while even more invisible is Mr Rawlings doing his best to look after two women and keep one step ahead of the law. Frankie's husband Horry Briggs is another scarcely visible persona, but at least he joins in the establishment of the East Rosewood commune apparently with enthusiasm and certainly with a very generous measure of tolerance. It would be
reasonable to assume that he is willing and able to help in the creation of Frankie's children, even though it is Hartley who fathers Miriam. "My next will be Horry's" she tells Miss Hailey who acclaims this as "a reasonable plan" (MSR 210).

Frankie and Robyn do not belong to the usual type of Jolley lesbians. For one thing they are obviously bisexual and for another they are equals both in status and age so that there is no element of that dominance, present in most of the Jolley lesbian pairs, of older over young or powerful over powerless -- of power rather than love or sex. They are full of vitality and energy, zestful in the pursuit of their sexual pleasures and, even though inclined to be boisterous, remarkably considerate to the old people. Their offer to take Miss Hailey to the commune is generous, especially as they are fully aware of Miss Hailey's lesbian failings and the attraction she feels for Frankie which they exploit so unscrupulously in Mr Rawlings' caravan where the almost naked Frankie entices her:

"Oh Miss Hailey," Frankie purred, "I wanted you to come out here. I think you're cute Miss Hailey. I'm real sweet on you. I'd like us to be real special friends, really I would" (MSR 147/148).

Indeed it may well be that their kindness is mixed a little with guilt since Hailey and Frankie are discovered on the narrow floor of the caravan -- "as the beam of Matron Price's pocket torch shone whitely on their tangled bodies" (MSR 148).

Most of these people and the lady patients, like Miss Nunne, the ancient but very energetic Mrs Morgan, Mrs Murphy, Mrs Tompkins, display a great interest in life and anxious to postpone death. Even if they
are propped up in the chairs on the verandah most of the day, they still eagerly await the evenings and the big game when the Matron's brother Lt. Col. Iris Price will stake all once again against Morgan and Shady in the big poker game. Sister Shady (unregistered) encapsulates all of this in pithy reports:

Hot milk prepared for Lt Col I Price 10 pm. Lt Col says why on earth Hyacinth because he never touches the stuff. Pat. very restless and disturbed. Mother (Mrs Morgan) came in at 4 am . . .
Mrs Tompkins says what's the matter with this place these days there's never any food around and with what she's put into the place she should get a snack now and then what about sandwiches . . .
All pats. play cards in dinette Lt Col brighten up but loose bad. Nothing abnormal to report. . . .
Milkman fell and bruise him in very awkward place dressed with menthol camphor 4 am (MSR 7).

The hospital is full of those waiting for death and yet full of vitality and interest -- it is a riot of unexpected activity with the bucket so strategically placed in the corridor that everybody trips on it:

"Well, you are immortal Tin Tin," Miss Hailey said.
"Just think of all the times you kick the bucket in the passage but you don't go off, I mean, you know what I mean, you don't pass on, pass away, shuffle off this mortal coil, you know what I mean" (MSR 216).

The broken steps lie in wait for the milkman to fall on at 4 am every morning -- Night Nurse Shady hears his word:

There is no clock here as you know and so when the milk comes I know it is four o'clock as he is punctual and I hear his word when he falls on the broken step out there (MSR 3).

The characters often so vaguely drawn are nevertheless all part of the joy of life in the nursing home which is the prelude to death, which is never mentioned, except in Mr Scobie's untactful riddle.
Ironically it is only the social worker who does not share joyfully in the carnival which might be a kind of dance of death. a Lisztian Todtentanz. Rosemary Whyte is a social worker in training who does not like to disturb -- especially does not like to disturb herself:

... peeping into the room as she stepped lightly on neat little feet along the passage [she] decided that all three old men were asleep. She consulted her watch. It was practically lunch time. She made a note on her folder to the effect that Mr Privett was asleep, that Mr Hughes was asleep and that Mr Scobie appeared to be about to sleep (MSR 77).

In fact her visits usually are abortive. She thinks, with Christmas approaching, that by now she is in a position of sufficient familiarity to pop in and wish everybody a merry Christmas. Perhaps it is a little early for Christmas but she might not find time as easily later:

"Hallo! Hallo! Everybody! I’m sure you remember me." She came upon a stillness with which she was not previously acquainted. The stillness was something not given in lectures and it did not occur in examination questions either. There was only one of the old men in the room and he was in bed. He looked tranquil. Very small like a child asleep except that his soft hair, decorating his head in wisps was white. There was no movement of response to her cheery greeting. She stood for a moment inside the door and then, clutching her file to her embroidered breast, she darted along the passage and out of the front door, Doctors and Visitors Only. Thank goodness she had Mummy’s car. She would go straight home. It was all so unexpected. Really it was all too much (MSR 109).

The answer to Mr Scobie’s riddle awaits all those who appear as characters of joy or sorrow, whether fully rounded or vaguely sketched in Mr Scobie’s Riddle and for all those who read it too. It is not just the death of the author now, there are no exceptions whether for cooks, social workers, matrons, writers or readers; it is the final resolution.
However Elizabeth Jolley's intention with Mr Scobie's Riddle to avoid a lament on death and dying was strong and the cause of much difficulty in the writing of this novel. The Mitchell Library papers indicate the work in progress over a long period -- some twenty years -- with experiments in short stories and a radio play which all contribute to the final book. In an interview in Making Stories edited by Kate Greenvile and Sue Woolfe, Jolley explains some of her difficulties and their solutions. First adding humour, which is one of the deficiencies previously noted with Palomino and then more landscape description. Rounding out of character more fully seems to be another addition, although Jolley's characterisation is often vivid when apparently rather sparsely drawn. Miss Hailey's development from the short story stage, when her appearance is limited to her attempt to get somebody to fix her blind, is greatly assisted by that sighting of the lady in the street "wearing a hat, a straw hat with a chinstrap, a bit like a Canadian Mounted Policeman's" (MS 155).

The actual form of the novel was a very important factor in providing a framework for the humour. Jolley considers the first person narrative which she uses in early drafts and stories as well as in Milk and Honey adds to the danger of developing too much into a lament:

*Milk and Honey* was written in the first person, and it borders on a lament, it has hardly any humour in it at all. I find the first person narration of *Milk and Honey* tiresome. It and *Palomino* are very slow moving, whereas in the writing of *Scobie* it's swifter, and that is something I learned alongside those slower things. (MS 163).
The shift to the third person narration seems to Jolley to "distance you a bit, and makes it easier not to be a lament" (MS 163). In addition to this change there is the interesting beginning to the novel in which bungled, incomplete notices, misspelt reports and comments on these reports are used to provide a varied, and very funny presentation.

There is also a "table of contents" called "A Guide to the Perplexed". This, according to Jolley, is simply a table she constructed during the writing to help her to weave together separate parts of the novel after trying various alternative devices, such as coloured paper:

They were key bits in the novel, so I'd find that bit, and then I'd know what was around there. I was such a long time writing it, and I was doing other things as well. But when the "Guide" went to the typist she typed it and collated it with the page numbers in the typescript, so when it came back from her I sent the whole thing to Penguin, and they quite liked the "Guide" and it stayed in (MS 160).

Of course the actual "bits" of the novel selected for this attention are themselves very interesting, mostly funny episodes which are very valuable in setting the tone of the book. These certainly invalidate any possibility of the development of a "lament" or a morbid thesis on the problems of the old or on death and dying. Some examples are:

Frankie, with a dripping lavatory brush, opens the front door to the officer from the Department of Public Health.

Matron Price unable to spell archipelago.

"Matron I am sorry about Mr Jack Privett I hope you are feeling yourself again."

There's nothing in the world like a good chunder.

"Holy Cow!" he said, "I suppose it comes to us all in the end." Hartley winks at Frankie.

The "Guide" however is preceded by the strange handwritten epigraph.
This is the Latin verse from Horace with the Hailey translation previously mentioned but it is followed by a Biblical second epigraph, or second part, still in Miss Hailey's hand: "the word killeth but the spirit giveth life". The whole is subscribed "signed H. Hailey". Paul Salzman in Elizabeth Jolley's Fictions: Helplessly Tangled in Female Arms and Legs, suggests this handwritten prelude by-passes the printed word with the "authentic" and "authoritative", written word much as Derrida suggests that speech is privileged over writing and stressing the dichotomy of "word/spirit; handwriting/print; death/life" (EJF 44). Heather Hailey's handwriting appears again in the quotation from Pascal in parenthesis following her return to the hospital by taxi, whose driver is evidently unpaid (MSR 43). Salzman suggests this second handwritten excerpt is to permit authentication of the Hailey handwriting by comparing the writing of the epigraph(s) with that of this message attached to Night Nurse Shady's report. At the same time the dedication to Leonard Jolley which comes earlier in the book than any of these preliminaries reassures us that Jolley is still in charge and that Heather Hailey is not making a take over bid.

The normal third person narrative does not begin until page ten, by which time there is a rather bewildering effect on the reader of the "unauthorodox" opening to the novel and it comes as no surprise when Miss Hailey proclaims:

"Don't, but do not take everything I say au pied de la lettre" (MSR 13).

Mr Scobie escapes this danger as he refuses to read Miss Hailey's novel because he does not "read works of fiction" (MSR 187).
Perhaps it is Blake who provides the key to the hospital for the wayfarer and the hopeless. Mr Scobie, urged by Mrs Rawlings and Matron Price to sign his savings over begins instead to write part of the last verse of "The Divine Image" from the "Songs of Innocence" (MSR 194):

To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love
Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face.
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.
Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk or jew;
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.
MILK AND HONEY

The papers in the Mitchell Library of NSW which record Elizabeth Jolley's progress in the creation of *Milk and Honey* indicate its actual conception under the title *A Prince of a Fellow* and the notes carry dates beginning early in the 1970s until publication in 1984. The preliminary notes are like those of most of the early novels. They are in that characteristic Elizabeth Jolley style with that strange mixture of the practical reminder and apparent irrelevancies such as:

Julia write
Black and Decker, 2 speed electric drill with complete set of screw driver and bits -- a sander and a saw.

Dingo who sleeps all day in this heat in a hole he has made for himself under a hibiscus -- come to life at night. It seemed fitting for the old woman to be Granny to the little girl.
Behold the Monstrous Human Beast

Perhaps this strange heterogeneous collection of ideas, thoughts and jotted notes is not at all dissimilar to Elizabeth Jolley's finished writing, as Delys Bird remarks on what seems to be this most characteristic quality:

... the capacity to bring together incongruous qualities or concepts. Through the new and unexpected relationships created between unlike things, Jolley enables us to see as she does ... the typical juxtaposition of the banal and the exotic ... [achieving] the breath-catching surprise of apparently effortless yoking *(NCE 171).*

The novel is very much about a theme which often recurs in Elizabeth Jolley's writing -- the adaptation of the migrant to the new land, the surprises and difficulties and, as in this case, the failure of that adaptation. There is a preliminary statement about immigration.
This is in a preface, though it is not so labelled, in the form of an allegory or extended metaphor of the winds blowing through Europe and collecting "the soot, the dirt the horse manure, the brickdust and the thistledown" to carry it to the new Southern Hemisphere country. Here some mixes with the "dust" of the new country, but some does not and is compacted as "cones" drawing ever closer and closer together and not mixing. This clinging to the old culture, drawing apart and failure to mix with their new neighbours is the essential behaviour of Leopold and his European family in their new strange land.

There are two epigraphs which reinforce the intention set out in the preliminary statement:

... and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey ...  
(Exodus ch 3, v 9)

The other is from William Blake -- the song of the Clod and the contrasted song of the Pebble from "The Clod and the Pebble", the third of the "Songs of Experience":

Love seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.

Love seeketh only self to please,  
To bind another to its delight,  
Joys in another's loss of ease,  
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.

Milk and Honey turns the coin of exile to the two forms of love -- the unselfish devotion which Norman, unrequited, offers to Madge is rare:

... I remembered every time I saw him how he had looked the day she died. And I realised too late how much he had loved her, how unselfishly he was able to love. And, unlike me, was able to put her happiness first or tried to, always before his own (MH 8).
There is something of this mixture of self-centred love and selfless love which is involved in the actions of exiled people. There is a love which draws the emigrant people together for their mutual comfort in the strange land, trying to maintain their identity, "the cones" which press closer and closer together in their pursuit of unchanging permanence of the cultural background which sustains them. But this is normally counterbalanced by an outgoing interest in the life of their new society. It is particularly the children who interact with their peers, meeting them at school, in sporting events and entertainments and becoming absorbed by the mores of their neighbours.

With the Heimbach family however, the difference between the life and interests of the educated Viennese past and the crudeness of the ways of Australia inhibits this development. This effects the adults directly but also the children are tightly bound in the family and do not introduce the new influences, particularly because of mentally retarded Waldemar. The severity of his disabilities is questionable but he is backward though his physical development is evidently not impaired. Leopold's fear that he would be confined in an asylum may be due to the need for his wife to be committed. There is, of course, a hint that Waldemar's disabilities may be more severe than is apparent in the opening chapters of the novel particularly in view of his excessive size and strength. The subsequent incestuous relationship with his sister Louise as Jacob glimpses it in the attic seems to be confirmation. The Wagnerian type motif of the spike heeled knee length boot is used as high light and symbol of this episode. The murder of Madge apparently dispels all doubts and Waldemar is then committed.
In the first chapter the poverty stricken life which Jacob, door to door salesman, is living with his family is described. Through the open bedroom door the untidiness of the bedroom is visible:

Clothes and shoes were scattered and a broken chair lay on its side. Kicked up on the end of the bed, as if with some life of their own, was a pair of knee length leather boots. The long sharp heels, as if obeying some cruel passion, were caught in the white bed-cover (MH 8/9).

Jacob closes the door but it swings open again: "The bedroom door would not stay latched, with a tiresome click it swung open. On the bed the boots kicked" (MH 9). In the disclosure of his wife's infidelity, when Jacob pushes open the door of the attic room he sees the sexual embrace of Louise and her brother, naked except for these boots which Louise is wearing. The sharp heels make indentations in the soft flesh of Waldemar's exposed buttocks as if Louise, crushed under Waldemar's weight, "had pinned him to her" by her crossed legs (MH 144).

The extraordinary lengths involved in hiding Waldemar so completely that even Jacob, living in the house, is uncertain about his existence is indicative of some deeper psychiatric problem. The parental love strong enough to achieve this absolute protection for a subnormal child is accompanied by suffocating qualities of oppressive exploitation. Waldemar must remain hidden with Jacob believing he is his murderer (after a fight as children) to ensure continuation of the payments for Jacob's board and tuition. The possibility that Jacob knows Waldemar is alive leads in turn to the pre-arranged marriage to Louise which just happens, as Jacob says, achieved "without any effort on my part" (MH 57).
Both aspects of love which are described in the Blake epigraph are explored deeply in *Milk and Honey* especially the oppressive, cloying sweetness of the love which envelopes the young Jacob when his father leaves him with the Heimbachs. He hardly notices the bonds which are to bind him to the family of Viennese expatriates who cling to their old culture like the "cones" of the allegorical foreword, crushed together and isolated as rocks in an alien sea from the life around them.

After he recovers from the initial shock, Jacob, coming to the home as a boarder and a student of music, is delighted with the music of Europe. He rejoices in the company of the beautiful Louise, Leopold Heimbach's daughter. The tender love of Leopold and Aunts Rosa and Heloise envelops him. They recognize (and perhaps exaggerate) his musical talent though as Wade later points out to Jacob they are also very much aware of the value to the family of the money brought into the home by the regular payments from his father. Jacob's age is thirteen years at the time of his arrival and the only discordant note in the atmosphere of love and devotion is sounded by the fat, retarded brother of Louise. "Which hand you hev?" Waldemar asks Jacob at their first meeting and Jacob's choice leads to a cockroach being released from Waldemar's podgy fingers into Jacob's shirt (*MH* 12).

It is Waldemar's "death" which transmutes the bonds of love which tie Jacob to the Heimbach family to bonds of guilt. After an episode of teasing, a frequent occurrence from Waldemar, Jacob retaliates with a blow which he believes results in Waldemar's death (*MH* 26/8). Leopold takes advantage of this opportunity to spirit the unhappy Waldemar away to the attic of the house where he is imprisoned in complete secrecy.
Leopold never talks to Jacob about the disappearance and the "murder" of Waldemar, let alone about his fear that Waldemar should be restrained in an asylum. It is Aunt Heloise who, much later, tells Jacob about Waldemar and why he is in the attic when he finds her alone celebrating her birthday with a solitary drink in the kitchen (MH 116/20). Waldemar is much bigger physically than Jacob though the Doctor, organized by the family to confirm Waldemar's "death", asserts that his heart is inadequate to support his body (MH 29). He also seems backward mentally, even if, from his relationship with Louise, it would seem that his sexual growth does not lag. However it is not clear whether Leopold's fears that Waldemar will be consigned to the asylum are based on fact or are fears arising from Leopold's remoteness from society, distrust of doctors and the experience with his wife's insanity. Subsequently Madge's murder and Jacob's discovery of the disgusting "jewel", Waldemar's false teeth, beside the body suggest that Leopold is right about Waldemar's condition (if not about his treatment).

Something sharp pricked my hand. When I looked, I saw it was the hideous piece of jewellery. It was the grotesque appliance with its food encrusted, crooked wires. Waldemar's false teeth (MH 145).

Reality and fantasy are constantly merging in this novel, the truth is elusive and slippery; Waldemar is an especially ambiguous figure, perhaps more than any other. Jacob remains uncertain about what takes place in the attic and the comparison to Charlotte Brontë's mad woman in the attic is inescapable. Perhaps, too Waldemar is a representation of the dark side of Jacob's own nature -- the monster who believes that he is a murderer -- another bond to the Heimbachs for Jacob.
Confirmation of Waldemar's existence in the attic would dispel this
lie to the household but before this can happen the noose is drawn
tighter first by the marriage to Louise and then by her pregnancy and
the birth of a child. At least theoretically, Jacob is the father,
even though he knows full well that this cannot be true. Yet he is
unable to deny the baby because of the family pressure.

Jacob is alone in the household even though its oppressive love and
deception hold him captive. He wanders through the house, exploring,
seeking to confirm or deny the existence of Waldemar but refusing to
face up to the issue as if enjoying his dilemma and accepting the
deception. Louise too, is remote and cannot be confronted. She is in a
room which can only be approached through the Aunts' rooms.

The house itself symbolises this division. It is a Gothic emblem,
dark and secretive with secluded or guarded rooms. Madge must be kept
separate from all of this. Though perhaps the orchestra provides some
independent possibilities when Leopold is no longer able to come to hear
Jacob play because of the condition of his legs.

The family vineyard and his father and uncle are all remote. No
part of Jacob's world touches the others; they are not integrated. When
they do approach each other as when Madge comes to the Heimbach house it
is entirely destructive. She comes to her death. This in turn leads
directly and almost immediately to Tante Rosa's immolation and to the
remainder of all the lives involved being lived out in "shallows and in
miseries". In the same way the attic in the house is never seen. It is
entirely separate. Jacob's room like that of Louise is isolated.
The strange fantasy world of the house by the river (rented by Jacob from money inherited from his father) is also a symbol. It is the residence of the ophthalmologist with black velvet curtains and the sensuous carpet for the passionate embrace of Madge and Jacob:

"The floor is the best place!" declares the slippery Madge, naked and wet from the bubble bath, still covered in soapy bubbles (MH 112).

There is a potent sexual attraction drawing Madge and Jacob ever closer together but at the same time further separating Jacob and Louise. Even so it cannot last and Madge is unable to face being in the house alone: "I'd get the creeps at night . . . I don't think I could stay here alone all night" (MH 113). This room is in the enchanted house in which Jacob wants to locate his family on different levels each separate from the other, with each part failing to contact the others as part of this unreality. But even for one night Madge cannot stay and they must part again. Soon this parting becomes permanent in death when Madge for reasons never clear either to Jacob or to us comes to the Heimbach house, presumably to encounter Waldemar instead of Jacob.

The Heimbach house and the house which Jacob rents from the unseen ophthalmologist are both reminders of the Gothic romance -- the castle with the attics (and the dark velvet curtains in the examination room) resembling the secret rooms of the Gothic castle. Madge is worried that there might be lurking spies somewhere in the house, especially behind those velvet curtains. It is locked up, enclosed and oppressive -- the passion is behind locked doors, just as the illicit passion of Louise and Waldemar is enclosed and secret, in the attic -- locked away.
Both houses too, are reminiscent of Jane Eyre with their respective attics ready for the mad man, mad boy or mad murderer though not mad woman for Elizabeth Jolley. But it is Jacob who is the murderer. Waldemar is hidden in the Heimbach's house to ensure that Jacob is securely tied to the family as a murderer and Jacob accepts this. He is quite prepared to accept isolation as his punishment even though it is for a murder which never happens and of course, one he did not commit.

In the house by the river the secret of Waldemar could also continue. Waldemar might still live in the attic, his existence still formally in doubt. Jacob makes no effort to clear up the ambiguity even after he knows quite positively that Waldemar still lives. He still pretends just as he pretends Elise is his child.

The symbolism modifies the Gothic mode of this novel which more closely parallels Jane Eyre. It might well be ironic in a kind of commentary on contemporary criticism and life -- we are blind to the sufferings around us and avoid value judgements where possible. Jane Eyre's first suspicion of the existence of any unknown person in the attic is a strange tragic laugh. The first appearance of Mrs Rochester is the attack on Mason. It is Jacob who attacks the teasing Waldemar. Both Jane and Jacob know of the suppressed darker aspects of their natures. The culmination of the impact of the attic dweller on both Jane and Jacob is in the destruction of their "marriages". With Jane the symbol of this is Mrs Rochester's tearing of Jane's wedding veil in half, separating the bride and groom, foreshadowing the frustrated marriage. When Jacob ventures to look at last into the attic he catches Waldemar and Louise in an incestuous embrace. The fact that the
marriage of Jacob and Louise is not consummated suggests the same type of prevention or frustration of marriage as for Rochester and Jane but the suggestion is that it is the dweller in the attic, Waldemar, who disrupts and prevents the true love liaison of Madge and Jacob by the murder of Madge. This is immediately followed by the consolation offered by Louise. Furthermore there is the purification by fire in both novels. In Milk and Honey the fire results from the action of Jacob, infuriated by the murder of Madge and his belief that the women of the house had some responsibility for it. Indeed he reminds Louise of her incestuous infidelity through the symbolism of the boots: "Where are your boots my lovely" Jacob sneers. He is immediately repentent but then flings the kerosene stove across the room. Tante Rosa is engulfed in flames. She is "quite hidden in the leaping fire" (MH 146/7). The fire injures all members of the household as they try to rescue Tante Rosa and while she dies from her injuries Jacob suffers burns to the hands which ultimately bring about the end of any musical career for the "Prince of the cello". Although there follows an episode of misery for Jacob in the final analysis he is released from the unrealisable expectations Leopold and the family entertain for him. The purification of fire has swept away the false estimation by which Jacob is imprisoned and sees him accepting life as a cleaner in a mental hospital:

... I could never ever have been what Leopold said I was. He used to call me a Prince of the cello. Now I realise that he did not really believe that himself. I am glad that I do realise in time (MH 184). ... it's the first time in my life I am not living on or through somebody else. It's cleaning up after people, but it's work I can do and it is necessary work and that makes all the difference (MH 183).
As Tante Rosa, the "Grenadier", dies from the flames, the repressions and pretensions die in Jacob and simultaneously start the train of events leading to the freeing of Waldemar and Elise. For both Waldemar and Elise life is much happier in the hospital where Waldemar is the shave orderly, his mental problems greatly improved by the treatment now available to him. Elise also given responsibility and in an official "made to measure" uniform brings meals to the patients and peels the vegetables (NH 183).

The fear and rigidity of the old life of the enclosed group of migrants clinging together for protection is resolved. Jacob, whose biological family is also a migrant family, begins to break out of the restrictions and inhibitions of such a background. Elizabeth Jolley, herself a migrant, is very understanding of the difficulties of assimilation. In a talk, at a Sydney University Extension class in March 1993 she told of her own experience. The strangeness of the new country is long lasting and the sense of displacement hard to dispell. Even such a simple matter as placing flowers in a vase in the house remains an unwelcome activity for several years because of the rejection of the new home and the nostalgia and sense of loss for the old.

For Jacob as a child assimilation into the new society is deferred by his close association with the family striving so hard to preserve the old ways of life and to remain unchanged. Yet he attends school for a short period and forgets his former life on his father's vineyard. Then the experience of playing in the orchestra and gradually getting to know others outside the family group causes conflict, especially as Leopold regards the members of the orchestra as "vulgar people" (NH 57).
They are people who play for money, to make a living but without any true feeling for music. "They have no ear, they have nothing except a certain skill to manipulate their fingers and an instrument and so produce the required sounds." In spite of Leopold's poor opinion Jacob longs "to be with them and talk with them, as one of them, especially Madge. She had become for me something forbidden, and so I thought, I must have her" (MH 57).

So for Jacob facing these opposing forces there is a symbolism in the houses themselves, first the Heimbach House, and later the ophthalmologist's house. This suggest the way Jacob wants (or is forced by his opposing desires) to organize his life. Isolated from each other there is Waldemar in the attic (the dark side of Jacob himself), and the "milk and honey" of the normal living areas where Jacob is the "Prince of a fellow" enjoying the devotion of Leopold, the Tantes and Louise. In the Heimbach's house there is the bower of the bride Louise guarded by the need to gain entry through the aunts' rooms -- the second of the secret rooms, the other being Waldemar's attic. In the house by the river the ophthalmologist's examination room with its black drapes is another secret room. Jacob is so repressed by the Heimbachs that it is only with Madge that his sexuality finds an outlet and most effectively in the secret chamber of this house.

Jacob is not ready to bring together this divided world in which he lives. He likes to keep each part separate from the others thereby increasing the risks attending the ultimate disclosure. Perhaps it is not just a question of what Jacob likes. He wants both Louise and Madge but Louise is elusive and Madge becomes an obsession. He wants to keep
his adoring circle of the Viennese family and yet mix with the "vulgar" players of the orchestra. But Jacob lacks the strength or resolve to make the decisions necessary to achieve his goals, amorphous even to himself.

He already really knows that Waldemar is alive and is in the attic room. He also strongly suspects that Waldemar's mother is in the asylum. Indeed after the woman patient at the hospital singing class comes forward to Leopold and asks "How is with Waldemar?" Jacob thinks, "how Waldemar is loved" but he remarks to himself only (MH 53). Jacob suppresses and denies knowledge of these matters and fails to ask the questions necessary to clear up any of the doubts which oppress him. "Could I really be free, I asked myself, if I knew Waldemar was alive, hidden in the dreadful room . . . or was it a dream that he was alive" (MH 53). Walking home from the hospital with Leopold Jacob is in a position to clear up everything: "I thought I would ask Leopold about Waldemar at the next corner. The corner came and went and I could not speak" (MH 54).

The integration between Jacob's two worlds only becomes possible after the symbolic release from his repression and imprisonment in the Heimbach family. This process begins with Madge's ill-fated visit to the Heimbach house. Jacob feels a nagging guilt that the reason is concerned with the possible move to the ophthalmologist's house. Perhaps a change of mind, perhaps a desire to clear up things with the family. Madge does not like deception or prevarication and wants to tell Norman about the relationship with Jacob. Presumably she would also like to be open with the Heimbachs but after her death it is impossible to know the truth.
Jacob nevertheless persistently seeks the reason for Madge's visit though nobody can, or will, give him the answers. Norman's comment is: "my wife always had a good reason for anything she did" (MH 185).

Jacob's questions range further. He hears singing at the hospital as he tries to find Waldemar and recalls the Mozart Requiem and his singing with Leopold:

And every secret sin arraign
Till nothing unavenged remain.

Now I wanted explanations, words to explain other words and to explain the thoughts and feelings in the music. I wanted an explanation, a reason to explain why Madge had come to the house that day. I wanted to know, perhaps for the first time in my life, why I was alive at all. And, whatever was I going to do next (MH 178).

Madge's visit to the Heimbach house sets off a chain of disastrous events. It results in Madge's murder and the subsequent death by fire of Tante Rosa, the burning injury to all the other Heimbach family members present. All of Jacob's money, inherited from the sale of his father's vineyard is burnt. Jacob's musical future disappears at the same time with the injury to his hands, burnt as they all try to extinguish the flames engulfing Tante Rosa and the house (MH 146/7). These dramatic changes of course do not only arise from Madge's action alone -- there is also the murderer without whom the visit might be simply a move of reconciliation between the two major aspects of Jacob's life. Suspicion falls heavily on Waldemar because of his strength, violence and the presence of his false teeth at the scene. Louise who takes charge after the fire, increases this suspicion with the police:
I am afraid my brother is more sick than we thought.
... I am afraid he will have to be taken away. We always tried to put it off, but now, well as you can see... I watched her eyes shine as she spoke (MH 149).

The novel offers no opportunities for the omniscient author/narrator, to express a view except in the prologue about the cones being set down in the new country. It is a first person narrative throughout with Jacob telling the tale. Of course he doesn't know the explanation of the visit of Madge to the house or the circumstances let alone the perpetrator of the murder. Elizabeth Jolley when questioned by Paul Kavanagh (Southerly 49-3: 447)) says she doesn't know but she suspects a woman murderer. But all the possible female suspects are themselves dead or beyond hope of explanation. Louise dies of overwork and sadness (or possibly guilt) and Tante Rosa from the burns she receives in the fire. Aunt Heloise is in a nursing home.

Music plays a very large role in Milk and Honey reflecting Elizabeth Jolley's own interest in music. Jacob goes to board with the Heimbachs so that he can receive musical training. The first impression he receives is of a young magpie making sounds of complaint as it tries to catch up to its parent to be followed soon afterwards by the contented sounds as it settles into its imaginary nest. From the house comes the music of a piano, as in Palomino, contrasting the Australian bush music of the birds with the European music of Vienna:

Through an open window came the sound of a piano, the first phrases of a Beethoven sonata, tender and thoughtful, hesitating and pausing for correction. Someone was practicing, faltering, and after a pause, starting again. I waited beside my father. The piano spilled into the quietness (MH 11).
Perhaps a favourite Jolley comparison -- between the sounds of nature in Australia and the sounds of the music of the imported culture of Europe. It is the same comparison Laura makes on her return to her Australian home after touring in Europe in Palomino.

Jacob is soon introduced to another contrast. He meets with Waldemar's rat: "It was stuck, head and half its body into a loaf of bread. Crumbs were scattered everywhere" (MH 11/12). This rat sings in a monotonous tuneless kind of dirge. Soon after meeting the rat Leopold Heimbach promises Jacob "I will make you a Prince of the cello!" (MH 13). Uncle Otto tells Jacob he has the gift of music from his mother. "She used to sing. You can remember your mother singing?" (MH 16)

Leopold takes Jacob with him to the mental hospital where he gives singing lessons. They work with the choir of St Helena's College in rehearsal, rather ominously, on the Mozart Requiem. For Mozart himself the work is ill fated, from the time of the commission by the mysterious stranger -- perhaps here too it is an omen of events to come:

Tuba mirum spargens sonum --
The last loud trumpet's spreading sound
Shall through the place of tombs be blown
To summon all before the throne.
Then shall the judge his throne attain,
And every secret sin arraign
Till nothing unavenged remain (MH 19).

The secret Heimbach sins will be disclosed and arraigned even though to avenge all seems hardly possible. Perhaps then, it is not surprising that Jacob wonders what these words really mean. "It seemed to have no meaning and yet once I thought it must be profound and wise" (MH 178).

Leopold sets Rilke to the piano with Louise "standing beside him singing, stopping and starting at his request."
'You, whom I do not tell that at night
I lie weeping
Whose being tires me
like a cradle
You who do not tell me when you wake
for my sake'" (MH 21).

As a boy Jacob leaves school to spend more time at home on his music, although continuing with such things as algebra and geometry. Louise was four years older than Jacob and able to help him with these subjects, though he is impatient. "Just tell me the answer . . . don't bother to tell me how to do it" (MH 178).

The family plays chamber music, sometimes together, sometimes the parts separately.

My cello kept crying into my heart. When I played the cello Leopold listened and counted softly. Sometimes he changed into a dressing-gown and played the piano and I played the first cello from Schubert's Quintet in C. [no doubt the Opus 163 for two violins, viola and two cellos] Sometimes we all played, Tante Rosa and Aunt Heloise -- violins. Louise the viola, myself first cello and Leopold second cello. . . . I was in love with the cello. . . . Leopold stopped me. "You are a virtuoso," he said (MH 34/5).

Jacob plays with the local orchestra as soloist and as an orchestral player. In this way he meets and falls in love with Madge, though Madge seems scarcely prepossessing. After a performance of the Haydn cello concerto Jacob is to take Madge to supper (but forgets to bring money).

Madge takes him home instead:

She had stiff blonde hair and grey eyes, puffy underneath and a full mouth . . . [Her hair] was different.
"It's a hyacinth rinse," she whispered and she bent her head. I leaned over and inhaled the fragrance of her blue hair. (MH 60)
Something about her feet, flirtatious in the trailing stockings had been ugly and pathetic. . . . the dejected stockings were what I remembered most (MH 64/5).
But Madge brings a critical view to Jacob for the first time as she
tells him that "there's music teachers and music teachers just like
there's orchestras and orchestras" (MH 67). Immediately after this
Louise and Jacob marry. "This afternoon I had been on the point of
merging with Madge but now I was married. To Louise" (MH 69).
Aunt Heloise played the Fandango from Mozart's Don Giovanni for the
bride and groom to dance. Instead of consummating the marriage on the
wedding night Jacob plays the cello and writes to Madge:

"... I am like a horse galloping without a rider"
I wrote to Madge, "after we have kissed each other
as we have, I must see you again. Please see me again.
I cannot live like this. I am so sad when I know you
are sad. Without you I am not anything." and signed
myself "Jackyboy" which was her name for me (MH 73).

Madge can offer further comment about the music they play and the
music they hear:

... that Heimbach, who does he think he is? And
what's a tin pot small town orchestra? I mean,
what does it mean to play either a violin or a
cello in that orchestra? What kind of standards
do we have? What great standards does that phoney
Heimbach have? They're having you on. You play
well Jacky but there's playing and playing (MH 127).

The overall construction Milk and Honey is one which lends itself to
some suggestion of the possibility of a musical form. The prologue with
its third person narrator is quite separate -- like a kind of fanfare to
precede the true beginning of the novel. The time changes are sometimes
rather bewildering but the start of the novel is at the nadir of Jacob's
fortunes, though before the death of Louise. The novel returns to this
time in Chapter XIX, three chapters before the end. What follows
thereafter is perhaps a coda with the acceptance by Jacob of a life where the first verse of the epilogue finally triumphs:

Love seeketh not itself to please
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.

Theme and variation is one possible construction, but an alternative is to regard the central part of the novel as fugal. The coda does not seem to be related to any previous themes. Unselfish love and acceptance of the world and people as they are is not a characteristic of the novel until the end when Jacob, purified by his sufferings, rejoices in serving the asylum patients in a humble way and brings Elise and Waldemar together. The love of Norman for Madge and his continuing generosity to Jacob and Elise is an exception. But for the rest the exploitation of Jacob by the Heimbachs, even if the disadvantages of migration to the family are taken into consideration, results in love of the kind which Blake describes in the second verse of the epigraph (actually the third verse of Blake’s poem “The Clod and the Pebble”):

Love seeketh only self to please,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.

The love of the Heimbachs for Jacob is tinctured with this self interest, "binding another to its delight" and even if not intentionally building "a Hell in Heaven's despite." The money for board and music teaching which Leopold receives from Jacob's father is very important to the impoverished Viennese family and the temptation to exaggerate Jacob's potential as a musician is great.

Jacob suffers from the enclosure which the Heimbach love inflicts on
him. His love for Louise does not develop in a natural way and is ultimately used to further bind him to the family through the betrothal and marriage when the death of his father results in the inheritance which makes him rich. In the end Elise, Waldemar and Jacob are happy trying to help the patients in the mental hospital. This change seems a little unconvincing. It is sudden and seems to lack a sufficient cause. Jacob tells Norman:

This place... perhaps I've said this before, when you came before, this place is full of people. For a good many of them this is the only kind of life they can have. The only thing that can be done for them is to keep them clean and comfortable (MH 183).

Norman's response sounds a little sceptical: "Is that so!" (MH 182)

Little motifs of the Wagnerian kind are used. For example the baby magpie, complaining, follows its parent and makes contented noises as it settles on the imaginary nest, while the parent bird finds something to eat in the short period of temporary freedom before the overgrown fledgling again pursues it. It is a "stupid" little bird (MH 11).

The baby magpie re-appears at the end of the novel, an "idiot bird":

The hospital park is ringed with trees, Norfolk Island pines, kurrajong trees, jacarandas and flame trees. Nearby under some magnolias, a mother magpie puts up with the endless wailing of her overgrown baby bird. The baby is an idiot bird. (MH 182).

The first time Jacob sees the "stupid" or "idiot" "overgrown" fledgling magpie is immediately before meeting Waldemar, and the second time is not long after finding him again at the hospital. Both occasions are marked by Waldemar's favourite guessing game: "Which hend you hev?" with his two turned down large white fists. Selecting the wrong fist results in a cockroach falling onto Jacob's shirt as the boys meet under the old
mulberry tree just before his father leaves him with the Heimbachs (MH 12). When Jacob introduces Elise to her true father, Waldemar, nobody wants to play "Which hend you hev?" with him, though his enthusiasm for the game is undiminished; and "somewhere on the grass we left the nutmeg sprinkler" (MH 180). The motifs for Waldemar symbolise the progress from cockroach to nutmeg sprinkler -- a large leap! After the first episode Jacob is consigned to the "nest" which becomes the prison of the Heimbach home. The second marks the entry of Elise into her life of service at the mental hospital in her "made to measure" uniform. This service gives her happiness; even though her intelligence may well be below normal, this does not interfere with the sense of satisfaction she achieves in the simple tasks she is able to do.

Ambiguities which allow the reader alternative interpretations are a feature of Elizabeth Jolley's writing and A.P. Riemer takes a more pessimistic view of the significance of this symbolism. Jacob's arrival at the Heimbach house with his father is when he sees the magpie parent and its 'stupid' baby bird. A.P. Riemer's comment is:

A few moments after this Jacob enters the make-believe nest of the Heimbachs' just as at the end of the novel Elise, his over-grown cuckoo-fledgling, follows him around the grounds of the hospital. The characters have, therefore, no choice. The integrity and the cultivation of the Heimbachs are as illusory as Jacob's bid for freedom. The world inside and the world outside, different though they seem to be, are merely manifestations of the common condition -- one symbolized by the madhouse and the idiot bird (Westerly 2 1986: 72).

Elizabeth Jolley herself comments on the novel in a way which is perhaps more hopeful. Candida Baker gives a verbatim account of her interview with Jolley:
I suppose *Milk and Honey* is dealing with certain unpleasant aspects of life and I've tried to show in fiction what happens when people are turned in on themselves, and it isn't very pretty. On the other hand, by the end of the book, Jacob, who has been thwarted and warped, has found a structure, a way of conducting his life. After all, we are all in a structure. (Yacker 1986: 232)

Another characteristic of *Milk and Honey* is the technique so often employed in Jolley's writing, that of repetition. This could be regarded in terms of a musical form although there might well be other possibilities, such as the use of a fairy tale style, suited to tales of fantasy. The opening chapter is rather like an operatic overture that touches on many of the themes to be disclosed in the work to follow and deals with them in summary. There are problems though for the reader who is not yet aware of many of the subjects mentioned. Tom Tausky points to the musical comparison:

> This is reminiscent of the ways in which phrases and themes can be teasingly fragmented in a musical work. *Milk and Honey* is much more repetitive than any other novel of Jolley's; in one respect, this characteristic is a reflection of the narrator's emotional but immature and muddled thinking; in another way, the use of repetition, often with some degree of variation, in statements about music in a novel dealing largely with music, cannot fail to remind the reader of the importance of repetition (and of the theme and variations form) in music (NCE 203).

Like *Palomino* the novel is also rather humourless compared with so much of Elizabeth Jolley's later work. This may reflect her own attitudes as a recent immigrant. It is not a criticism which is often made of this novel, as it is of *Palomino*, perhaps because the Gothic mode is not a genre which is usually associated with humour unless the work is satirical (like Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*). There certainly
does not seem to be a satirical intention in *Milk and Honey* unless Heimbach's "Prince of a Fellow" name for Jacob is intended in that way. Indeed the book does seem to have a serious objective in indicating a life purpose, especially as related to acceptance of the facts of immigration. Jacob in the "coda" to the novel explains:

I'd like to tell Norman that suddenly now in these last few weeks everything seems clear to me, that it's like the short and splendid relief when severe pain has responded to treatment. Now, even the lives of magpies seem full of meaning (*MH* 182).

He accepts Waldemar and takes his hand. He places Elise's hand in Waldemar's and the three are united and "somewhere on the grass we left the nutmeg sprinkler" (*MH* 180).

Elizabeth Jolley in the same interview with Candida Baker as that quoted above comments on the reception of *Milk and Honey* on its publication in 1985:

Some reviewers didn't care for the book. It was as if I had touched something in them which disgusted them. Jacob, the main character, is shown to be warped by overdevotion. I wanted to show what could happen to individuals when they become refugees and try to survive on each other. How people can mean well but are unable to see what they are in fact causing. It is one of the first novels I wrote (*Tacker* 1986: 232).

Perhaps there is something of an earnestness of purpose shared by this novel with *Palomino* and *The Well*. As an immigrant herself Jolley knows first hand the problems which face the newcomer in a land with so many cultural and physical differences from the land of their birth. References from the bible and literature and the gothic, fairy story quality seem also to emphasise sin and retribution — "And every secret sin arraign/Till nothing unavenged remain."
FOXYBABY

Once again the relationship between women is a major theme of this novel, as it is for so much of Elizabeth Jolley's writing. In Foxybaby it is the relationship between writer Alma Porch, school principal Josephine Peycroft and the women attending a Summer School whose avowed objective is the loss of weight -- a slimming school. Miss Porch is conducting her class through a study of writing, using a dramatic treatment of her work in progress, the Foxybaby novel, as the example.

The relationships between the various women characters are not primarily lesbian, though there are certainly some sexual episodes, auto-erotic, lesbian and heterosexual. Men, although again consigned to a secondary role, are in greater strength than in earlier novels. Dr Walter Steadman is a central figure in the novel within the novel which is the subject of the "treatment" by Miss Porch for the weight watchers of Miss Peycroft's Summer School. The villain of the piece, full of cunning and devious plans for his own enrichment, Mr Miles is a vigorous, though perhaps not altogether endearing character. Both Anders and Xerxes, in spite of their homosexual passion for each other, have considerable attraction for Miss Harrow, and are not devoid of interest for Miss Porch, though her attitude to these strange young men is a mixture of revulsion and fascination.

Miss Josephine Peycroft, Principal of the Cheatham East Trinity College engages in a preliminary skirmish on the content of the course with Alma Porch when she contracts her as tutor for the Summer School.
The presentation of this clash is by an epistolatory method, though we see only the letters which Miss Porch writes. We can readily deduce what Miss Peycroft writes in return. The uneasiness of this relationship, first appearing in the letters, continues as Miss Peycroft tries to dominate the course for the Creative Drama students. At first Miss Porch displays surprising firmness (surprising even to herself) when she insists, for example, on the type of music suitable for her "treatment". Miss Peycroft's proposal to develop the presentation as a musicale with chanted narration, "alto, you know" accompanied by herself playing double bass and cello as an obligato like "that part of Smetana's Bartered Bride where the wonderful bass voice is so beautifully sustained by an exquisite obligato", is soundly rejected by Miss Porch insisting on her choice of music: "As I told you before, it's definitely punk rock, solid rock and disco... If possible some of my characters should wear leather and spikes and metal studs" (FB 42).

In spite of this spirited start complaints about the noise of the rock music, especially from the cook, Mrs Miles, combine with the persistence of Miss Peycroft to defeat the author. As the transistor radio, source of the music, is set up in the "kitching" Mrs Miles, who can't hear herself think and "nothing of what's in my own head", is not unreasonable in her complaint (FB 90).

So the eventual musical accompaniment to the reading by Miss Porch is provided by the cello or double bass played by Miss Peycroft accompanied by Miss Paisley, her secretarial assistant, on the tapping sticks. The equally unwelcome promise of the recorder or pianist from the group fortunately does not eventuate (FB 30).
Miss Peycroft as Principal of her college is naturally in a position of authority and cannot resist the desire to exercise her power which, in the end, effectively gives her control over Miss Porch's course and its concerns. This is involved with "the drama of human conflict and the resolution of conflict" (FB 7). But her domination over those in a more dependent position, like her assistant Miss Paisley, is more complete and remorseless. It is very similar to that relationship between Miss Thorne and her secretary Miss Edgely in Miss Peabody's Inheritance. It is intense and has sexual aspects besides the master servant contract involved through the business arrangement between a headmistress and her assistant or secretary. In both cases the person in authority is considerably older than the servant. The same type of association occurs in My Father's Moon where the headmistress, Miss Palmer (Patch) and the Deputy Principal (Myles) must not be disturbed if they are together in Miss Palmer's room (MFM 8) and when Patch and Tanya (the art teacher) share the bathroom (evidently not infrequently) this also is sacrosant (MFM 9).

A. P. Riemer points to the difficulty of determining whether these relationships are a parody of lesbian attachments and the consequences on Elizabeth Jolley's standing as a feminist if such a reading is accepted. He does this, with the proper caution of a male critic in dangerous waters, in an essay on Elizabeth Jolley in International Literature in English edited by Robert Ross. He describes Josephine Peycroft as a "grotesquely bullying monster; her aptly named offside, Miss Paisley, is cowed by her friend's and employer's larger than life bossiness" (375).
Miss Peycroft and her strange establishment, though under challenge by Miss Porch and her imagination, remains unchanged, resistant to all efforts to lift the school from its basis of sordid commercial exploitation. She is as dominant in the school as is Matron Price in her hospital of St Christopher and St Jude or Miss Thorne at Pine Heights.

The setting of an all pervasive large organization is something which provides the background in much of Elizabeth Jolley's writing -- hospitals, and schools are the particular targets and though they may be ridiculed for their rigid and authoritarian restrictions on the lives of all those who fall within their jurisdiction they remain immutable. This is the case with the nursing home, where those who challenge as Mr Scobie does eventually disappear from the scene (through death) or with the Trinity College where Alma Porch finds her fiction escaping from her control and where her awakening removes her from the scene, which is all a dream, (FB 260) as effectively as death removes Mr Scobie from the world of St Christopher and St Jude.

It is interesting that the dominant women and the dominant institutions are apparently interdependent. Such institutions are the ideal vehicle for the women who are in charge of them to fulfill their desire for authority and dominance. Even though the ownership of the nursing home of St Christopher and St Jude is lost by Matron Price through the folly of her brother's gambling, the hospital continues to function in a way which is completely unchanged by the loss of title and Matron Price is in no way diminished by the change. Perhaps Miss Hailey is an exception, being stripped both of authority and financial backing through the force of conflicting desires. Though Miss Hailey seems to
belong, at least originally, to the band of bullying headmistresses. She
reminds Hyacinth Price as they drink together about her former secretary
with her "battered look . . . an impassioned mouse" (MSR 222/3).
But Miss Hailey seems quite resigned to her fate; she gives up all
domineering ways and is content to try to find satisfaction in her
writing, as far as satisfaction with anything is possible at the
hospital of St Christopher and St Jude. This is also Alma Porch's pre-
occupation and both are aware of the problems of communication and the
power of imagination. Perhaps both now see the hollowness and futility
of authority, particularly when its exercise is in a high handed way.

Understanding and communication through the written word offer
greater satisfactions, and perhaps also eventually greater influence
over minds and hearts than dictatorial power. Ideas can be propagated to
others more effectively if a more subtle method is used. The tale of
Steadman and his drug addicted daughter and grandchild may convey more
than direct efforts and authoritative prohibitions would succeed in
doing. Maybe this is fairly clear in Alma Porch's writing but what is
the message with regard to incest? This possible relationship between
Steadman and his daughter is hinted at with the glassy eyed fox fur as
the symbolic witness. This is the foxybaby game. But is the possibility
of such a relationship to be seen as preferable to the alienation of
drug usage or the sterile inhibitions of society? True communication
is surrounded by many hazards of misunderstanding. Perhaps the strange
mixture of intentions in the dinner party which Miss Harrow and Miss
Porch attend with Anders and Xerxes is another example. The expectations
of Miss Porch are very different from those of Miss Harrow and both far from the intentions of the two young men. Miss Harrow and Miss Porch both expect to eat a meal, at the very least superior to what they would get from the college. Miss Harrow also anticipates sexual adventure and Miss Porch secretly fears this. But communication is often imperfect and neither expectation is part of the purpose of Anders and Xerxes who are intent on a handsome return from the sale of their so-called paintings in exchange for the investment of a few lettuce leaves and a rather ancient small chicken.

The painting which to Miss Porch is like a carrot in a mop clearly conveys other more suggestive meanings to Anders (FB 234). Miss Porch with a shock, eventually sees this too. "She . . . found herself wondering whether the purple red vegetable was protruding from the bushiness or whether it was being pushed into it" (FB 235).

The sliding of meaning is constant throughout the novel, just as slippages, at the slightest provocation, occur to Alma Porch constantly. It requires only the slightest hint for the Porch imagination to branch off in any direction, the most unlikely connections appeal to her most.

Immediately the correspondence between Alma Porch and Miss Peycroft is complete the third person omniscient narrator who takes up the account of the geographical location of the two Cheathems is involved in an imaginative departure from reality as the gravel track and the "endless paddocks of wheat" are transformed into the waterless river meeting the sea at the very place where huge children, offspring of "happily married giants" have hurled enormous rocks into the sea as discarded playthings (FB 10).
An identical Volkswagen to the one Alma drives seems to follow her as Alma leaves the city and the narrator recounts how the traveller through the wheat country sees strange things: "Old, grey, bent men and women wait indefinitely on green misleading corners, becoming part of the bushy roadside undergrowth as soon as the helpful traveller stops to investigate . . ." (FB 13).

When Mrs Viggars, most rumbustious of the students, asks her about the background of the girl who plays the part of Sandy in the realization of the Porch's novel this imagination immediately conjures up an absent Mr Peycroft -- brother of the principal of the Cheatham East Trinity College as father of her two little boys:

For a moment Miss Porch seemed to see Miss Peycroft's brother, perhaps an unmentionable relation, perhaps wearing a pale blue or pink silky rollneck body shirt and stepping lightly across the courtyard, a clipboard of poems held close to his slender chest (FB 183).

While Mrs Viggars continues with the conversation, Miss Porch goes on to construct a fantasy of an encounter with a handsome, naked-to-the-waist, gardener's boy. How is it this attractive young man is recruited to the Peycroft workforce? Is homosexual appeal to brother Peycroft the reason? The power of imagination is just one aspect of the fantasy which delights in a novel like Foxybaby. It is one of the major activities of the writer and influences the relationship of reader and writer. In the same conversation with Mrs Viggars, Miss Porch explains how the desire to write might arise in actresses: "Actresses often want to write . . . I suppose people do want to write their own experiences. Sometimes these are interesting to other people" (FB 184).
Imagination, fantasy and its encouragement are part of the process of writing and one which is very strong in Elizabeth Jolley's awareness of the role of the author. She deals with these functions of the imagination more explicitly in "What Sins to Me Unknown Dipped Me in Ink", the first essay in Central Mischief. Elizabeth Jolley describes the fantasies which she and her sister enjoyed as little children. They involve the games of people:

With sofa cushions on our heads we said we were widows. The date-box buses we pushed round on the linoleum stopped at the table legs to pick up the waiting passengers, the little china pigs and dogs and cats, brought by relatives who travelled, and an assortment of wooden clothes pegs hand painted to look like sailors and Spanish dancers (CM 5).

The process became more elaborate and complicated with the twin dolls' houses where the sisters looked in through the rooms without any front walls at the exposed activities of their doll characters and develop the endless saga of their lives. This was a continuing process over many years, even in the correspondence between the sisters after Elizabeth emigrated to Australia.

An interesting comparison with this play of creative invention is to be found with the Brontë sisters and Branwell, their brother, who similarly evolved a complete world from Branwell's toy soldiers. Emily Brontë particularly continued with this all her life. The Brontë's little books with tiny, almost illegible writing and sewn bindings are reflected in the stories the homesick Elizabeth Jolley at the Quaker boarding school, wrote for her sister or to tells her friends in the dormitory: "I wrote stories, mainly about rabbits which were rather like people I knew and sent them home to my sister. . ." (FAV 132).
The little dolls, a present from her mother to Elizabeth Jolley when
holidaying in Germany and the toy soldiers, a present to Branwell from
Mr. Brontë returning from a distant pastoral visit are another parallel.
Both dolls and soldiers are the means of providing a stimulus to
imagination, and the exercise of the techniques of story telling,
developing the writing of the Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Jolley in a
similar way. Fantasy grows as it is indulged.

But imagination is only part of the making of the writer and
Elizabeth Jolley is very interested in people and the exploration of
their motivations, the expression of their emotions, their loves, hopes
and ambitions:

It seems to me that every person is a kind of
miracle both in the anatomy and the physiology.
A miracle too in the use of the mind, the intelligence,
the memory . . . To study and to write about the
manifestation of human life, to create characters
and situations from the observation of real life is
a great privilege (CM 11).

In Foxybaby imagination and realism combine as Miss Porch talks to
Mrs Viggars about her unfinished novel. The framing narrative and
interior story join together like the horizon they can see from the
beach with the "shining strip of light . . . joining the sky and the
sea" (FB 255). The antiphonal effect of the two narratives climaxes in
a tutti for the full forces in a concluding insight then only to be
deflated by the disclosure of the unreality of it all. Just a dream!

Mrs Viggars decides she wants to adopt and care for the actress who
plays the part of Sandy in "Foxybaby". She is prepared to take not only
the actress Anna but also her three children, the two boys and the baby
born at the school. How does Alma Porch react to this?
"You know," Miss Porch said quickly, "when you talk, it all sounds so simple, I mean your idea about a nice home and choosing schools and so on... but what am I to do? The predicament is, as I have it, insoluble" (FB 257/8).

Then along the beach in the distance small figures are seen - a thin girl with red gold hair walking in front, a well dressed man, middle aged and in good condition and carrying a baby. Sandy's family is smaller at this stage than Anna's but the clash of the story within the story of the unfinished novel and the story of the incredible summer school at Cheathem East, almost of the real and the imagined, can be resolved only by an awakening (FB 259).

This awakening discloses that the clash is not between the real and the imagined but between the waking and the dream with a dream of imagined worlds creating an uneasy feeling about whether there is any reality at all. Is it possible to perceive an actual, real world in any way that does not come through the medium of language? Even to dream requires more than technicoloured pictures, especially if it is to be conveyed to anybody else. Perhaps it is as Patrick White describes it in The Tree of Man. The coloured glass from the flooded church which the boy finds, collects and brings back to Durilgai illuminates the world. Amy Parker and the boy both see the world of crimson and purple and gold through this glass from the church before Amy loses the boy again. But he leaves her the gift of seeing afresh. In keeping the glass she retains this insight and can pass it on eventually to her grandson. He, seeing the world of crimson and purple, knows that he must write a poem -- a poem of death, a poem of life (TOM 95 and 479). In this way the vision precedes the word, the insight is essential but must be clothed
in words -- "long words wired for the occasion, marble words of
dictionaries, paper words . . ." (TOM 479).

Writing is also creation and when Mrs Viggars threatens to adopt the
girl, "the one who is and is not Sandy'", and she tells Miss Porch she
wants to take that girl home, Miss Porch is alarmed: "'I can't let her
go, I haven't finished . . .'" (FB 256). Writing, creation and power
are all inter-related. Though Miss Peycroft takes up the challenge of
power from the outset -- even in the correspondence with Miss Porch
before the course is settled -- it is Miss Porch and Mrs Viggars who
finally determine the meeting of fantasy and reality as Miss Porch
pulls "her feet steadily out of the windblown drifting sand" closing the
gap between author and the characters of her creation -- the thin girl
with the red gold hair, "the well preserved, middle-aged, well-dressed
man" and the baby (FB 259/260).

The conflict evident in the initial correspondence as the Misses
Peycroft and Porch negotiate on the means by which the nourishment of
the mind might override the need for the nourishment of the body
concludes with a "Pax, double Pax" and a symbolic handshake on "Guides'
Honour", even though the course is one addressed to the resolution of
human conflict (FB 6/7). If one man should wilfully and deliberately
hurt another . . . it has nothing " to do with homosexuals, politicians,
governments, shire councils, education departments or the health scheme"
(FB 7). It is part of the drama of conflict. Maybe this conflict is
necessary to progress. Again like Patrick White, in the epigraph which
Mahatma Ghandi provides to his first published novel Happy Valley
(1939):
It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering, which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone... the purer the suffering, the greater is the progress.

Perhaps for Jolley the same principle applies but the essential and indispensable condition is conflict and the drama which it invariably involves. The relationship between women is a one of the main themes in the novels so far considered. But the relationships are varied and, as in the case of Weekly and Nastasya, by no means always relationships of love. Sometimes it is of conflict and this is not always between relatively equal combatants as could be considered to be the case between Miss Peycroft and Miss Porch (although the relationship alters in balance through the course of the novel). Quite often it is an association in which the power of position and authority is the prerogative of the older of two women who is thus in a position of considerable advantage. The drama and stress of the bond often means that the exercise of this superior power places the weaker and more vulnerable person in a position of dependency. There may be a situation of ambivalence between the protagonists -- a love/hate relationship -- where the woman in the superior position acts with cruel disregard for the other which amounts to a woman (rather than the man postulated by Miss Porch) hurting another woman "unnecessarily and deliberately" (FB 7) and often cruelly. This is not so much a condition of conflict as one of torment, perhaps even of sadistic hurtfulness, inflicted for some perverse satisfaction not really involved in simple conflict. In each of the novels there seem to be women like this.
Miss Thorne was, of course, fully aware of the role of conflict and the nice young man sitting next to her on the plane on the return flight from Europe lent her that magazine of literary criticism which confirmed this:

... The discussion falls on the concept of structuralist reading and the exposure of the artistic process as being an achievement, on semantic levels, of harmonious surfaces built on insoluble conflicts ... (MPI 151).

Although she gives her full attention to this proposition it still leaves her in a condition of some wonderment because she is "unaccustomed to being unable to understand anything she reads", as well she is troubled about being a character in a novel and thus not a "character at all" (MPI 151). But for Miss Porch, accustomed to the creation of character and artistic processes, there is no such difficulty. She knows that for those in weaker positions like Miss Edgely or Miss Paisley there is no hope of success in conflict or even of developing any individual character. They are in such a position of weakness that they are obliged to suffer the dominance of the older and more powerful partner without hope of effective retaliation; they must simply suffer. Both Peycroft and Paisley are acting according to the roles predetermined in this drama of life, "harmonious surfaces built on insoluble conflicts"; neither can express any real individuality. Like Miss Thorne in her treatment of Edgely, Peycroft offers gratuitous offence to Paisley for no other purpose than that of inflicting suffering and demonstrating her mastery. She is another of that group of domineering bullying women who are the most impressive of Elizabeth Jolley's women. One example of this behaviour by Miss Peycroft occurs
on the occasion of the induction of Miss Porch to the mysteries of Trinity College shortly after her arrival at Chestem East:

"Did you know," Miss Paisley interrupted, "that Brahms wrote twenty string quartets before he published one?"

"Yes, Paze," Miss Peycroft replied. Miss Porch noticed that Miss Peycroft seemed to treat Miss Paisley's muddled attempts at intellectual survival with the kind of gentleness which restrains impatience. "Yes, of course I know. It was I who told you that" (MPI 22).

Miss Porch seems unduly understanding when she considers this putting down of Paisley to be restrained and patient but of course, she is considering the resolution of conflict (between Paisley and Peycroft). Paisley does at least react more positively than Edgely who merely seems to express her displeasure in tantrums -- like her various absences on tour. But Paisley refuses to re-arrange the accommodation so that Miss Porch can be in a room alone; leaving her to suffer from the company of the eager widow, Jonquil Castle. Thus she visits the offence on the witness (Porch) rather than the offender (Peycroft).

Sexual activity seems prolific, between the women, between the males and between men and women. Miss Paisley seeks Miss Porch's opinion about the lesbian attitudes of her headmistress, especially to allow it to be known that she (Miss Paisley) is moving in with Miss Peycroft (FB 36/38). Miss Porch protests against labelling people, especially by sexual preference. Exuberant sex, however named, flourishes at the School, although some episodes may be expressions of dominance on the part of the powerful partner over a weaker one. Where there seems to be a rough parity in the status and strength of participants there still may be elements of conflict, even though this may be more for show.
For example the adventures of Anders and Xerxes in the agapanthus (FB 226) or like the waterfights between Miss Snowdon and Miss Thorne — "Oh indecently exquisite" (MP: 11) — this is really just a stand off, like the challenge for dominance between males with pack animals. In this case the clash is accompanied by playful elements and is not entirely serious. Between the women the position of the senior must not be in jeopardy though the dominant Matron Price may occasionally grant moments of tender and compassionate intimacy (as on the night "upstairs" in Hyacinth's "spacious" bed) but Miss Hailey is back in Room Three early next morning (MSR 220/5).

Miss Paisley is delighted similarly with the prospect of sharing the room with Miss Peyecroft since these moments of recognition are treasured by the dependent partners. But there is nothing of the equality existing between Thorne and Snowdon. The ready acceptance of these dominating roles by the female is a rare occurrence in the animal world. The desire to dominate appears to be the instinct of the male animal and in our society it is the obsession of many men, but certainly not an unacceptable model for Jolley's large scale women. In this way the dominating lady is invariably in an authoritative position with downtrodden subservient female lovers. This is hardly flattering to the image of Elizabeth Jolley's strong women. They are bullying and even sadistic when they can get away with it using the weaker partner as an object to feed their own ego build up.

Jolley's attitude to lesbian associations seems at the very least ambivalent. Perhaps indeed it is really something which is actually repulsive and not at all acceptable to Elizabeth Jolley personally.
It suggests that in jettisoning the patriarchy some of the dominating
characteristics of the system, particularly the personal authoritarian
features, are actually retained but reallocated -- to the dominant
women. In fact the divide in Jolley society is not really gender-based
but personality traits of self-centredness, bullying, and intolerant
domination are characteristics shared by both sexes as part of the
social environment which values, perhaps falsely, these qualities of
the leader, the strong man (and now the strong woman).

So there is not a clear rebellion against the patriarchy involved in
the much featured lesbian relationships in Elizabeth Jolley's writing
but a further corruption of women by endowing them with some of the
worst features of men -- particularly the desire to dominate and to
express this dominance sexually, not so much as love, as an expression
of power. This of course means a continuation of the clash no longer
just of men against women but of the power maddened women (and men)
against those in positions of vulnerability and subservience.

Especially if there is an ironic interpretation of the lesbianism in
Jolley novels, it may be that the desire for power and domination would
confirm the importance of conflict as a basic theme in the Jolley
fiction. The abuse of this power may be greater where the difference in
the status of the protagonists is present, possibly proportional to the
degree of the difference. It is interesting that even though Miss
Hailey has lost all authority and status she is still very much
conscious of the status difference between herself and her former
secretary. She reverts to her former values and bullying attitude and is
dissmissive of any virtues her secretary (who is apparently like poor
Edgely) may possess and contemptuous of her sexual prowess as she reminds Hyacinth Price about the secretary she cannot remember:

But you'll remember her in a minute. She was a sort of small passionate creature, an impassioned mouse. Once roused she was quickly assuaged, her passion, I mean. But so possessive, my dear. So repetitive. An utter bore! Surely Tin Tin you remember that time in Venice? For myself I prefer something more complicated, something more provocative (MSP 223).

The unnecessarily hurtful and abusive petty bullying as a comment on human nature is perhaps more depressing than the circumstances of the students cavorting at the Summer School in Cheatham East. Though a regime of abstinence is officially in place, there seems little problem getting around these regulations and the midnight feasts at the Miles restaurant flourish with the support and the generosity of Mrs Viggars who, at least, shows little sign of authoritarian complexes and is happy to help all her fellow students generously.

There are two epigraphs for Foxybaby. The first from Thomas Hardy and the second John Bunyan:

... To be conscious that the end of the dream is approaching, and yet has not absolutely come, is one of the most wearisome as well as the most curious stages along the course between the beginning of a passion and its end. Thomas Hardy.

In some ways this epigraph resembles the riddle so amusing to Mr Scobie. We know what must happen but not when or how. The emphasis on the fantasy and its insubstantiality is not confirmed until the very end of Foxybaby and does nothing to reduce the suffering involved in the various conflicts encountered along the way.
The two strands of the fugue approach each other as the account of the students at Trinity College and the tale of Mr Steadman and his drug addicted daughter and grandchild draw to their conclusion. Miss Porch feels she is trapped, enclosed and her efforts to escape from the domination of Miss Peycroft and the Trinity House College are futile. The trinity of Miss Peycroft, Miles and Miss Paisley dominate and imprison her as she stands on the "threshold" as writer-in-residence at the Summer School. She remains imprisoned after the capture of her VW in the faked "accident" organized by Miles with his ancient collision prone bus. But as Mrs Viggers encourages her to go forward to meet the family of her creation coming along the beach she glimpses an awakening:

In the distance in a patch of sunlight from between the parted clouds Miss Porch thought she could see two people stumbling in the soft sand coming towards them. Slightly in front seemed to be a thin girl. The slowly emerging light from the sun shone for a moment on the red gold of her hair. Behind her, close to her, was a well-preserved, middle-aged, well-dressed man. . . . He's carrying a baby . . . They belong to you. They are yours. Don't let them go now. . . . (FB 259).

The second epigraph from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress also emphasises the dream, the fantasy and slides away from reality. Then there is the awakening:

. . . Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

Christian starts his journey from the City of Destruction with his great burden on his back. It is "in the Similitude of a Dream" from a Den where he tells us "I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept I dreamed a Dream."
The dream of Miss Porch is a two fold dream with the two strands interweaving throughout or answering in antiphonal song. It too is a journey like Christian's and like Christian she is troubled on the way to the wicket-gate by Mr. Worldy Wiseman and his friends. For a school of culture and abstinence Miss Peyecroft's establishment at Cheatham East plunges wildly down this path "even from the Gates of Heaven". Not only is the novel within the novel a tale of drug abuse and incest as the dignified Dr Steadman seduces his young daughter with the suggestive Foxybaby game:

She climbed into his bed early in the morning. She climbed astride him as if he could be ridden... Along his strong arm the light foxyfur ran and ran, alive, covering her wriggling childish laughter... Every time Steadman knew it must end. He told himself, "It must end" (FB 201).

So it is a deliberate sin -- Steadman knows it is wrong but persists (or is unable to stop). Sandy grows up and becomes a drug addict. She is suffering from infections, sores and "eruptions". Her hair is a tangled mess. Anna the actress who plays the part is little better. The baby is ill, grey in colour and suffering the same sores: "My baby's rotten like me. Even his mouth. He can't suck" (FB 89).

Miss Porch herself brings her own fox fur, "perhaps the only autobiographical detail in the fiction of Miss Porch" (FB 47).

The fox is suffering from the journey, packed between books and manuscripts which flatten him. Miss Porch is "solemn and reverent" as she handles him:

The golden eyes of the fox were bright still, frightened and cunning. They held in their glassiness a knowledge of things not found in a spinster's luggage...
It was not for him now to lie on the creamy neck and plump white shoulders of a concert-going woman (FB 46/7).

Miss Porch, like Sandy Steadman, is also motherless though at Trinity College for the first time in many years she missed her mother. "Had her mother been alive she could have instructed her to phone with an urgent message" (FB 73). She would prefer that it be someone "disagreeable and tiresome" -- perhaps like Miss Peabody's mother. Nevertheless the loss of her mother does not really seem to cause psychiatric problems for Miss Porch!

In the framing novel there is even more sin than in the Foxybaby story of Sandy and her father, at least in quantity if not in quality. After all, incest is absolutely taboo. But Trinity College is rife with every aspect of sexuality, every conceivable normal or abnormal type of sex and most of the deadly sins. In spite of the school's puritan aims gluttony is not exempt -- though expensive. Mrs Viggars with double chins and white body hair (with the quality of a durable hearthrug) (FB 99) generously pays the exorbitant prices at the Miles underground restaurant and most students join in. Irregularities abound like the homosexual (or are they bisexual?) Anders and Xerxes cavorting in the agapanthus naked (FB 226). Xerxes appears to be a doubtful Greek. Miss Harrow, not one of his admirers, thinks the "sly foreigner" may even be a common garden American (FB 75).

Poor Jonquil Castle misses her boudoir exercises; Mrs Viggars proposes to Bennett, though noting their common gender realises it cannot be quite the same as ordinary marriage:
Of course Rennett, you understand, I am not able to offer you marriage. Naturally as we are, er, of the same sex we are not in a position to marry but I have been entertaining the idea for some time, ever since I met you for the first time, here, ten years ago . . . (FB 18)

Miles enthusiastically pursuing Finchy and everybody else who shows the slightest promise, diagnoses Sandy's problems and offers the cure: "With my experience between the bedsheets so to speak I could nail 'er, I could fix 'er up. The little vixen. She'd be no trouble . . . Take Finchy here, she's great . . . " (FB 163).

In her initial letters Miss Porch quotes Samuel Johnson to indicate the type of offering Miss Peycroft and her students should expect of her:

The mind dances from scene to scene, unites all pleasures in all combinations, and riots in delights which nature and fortune, with all their bounty cannot bestow. . . To indulge the power of fiction and send imagination out upon the wing . . . (FB 8).

While the carnival which is Trinity College is not all Porch's doing there is no doubt that it lives up to the prediction of Dr Johnson. For Bunyan as for Ghandi (and also for Alma Porch) all is illusion, all is fantasy, while for Jolley that illusion abounds and nothing is what it seems. In fact Jolley, Ghandi and Prospero may be in agreement with Alma Porch -- the dream is everything, the imagination is all:

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff As dreams are made of, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep.
THE WELL

Elizabeth Jolley acknowledges the support of the Australia Council and the Western Australian Institute of Technology in the writing of The Well. The Literature Board Fellowship is recognised with gratitude as providing support for the final draft of the book written in 1985. The first draft in the Mitchell Library collection of Elizabeth Jolley's literary papers is dated 1984 and was then entitled "Jacob's Well". There are also notes for a radio play "The Shepherds Well" and "The Well story and Radio Drama" and this is dated "c.1984".

Basically The Well is a revisiting of the themes of Palomino with the usual variations so typical of Elizabeth Jolley. It is a dark obsessive tale in the Gothic mode -- the dim mysterious depths of the dry well inhabited by trolls, prince, princess and dead man existing below the endless plains of wheat under "the immense clear blue sky" (WEL 2) isolated, remote and alone in the silence. The lascivious joy and riotous humour of Foxybaby disappears; there is no interweaving of competing themes. It is an account once more, almost devoid of humour, of the interaction between two women -- the adolescent convent orphan, Katherine and elderly spinster, Hester Harper. Katherine's is without any family; her surname seems to be of no significance -- it is never given. She is motherless (as is Hester) but also without a father. Katherine is accustomed to frequently changing foster parents and orphanage life and her strongest "family" links (or substitute for family) are with other orphaned children of similar upbringing.
Marion Halligan in a radio broadcast (ABC "Books and Writing"
12/3/93) spoke of her own inspiration being visual -- she sees pictures; for Elizabeth Jolley the "vision", she believes, is musical. Whether this is so or not it is possible to regard the theme of the relationship between two women once more as the fugal subject with variations woven around that. The ages of the proponents are widely separated.

Katherine is fifteen years old at the outset of her association with Miss Harper. She tells Mr Harper on her arrival at the farm: "I'll be sixteen in July" (WEL 10). Hester Harper's age is not clearly stated but she seems to be in the late fifties at the beginning of the book. In describing the very satisfactory way in which Katherine and Hester devise entertainment for themselves the omniscient narrator remarks on the "great difference" in age between them (WEL 20).

Discussing her writing methods in the Sydney University Continuing Education Program in March 1993, Elizabeth Jolley gave an example of her methods for the development of ideas in The Well. It apparently began with a simple idea of making up parcel of old clothing for despatch to the needy people of some poor country. The idea of getting used clothing together in preparation for a gift to a charity is one which would seem innocuous enough but for Elizabeth Jolley (and she thinks many others) it is an activity in which there is an underlying hazard. As the potential giver goes through the clothing which she regards as completely superfluous to her needs, a reluctance to part with each object arises and more and more each item seems to increase in value and desirability and to become indispensable. It happens also that an assistant is not effective in providing the necessary decisive
selectivity which would be so helpful. Instead the process becomes ever more difficult to determine. This is for reasons already encountered and perhaps the convenience, sentimental attachment or general utility of those unneeded things. Instead of the number of articles to be given away increasing, it actually diminishes as the inspection progresses. The process becomes more and more extended.

This particular presentation, for which the examination is taking place, is intended to be for an orphanage. By a gradual development the assistant becomes associated with the purpose and thus this assistant evolves herself into the orphan. So in this way the idea of Katherine, as a young assistant, gradually transforms until she becomes Katherine the orphan. Of course the association of ideas of the most incompatible kinds is in fact quite familiar from the Jolley method of making notes previously mentioned.

The process of the actual sorting of the clothing by Kathy and Hester as it occurs in The Well is only a small, not very significant episode in the novel. It is described as occurring on those rare occasions when the close domestic life of the two women is slightly interrupted by the consideration of the deprivation of the needy of the world:

*Sometimes, though not very often they thought about the outside world. . . . Hester would write one or two small cheques to send to worthy organizations who were preventing the populations of poverty-stricken countries from starving to death. On these occasions, acting on Hester's instructions, Katherine would bring several armfuls of clothes from their respective bedrooms and spread them on the sofa and the chairs and then they would go over the clothes trying to decide which things they no longer wanted (WEL 40).*
The theme of power is again present. Clearly Hester is in a position of dominance. She takes the initiative in rescuing Katherine from the orphanage when she sees her in the Grossman's store and enquires about her. The epigraph indicates that her intention from the outset in terms of William Blake's "The Clod and the Pebble" is "to bind another to its delight":

"What have you brought me Hester? What have you brought me from the shop?"
"I've brought Katherine, Father," Miss Harper said, "I've brought Katherine, but she's for me."

The purpose of bringing Katherine home is not consciously sexual as seems to be the case with Laura in her liaison with Andrea in *Palomino*. Maternal instincts in Hester might possible be involved in view of the immaturity of Katherine and the very considerable age difference but there seems to be a rejection of motherhood in *The Well*. Hester is also a cripple physically and perhaps this may reflect some emotional crippling. She is a still very much involved in her recollections of her childhood governess, Hilde Herzfeld. She recalls "the stains in the armpits . . . dark moist half circles, fascinating and repelling in the too warm stuff of which the dresses were made" (*WEL* 16). Seemingly this is not so much indicating a dissatisfaction with her beloved governess, but it is a distaste for femininity generally rather than specifically for Hilde.

Sleepless in the night Hester relives her betrayal of Fraulein Hilde. Hester finds her much loved governess bleeding and distressed on the bathroom floor, as she miscarries. It is not difficult for Hester to deduce that the father of the child who is lost is actually Mr Harper.
She is shocked, not so much by the miscarriage -- growing up on a farm she is already familiar with such events -- as by her jealousy aroused by the discovery that neither her father nor her best friend are hers exclusively but enjoy a secret association previously hidden from her. She disregards Hilde's plea for help:

Hester, staring at the blood-stained woman who was her dearest friend, knowing something of the scene . . . slowly began to understand something dreadful. Without really telling herself that she could not reveal to her father what it would seem she knew about him privately, she limped back to her own room instead of going to his room or her grandmother's. Climbing into bed she pulled the blankets up and round the top of her head (WEL 122).

Already very much attracted to the patriarchal image of the male in the absence of the mother, Hester's brief dalliance with femininity through the agency of Hilde comes to an end. She knows that she is not attractive sexually, particularly because of her awkwardness due to her deformed leg. Even as a child she tries to hide the leg from view for example when being photographed (WEL 47). Hester "following her father's ways and wearing all the keys on a gold chain round her neck" concentrates "on wheat and sheep". She wears no "rings or ornaments of any kind. Only the keys" (WEL 7). Following the miscarriage and Hilde's departure Hester goes to boarding school. She is fourteen years of age (a year younger than Kathy when she arrives). Most of the girls are already established in friendships because of their longer residence at the school. They resist any effort to break up these friendships and Hester never succeeds in finding a true friend. She becomes more and more confirmed in her rejection of the feminine and her father fixation grows stronger and she is isolated, becoming another outsider.
Hester is familiar with the business of the farm and decides she will continue to run the property after Mr Harper dies (VEL 7). So that although there are strong resemblances to Laura, both being farmers and both strongly oriented towards male relatives — fathers and uncles — with Hester there is a positive rejection of the female image and especially the maternal. "Hester had never known her mother." With Katherine (an orphan without either father or mother) the word "mother" is never mentioned and seems "to have very little meaning for either of them" (VEL 47).

When she takes the fifteen year old Katherine home with her there is an awakening of the maternal in Hester though she still suppresses this as far as possible under a gruff manner. She is "surprised even shocked" at the impetuous hug and kiss with which Katherine thanks Hester on their arrival back at the property after the rescue from Mrs Grossman (VEL 10). But even at this stage there are threatening omens of future violence and concealment. Hester introduces the Brahms four serious songs on Katherine's first night at the property:

For that which be calleth the sons of men bealleth beasts; even one thing bealleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other;
Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward,
and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward
to the earth . . . Unter die Erde (VEL 11).

Hester recalls the pictures she fits to this song in her childhood "of water flowing far down under the ground; water seeping over smooth rocks" of underground pools feeding the "mysterious roots of the reeds and the trees" (VEL 11). The line of big trees running along the boundary fence reminds Hester of her father's explanation:
... trees growing like that suggested that there was water flowing under the earth, probably over a rock face a long way down. These old trees, he said, more than likely had their feet deep in sweet water ... reaching water that was often beyond the reach of men (WEL 28).

Similar images are evoked by the dark mysterious well in the courtyard of the shepherd's cottage where Hester and Katherine ultimately live:

... the inside of the well seemed cool and dark and tranquil. Mysterious draughts of cold air seemed to come from somewhere deep down in the earth. If they bent their heads close to the unclosed part of the cover they thought that, even though the well was dry, they could hear from its depths the slow drip drop of water. ... Sometimes they threw small stones into the well and though they sometimes hit the sides of the shaft they never heard them reach the bottom (WEL 31/2).

Often the women sat on the low coping stones around the well, sitting in the sun but peering into the blackness, perhaps the blackness of mysterious femininity, the depths of their sexuality repressed.

The acquisition of Katherine arouses mixed emotions in Hester. There are elements of the maternal but perhaps even more there is a desire to re-live her disappointing girlhood through Katherine. Katherine is attractive and healthy, Hester's playmate and lost youth. Hester enjoys teaching Katherine to cook. This should leave more time for Hester to express her masculine role and to devote this time to running the property and dealing with her business affairs. But she is keen to share in the pleasures opening to Katherine under her guidance. So much so that girlish interests are more often aroused in Hester than are cultural interests in Kathy. Spinning, making clothes, cooking, shopping in town, and even the city, are the activities which become all important in their lives.
Hester's neglect of the business affairs of the farm goes back to Katherine's arrival at the Harper property. Almost immediately Hester reverts to the long neglected interests of her time with the much loved Hilde. When her father wants to do the books she keeps putting it off.

Hester invented ways of escaping from her father's company. She was glad when Mr. Bird came and she encouraged his visits to be more frequent and prolonged into the evenings. She was still diligent in the house and garden. She still considered the running of the property to be of first importance but . . . had to acknowledge . . . she was not facing the responsibility most of the time . . . (WEL 14).

More and more romance and femininity begin to take over as Hester plans "how she would keep Katherine, perhaps travel with her sometime, educate her and leave her all her money when she died" (WEL 12).

An orgy of acquisition develops as Hester tries to buy Kathy's loyalty. Sometimes Katherine and Hester arrive home after a day's shopping and tear open the parcels with the "crackling wrapping papers as soon as they were in the house". They try on "slippery silky nightgowns . . . Katherine "crooning, swaying her hips and clicking her fingers, modelled the new clothes." Underclotbing of "feathery black fragments" are part of the show which both Katherine and Hester thoroughly enjoy (WEL 37).

Maternal drives seem to mix with no longer repressed sexual interest. Perhaps Hester really fears sexuality and tries to avoid any expression of desire but it is too strong and she is obsessed to possess Kathy. There is a clash between the patriarchal world of her father and the feminine life with Katherine. Hester tries to avoid the practical (and masculine) responsibilities or facing the inevitability that Katherine must grow up. The child cannot remain in the womb for ever.
The irreconcilability of the patriarchal and the maternal creates a tension which is continuing and which Hester evades rather than resolves. Mr Bird warns Hester that she needs to take precautions to protect herself and Katherine against intruders. He recommends a dog. But Hester thinks it is too much trouble to feed and look after a dog. Hester thinks the geese might scare off an intruder. "There were four white ganders with strong flexible necks. They were powerful birds and their blue eyes were cold and steady" (WEL 36/7). Besides she is sure there is a gun "somewhere":

She was not sure now where it was. It was bound to be somewhere; mislaid, she thought, during the move. She meant to find it and put it on top of her wardrobe but in an uncharacteristic way, she let the gun and its much-needed meticulous care slip from her mind (WEL 37).

The maternal world is transitory. It can never last -- the child must ultimately grow up and leave. But Hester tries to struggle against this and avoid acknowledging the truth. Mrs Borden, whose husband buys the Harper ancestral home and then the greater part of the property, challenges Hester about this. At the party given for the celebration of the purchase of the property from Hester she remarks on Katherine's frock and her isolation from the community:

. . . we think it is not right to keep Katherine, a young woman like Katherine shut away. I mean, she must think of men, a man? Sometimes? . . . it does seem that Katherine is intelligent. She could be a teacher, primary of course, or had you thought of nursing as a career? (WEL 72/3).

The very pregnant Mrs Borden and Hester watch the dancers. Katherine enjoys her dancing, she is full of vitality, energy and grace and the two women watch her with pleasure:
"Kathy's enjoying herself," Mrs Borden said. "It's a pretty dress, Miss Harper, that Kathy's got. I guess you made it together. But it's too nane. Pardon me for saying so but the dress is too nane. I guess it's the Peter Pan collar... . . . Kath's not her age in it. It's too nane, but" (VEL 75).

Hester feels rather hurt about the party generally and her observation of the fact that she is no longer the important land owner in the district. Her uneasiness about Katherine and the possibility that she may not always remain with her is already a worry. She fears the danger of an impending visit from Joanna, an orphan from the same institution as Katherine, recently set free from, "not prison really -- only a place to get better from" (VEL 32). Katherine is corresponding with her and seems to be very fond of her. Hester agrees to the visit, hoping to keep it as short as possible -- maybe only a week, but Katherine thinks of the problems of getting about to dances and in to town to the cafe or to El Bandito, the road house (VEL 51). She wants to learn to drive the car. Hester acknowledges that she is jealous about Joanna:

Actually jealous. At her age. All because Katherine wanted the company of this Joanna. Rubbish company, a girl who could do nothing but harm. Hester was vague in her mind about the life this other girl could have had but it was dirty and infected and should be kept away from the freshness and purity of their own lives (VEL 45).

So after the Borden's party Katherine wants to practise her driving and insists on taking the wheel for the long, lonely, road home. Hester is tired and sleeps:

"You sit back Miss Harper, dear, and take a rest. . . . If I'm to get my test next week Miss Harper, dear, . . . I'd better get in some practice hadn't I." (VEL 1).
When Hester wakes up she is alarmed at their speed and warns Katherine. But on the lonely track Kathy, in a happy mood of elation after the dance, turns the last bend in the track and the Toyota strikes a man with a dull heavy thud. The man is caught on the roof bar and Hester guides the vehicle into the yard beside the well and pushes the man from the bar and down the well.

Before all this it is usual, when sitting in the sun on the coping of the well, for Kathy and Hester to invent myths of the troll who lives deep down in the well. How useful he might be if he would come up and work for them. Then there is the charming prince, very romantic in his white silks, but only an image of glamour, lacking the practical usefulness of the troll. But now they are facing a real man, dead or alive, in the well, rather than imaginary trolls or princes. The situation becomes even more grim when it is discovered that Hester's money, still kept in the house in spite of warnings from Mr Bird, is gone. It seems likely that the dead man is also the thief and Hester sees no option but that Kathy must go down the well to recover the lost money. Clearly she is unable to do this herself with her crippled leg. Kathy is horrified at the prospect of such a gruesome task and refuses. Hester goes in to the Grossman's store to buy a rope for the descent and on her return finds that Kathy believes the man in the well is alive, wants to get out — "Out, I want out" (VEL 113). Kathy has lowered down food to him, believes he is falling in love with her and she with him. Already there is talk of marriage and he is to ask Hester's permission. "Oh Miss Harper he's the sweetest sweetest person!" (VEL 115).
The stories that Kathy and Hester invent with such delight about the
troll or the prince in the well now come alive. The man in the well
alternates in pleading to be brought up and threatening -- alternately
the ugly troll and the charming prince. The shock of the accident is a
trigger which releases the latent sexuality in Kathy. No longer is it
enough to invent fairy tales and dispel energy in a spirited dance.
Kathy's desire is now in the open. As Mrs Borden already surmises --
Katherine needs a man. And that man is in the well crying to escape.

Again it is a clash between the feminine and the masculine forces.
The well itself is a symbol of the mother -- of the entrance to the womb
of the earth itself. Into this wound, gash, in the earth there is a
forcible entrance of a man -- thrown in. Now we cannot tell whether he
is dead or alive. Hester herself thinks he must be alive when Katherine
offers her a hundred dollar note for oysters for the man in the well.
The money arrives from deep down in a little flower basket which Kathy
lowers. "... it's only money Miss Harper, some of your own money"
Kathy explains to Hester (WEL 131). Or is the real explanation that
Kathy is the thief and is hiding the stolen $100 money?

The enigma is not resolved but Mr Borden comes with his men and
helps Hester by nailing down the cover on the well. Unlike Joseph in
Genesis (37:29), the man in the well is sealed in and cannot emerge from
the dry pit, even to be sold into slavery. Perhaps this is as expected --
he doesn't ask to be called Joseph -- but Jacob, Joseph's sorrowing
father (WEL 133). But the sealing of the entrance ensures that the
dangerous sexuality is repressed though the threatening image of the
well itself cannot be so easily suppressed and remains as a threat.
Hester feels the immediate menace and the present danger is over. The thought of a man violating the purity of Kathy's lovely body is intolerable -- "that man, touching or handling her perfectly made and childlike body was repulsive" (WEL 152). Or at least this threat is deferred -- it can hardly be thought to be eliminated. She can't now become "the possession and plaything of the troll" with "horrible anti-social habits" like their imagined imprisoned princess (WEL 32). But no longer can she remain Hester's plaything and possession.

There is the coming visit of Joanna and the possibility that Kathy will want to go off with Joanna. Joanna is suffering from an attack of religion and is keen to go to America to study the doctrines of the particular sect from which she derives her inspiration. Would Kathy want to go with her? The thought is threatening to Hester's peace of mind. She depends so much now on Kathy. But she knows she cannot say that. Hester knows she must not mind if Kathy wants to go:

... with Joanna to the city -- to America -- wherever it is people go these days, she, Hester must not mind. Of course she minds, she says; she does mind ... She wants to beg her not to go, not to want to go. ... she cannot face a life without Kathy; every day to wake up and know she is no longer there (WEL 170/1).

Elizabeth Jolley's interest in music influences The Well as it does all her writing. Quite apart from the specific references to music and its performance, rather inadequately by Hester both vocally and pianistically and by quite nice singing from Katherine, there is its effect on the form of the novel. The structure of the novel seems to follow the musical pattern with a strong statement of the equivalent of the first subject at the beginning of a musical composition.
The book begins in media res with the accident on the narrow winding track as Kathy drives home from the Borden's party. The narrative then reverts to the lengthy explanation of how it happens that Kathy is driving, and how she and Hester are living on this winding track anyway. When the recapitulation comes in the middle of the novel the reader is in a far better position to understand what it is about. This follows on from page 78. But the work circles around and returns once more to this first subject at the end of the novel when Hester recounts the tale as a fictional narrator to the Bordens on the road back to where the stranded Toyota and Katherine wait -- stranded by running out of petrol as they go to meet Joanna. But what story will Hester tell? Surely she can't tell it as it truly happens? Hester is now in charge of the tale and even Kathy is not there to check her on anything she may say.

It seems that Elizabeth Jolley thinks of the construction like musical themes or subjects which are woven in and out of the fabric of the novel, often beginning with hints or bare suggestions rather like motifs in music. For example the possibility that Kathy could be a thief is first raised indirectly and gently by Mr Bird who warns against the danger of keeping large sums of money in the house -- "You're asking to be robbed . . . You could get a visitor, an unwelcome one, not invited, down that track any day" (WEL 60). Hester thinks about the rather unwelcome (to her) Joanna. But Mr Bird goes on with his advice

There's people as sometimes forget who their benefactors are. . . . And, if you'll forgive me for saying this, . . . it may be a case of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. Only in the circumstances I'm referring to the thing, and it's not a horse, the thing you might be needing to watch is already in the . . . (WEL 61/2).
Hester interrupts Mr Bird at this stage, not really wanting to hear the suspicions he entertains about Katherine. In fact when advising Hester to sell the property he gives a similar warning: "And if I might advise you to hold your tongue about it [the plan to sell] before everyone, including little Miss Whatsname in there" (WEL 56). Kathy herself also makes some reference as she takes the car key for the drive home from the Borden's party.

As Hester fumbled with the ignition key which she wore on a chain around her neck Katherine's neat quick fingers helped themselves. "Make a good burglar wouldn't I," she laughed as she slipped into the driver's seat (WEL 76).

These motifs recur after Kathy offers a hundred dollars to Hester to go to town for some oysters for the man in the well. At first Hester thinks the man must be down there alive in the dark and damp. He sacrifices a little of his gains for food. But then she thinks again:

Another thought, an appalling one came into her mind. She remembered Mr Bird's warning. Perhaps he had been right after all. She could have laughed if she was not so bitterly hurt. Katherine must have the money. She had stolen it and now to make her believe that the man was alive had given a note back (WEL 132).

When Hester first brings Kathy home she does her best to make things comfortable for her, especially as her father and Mr Bird are inclined to take liberties:

Mr Harper said, "let's see if your legs are good." He poked his stick under her skirt flipping the material up. "Give her a pinch," he said to Mr Bird, "on the bottom," he added. Mr Bird, grinning leaned forward making a pecking movement with his thumb and forefinger but Kathy, who was nimble, jumped aside (WEL 10).
On the first evening Hester "wanted to enjoy her new acquisition". She shows her a more cultural side of the life of the Harpers than her father's welcome foreshadows by singing Schubert lieder in "an untrained contralto" with a rather heavy handed piano accompaniment. She thumps the keys, "her way of playing" (WEL 10). She is pleased to see that Katherine listens attentively, although it does not occur to her to find out if this is genuine enjoyment or a pretense. Impressed by what she thinks is the success of the Schubert on the untutored Katherine, Hester embarks ambitiously on the Brahms serious songs. Much later we find what Kathy really thinks as she and Hester argue over the fate of the man in the well. When Hester refuses to give Kathy the keys of the Toyota to go for help from the Bordens for the man she believes still lives she accuses Hester of killing him:

"I hate you and I shall always hate you. I see now what you are really like ... I do know what's good and what's not good -- I know a bad thing. Miss Harper I know when a person's bad ... I hate your music too. More than anything I hate that" (WEL 138).

Hester knew quite well from their game of choosing cassettes for each other that Katherine's choice differed from hers. She knew about Neil Diamond and songs like "Hold me just a little longer", "I can't let you go" and so on (WEL 105) but her strong dislike of classical music is a complete surprise. The man in the well also sings, according to Katherine and in response to Hester's questions about this singing Katherine sings herself for Hester the Shakespearean Dirge which is his choice, a selection of sinister significance for him:

Come away, come away, death,
   And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
Because of his distress the man in the well can sing only one more line:

[Not a friend, not a friend greet]
My poor corse, where my bones shall be thrown.
(WEL 127).

And the sad and singularly appropriate, ending he is unable to sing is:

A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O, where
Sad true lover never find my grave
To weep there!

This is probably one of the songs Katherine and Hester sing together in performances for her father and Mr Bird which don't sound altogether attractive:

They began to provide music together. Hester, peering short-sightedly at ancient copies of songs, played the piano and Katherine, who had a piping but sweet voice, sang. Often they were not in time with one another. Hester banged and crashed the keys together making the most grating discord and Katherine sang flat but neither Mr Harper nor Mr Bird, who often stayed on in the evenings were critical (WEL 12).

It is possible that Elizabeth Jolley may also be making a reference to Beethoven's Fidelio with Katherine emulating Leonora in attempting to rescue her lover from the dungeon. There seem to be allusions of this nature in the short story "Winter Nellies" (TE 40/50) although there the pointers are much more definite. The heroine is named "Leonora" and she refers to Ludwig, giving her a place in his opera.

Hester notices that there is a difference in her own appearance as she listens to music and she thinks she can see such differences with others.

She knew from listening alone that while she listened her mouth took on a different shape, the lips drawn together and pursed. Once, seeing her music-listening mouth in the rear mirror, while she was driving home with a string quartet in the cassette player she understood the possibility that her whole body was, during the music different (WEL 65).
In fact it is not just the lips which are affected but also the "tilt of the head", the set of jaw tones, the movement of eyebrows (WEL 65).

Hester remembers, as she listens to Mozart after breakfast one morning, string quartet performances she attended whilst a student at school. She is particularly touched by the way the players, dressed in ordinary street clothes, sitting on ordinary wooden chairs, leant forward towards each other "as if to make an emphasis and then pausing and leaning back allowing the phrases of music to follow one another and, in turn to meet and join, to climb and cascade" (WEL 66). She notes too, in their concentration on the music that their faces adopted, a seriousness of expression, a tendency to tilt the head, a sensitive movement of the skin around the mouth and a vulnerable exposure of the back of the hand as the wrist drops, presumably in bowing. Hester hopes she will be able to take Katherine to Europe and attend such concerts again.

The Well is in many ways a tale of repression and secrecy. The well itself is dark and secret but with the suggestion of underground caverns and subterranean streams flowing over smooth rocks, forming pools. The well fills up in the storm:

The well water gurgled and splashed slapping as it was forced upwards from below. She could imagine the holes in the rocks far down through which the water was making its way, trickling slowly in places and then gushing to fill caverns. As more water flowed underground and the small openings and channels became blocked with earth and stones, more water would be forced upwards in the wide shaft of the well (WEL 150/1).
When she fears that the body or even the live man may rise in the upwards thrust of the storm water she tries again to suppress the evidence it would supply by striking wildly with her stick. This is ineffectual because her stick will not go far enough down.

"Down!" she said in a voice which she did not know was her own. "Go down! Go on! Down! Go back down!"

... She bit her lip till it bled, knowing with a hardly suppressed anger that the man, if he was there, was not anything more than a corpse (WEL 149).

In her relationship with Katherine, Hester refuses to recognize her own sexuality or that of Katherine. Anything of this nature is repressed forced down and perhaps the fantasy of the well is in part sublimation.

The fantasy created over the years contained in its invention all that was romantic and beautiful; the fairy-tale lovers and the safe dangers of cosily imagined evil lodged in some distant place. There was the idea of a world of caverns lined with jewels and perhaps the possibilities of magic practices which made wishes come true. There were the sounds too of the rushing wind, the dripping of precious water and the unintelligible murmurings of voices, which could be human, in the depths of the well (WEL 144).

Hester tries to live her own frustrated teenage years through Katherine. As Mrs Borden sees she is keeping Katherine in a kind of captivity for the companionship she gives her as well as the fantasy of living her young life again through Katherine. Mr Harper suffers no less. The son he hopes will help him in his old age to carry on the property when he dies is in fact a clumsy crippled girl. Though she is eager and willing to do her best to help it is not the same. When the opportunity offers to try to remedy the situation with Hilde Herzfeld it is very natural that Mr Harper should take advantage of the situation, no doubt finding at the same time some sexual satisfaction too.
But the baby is lost with the miscarriage and the son, companion, helper, partner he longs for is denied him. He is frustrated yet again. His mother, Hester's grandmother, insists on inflicting the harshest penalty. Hilde suffers the cruel punishment of the loss of the child, the lover, and her little friend, Hester, plus the indignity of her banishment:

The father . . . must have hoped again for a son, a healthy capable boy, a partner and a companion, without bargaining with the attitudes of his mother, Hester's grandmother, and not knowing fully her punishments. His shame and disappointment must have accompanied him through all the years as did the memory of the banishing of Hilde Herzfeld accompany Hester herself, having turned away -- as she did then, not wanting to know -- from the terrible and secret pain (VEL 150).

Of course the grandmother herself is probably actuated in turn by her own frustrations to act so harshly with poor Hilde. Perhaps Hester feels still, as she did then, the same disgust as her grandmother about the relationship between her father and her governess. It is the same revulsion arising now at the thought of a sexual relationship for Kathy:

How could she have suggested to Kathy that she make herself pretty and go down for what was cowshed and corner-of-the-paddock business. The mating of cattle for stock was alright for the beasts and for some people but it was not for Kathy. Not for her dainty innocence (VEL 150).

It is not only sexual desire which is repressed in The Well. Hester's guilt over her desertion of Hilde comes back to haunt her. She suffers painful remorse as she reads Mr Bird's detailed and painstaking instructions to her on how to manage her finances. This is written with surprising neatness in a number of cheap exercise books -- which Hester reads as she learns of Mr Bird's illness:
At present all investments are in one of three groups. Inscribed stock is recorded in a central register. In the case of inscribed stock it is not essential to have the original certificates though it is useful to have a record. The Savings Bonds can be cashed at one month's notice and the Central Authority Bonds can be cashed on application to the treasury. . . . (WEL 165).

Hester could hardly read as the tears fill her eyes. She understands for the first time how completely Mr Bird's care and devotion is at her service without ever receiving (or expecting) thanks or gratitude. In talking to Rosalie Borden about his death from an aortic haemorrhage Mrs Borden reminds Hester: "did you know, Miss Harper, that Old Birdie wrote out every sum and every word all by hand!" Of course Hester knows this full well but only says "I know".

. . . for the first time she thinks about the pain Mr Bird must have endured. And how, like Hilde, bloodstained and in pain, he must have thought about her and the things that would worry her and, hardly able to speak, he had left some words for her (WEL 174).

The words of William Blake ("Songs of Experience") which Elizabeth Jolley uses as the epigraph for Milk and Honey could be the epitaph for Mr Bird:

Love seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despite.

Though for the most part it seems that the characters (excepting Mr Bird) in the novel would be better represented by the last verse of the poem:

Love seeketh only self to please,  
To bind another to its delight.  
Joys in another's loss of ease,  
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.
The novel starts with the accident, comes back again to it though in fuller detail in the middle of the book -- and then returns to it once more at the end as Hester recounts to Rosalie Borden and her children the "fictional" story of the accident and gives a belated response to Dobby Borden's question as to how the Toyota's "spotlight on [the] roof bar's broke" (WEL 17).

Hester remembers her meeting with the woman writer in Grossman's who tells her about the trouble she is having with her novella "set, do you see in a remote corner of the wheat. Very regional" (WEL 156/7). But she lacks the essential: "narrator who has gone through all the experiences in the novella and is relating them" (WEL 156/7).

In framing her account of events for the Borden children Hester knows that she is fully steeped in all the experiences of her story and is a narrator amply equipped on that score to relate fantasy and fact for them. Hester's initial alarm at Dobby's questions disappears. Confident knowledge replaces any disquiet knowing she is in the position of the omniscient narrator of a fiction who is fully experienced in the events to be described. She is the "someone who has actually had the experience" and the narrative of life of the Borden children and death of the man in the well begins like a fairy tale:

"It was one dark night," she tells them, "along this very road only much farther on... something... happened..." (WEL 175).

But there is still the problem of what to relate -- should it be an accurate history or is she a narrator who is free to fantasize? We are left wondering as Dobby Borden says: "Go on Miss Harper! Along this road, now tell us what happened" (WEL 176).
THE SUGAR MOTHER

This is a novel about motherhood, marriage, sexuality and some of the familiar Jolley themes, such as the loneliness of the immigrant and the incomparable balm of music. The mother is a proxy mother and deputy wife for Edwin Page, university professor whose "regular" wife, Cecilia, departs at the beginning of the book on a year's sabbatical leave. Neither Cecilia nor Edwin could imagine the strange adventure in marital relations and parenting about to overtake Edwin. Cecilia is careful with arrangements to ensure his safety at home, making a macaroni cheese and leaving it in the refrigerator, before her departure to ensure nourishment and comfort for the professor in her absence. Cecilia also organizes friends to guard him, especially former schoolfellow, Daphne.

Of course Cecilia might not approve of the fantastic proposal that a substitute should take over her role as wife to become the mother of a child which, after three abortions, she would not seem to want. Cecilia, a vivacious gynaecologist, abandons the not so young Edwin, whose speciality is Renaissance literature, for a fellowship in obstetrics to be spent in the company of a colleague, a gynaecologist too, whose thesis is on postnatal depression (SM 73). This lady is so unattractive that Edwin teases Cecilia about her relationship with her: "What did you and Vorwickl do together and how? What was it like?" The name, Vorwickle is intriguing and evocative but she is certainly unprepossessing:

... an ugly woman... but clever, a colleague as deeply involved as Cecilia was herself... She was stout and wore... thick-lensed spectacles, and her hair was drawn back into a heavy bun (SM 11).
It is Cecilia who knows about women's bodies but she is already on her foreign travels when Edwin, who is not quite not so knowledgeable on these matters and who initially was attracted to Cecilia especially because of her knowledge of the human body and its mysteries, first comes to know Leila. Edwin is naturally unable to benefit from Cecilia's advice when it might be most useful to him, both because of her absence and the delicate nature of the relationship which develops between him and Leila. She offers comfort to Edwin for Cecilia's absence and very rapidly becomes the "sugar mother" and in a way which is most pleasing to Edwin, the deputy wife. Later suspicions arise in the reader that the true sugar mother might indeed be Leila's mother, the aptly named, Mrs Bott.

Elizabeth Jolley allows her interest in the question of age difference considerable scope in The Sugar Mother. Edwin is over fifty and apart from her specialised knowledge one of the factors to arouse his interest in Cecilia was her youth. But it is not quite youth in the same terms as it is with Leila. She is a girl of only a fifteen years, whose mind could well lag even behind her youthful body.

By an interesting coincidence, immediately after Cecilia's departure Edwin is greatly tempted to sit in front of his television set "to watch a film described as a movie looking into the innermost thoughts of a middle-aged, happily married man who has an affair with a fifteen-year-old girl" (SM 9). Edwin resists the temptation to watch this Lolita look alike film and instead gets out Plutarch's "Advice on Marriage" though before long he notices that he is not taking in what he reads and so sets the book aside (SM 9).
Cecilia really makes very adequate preparations for the care of the innocent Edwin in her absence. In addition to the macaroni cheese, there are arrangements for their friends to continue with the tradition of an exchange of dinner parties (which not infrequently result in a wife exchange too) and for Daphne, to keep a particular eye on Edwin, especially, one gathers, in the light of the latter practice.

Leila is being taken to the theatre when she and her very proficient mother are locked out of their house by accidently leaving the key behind as they leave for the play. Discovery of their dilemma is delayed until they try to get back into the house:

"Oh, Dr. Page, I am very much afraid," Leila's mother said . . . "it is impossible to break into our house. As you know, we have only recently moved in. It's absolutely burglarproof: metal grilles, locks and bolts on the doors and the windows" (SN 18).

Mrs Bott's late husband, knowing the ways of the world and the need of women for protection, with timely foresight warns Mrs Bott to take precautions: "If I'm not spared, if I'm took, be sure to choose a house you can't be raped in" (SN 24). But he didn't mention the dangers of being locked out of such a house. Of all the times when such a mishap should occur it actually coincides with the day that Cecilia leaves. There is nothing Edwin can do but have them stay for the night even though he knows it will be difficult for him to sleep with strangers in the house. Naturally the Botts are unprepared to spend the night away from home and Edwin lends Cecilia's nightgowns and gallantly invites them to use the bathroom first, insisting even though Mrs Bott does warn that they take a long time as the "lingerie" (a word she lingers on and allows to "roll on her tongue") (SN 26) requires to be rinsed out.
Eventually, after what seems a very long time, the sound of running waters subsides and Edwin, knowing he won't be able to sleep, still seeks the consolation of his shower. He observes the light is still on though the hall is deserted. Cautiously emerging from his study, he begins walking along the hall to the bathroom from which Leila unexpectedly emerges.

He saw Leila coming out of the bathroom. He was too far along the hall to turn back. He saw that her blouse was unbuttoned. She gave a shy half-smile and slid by him sideways: her full youthful breasts, pinkly innocent, moved slightly in the opening of her garment.

... [Edwin] pretended to be looking along the hall for a cat to catch and push out of the kitchen door. Leila, without attempting to pull her clothes together, disappeared into the guest room (SM 30).

From that moment Edwin is lost. Continuing on to the bathroom Mrs Bott's "voluminous undergarments hung dripping from the shower curtain rail. He turned abruptly and fled from Leila's mother's washing" (SM 31). Edwin, however remains "deeply moved by the sight, that glimpse of the girlish pink body... the pink mounds which were Leila were sweetly inviting" (SM 30/1).

Edwin is an admirer of the the "ancient Italian mathematician Girolamo Cardano":

Cardano was remembered in encyclopedias because he perfected a method of finding cube roots and was physician to the kings of Scotland. But it was his self-revealing passages in his autobiography which made an even greater claim (SM 8/9)

In admiration and emulation of the great philosopher's style Edwin keeps three books of the body. These books are divided so that one covers all external matters, one all that pertains to the internal and the third is the one which deals with intangibles. The one on externals
is planned to be like a map with the body divided into sections. Skin characteristics and idiosyncrasies are to be charted so that each mole, each wrinkle, each pimple, bruise, dry patch, etc. would be charted.

The events with which we are dealing would naturally be a concern of the "intangible" notebook. Yet of course there can be problems with this rigid division and while the matters of present concern may be to an extent intangible, there are also external, in that there are events which Edwin does not originate. Thus external forces are involved in forcing their way into his life. Then again Edwin does admit these events or the forces behind them are not solely external. To an extent he invites some of them to enter his life as he did, from a sense of duty, or from indecision, invite Leila and her mother to stay with him.

From the moment he considers seriously the tapping at the window as Leila and her mother try to attract his attention the world of fantasy begins to enter, just as shortly afterwards he invites Leila and Mrs Bott into the house. Do they come in answer to his needs? Perhaps it is to fill the gap in his life, the lack which troubles him whenever he is in a position to relax. Every day on his way home from the university he stops to watch the children playing in the park:

Always on the way home he watched the children running and playing in their little playground in the pines. It was the thin nimble legs which attracted. At the backs of the childish knees the endlessly strong and tireless ligaments were clearly visible beneath the skin. Quite tiny children climbed the rope ladders with fearless happiness (SM 210).

In response to the fantasy of Edwin's dreams Leila comes already pregnant (unbeknown to Edwin) with the longed for child of those dreams.
Mrs Bott brings comfort and nurture and both she and her daughter possess qualities to supply the gaps he feels — both seem part of the dream. As he prepares his lecture, seeking material from different sources he becomes more aware of his loss and the emptiness or gap in his life. It seems "brittle and without meaning then and he longed to give up once for all the habits of pleasure, which included overeating and stupid excessive drinking". He thinks of Jason and the passage from a novel "where a father lifts up his naked baby son to his lips in the presence of a woman who has come to take the baby, to buy him if necessary". He contemplates the idea of children and the beauty of the young: "Children's bodies were loose and free in their clothes, he thought. He liked to hear their excited voices" (SM 29).

So the external, the internal and the intangible are all involved; nevertheless the intangible is the proper book for the admission of Leila and her, sometimes sinister, mother. Mrs Bott with her careful management of affairs manipulates events in an almost Macchiavelian manner. This is disclosed in the culminating discovery of the spare keys for the house next door. They are "found" as Cecilia's return is imminent:

"We can't break in." Leila's mother said. "It's burglar-proof -- we know! We'll never get in there. Remember? . . ."

"It's never too late for people like agents," Daphne interrupted, "and since they're [the Botts] packed it should not take long to move. . . ."

"You'd better phone the agent," Daphne said. . . . "Wait on!" Leila's mother was rummaging in her large handbag. . . . (she) pulled a little bunch of keys from the depths of her bag. "My!" she said. "Is my face red! Here's the spares. . . ."

"You've actually had the keys, then. All this time, then!" Daphne did not hide her annoyance (SM 196).
The arrival of the Botts into Edwin's life is marked by a motif of tapping -- perhaps it is the knocking of fate. Their departure is similarly signalled as Edwin's time of destiny passes. Mulling over his three books of the body, especially that of the intangible, and sad at Cecilia's departure, he writes on a fresh page: "... a world of disorderly notions, picked out of his books, crowded his imagination" (SM 17). Then he hears a noise outside his study window. It is a sound of "tap-tapping" softly on the window (SM 17).

The sound from outside came again. It was a soft tap-tapping on the lowest part of his window. The sill was quite high off the ground. Someone knocking, unless he was very tall, would have to stretch to reach... Edwin stood up and, leaning over his desk, raised with difficulty, the wood being old, the bottom sash (SM 17/18).

It is Edwin's first introduction to his neighbours. Mrs Bott explains the problem, at the same time recounting the plot of the play:

It was just when the man -- not the one with the Afro, the other one -- when he gets run over on the railway line -- how they do that on stage beats me -- it was over so real: it was then that I remembered seeing our keys on the kitchen table where I left them. I never picked them up! So near and yet so far! (SM 19).

The same knocking is heard as he and Daphne drink champagne to celebrate the near escape from disaster by the twin miracles of Cecilia's delayed return as her flight is diverted to Cairo, and the decisive transfer of the Botts to the house next door once again. Only Daphne's presence makes the latter move possible. For Edwin decisive action is difficult, particularly where his emotional preference is against the change. So as Daphne urges decision there is again the same sound. But now the tapping is only the "old woody hibiscus and broom".
"Come on, Teddy!" Daphne said, "You're going to have to make some decisions, you'd better start now."
Edwin thought he heard a rustling and a tap-tapping at the window, as if someone low down on the path outside was trying to reach above the sill to knock on the glass. He stood still to listen.
"D'you hear anything?" he asked...
"Yes," Daphne said, "it's all those branches; a lot of dead wood to be cut out" (SM 208).

Between the two tap-tapping signals there is a world of delight for Edwin but also a world of doubt and anxiety. Leila's mother and Leila herself are most co-operative. Indeed it is Mrs Bott who suggests the idea of a delightful surprise for Cecilia on her return in the form of a new baby for the family, conceived by the good Dr Page on the surrogate mother (or in Mrs. Bott's terminology the sugar mother) her young daughter who is, or seems to be, so happy to oblige.

During that first night alone with Leila he had thought briefly of Cecilia while his arms and thighs were holding and caressing Leila's young body. He hoped Cecilia was not frightened over Montreal when the plane hovered in that sickening way before landing. Forgetting Cecilia he offered Leila nothing more than warmth and sleep that night... He found he enjoyed the sensation and the power which was in the restraint. Later he was obliged... to make his way...to the bathroom. Slipping back into the warmth beside Leila, he had been agreeably surprised at this guiltless return to a youthful action which was followed by a feeling of well-being and contentedness without misgivings and without the customary bleak sense of being alone (SM 113).

It is not long, however before Edwin is telling Daphne about his impending fatherhood. Leila is "going to have a baby".

"Daphne, Leila's baby will be mine, my baby, mine..."
"You would qualify as Grandfather" -- Daphne smiled at the idea -- "for any child of Leila's."
"Yes, I know" -- Edwin was meek -- "but the child will be mine. I am the father of the child..."
"The baby will be mine and... Cecilia's; that's part of the arrangement" (SM 115).
Leila's mother also possesses a certain usefulness, if not exactly charm. Her cooking is excellent and provides Edwin with comfort for the inner man that certainly deserves to be recorded in his Body Book No 2. She is also careful not to diminish the possibilities for Leila to be with him, in fact she is quite tactful and he cannot fail to be aware that the women admire him, an awareness which is not altogether unpleasing:

Quite clearly Leila and her mother admired him. It was easy to enjoy approval and admiration even without any recent practice. One morning he found... a youthful yellow tie and some socks patterned with cream triangles. He felt quite excited when he put them on. It was like being young again to wear them (SW 60).

Nevertheless there is something quite overpowering for Edwin in Mrs. Bott's presence in spite of her care "not to intrude" and her diligence in the kitchen "washing the edges of the table and the cupboards or filling the kettle." She produced "golden brown scones or sausage rolls", baked dinners and enjoyed her own eating even at the risk of putting on weight. "Being overweight, she said, the flesh did protect the organs. She had a hazelnut whirl covered with a hot caramel sauce" (SW 61/3). Edwin certain approves of the cooking but still does not escape the uneasiness:

When she was cooking she seemed kind and wholesome and there was nothing sinister about her at all. At other times, when he was thinking about her and not seeing her, he was overcome with a kind of helpless amazement that she was in his house at all. Her way of getting into the house, by invitation from him, was frightening (SW 62).
In his quest for Leila's love Edwin finds that the solace of the classics is losing its power for him. His work and his writing is taking second place and when Daphne reminds him that it is a situation similar to that of Medea and Aegaeus he begins to feel uneasy:

He did not want to think he was being used, being lived on, was parting with considerable amounts of money and letting his work and his writing fall into the background. Certainly Leila acquiesced readily as if made by her mother to do certain things, but that could not really be how it was. . . Leila in bed, seemed to want him very much, and he was sure that he pleased her. She had no sophisticated ways but it was unendurably pleasant to teach her (SN 160).

Eventually these anxieties build up so that it becomes difficult for him to really believe that he is about to be the father of Leila's child. He wonders if her pregnancy is the basis of the relationship and whether Mrs Bott sees in him the solution of a difficult problem for Leila. Everything seems earlier than it should be -- cravings, morning sickness, tender breasts. Eventually the baby arrives sooner than the expected date. To be sure he loves Leila but it is a "torment" he is unable to escape:

[He] thought that the child was not his and that Leila and her mother had made use of him because he was soft and rich and they were in a predicament which needed a kind man and a man who had enough money. Furthermore . . . a man who was lonely (SM 204/5).

But he could not escape. "He could not give up Leila and the child. . . . Never mind who the father was. If he was not he loved Leila enough to have fathered several children . . . ." (SM 205).

At the beginning of his relationship with the Botts Edwin quotes the way Cecilia feels about the individuality of each occasion of childbirth.
Mrs Bott considers that "childbirth is so repetitive" but Edwin tells them how "radiant" his wife is when she returns home after every birth. She comments, he says, on the beauty of birth the "special light . . . which surrounds every newborn baby. Every birth is an event, a miracle" (SM 23).

In spite of the danger, of which he is aware, of being somewhat pompous Edwin refers to depictions of the Virgin and Child by both Hans Memling and Albrecht Dürer explaining how they can make this beauty clear so much better in painting than he is able to in words. Later Edwin refers again to the Dürer work and the painting of Benvenuto di Giovanni: Madonna and Child Enthroned Between Two Angels in relation to Leila. He regards her as possessing qualities which are "Madonna-like . . . the tenderness in the tilt of the head and the possibilities of silence, patience and endurance" (SM 192/3/4). He thinks of Joseph with his "wan starved look". Perhaps he, Edwin, is like Joseph in that he is not the father of the child. This does not go so far as to consider any immaculate conception indeed the possibility of a "young, spotty-faced male accomplice who regularly received the letters Leila wrote in her large handwriting on decorated notepaper" cannot be avoided. Actually it is in relation to the fur coats which Leila and her mother wear that he suspects the "spotty-faced" young man as being the accomplice, but it could of course relate as easily to Leila and her pregnancy (SM 193).

All the elements of the story of the Holy Family are present, although in a way which involves a complete rearrangement of the
characters. Could the Benvenuto di Giovanni painting of *Madonna and Child Enthroned Between Two Angels* in fact refer to Leila and child surrounded by the two large ladies -- Mrs Bott on the one side and Daphne on the other? Certainly it is difficult to regard either as angels, especially considering the unconscionable way in which Daphne tries to seduce the husband of her old school friend on the pretext of saving him from the ravages of the Botts. This is the "weekend of sin . . . [to consist of] champagne . . . music late at night in the bathroom, squeals from the bedroom . . . late for breakfast . . ." (*SM* 57/58).

The question of whether the pregnancy of Leila is pre-existing or not is never completely resolved. If Leila arrives on Edwin's doorstep already pregnant there is no explanation of how this happens, unless it be the vague reference to the "spotty-faced" youth. Nor is her age ever very clear. Is she only fifteen years of age? In this case as Daphne so correctly points out Edwin could be in serious trouble. It would be, as she says, carnal knowledge, sexual intercourse with a minor (*SM* 115).

Perhaps Edwin is undergoing a conversion, a religious conversion. The comfort of the ancients or even of his guide and exemplar, the Renaissance scholar and physician Girolamo Cardano, is failing him in his time of crisis. Though he is already greatly impressed by Cardano's meditation of the Blessed Virgin. And he recalls with pleasure the way Cecilia sings as she goes off to another delivery "singing inside herself with angels a sort of hidden choir: 'All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above'" (*SM* 29). He thinks of Memling, Dürer and the Van Eycks and how the babes appear in their paintings so relaxed and innocent and yet with faces of experience and knowledge:
"The children lay there in complacent repose, each with innocent limbs and a babyish head which contrasted with the facial expressions of wisdom more suited to those of an old man. This contemplation of the representation of the human individual as a naked, plump, contented child, the subject of countless acts of adoration and contrition, never ceased to fill him with indescribable longings (SM 26/7).

The story of the Holy Family is evoked by Edwin's adoration of the child and the doubt about its paternity:

But the baby? His baby? His and Leila's? Or whose? . . .
Then there was the birth certificate. He had never seen it to know if his name was on it . . .
"Just don't you worry, Dr Page . . ."
"Leila'll register . . . she'll see to all the necessary won't you, Leila pet?" (SM 205).

But Edwin is unable to look after the child without Leila. "The angel"

Daphne also fails him and is unable even to feed the babe. The elements of the nativity are rearranged and simplified so that we are left with a mere hint with the story of Joseph and Mary. In this it is similar to the suggestion in Milk and Honey of a relationship with the Biblical tales of Joseph the favourite son of Jacob and his banishment from the family to eventually become their benefactor. Jacob in Milk and Honey goes on a similar mission to Joseph but fails to achieve success equivalent to that of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Jacob leaves home and eventually his benefaction is to the new adopted family of the Heimbachs. Perhaps this same story from Genesis (Chapter 37) echoes through The Well with the consignment of Joseph to the pit. There is also the draft titles of this novel as Jacob's Well. With none of these allusions is there any exact parallel -- it is more like the musical construction of themes and variations with the variations going far from the scrap of a theme which the Bible contains.
There is almost a suggestion of parody with Edwin the unworldly, scholarly, professor, deceived into accepting Leila's child as his own with the innuendo that Joseph, the unworldly carpenter, accepts the Christ child in a similar way. Neither are really concerned about the true facts of paternity but accept the child gratefully and wholeheartedly. There is also the discrepancy of age between Edwin and Leila and the idea of a similar discrepancy between Joseph and Mary might be likely adds reality to the parallel.

It is difficult to consider Mrs Bott as the Angel of the Lord, any more than as one of the angels in the di Giovanni painting, although it is in fact Mrs Bott, like the angel messenger to Mary, who suggests and approves her daughter being the vehicle of the "virgin" birth. This condition would certainly be the case if all the occasions of Edwin and Leila sharing a bed follow the same pattern as the "prima noctis" where, either because of impotence or a restraint of delicacy, Edwin resorts to masturbation.

In addition there is Edwin's quotation of Jason from Euripides in self-justification:

If only children could be got some other way without the female sex! If women didn't exist, human life would be rid of all its miseries. . . . (SM 13).

Alternatively there is almost an angelic quality about Cecilia as she sings the few words of blessing as she departs for the next birth: "All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above" (SM 29). The unproductive nature of his relationship with Cecilia is to be corrected by Leila. In this way she will benefit from this surrogacy which she might not really find objectionable. Though as to whether she would
want her fertility restored there is certainly room for doubt. When Mrs Bott suggests that Cecilia would really like a baby she says:

You must miss a lot not having kiddies of your own.
Dr Sissilly must in her most secret heart wish for a little boy or girl just like you. All of us ladies in our real true hearts . . .

Edwin is haunted by his reply agreeing about the desirability of children:

. . . he and Cecilia, did miss awfully having children, expanding, children led to pets and sports and parties and hobbies -- all sorts of things and places and holidays one would never have thought of. It was so sad, he explained during Leila's mother's third glass of port, Cecilia having three abortions -- miscarriages.

Quickly he changed from the more technical to the popular, thinking that he saw Leila's mother stiffen slightly at the implications carried in the word "abortion" (SM 48/9).

Then there is Cecilia's laughter for which no cause is explained to the reader (or for that matter, to Edwin). She laughs often and musically; possibly it is at Edwin and his foibles -- for instance the way in which he folds up his pajamas. She is popular and her laugh draws people to her. Sometimes it simply seems to be a nervous laugh as Edwin hears her laughter through the telephone conversation from her suite on the twenty third floor of the Conference Hotel in Toronto (SM 53/55). But Edwin sometimes suspects that the laughter is at him, directed against him, in fact that particularly from a sexual point of view he was not quite adequate and it is this which resulted in the infertility (SM 135).

As usual in the Jolley novels there are frequent references to music. Leila's taste, of course, is for pop music, often repeated. For Edwin such music is normally particularly unappealing but such is his infatuation that he capitulates and surrenders his taste without a struggle. He tells Daphne about it:
And today when I came home Leila was playing records . . .
And there she was curled up in an armchair with her head
in a towel and the whole house full of what the dear child
calls music. It was only one record; she'd bought it the
day before and wanted to hear it. She must have played
it a dozen times, over and over again (SM 45).

Edwin, when reading student assignments with less than the care they
deserve, often indulges in what has become his habitual pleasant little
dream of Leila. He has "no right to this little dream, but its
impossibility made it all the sweeter". Lunchtime noises often include
the sounds of music. "It was Leila's sort of music; it had a steady deep
beat and a thin plaintive howling which was, he knew the singing.
Liking the sound, he often opened his window" (SM 59/60).

The same sounds haunt him as he writes up his body books. He
considers what his symptoms might be for inclusion in his notes for the
book of the "internal" after one of Leila's mother's baked dinners. He
finds instead of indigestion from the pork dinner repeating the words of
the song on Leila's record persistently recur in his mind. He tries to
write them down:

        You're my only occupation
        my only situation yair yair yair
        everything I hold so deah huh huh huh
        only because you are near yair yair yair.

He tried to scribble down the words of Leila's record, what he thought
he'd heard. He had the tune in his head . . . It was not as it should
be, but pleasing all the same to have something to sing.

    The words you say hula hula hup
        in your own way yuppy tuppy yair yair
    can fill my heart with sunshine huh huh huh hula hula hula
        happy
    and then I know you'll always be mine huh huh yair yair
    you're my only occupation yair yair yair (SM 51).
Classical music is introduced very early in the book as Edwin talks with Daphne on the telephone -- clearly the quality of the reproduction may be poor but nevertheless, even though the volume is excessive, it is not difficult to identify the Haydn Trumpet concerto which Edwin hears playing under (and sometimes over) Daphne's voice as she talks:

"Can you hear it, Teddy? It's so invigorating. I'm getting more energetic with every blast . . ."

Daphne is even more spectacular in the "weekend of sin" as she sings music from "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast" (a cantata based on Longfellow's poem "Hiawatha" with music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor). Daphne is singing to the accompaniment of a recording, evidently a very old recording, played on a portable player from the bathroom:

Suddenly there was a tremendous noise from the bathroom. He [Edwin] listened with horror to a resonant braying sound from behind the closed door. He stood quite still in the passage but no one peered stealthily from the spare room. It was as if there were no one in there. The braying opposite continued. Even Prince, outside the kitchen door, held his bowl in midair . . .
"It's a love call, . . . it's the Indian Love Call to accompany 'Hiawatha'." He heard the music. It came from an ancient record, scratching from a blunt needle, cutting across the sheer silence of the house like the rasping cry of a predatory bird along a steep and deserted cliff. It was dreadful music. He was a snob about many things and music was one of them (SM 72).

While the performance of music may not be one of Daphne's strongest points, she is nevertheless knowledgeable, in fact, authoritative about music history and theory. Edwin is greatly disappointed with his lecture -- he thinks it "a flop" and runs away from the lecture hall, leaping down the stairs three at a time. He is almost distracted.
At the same time he is troubled by a certain phrase of music. He can't get it out of his head and decides to track it down by playing all the Mozart piano concertos until he finds it. He explains to Daphne:

It's as if the pianist goes back as if to replay, to redo the run of notes and the chords ... I can see him go racing forward, leaning forward, coat tails up, and then it's as if he sits back and knows he has to play it again, so he does and then continues (SM 81/2).

He asks Daphne to identify the concerto and she in turn asks him to sing the phrase and which movement is the one in which this occurs. She can't think of it then but later, after Leila and her mother leave for the airport and their flight to London she comes to help Edwin with the baby -- mercifully at this time fast asleep. Daphne says:

I think I have found your Mozart piano concerto ... the one in which you thought the pianist seems to start and then makes a mistake, he pauses and goes back and then forward as if to put right the mistake ... It's number eight in C major, C Dur, the third movement, but it's not as you said. It's not the coming to the mistake and going back and playing over again to correct the mistake. It's not a putting right, not a fresh start -- only something going on in the way it has been going. It is the actual music; in the actual music, I should say; it is the way it was written -- it's even more inevitable that way (SM 174/5).

Elizabeth Jolley mentions this passage and the consolation she finds in the concerto which she says "has a certain significance (perhaps mistakenly) for me". She pictures the pianist "flinging up his coat tails and then leaning forward, with more energy, in order to go back in the music before playing it over". And this is the same image she gives to Edwin:

The music, the phrase from the piano concerto, becomes a metaphor for the mistake Edwin might be making in his life ... The music and the imagined correction, offer a parallel to events in Edwin's life. This is something we might all wish to do -- to replay, at times, our lives (CM 115).
The title of the novel refers to what is taken as a malapropism by Leila's mother for surrogacy and seems at first to be a reference to Leila. But the implications of Sugar Daddy and the way in which enterprising young ladies are able to benefit from the wealth of old men who are attracted to them may make it more likely that the reference is to Mrs Bott. The ambiguity and vagueness is part of Elizabeth Jolley's usual method of suggesting different levels and aspects of meaning. In fact the seducing father appears in other novels, like Steadman in the novel within the novel of Foxybaby where the faxybaby game he plays with little Sandy would be called in contemporary usage, sexual abuse (FB 204 and 209).

Edwin is ambivalent in his attitude towards Leila and indeed towards Cecilia -- being considerably older than both of them. When Cecilia comes home from the hospital she perches on his knee, as she would her father, and tells him about what she is thinking of the conversations of the day and pours "whisky without measuring it" (SM 14). There are times when Edwin feels as a father towards Leila. He is eager to achieve fatherhood but not very clearly whether it be with her or for her. Arriving home late he finds Leila and her dog both fast asleep unable to stay awake to welcome him:

There was a book under her cheek and he supposed she had brought in the puppy to play . . .
She looked very young and soft and desirable. . . .
She would forget him; he must explain this. The thought was too terrible. He leaned down to her soft warmth, unable to stop himself.
Leila woke as his lips caressed her hair and her cheek. . . .
"I'd like some bread and butter," she told him, "and a soft boiled egg."
They went quietly down the hall together . . . Edwin, with comfortable feeling of being the provider . . . (SM 164).
For both Cecilia and Leila Edwin adopts the fatherly role readily but then the prospect of his relationship with them being incestuous arises, more particularly with Leila because of her youth. At least Steadman thinks that he must stop his relationship with Sandy but for Edwin the forbidden nature of the relationship only seems to add to Leila's attractiveness. With Cecilia he seems to be awkward and hesitant, unsure of himself. Perhaps the unexplained laughter is an indication, of Cecilia's feelings towards Edwin. This undermines his confidence:

He always folded his pajamas every morning in a flat way to lie under his pillow. When he unfolded his pajamas in the evening and put them out on his folded-back bed cover, Cecilia laughed. At least she had laughed when they were in a room together. He did not think it was amusing to be tidy. Cecilia was untidy; she left her clothes everywhere: desperately untidy, he thought, forgiving her every time, knowing from films that surgeons stepped out of their white surgery boots, leaving them just where they stepped out of them. They threw off their gowns and ripped away their masks and rubber gloves before the nurse trotting alongside, had a chance, with her pink nimble fingers, to remove them (SM 135).

Then there are some other negative aspects to his marriage to Cecilia. Edwin tries to recall them in thinking up some justification for his recent defection to Leila.

Cecilia saying in one of the more bitter moments that she felt trapped with him and that her work was her way out of the trap, so would he remember not to remark that she was always off to the Mary and Joseph [hospital] (SM 119).

Edwin and Cecilia do not sleep together -- there are separate rooms as the quotation above indicates. In fact Edwin's neatness almost amounts to fussiness, no doubt especially irritating for Cecilia.
For his part Edwin forgives Cecilia her untidiness because of the training and attitudes of surgeons and the way in which they are waited on and protected by theatre sisters and the nursing staff in general.

Naturally Cecilia adopted their ways. She was one of them, and though the mess in her bedroom disturbed Edwin, he put up with it because it was the background to her work (SM 135).

But this attitude is of a parent towards an erring child. Of course Edwin is older than Cecilia but only, Edwin tells us as he thinks about his problems, by fifteen years. Yet "it had always seemed a startling difference in age" (SM 125). No doubt the dissatisfactions with the marriage on both sides, hidden from view and never discussed tend to make Leila more attractive. The strange attitude of an incestuous fatherly affection to Cecilia now extends to Leila.

The Sugar Mother is concerned with sexuality from a male point of view, rather than from the much more usual outlook on sex occurring in the previous Jolley novels, where sex between women is examined. There is some reference to the male point of view in Mr Scobie's Riddle where Mr Scobie remembers his bedroom adventure with his favourite pupil, Lina. Lina shows him the "loxy picture" she likes best.

"... a woman with long golden red hair. She was reclining on a sofa. Her indolent body was naked, covered in places by the long hair... "Now kiss me. Hard. Harder." She [Lina] pulled him and held him with her strong childish arms and legs (MSR 97).

It still puzzles poor Mr Scobie as much now in the home of St Christopher and St Jude as when it causes his banishment from Lina so long ago. Perhaps Mr Scobie does not represent the typical male point of view, especially as regards sex, though Hartley is a different matter.
Mr Scobie's nephew is undoubtedly an example of a strongly sexed male:

The trouble is ... I still love Sybil. She's a lovely woman but she's got some very nasty ways (MSR 86).
It's the fair sex, Nunky, always wanting this and that (MSR 128).

And of course he is able to set up the commune with Frankie and Robyn in Mr Scobie's old house and father Frankie's baby (MSR 209/210).

Miss Paycroft in Foxybaby suggests that there is a kind of explosion that takes place with men in a homosexual relationship and of course, there is the adventure of Xerxes and Anders in the agapanthus, while Miles can hardly be held to be undersexed, any more than Dr Metcalf in My Father's Moon. But in The Sugar Mother there is a much more thoroughgoing exploration of the male attitude to sex. Edwin himself is not just an average male, as already discussed above, but he certainly is aroused by the glimpses of "the pink soft body of the young girl".

The girl's own mother suggests that her daughter obliges Edwin by being a surrogate mother in order for him to present a baby to his childless wife when she returns from her year's study leave (CM 107). But then there is the strange mixture of father and lover in his relationship and complete failure (perhaps understandably) to respond to any of the advances made so overtly by poor Daphne who fails to evoke any sexual response in Edwin even in the "weekend of sin".

Elizabeth Jolley remarks on the questions people ask about her writing on sex and how she manages to know how men feel, or for that matter to see things as a lesbian lover, or indeed to write about sex at all:
How can someone who looks like you, I mean that lilac shawl, the spectacles and your hair going grey -- how can you, at your age, write about sex? Have you had lesbian relationships? How can you as a woman write about male sexuality? . . . There is of course no real answer to a question like this other than that there are both limits to and extensions of awareness. To be aware of someone else's feelings or thought at a specific moment creates the possibility of the imagination supplying the rest (CM 107/8).

The book begins with a quotation from the middle of the novel in a way which is scarcely intelligible to reader at that stage. They must assume that all will be made clear in the long run. It is not like starting off in media res, it is more like the trailer, perhaps under the credits, of a movie. As well it is a quotation of the nostalgia of the immigrant in exile from the motherland (a favourite Jolley theme) which is really a sub plot within the novel -- about those who think of England as the "Old Country" and the idea of going back there as going "home." "He, [Edwin] believed this was described as a migration syndrome . . . " (SM 1).

This first episode is of the friends he and Cecilia make on the ship migrating to Australia. Friends who share little in common with them except that voyage. The men are ex-Indian Army Officers -- the Honeywells, the Fairfaxes and the Wellatons. The wives, usually younger, are second wives generally. Wife-sharing (organized by the "key game") is the usual culmination of the dinner parties they hold to keep alive their friendship and the memories of the "Old Country". Cecilia arranges for one of these dinners to take place not long after she leaves to contribute to Edwin's "comfort".
A second "trailer" of the same nature but slightly longer duration (a page and a half) serves to introduce Leila and Leila's mother starting with a few words intended to strike a memorable note but again hardly very easy for the reader to place in context:

"Leila dear," Leila's mother said, "we shall be running out of knickers. Remind me, dear to do some washing tonight when we come home. Now, have we got everything? Got the tickets? Yes? Slam the door then dear. We'll wait by the gate for our taxi. He should be here any minute now" (SM 2).

This is the decisive point. As the door slams we do not notice among Leila's mother's questions that she fails to ask "Got the keys?" But it is the omission to ask that question, or at least to bring the keys, which is the "key" to the plot. This is where fate begins the action which so much involves Edwin in a series of events which take place without any volition on his part. This begins the movement which then cannot be contained as the mother and daughter return to find themselves locked out of the impregnable, rape proof, house next door.

A third introductory passage brings Daphne to the reader informing us both of her love of music with the blaring Haydn Trumpet Concerto and her hopeless love for Edwin. The "tour de force" of the macaroni cheese and Daphne's offer of a shared "incredible pizza" ensure all important aspects of The Sugar Mother are covered by way of preview.

Such introductory methods are not unusual for Elizabeth Jolley. For instance the handwritten epigraph to Mr Scoibe's Riddle with explanation and translation of the Latin of Horace. This epigraph is written by the irrepressible Miss Hailey. Perhaps the "Unwritten Letter" at the beginning of Palomino referring to events coming later in the novel.
and anyway written when the events of the novel are all complete before the letter is "unwritten"! But there is also the same kind of conclusion to the novels and *Palomino* ends with another "Unwritten Letter" which still leaves much up in the air, questions unresolved and doubts remaining, for example the fate of Andrea's baby. Similarly *The Sugar Mother* leaves much unanswered too -- when does Cecilia return? What happens about Leila, her mother and the baby? Does Cecilia get to know? If so, what is her attitude? What really is Cecilia's relationship to the ubiquitous but invisible Vorwickl? And is Vorwickl coming back with her?

Thus the ending in fact is something of a question mark. We are disappointed to think that the gentle, no doubt pacifist Edwin is at a loss, thinking that World War III might be a fortunate way of solving all these problems with Cecilia "holed up" in Cairo in the company of the indefatigable Vorwickl. They would not be unemployed "since babies were born everywhere and all the time" (*SM* 210).

Considerations of the preparations war requires are followed by possible entries in the notebook of the intangible. Nostalgia for the "Old Country" and the "Empire" disappears and even thoughts of World War III are dispelled by the imperative of the still impending lecture "The Study of Man" (is it ever completed?) and "waiting for the expected stomach cramps" in the most immediate future. Even the omniscient narrator can offer us little to hope for, though of course we can speculate on a more flexible plan for marriage. Perhaps legalised bigamy or polygamy might be preferable?
MY FATHER'S MOON, CABIN FEVER AND THE GEORGES' WIFE

THE "VERA" TRILOGY

With the publication of The George's Wife in October 1993 the trilogy of Veronica Wright's memories and nostalgic reflections which began with My Father's Moon and continued with Cabin Fever appears to be complete. Remorse and sadness seem in the end to be the dominant mood though tempered by a kind of reluctant acceptance. Vera is the first person narrator in all three of the novels where the memories interact constantly between each of the books. My Father's Moon first introduces Vera as she recounts the experiences of her childhood, schooling, nursing and her love affair with Dr "Jonty" Metcalf. The memories do not follow a sequence and the distinction between fact and fantasy, the true event and the imagined, is difficult to establish. Vera, as an unmarried mother, struggles to retain her independence and bring up the child of her union with Jonty, dead in ambiguous circumstances in the last throes of the war. Many of Vera's memories are of events closely paralleled by those of Elizabeth Jolley herself and the style is close to autobiographical. The parents are not unlike Jolley's father and mother and there is a father-fixation evident which may well be shared by Vera and her creator.

In Cabin Fever Vera is older and recollections of various events, mostly rather uncomfortable ones, intrude upon her as she prepares to present a paper to a medical seminar in the hot house atmosphere of American conference sophistry. There are new characters on the stage,
many with the typically grotesque traits which Jolley portrays so vividly. These include Mummy Doctor (alias Dub Dub) and her sublimely selfish sister Dib Dib. Both call to mind the Trendelenburg position for Vera -- preferably for examination and thus without anaesthetic (CP 82 and 83). Mummy and Daddy Doctor are parents of the two little girls in Vera's charge -- Angle and Bangle. Mr Peters and his wife Sister Peters of the Hilda Street Wentworth Maternity hospital where Vera's daughter, Helena is born are much more attractive people but most significant for the trilogy, is the meeting with the Georges. Vera's future husband is Mr George or Oliver, a professor and his older teacher sister is Eleanor, but known as Miss George. However the wedding is long delayed and does not take place until, in The Georges' Wife, Vera and Oliver George are established as immigrants in Australia.

In discussing *Milk and Honey* Jolley suggests that narrative in the first person seems to induce a mood of regret and sorrow:

*Milk and Honey* was written in the first person and it borders on a lament, it has hardly any humour in it at all. I find the first person narration of *Milk and Honey* tiresome . . . . [The third person narration in Mr Scobie's *Riddle* distances you a bit, and makes it easier for it not to be a lament (MS 163).

It is interesting that in the trilogy, dealing often with what seems to be the most personal of memories, Jolley returns again to the first person account which once more involves that tendency to set a tone of sadness. This is lightened to some extent compared with *Milk and Honey* by the greater use of humour. Jacob eventually finds satisfaction in a life of service, even if it is menial while The Georges' *Wife* ends in the reverberation of bells and the resonance of memories, mostly sad.
The epigraphs to The George's Wife include one by Evelyn Peacock which echoes Jacob's idealism: "the smallest service done to the lowliest possess an eternal value". In The George's Wife Vera, now a doctor, would be able to offer similar service but she procrastinates and is still the same-self centred, calculating person who is seduced by the glamour of Dr Metcalf and his wife in My Father's Moon, where she succumbs without a struggle. Later in Cabin Fever she is able to persuade the Georges to take her and Helena in when they arrive on their doorstep "not expected by anyone ... in the remains of the half light evening ... cold and wet through because of the sudden downpour" (CF 209). Once there, the seduction of Mr George on his narrow bed is not difficult. Vera's mother always hoped for greater things from Vera and deplores her entry to the medical profession. When material to be made up into nursing uniforms arrives Vera remembers her mother's disapproval both of the uniform and the profession:

My mother says the stuff is pillow ticking. She feels there's nothing refined about nursing ... She says she has other things in mind for me, travelling on the continent, Europe, she says, studying art and ancient buildings and music (MPW 45).

Vera graduates to some higher professional status in Cabin Fever and then as a doctor in The George's Wife but she remains susceptible to seduction by what she feels is a superior life style. She is exploited by the pretentious Felicity and Noël (TGW 92) and infatuated by the widow, who Mr George thinks vulgar and nondescript (TGW 124/5).

At the end of The George's Wife there is a catalogue of regrets emerging from Vera's "waiting room". The father whose moon shines everywhere is killed by a lorry in the Moseley road. Mr George is in his
wheelchair but hoping to set out to the British Museum in the morning, meanwhile he waits for his sister Eleanor who will never return. The children, Rachel (daughter of Oliver George and Vera) and Helena, left behind in England grow tall while Vera and Mr George emigrate; they are still babies to him. Vera suffers regrets and uneasy remorse for those she neglects until too late -- the widow, Gertrude, Vera's mother and staff nurse Ramsden. She remembers Ramsden, that she has yet to talk to her about the "downward thrust of the cello and about the way the other instruments come up to meet the cello..." (TGW 171). The promise of the first epigraph of The Georges' Wife is not yet fulfilled:

Die mit Tränen säen, werden mit Freuden ernten.
They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

For Vera it may be "joy" will be in the "everlasting life" to which her father, she imagines, is carried, gathered up off the Moseley Road, safe, comfortable and peaceful forever (TGW 138). Meantime there is the puzzle of memory and she echoes Saint Augustine's wonder "in the vast cloisters of my memory. In it are the sky, the earth, and the sea, ready at my summons, together with everything I have ever perceived... In it I meet myself as well as I remember myself..." (CF 235). The past is inescapable and does not always wait for a summons but intrudes, unbidden and uninvited into the present.

Emigration to Australia with Mr George cuts them both off from relatives and old friends -- Vera's father, mother and children are all left behind in The Georges' Wife. Nevertheless the refrain of the past is still insistent and the rhythm of the wheel chair on the streets of the dreary suburb as she pushes Mr George along brings it into her mind
with vivid recall tinged all the time with that element of guilt. The exotic experience of the "ménage a trois" with Felicity and Noël comes back as does the long period of recuperation from tuberculosis completed by the translation to Australia. However the great distance from sister Eleanor makes "coupling" with Mr. George less obnoxious. A shipboard wedding appeals to Vera but is rejected by Mr George and eventually a registry office at ten past eight in the morning with two witnesses generously making themselves late for work by "stepping into" the ceremony at Vera's request is the venue of the long desired marriage (and with it the "respectability" coveted so earnestly by Vera's mother). Miss Gladys Moore is thought to have "enjoyed it the most... she was the happiest one there and her eyes shone" (TGW 163).

There are considerable changes in the narrative style of these novels when compared with the earlier books. In a way the change is to a more straightforward account which seems simpler, though introspective and thoughtful. No doubt the first person narration contributes to this as does the episodic flash back method. The only other novel to use this narrative method, as mentioned above, is Milk and Honey as Jacob recounts his life story. (There are first person sections of Palomino but there is considerable narrative variety in this novel.) There is some humour in all three novels but it is not nearly so prominent as in those earlier books, especially where it seems to be consciously introduced as in Mr Scobie's Riddle and none of it is as extreme as in Miss Peabody's Inheritance. The autobiographical style departs from that of previous novels. Some of the experiences are very close to those of Elizabeth Jolley's own life.
Milk and Honey and the novels of the trilogy use a kind of "teaser" at the outset. This is a small section of a scene which the reader will not be able to understand at this stage as a kind of preview of what is to come. The text of Milk and Honey is preceded by a parable about the problems of immigration and the difficulties some of the new arrivals experience in settling down in the new environment. This is in terms of cones being swept from Europe by a great wind and then being unable to settle down in a new society as individuals, instead setting up and preserving an enclave to attempt a recreation of the old world in the midst of the new. But the actual first few lines of the novel itself are about the strange search Madge makes to see if she is without her tamox. Surely only intended as a "teaser", being quite irrelevant to the narrative generally except that it may disclose something of Madge's honesty and freedom from any inhibitions, especially as she goes on to wonder what she will tell her husband.

Cabin Fever begins with a similar apparent irrelevance, unconnected with the main narrative, but there is not just one of these tiny scenes but two. The first is headed "Shirt Sleeves":

I am still here on the twenty-fourth floor and when I sit in front of my mirror I can see, in the mirror, someone on the twenty-fourth floor across the street. He is sitting upright at a table and is in his shirt sleeves. I have no idea who he is.

Then on the next page and just as isolated but without any heading:

"I should never have given you the book about Elizabeth Ney."
"Whyever . . . She was a sculptor and an artist . . . She . . ."
"She had a baby in that book without being married."
"Oh! Really!"
"It must have given you ideas . . . "
"Don't, do not be so utterly stupid. How can you be so stupid!"
"Keep your voice down. You don't want the others to hear you speaking to your mother like that."
These excerpts refer to episodes in the texts but cannot be understood in isolation at the outset and demand the reader's trust until the context is disclosed; both use almost a film technique rather than musical forms or literary methods. A scrap of a musical phrase could be quoted early in some musical forms (such as a fugue) but would usually then be developed or answered by another theme. Whereas no immediate development occurs here. Perhaps an operatic overture may quote themes of later action, but rarely only one or two episodes.

*My Father's Moon* does start with a short isolated "Author's Note" but this is much more practical in purpose giving a list of abbreviations for readers not familiar with wartime contractions:

It comes as a surprise to realize that time has gone by and that there are now people who are no longer familiar with the abbreviations which were once part of everyday existence. . . . The abbreviations were always used. They were part of the idiom. I never heard the words spoken in full. Similarly RMO and RSO were always said for Resident Medical Officer and Resident Surgical Officer respectively.

Elizabeth Jolley

This note gives an air of historical authenticity to what follows, but it seems not to be part of any art, simply useful information for understanding the jargon common in hospitals and the services during and just after, World War II, the period in which these two novels are set.

The actual narrative of *My Father's Moon* begins with Vera's departure from home for the Fairfields School:

At last the day has come when I must leave for Fairfields. It is all arranged. I have been there once already and know it to be a place of grated raw vegetables and children with restless eyes. It is also a place of poetry and music and of people with interesting lives and ideas (*MFM I*).
The ongoing narrative is then frequently interrupted by reminiscences of former events, often tinged with an atmosphere of sadness. Again this is very similar to a filmic technique of flashbacks. The first of these begins on only the third page and is of the aborted visit of staff nurse Ramsden, a woman of education and culture much admired by Vera but with whom she is unable to establish a meaningful relationship.

Similarly *The Georges’ Wife* begins with an excerpt of the shipboard conversation between migrant, Vera, and her newfound friend “the widow” during the voyage to Australia. They discuss the sexual activities of Vera, Noël and Felicity in a ménage à trois before going on to a description of the course followed by Vera and Mr George in the wheelchair in the narrative present, and in Australia.

Contributing to the difference in style, making the trilogy more reflective, is the theme of recollection and the reworking of memories with the dominating feeling of sadness and remorse. This method is followed in all three books and the first flashback is to Ramsden in *My Father’s Moon*. Ramsden comes to visit Vera and after a long train journey, delayed by fog, Vera feels unable to go through with the visit. She pretends there is some family tragedy which is so recent that she is prevented from giving any warning to Ramsden before she sets out. Ramsden, left on a cold English station in thick fog, where the waiting room fire is dead, takes the next train returning after hours of waiting in the cold. But the real reason for this perfidy may well be the father fixation which holds Vera in an unstable state, still seeking to establish her identity. It is on this railway platform that Vera’s father always farewells her as he is doing now, walking up and down
awaiting the train's arrival, on the very same spot that for Vera evokes the recollection of her infidelity to Ramsden.

Vera in the trilogy and Jacob in Milk and Honey are both doomed to be victims. They invite exploitation from those around them, many of whom they suppose to be their friends. Their mutual innocence causes difficulties and problems for them making it impossible for them to avoid the sufferings to which they seem predestined, mainly arising from personality traits and inbred characteristics. Jacob and Vera are naive and trusting and this leads them into situations where their trust can be readily abused. Perhaps they are modelled on some of the earlier literature of the eighteenth century where the principle protagonist, like Henry Fielding's Tom Jones, possesses a superficial innocence and simplicity though by no means lacking in a basic ingenuity when self preservation is concerned.

Jacob and Vera both find sexual delight involves a bigger price than they expect and perhaps there is a similar underlying message of the recommendation of the worth of innocence. This may eventually lead to good as it does for Jacob, though in a somewhat unconvincing, almost contrived way, when he extols the virtue of lowly work to benefit the weakest and poorest of our brothers if it is performed with integrity, as mentioned above (page 220) (MH 183). Tom Jones also ends in the virtuous conversion of all that may be a little below the best that may be expected of humankind, into great and generous achievements. He is generous to friend and foe alike, even to such as Blifil. He becomes the very model of all virtue:
Whatever in the nature of Jones had a tendency to vice, has been corrected by continual conversation with this good man [Allworthy], and by his union with the lovely and virtuous Sophia. He hath also, by reflexion on his past follies, acquired a discretion and prudence very uncommon in one of his lively parts. . . . there is not a neighbour, a tenant or a servant, who doth not most gratefully bless the day when Mr Jones was married to his Sophia (Tom Jones 873/4).

We know that Vera possesses some of the native cunning and genius which so helps Tom Jones when he is surrounded by the difficulties and dangers of life. Vera demonstrates this for example when the Child Welfare officers come to inspect how she is managing with her baby and whether she should be entrusted with its care. They are two stout women who arrive on bicycles and after intensive and hostile questioning, Mr Peters [about to be promoted all unknowingly to Uncle] can stand it no longer and intervenes:

"That's enough!" Mr Peters, in the corner with his tool box, stands up suddenly. "She's a nurse that's because and why" [Vera is so quick and easy with the baby] . . . "Uncle I didn't know you were still here in the kitchen. Could you please hold Helena [the baby] for a few minutes. I must see to the soup" (CF 113).

Now, seeing that Vera is living with her family, the welfare snoopers are vanquished and "Uncle" Peters tells Helena "Uncle! . . . Your mother . . . she's a sharp one. Me, uncle! You've no need to worry with a mother like you've got" (CF 113).

Undoubtedly Vera is sharp and there is also behaviour which throws considerable doubt on her apparent innocence. She can be vindictive and cruel and at the same time ingratiating. There are efforts to seek
favour with those in authority by means which might seem excessive to many of her colleagues at the hospital. The chapter "Night Runner" in My Father's Moon contains several examples of both kinds of behaviour. ("Night Runner" as a separate short story appears first in Meanjin 42, 4 (1983) and in an Anthology Room to Move edited by Suzanne Faulkner.) Vera feels that Staff Nurse Sharpe and nursing auxiliary Queen treat her unfairly. They sit in the office all night with army blankets around them, drinking coffee and give orders to Vera who does most of the work. So Vera, in retaliation, re-arranges the location of the fire equipment (buckets of water and sand) and empty oxygen cylinders just a little, but sufficiently for both to fall over them as they hurry through the ward in the dark "making the biggest disturbance ever heard in a hospital at night". Night Sister Bean, hearing the noise tells them they are to report to Matron next morning at "nine a.m." (MFM 68). She plays similar "jokes" on Ferguson. Yet she makes a cup of coffee for Night Sister Bean and writes a Christmas Card for Matron to ingratiate herself with them although she worries about the card and tries to get it back again. (MFM 71 and 75).

It is interesting that all three books of the trilogy include remorseful recollections of staff nurse Ramsden. Vera is trying to make amends for at least one of those whom she betrays earlier. It is true she doesn't know where Ramsden is and is unable to contact her. She thinks she may be the woman she sees in the train -- "... I intend to speak to the woman Ramsden, I shall say, is it you?" (MFM 19). Or perhaps as the woman in charge of the night shelter tells her she is in darkest Africa:
There was a Ramsden she thought, yes she was sure, who joined the Queens Nurses and went to Mombassa ... Yes, went to Mombassa with the Queens Nurses. Very fine women, the Queens Nurses. And one night, so she'd heard, the cook in the nurses quarters was stabbed by an intruder ... But of Ramsden herself she had no actual news (MFM 29).

At the end of the book, still unable to resolve the problem of her guilt and longing for Ramsden, Vera thinks of the little book of poems "decorated with edelweiss and gentian, a circle of neat pen and ink flowers" with the inscription in "her neat small handwriting":

The best is not too good for you
Und Ihrer Weise Wohlzutun.

Vera thinks when she finally is able to she will talk to the Ramsden look alike in the train and say:

... much water has gone under the bridge and I never answered your letters but is it you, Ramsden, after all these years is it? (MFM 171).

At the end of Cabin Fever Vera, in her twenty-fourth floor room, sees again in her Lady of Shalott mirror, the man across the road in his shirt sleeves on his twenty-fourth floor and repeats the teaser:

I am still here on the twenty-fourth floor. When I sit in front of my mirror I can see, in the mirror, someone on the twenty-fourth floor across the street. He is sitting upright at a table and is in his shirt sleeves. I have no idea who he is (CF 236).

Vera is frightened, near to panic in her hot airless room, she even loses count of the days. and she thinks again of Ramsden:

It is enough for the present, to create Ramsden in my own image. It's like this, certain phrases of music recapture Ramsden clearly. It is as if we are walking together once more in the rain as it drips through the branches of the beech trees in autumn and I am listening to her telling me something ... I never walked anywhere with Ramsden except in my imagination (CF 237).
In *Cabin Fever* Vera is denied the happy ending which comes to Tom Jones on his return to Sophia, with the support of the admirable Allworthy. Vera is far from the father who says looking at the moon is seeing the same moon that he looks at wherever she may be (*MFM* 26).

Vera cannot break away from her mirror as the Lady of Shalott does when the bold Sir Lancelot rides by singing "'Tirra lirra' by the river". Nor can she find the peace and resignation of the Lady of Shalott as she floats "down to Camelot". The sufferer from cabin fever may wish for the escape from reality in the mirror which looks out from the twenty-fourth floor but the cure for the disease is in the recognition of the symptoms and the collection and the weaving of the web of experience as the Lady of Shalott does. "How can anyone's life, in reality, at the present time, contain the fulfilment of expectation and the happy ending of a romantic fiction" (*CF* 237). Vera cannot, in the end, get Mr George to agree that they are now a "couple" -- "an ugly word" he says (*TGW* 182).

Vera's father believes this life is merely a "prologue to some other kind of life or existence". It is part of the pattern of a "power greater than any human power" giving meaning to earthly life. "The storehouse of experience was a mystery. In spite of not knowing, human individuals went along living their lives baffled when they questioned" (*CF* 235/6). Vera is still suffering, life still baffles, the web of experience progresses, weaving by night and day the "mirror's magic sights" but she cannot emulate the Lady of Shalott with "colours gay". The ease of the romantic ending is not (or is it not yet?) available for Vera but the process of the collection and sorting (weaving) of the material for the "storehouse of experience" is continuing (*CF* 236).
Delys Bird looking through the papers of *My Father’s Moon* in the Mitchell Library collection notes that the manuscript is "a huge pile of tiny notes, handwritten sections of the novel, half written and rewritten stories, reminders, typewritten sections and so on" (*NCE* 174). They are the same type of the, as yet unsorted, impressions of life in Vera’s storehouse of experience. Amongst these notes is:

One section . . . bound with a paper on which is written in red "My Father’s unextinguished Moon". The moon is like the writer’s desire, registered in the notes, "to make a living picture from the half remembered by writing something from the inside and something from the outside". Both moon and memory have the same elusive, haunting quality (*NCE* 174).

Elizabeth Jolley’s notes go on to remark on the elusiveness which leads to a problem of not being sure which is memory and which creation or recreation of the imagination. She would like to hear again the voices of her parents and uses an analogy of her father’s voice and her mother’s, likening them to a mountain stream running on and on (her mother) with every now and then the interruption of a boulder in the course of the stream (as her father comments, answers or interrupts).

There is a note denying that *My Father’s Moon* is autobiographical although "it is set in an environment which had an overwhelming effect on the author". It is easy to believe that this is so. Elizabeth Jolley herself attended a Quaker boarding school from the age of eleven, suffering initially from homesickness. She trained as a nurse at a wartime hospital. Her mother was Viennese, daughter of an Austrian general and of course spoke German in the home. Elizabeth Jolley’s father set the pattern for Vera’s father always seeing his daughter off on the bus or train on those journeys back to school or hospital. One of the
customs of the school discourages the use of overcoats -- hence the school coat, unused at school, which continues as the constant companion of both Elizabeth and Vera (CM 27/8 and MF 2).

In addition to the papers to which Delys Bird refers there is the set of eight notebooks previously mentioned and some assorted papers called "George's Wife" and "A Feast of Life". The titles seem to be alternative, though perhaps "George's Wife" is a later suggestion and of course the title of the third book of the trilogy is very close to that. This box (ML MSS 4889/3) contains manuscripts dated from 1950 to 1965. The first notebook also is annotated "Memoirs" and this is dated 15th March 1956. There is a prologue:

Coleridge said once "I could inform the dullest author how he might write an interesting book. Let him relate the events of his own life with honesty, not disguising the feelings that accompanied them."

Only one side of each page is used for the main manuscript, though notes are frequently placed on the opposite page. On page one such a note is as follows:

I thought of the title: "The Feast of Life" one Sunday morning while I was preparing the dinner vegetables in the kitchen and on the wireless (billiard room) (I had put on a record it) was Kathleen Ferrier singing some Handle (sic) arias.

This is written in blue ink and then crossed out with two lines in black ink. This first volume then goes on to express doubts about the ability of the writer to complete the task just begun. Whether these doubts are doubts of the author or of the narrator is not very clear and this part of the manuscript is not reproduced in any completed form:
Now in starting on this book which comes into my mind so often I find myself wondering whether I shall really write it or pause after a few pages and after the pause come back to it only to discover what I have written is poor useless stuff. And I think to myself "supposing I were to write in violet ink and use only words, phrases and materials which I want to write and not make a great labour of it." But all birth is only achieved by great labour.

There are other notes of the usual ambiguity. Opposite the first page for example:

Kreutzer sonata -- gramophone broke. Played it on 45. Not very good.

Low spirits because of my marriage and not having any hope with the book. Not one paper is interested in what I might want or be able to do. Disappointment and the resulting tiredness. Roses.

Volume 2 of the notebooks contains the essentially unchanged account of the chapter of My Father's Moon headed "Bathroom Dance" (MFM 45 ff) including the journey of Vera with her friend Helen Ferguson and Helen's mother (who goes with them to London) to the hospital, St Cuthbert's. Helen's anxiety about leaving without seeing David (with whom she feels she is in love), Vera's good looking but poor tasting carrot preparation so successful at the invalid cooking test and then finally the graceful performance of the nude Diamond and Snorter in the steamy bathroom "like a pair of sea birds engaged in a mating display" (MFM 53). This chapter also appears as a separate story -- first in Overland 92, 1983.

Vera tires of Trent and moves in with Lois. Their attachment becomes rather intense and while Vera is trying persuade Lois that Tango Bolero is easy to listen to the Home Sister comes to their room to try to subdue the noise. They are both naked but Lois manages to hide in the wardrobe and Vera to excuse her nakedness because she is too hot.
Pull the pillow out and put it back where it belongs.
And try to remember that others want and need their
sleep. And another thing. Nurse, it is not healthy
to sleep without your gown. See that you put it on
at once (NFM 80).

In Volume three of the notebooks there is a somewhat similar scene but
at Lois' mother's house when both girls are naked in bed and it is Lois
who is discovered without the usual nightclothes and her mother makes a
similar suggestion that she put on her pajama top.

The Feast of Life continues in Volume four with the short story
"Hilda's Wedding" (WIL 39/46). It is the introduction to Smallhouse and
Gordonpole, who polish "the whole hospital every night" and small dark
Feegan in his "endless dance up and down and across, back and forth all
through and over the whole building all night long checking the fire-
fighting equipment." Vera checks on the fresh milk delivery by drinking
a basinful, outside the subterranean kitchen.

Volume four also brings in Dr Metcalf who is still known as Jonty
and his wife, whose name is Joanne instead of Magda but she is in bed
with her red setter lying full length beside her, his head on the
pillow. Mrs Privett, the Metcalf's housekeeper, is disapproving of the
"friendship" growing so rapidly between Metcalf and Veronica. Mrs
Privett does not like Vera. The feeling is fully reciprocated.

The river shack the site of the first love making between Vera and
"Jonty" (NFM 125 ff) appears in the fifth volume of the notebooks and
is dated "Sunday 19th October, 1958"; the shack is called "Jasmine
Cottage". The love making of Vera and Dr Metcalf both in the cottage
and in Jonathan's forbidden room at St Guthberts is all in the notebooks
as it is in Cabin Fever and My Father's Moon.
The betrayals are there too. Gertrude goes by the name of Hannah in the notebooks but Vera's reluctance to go to her assistance as she lies so ill in her house is the same. Perhaps in any case there is not a lot that Vera could do but the failure to visit haunts her, especially going instead to see the Metcalfs. So the feeling of guilt and remorse is just as real and just as painful.

The love making with Mr George in Cabin Fever and The Georges' Wife on the narrow bed which makes them lie so close together appears in the notebooks although the bed is Vera's -- though it is quite as narrow and the eagerness (and "shamelessness") with which Vera seeks a repeat performance is the same. As well her lover is known as Arthur and seeks her out, with a different time sequence from the published novels, at Fairfields School to try to make her his wife while Vera will not leave because of the problems for the other teaching staff if she does. This is a reversal of the perfidy so typical of Vera's behaviour and would be a reformation reminiscent of the transformation of Jacob at the end of Milk and Honey. But of course, it does not happen in any of the published works. This visit by Arthur is in volume No 7 of the notebooks and carries the latest date of any of the notebooks -- 24th February 1961 with the address 10 Parkway, Nedlands, W.A. It is still called A Feast of Life and it is in this notebook that Mr Morris is arrested by the police, his wife expecting that his absence in gaol is to be a long one and it is Tanya who thinks she will leave the school and Patch suggests to her, as she does to Vera in My Father's Moon, in effect -- "stand not upon the order of your going but go at once".
The notebooks seem therefore, to contain a great deal of the material which ends up in the trilogy although it is extensively re-arranged. There are also some notes rather like the one above from volume one wondering whether the writing being embarked on now is ever going to come to fruition. Some of these are very revealing of the state of mind of an author who is having trouble finding a publication outlet. For example:

Why do I expose myself to these people. I feel very much afraid the story will not be a success. How my eyes hurt tonight.

It seems I am not able to come to the surface of my story at all but must race to the end carried away in my own memory.

Oh if only the Pelican could be successful. But I just read a very sparkling short story in the Bulletin. I ought to try to write like that.

Delys Bird mentions that the papers are marked by a sign of the cross in the left-hand corner \((NCE 173)\) (though this is not the case in the notebooks) just as Vera does:

I never write a page of anything without first putting this little mark, without first asking a Blessing. How can I tell anyone this? . . .

"Always ask a Blessing," he [Vera's father] said, "before you do anything, before you undertake anything and then remember, always, to pray again and offer thanks."
The little mark which is a tiny cross is on everything I write. I do not want to tell people about the little cross. People are suspicious \((NFM 123)\).

The books of the trilogy all acknowledge the assistance of Curtin University for the opportunity of contact with staff and students and for a room in which to write. In an interview in Canberra with Candida Baker Elizabeth Jolley mentions the changes in her work habits made possible by the increased support from two sources in particular.
These are the Literature Board of the Australia Council, helping with Fellowships, and the Western Australian Institute of Technology, now the Curtin University of Technology, employing her to teach in the School of English but where she has a room and "can take my own writing work and work there whenever I like" (Yacker 1986: 219). This enables her to eliminate the kind of interruptions a housewife constantly suffers. The Literature Board money also simplifies the problem of paying for the typing of her handwritten manuscripts or the necessity to make extra money to pay for this, for example as a "flying domestic". No doubt her royalties now ease this problem without the necessity of dependence on the Australia Council. Jolley's appreciation of the support of both institutions, as appropriate, appears in many of her books. But as Delys Bird points out, the changes to her work methods are not followed by any noticeable change in the novels themselves or the way in which the notes on scraps of paper are linked to other notes which at first sight are in no way connected (NCE 173). Indeed the nature of memory and recall of long past events seems to result in an even more episodic output in these books. In relation to My Father's Moon, Delys Bird remarks on the deceptive simplicity, the evocative images of the narrative arising from the linking of the multitude of notes -- "both moon and memory have the same elusive, haunting quality" (NCE 174). But in these novels it seems that memory is playing a larger role -- perhaps because the memory of the events of youth seem to predominate and remain alive for most people as they get older.

A.P. Riemer in his review "Mooning around in the past", remarks on these vivid images -- perhaps most are ineradicable memories:
Sharp observations of hospital routine -- preparing bread and butter for the patients' trays, chasing cockroaches with steel kitting-needles, shivering on night duty and trying to keep warm in old army blankets . . . the death of a gangrene-ridden, maggot infested patient (ABR 110 (1989): 27).

And there are many others, perhaps most from the hospital experience of a trainee nurse, but also heterogeneous, apparently random memories often vivid, sometimes cruel, sometimes pathetic and sometimes with touches of that strange Jolley humour. There is the delightful little refugee, Recha "tipping forward on high heels" ostentatiously helping with the clearing up after a meal walking busily backward and forward in the kitchen as she scraps "morsels of food on to saucers -- scraps of fried bread and bits of chopped-up liver. She carries them one by one to the top pantry shelf" (NFM 41). But she is having trouble with her "monatsfluss" and drops little swabs, blood filled cotton wool swabs, on to the floor as she walks. Swabs caught on her heels "mottling the tiles as if with squashed strawberries" (NFM 42). Either by design or accident Recha leaves with Vera's silk frock, her best frock, she is yet to wear it herself, but now it is gone.

In Cabin Fever, Vera, returning home pregnant, and trying to hide her pregnancy from the neighbours, is persuaded by an elderly German woman neighbour, who is locked out of her house by absent-mindedly leaving the key on the kitchen table, to climb up to the small bathroom window to gain entry to retrieve the key. Vera doesn't want to take her coat off because she fears this would disclose her "condition" and with the encouragement of Frau Meissner, the neighbour who, with scant concern for Vera, eulogizes:
She is, how you say a fine young vimmin. Sie ist eine Valkyrie. Wiz her strenz she can do ANYTHING she wants. See her beautiful skin! She is healsy und stronk und yong. She will get me back into ziss house (CP 71).

As a consequence after climbing from the dustbin to the coal house roof and then up to the narrow high window, bulky with coat and pregnancy, Vera is indeed stuck:

When I am half way through the window the bath looks a long way down on the inside and my feet are no longer able to be supported by the pipe outside. I notice the greenish stains in Frau Meissner's bath. I am stuck. It seems I am too big to squeeze through the window. I should have taken off my coat. I try not (to) call out in panic. I make one great twisting effort. It hurts my side and I am afraid but I lean down and am slowly head and hands down into the bath (CP 72).

The scene is similar to one in which Miss Peabody thinks she is locked out and persuades the reluctant Mr Bains to assist her to enter her house

... by way of the drain pipe. It enabled her to clamber on to the coal house roof. From there it was possible to crawl through the bathroom window. This window, which was very small, was always open.
... She was much heavier that he had imagined.
... Mr Bains did not watch the last part. He turned away a second time. From the corner of his eye, however, he was aware of her two legs in "steel" (stockings) waving frantically as she worked her way into the small space of the window. He supposed, knowing the general pattern of bathrooms in such houses, she would land in the bath (WPI 128/9).

This seems to be one of those valued memories which recurs. Is it indeed a real life experience? Helen Daniel in The Good Reading Guide considers of My Father's Moon "it is difficult not to see this deeply moving work as the most autobiographical of Jolley's novels... a meditation on memory and its workings... a process of retrieval, both confessional and defiant" (143). This is true of the whole trilogy.
Perhaps it is because the proportions of fantasy and memory are much more heavily weighted towards memory than in previous Jolley work, that there is not the same brilliant display of ebullient humour characteristic of some earlier books. There is some but it seems a little subdued as if the memories are sometimes painful especially where confession is concerned. Conscience dominates the recollections of past sins both of omission and of commission, some are petty and some mean, some venial and some carnal. Vera does not emerge as any kind of heroic character, and for much of the time, is not even likeable. Remorse and sorrow become more prominent by the end of The Georges' Wife.

She is particularly prone to the betrayal and abandonment of those who love her. In the trilogy as a whole it is a prominent theme. *My Father's Moon* is indeed a novel of betrayal as well as memory. "Not this man but Barrabas! Not this man but Barrabas!" is the cry of the senior girls as they pull off the knickers with pockets from poor Bulge (*MFM* 35). Vera for her part is both victim and persecutor and Bulge is among the first of those she betrays. Not only is Bulge undefended when divested of her intimate apparel, but as she sobs during the prayer meeting Vera again denies her, almost in the words of Peter denying Jesus: "I don't know her. She isn't my friend" Vera says "she's not my friend" (*MFM* 37). Peter says "I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew" and in accordance with prophecy denies Jesus thrice (*St Matthew* 26, 75). Vera goes on to steal a bath when it is not her bath night and drinks the glass of hot milk Matron sends for Bulge and fails to put the "arm of care" around the "shoulders of distress" (*MFM* 18).
But of course, Vera, Helen, Amy and Fluffy Hair are all victims, victims of betrayal by the senior girls, the demure Etty and her friends. In a cowardly, mean and vicious pretence of a welcoming picnic the senior girls of this Quaker boarding school lure the young children, newcomers, to a quarry at Harpers Hill, tie them up and push them over the edge down a steep rough quarry wall and leave them to get back to school as best they can. Then at the Sunday meeting Etty gives a biblical reading to the meeting, summary of which is "Shall the clay say to the potter why hast thou made me thus..." (MFM 37).

Yet when Bulge shows Vera the tear in her dress and is unable to stop crying Helen sitting next to Vera on the other side to Bulge "nudges me and grins, making grimaces of disgust, nodding in the direction of Bulge and we both shake with simulated mirth, making, at the same time, a pretence of trying to suppress it" (MFM 36).

This sad tale of Vera's introduction to school with the hypocrisy, cruelty and self centredness of contemporary society demonstrated in parvo, foreshadows the treatment she receives as an unmarried mother. Her backlash against her ostracism is understandable. She is an outsider at school (not a birthright Quaker) and at the hospitals where she runs foul of the caste system of British male dominated society during and immediately after World War II. It is interesting that amongst those who are aware of their superiority to Vera are the two theatre nurses bearing such ridiculous names as Snorter and Diamond, but who demonstrate their feet of clay in the bathroom dance. But Vera is good at her work, in spite of the horror it sometimes evokes, for example with the young soldier being eaten by maggots (MFM 113).
She is good at study and the Matron expects her to do very well at the end of her training. She tells Helen after receiving the dread summons to appear at Matron's office "... she [Matron] is very pleased with my work and she'll be surprised if I don't win the gold medal" (MFM 51).

Unfortunately Vera's skill at nursing and study is not matched by her social acceptance. She is clumsy, lacks the social graces and has no sex appeal. She is aware of this to the detriment of her confidence: "I wish I could be small and neat and pretty like Amy" (MFM 34).

So Vera is no match for the hospital Lothario and succumbs to the charms of both Dr Metcalf and his socially superior, but rather overpowering wife, Magda. Vera is ashamed of her German speaking mother, impatient with all her efforts to help with her baby. Even the German neighbour, Mrs Meissner exploits her; for example when, heavily pregnant, she climbs to recover that lady's locked-in house keys.

Vera's friendship with Lois is also somewhat one sided. She tries to tell Gertrude about it, about the nightdress she buys Lois and the cigarettes; but "Lois never wears the nightdress giving it instead to her ugly, stupid mother who is so greedy she would take everything" (MFM 106/7). Lois never has any money and Gertrude explains that if Vera is paid twenty-eight shillings a month, Lois must be getting it too (MFM 108).

Perhaps the symbolism of the crushing restrictions of society and the domination of the patriarchy, even more oppressive in the hospital than in society at large, is to be found in Vera's walk along the bombed doctors' corridor in the light of the full moon. The corridor is enlarged by the moonlight to seem like another room. But it isn't, it
is a corridor boarded up with barriers to prevent accidents as it leads to a great chasm, a black hole and dominating this hole high above it is the "huge clock tower which is a water tower" and also a phallic symbol -- symbol of the power of the patriarchal society which threatens Vera. The water is pumped up into the tower from an artesian well under the hospital to gain sufficient pressure for reticulation throughout the whole building.

I feel afraid of the power and the force of the water in the tower. I can imagine all too easily, the depths of the precipice in front of me. It is as though a neglected wound which I already know about, has been uncovered (MFM 162).

The moon shines on the huge water/clock tower which draws strength from the depths of the well far down and stands erect, poised over the blackness of the hole beyond the broken end of the corridor, with inescapable phallic resonances. Vera is tempted to step across to the moon itself, her father's moon. If she was there he would automatically know:

It is only such a small thing I have to tell. Perhaps it is the small things which are the hardest to tell. They are the things which make all the difference. It is because it will be so unexpected for him. What I need to tell him will be unexpected (MFM 163).

The only light in Vera's darkness is Nurse Ramsden. She stands for the things of the spirit -- for the cultural life -- for music and the great composers -- Bach, Beethoven, Mozart on to Sibelius -- for literature from Rilke to Hardy. But how real is Ramsden? She is both a dominating influence and an inspiration. Vera always thinks how Ramsden would come to rescue her: "being at a stop, not waiting for a bus" in the light of the rising full moon (MFM 30). She gets an earlier train:
I look at her hands (the hands of the woman who would be Ramsden) and feel sure she plays the piano. When I look at her hands it is as if I can hear her playing a Mozart sonata or practising something from Bach. Repeating and repeating phrases until a perfection is achieved. I am certain, as I go on looking, that she plays Cyril Scott's "Water Wagtail" (MFN 19).

So Ramsden is not so much the woman as the myth. She is the construct of Vera's imagination, a fantasy ideal which is so important to Vera in a world so harsh and cruel that even the moon does not help. But there is the ideal of Ramsden, cultured, calm and dignified which inspires and comforts Vera. It is the goal and her ambition to emulate. It is the friend in the hostile threatening patriarchal society which so often takes advantage of her. In My Father's Moon Ramsden appears very early, on page three in fact. As Vera waits for the train setting out for the hoped for cultural life at the school which is to be such a disappointment, Vera walks up and down with her father and is reminded of Ramsden and the unfortunate aborted visit when Ramsden arrived in thick fog at midnight:

"And is Miss Ramsden a good girl?" would be his (Vera's father's) greeting, a continuation of, "and is Jeannie a good girl?" He would say it to Ramsden without seeing the maturity and the elegance and without any understanding of the superior quality of her underclothes (MFN 3).

And at the end of each of the books of the trilogy it is Ramsden who supplies the hope that everything might not be lonely and bleak. Vera thinks of the grieving Magda who "simply can't live without him (Jonty)" (MFN 168). She thinks of the Woolworth's sixpenny wedding ring, of Nurse Roberts waiting in the rain for the workmen's bus with nowhere to go. She thinks of the nurses' dining room with Sister Bean calling the
roll (with no-one to answer her name) and of Lois seeing the Woolworth's ring, extinguishing her, Vera supplied, cigarette and saying: "whoever would have married you?" (MFM 170). To make everything that much worse "tomorrow is Good Friday" (MFM 171). Vera seeks the consolation of her myth and decides she will take the earlier train and speak to the Ramsden look alike:

*Ramsden* I shall say, is it you? Much water has gone under the bridge -- this is not my way -- but I shall say it carelessly like this -- much water has gone under the bridge and I never answered your letters but is it you, Ramsden, after all these years is it? (MFM 171).

And Ramsden is still there at the end of Cabin Fever, or rather it is the image of Ramsden, or perhaps the image of the woman on the train who is the image of Ramsden:

I have never spoken to the woman on the train. It seems enough that I promise this for some future time. It is enough for the present, to create Ramsden in my own image. It's like this, certain phrases of music recapture Ramsden clearly. It is as if we are walking together once more in the rain as it drips through the branches of the beech trees in autumn and I am listening to her telling me something.

I have never walked anywhere with Ramsden except in my imagination. And the music now, which recalls her, is not the music we listened to together. The Schubert piano and cello is not the piano and cello music of those other times. Perhaps the ability of the cello to suggest the tender reasoning I heard in her voice is a part of the mysterious process of acknowledging something which is to be slowly unlocked at some time later on (CF 237).

In The Georges' Wife Vera returns to the Ramsden myth. She recalls telling the widow about the wartime ankle socks which Ramsden wore -- about the music she didn't really hear with Ramsden, about the walks she didn't really take with Ramsden but there is the downward thrust of the cello which always brings Ramsden back into Vera's mind (TGW 171).
Vera wants to experience the effect of her waiting room and it is in “The Third Waiting Room” Vera grapples with her Ramsden mythology. She recalls, as she tries out the waiting room “in this grey and pink reception place”, how she consistently fails to take the opportunities that arise with Ramsden:

I did not walk anywhere with Ramsden and when I see her that time, sitting near me in the suburban train (except for her white hair she looks the same and is within reaching distance), I intend to speak to her and, with that strange feeling that there will be another time for my intention, I let that chance go . . . (TGW 172).

But the same thing happens with the widow. Vera makes one visit to the widow but it is the only time. “Perhaps it is simply that I let the intention and chance go -- yet again. Perhaps this is what I am like.” (TGW 173) The widow writes: “you will come again, Migrant (the widow’s name for Vera), won’t you soon?” (TGW 173) But Vera delays too long and the widow is the only passenger to die when a tourist bus goes off the road in the Pyrénées. She leaves her estate to Vera.

Vera in the meantime changes from her speciality in surgery back to general practice. She remembers Noël (the male member of the ménage à trois) telling her that she would need to make up her mind between being a surgeon, a physician, or what to him is a “cheap psychiatrist”. Being very ill and cynical about the medical profession himself, he predicts the dilemma in cases when there are no remedies “except those surviving from folk tales and legends . . . mythology . . . and witchcraft” (TGW 179). So the catalogue of self blame, of guilt and remorse mounts and Vera is alone. Her parents are dead, her children in England and grown up, Oliver George senile, the widow dead and Ramsden
forever lost. To live is to make errors but, there is a constant search for absolution and redemption and yet no one is left to accept the confession. Memory can’t supply the consolation, but rather more of the accusations.

The Georges’ Wife goes over once more so many of the themes in yet another recapitulation. Vera recalls Gertrude’s place when the Ram is caught in the the apple tree and rescue effort to free him seems likely to be futile. Gertrude explains that "an animal was not the same as a human . . . the ram would not have been thinking and anticipating the suffering of being trapped and slowly starving to death . . . " (TGW 13). The father who always walks up and down at the station or bus stop -- even going to London to farewell his wife, daughter and Mr. Berrington departing for a holiday in Germany -- is remembered with "white face", waving and smiling (TGW 18/19). Vera recalls the "magic world inhabited by Dr Metcalf" and Magda and we learn for the first time that Dr Metcalf reminds her of Tolstoy’s Levin. The relationship between two women is revisited in the friendship of the “migrant” and the "widow". The lesbian overtones are present but are more muted than in Palomino. The advice of her caring Mother is repeated to an unhearing Vera who as a result lives again an episode of infatuation and exploitation with Noel and Felicity. Noel finds her as a "hedge-ling" and she lies between them feeling "their nakedness on both sides . . . " (TGW 77/78). It is a reprise of Magda and Jonty with variations.

There is emphasis on the experience of the emigrant building on both The Newspaper of Claremont Street and Milk and Honey. The result is an isolation like that of Weekly but without the pleasure of the
acceptance of the solitary life. There is no resolution like that of Jacob as he serves the lowliest in humility and contentment. Vera thinks of "homelessness, the sense of not having a place of sanctuary to return to" which can come at any time. There is an accompaniment of pealing bells:

    The church bells are repeating and repeating, still, their expected measured and exuberant movement of sound; the next falling sounds ringing out over the first falling sounds. The sustained pealing fills the afternoon and my waiting room (TCW 181).

The bells chime in with Vera's memories reverberating throughout the trilogy but with increasing insistence in The Georges' Wife as Vera meditates on the conundrums presented by the many voices resounding from the past. The external facts and events are no longer as insistent as these echoes of the dreams. the pains, the agonies, and the joys (now seemingly brief) reverberating through the the corridors of memory. With the last volume of the trilogy Vera is still the exile, still the stranger and still the captive of her memories.
CODA

Elizabeth Jolley is a writer who is driven to write. She comes from a background where the family was isolated in a community which, if not actually hostile, was very reserved in the way in which it accepted those who are thought to be unusual. They are not the norm. So those who speak a foreign language, come from a foreign country, belong to a "peculiar" religious group, especially with views differing from the community at large, such as the Quakers, tend to be outsiders.

To seek relief from this situation by writing seems a very logical and sensible step. The "outsider" was a role which Elizabeth Jolley continued to play as a newcomer to a boarding school where other children were well established, perhaps over years. The school was a religious one and "birthright" Quakers had an advantage even over those brought up in the faith, but not born into it (as was the case with Jolley) (FAV 132). As a trainee nurse entering a very class conscious profession Jolley did not feel comfortable. She did not have the same accent or feel at home amongst the girls from "county families . . . (of) twin sets and pearls" (CM 3). Committing thoughts to writing made it possible to express those sentiments which are troublesome but which can't be verbalised in such environments. So the habit of writing was established from childhood. As a British migrant in Australia she was once again a stranger, an outsider.

Caroline Lurie, in organising the articles and essays for Central Mischief, tried to establish a pattern of Jolley's writing:
Of course I was half-looking for a pattern, a theme, a chronology, some organising principle. And what emerged, quite simply, was Elizabeth herself. Bereft of the masque-art of fiction here is a human being a writer, exploring her world, musing on her origins, what has moved her to do the work she does, the jobs she has done, why she lives in her own particular way. . . . Elizabeth reflects on her life and ideas in precisely the same way that we all reflect on this. Perhaps with a sharper eye, a keener wit, a more unblinking honesty than most of us can manage (CM xiii/xiv).

Although these reflections may be more open in Central Mischief than in the novels, the same process is at work in all the books though mostly with the veil of the persona of the narrator or major characters intervening between Jolley and her readers. This veil may contribute to an even greater honesty in dealing with those topics which closely touch the actual reactions which the author herself experiences. There are constant repetitions and re-examinations of the favourite themes, such as the migrant experience, the impact of the vast new landscapes, the need for established roots, the five acre virgin and so on.

The fact that there is an effect of catharsis for Jolley in her writing in no way diminishes the appeal for readers who empathise with her and with her characters. They know she understands them and from the readers' point of view there is an insight into Jolley's mind — her thoughts and emotions, her keen vision and yet her gentleness.

Like Heather Hailey in Mr Scobie's Riddle no doubt Elizabeth Jolley will go on writing regardless of publication. Though there must be considerable doubt about the effectiveness for the author of any alternatives such as those available to Miss Hailey, like the pine tree dance of "majesty" and "transfiguration in the changing light of the morning sun", or "new life" and "new ways of living" (MSR 211/2).
The problem of the outsider, the sense of isolation even when involved in an association of many other people is something which may contribute to many of Jolley's particular themes and interests. Apart from Elizabeth's own life at home, in school and hospitals, the vicarious knowledge of the way in which her mother suffered, living in a foreign land, the land of the former enemy, separated by language and cultural differences from those around her reinforces her understanding. There is also the way in which the pacifist beliefs of her father isolated him from society in World War I and even from his family to further strengthen these impressions. The isolation of the parents leads directly to the isolation of the children. Perhaps most of all in the long run is the loneliness of the writer. The attempt at a defence through writing only makes matters worse in the long run. Elizabeth Jolley mentions it in her article "Living on One Leg Like a Bird": "Writing is a terribly solitary occupation" (CM 132).

The experience of the outsider is closely related to the theme of exile. The immigrant is ambivalent in the awareness of "the reality of transplantation and chosen exile" (FAV 9). There is the old culture and tradition left behind with sadness and regret and the excitement and strangeness of the new. "Living on one leg like a bird" is the way Judah Waten describes the feelings of a family having difficulty in accepting the strangeness of the new land and longing for the familiarity of the old. They are tempted to return. Elizabeth Jolley quotes from his book Alien Son as she writes of her experience in exchanging the old life left behind and the altered attitudes and awareness of the new (CM 140). Many of the new things are enjoyable.
Here are some of these new impressions for Jolley herself:

To walk barefoot on the fragrant sun-dried grass and eucalyptus leaves is a remarkable experience. Suddenly the soles of the feet become important. In the extreme dry heat in the summer, in the bush all life seems withdrawn. To sit with closed eyes on the warm earth, to breathe in the fragrance and to listen to the magpies and to the strange cries of parrots and cockatoos and the wild mad laughter of the kookaburra is to realise that this is indeed a foreign country where human life can be of very little account (CM 134).

Another aspect of the migrant experience is the desire for the ownership of land -- "the five acre virgin [block]". This is expressed through the theme which dominates The Newspaper of Claremont Street as Weekly struggles through her cleaning work to accumulate a sufficient mountain of silver coins to purchase her block of land. As Uncle Bernard, Dutch migrant protagonist in some Jolley short stories says: "Work, save and we buy place. You will see. No troubles" (FAV 91).

Every week-end Bill Sprockett goes out to see the land he couldn't buy because he had lost the money his father sent him for it at the trots. Now he could only look. "Bill Sprockett's Land" (FAV 92-97). There are even those who manage somehow to get the use of the land without the money to pay for it. The clever deal which Mother makes to defraud the kindly doctor purchaser allows the family to stay on the property while the last crop is planted and matures. Who would expect the crop to be jarrah trees? "A Gentleman's Agreement" (FAV 26-32).

Another escape for the outsider is through love. most effectively through sexual love, although this love may be either heterosexual or homosexual. The central issue of Palomino, is lesbian love. The participants are both outsiders seeking comfort and consolation.
Perhaps Laura is clearly lesbian with the history of earlier affairs leading to Esmé's murder and Laura's deregistration. Andrea, however, is obviously not simply a lesbian. She may be ambivalent in her interests but the relationship with her brother indicates her heterosexual desire even though she participates in the new passionate relationship with Laura with enthusiasm. Whilst at the same time Andrea tries (unsuccessfully) not to disclose to Laura she is pregnant with a child fathered by her brother.

Emotional and sexual description is intense in conformity with the Gothic plot of murder, incest and lesbianism. There are passages of lyrical description which sometimes seem a little forced. The characteristic humour in most of Jolley's writing is almost completely absent from this book -- perhaps because of the perceived necessity of ensuring a serious treatment of subjects for so long taboo and perhaps too, because the writing begins early in Jolley's career. Change in public attitudes to the discussion of sex makes it difficult to recall the restrictions which might apply to accounts of lesbian behaviour in the 1950s. Description of sexual scenes are fairly explicit between Laura and Andrea though more restrained in the affair with Andrea's mother, Eva, and absent altogether in the friendship by correspondence, and perhaps largely in the imagination, with the eminent gynaecologist Esmé Gollanberg. After her deregistration, if not before that, Laura, living alone in the country, is clearly the outsider. Andrea through her incestuous pregnancy becomes isolated from family and society and joins the ranks of outsiders.
In the short story "Grasshoppers" there is a lesbian infatuation between school teacher Peg, and a would-be faith healer Bettina, which ends in the disastrous visit to India, the death of Peg's daughter and serious illness of her mother back in the illusory safety of the farm home. The element of humour in this story (especially in the predicament of the pregnant headmistress Miss Moles) seems to lift the predominant tone which is not quite so earnest and serious as that of Palomino. It is the humour, sometimes delicate, sometimes crude but always entertaining which is one of the great attractions of Jolley's writing and a powerful element in her remarkable public acceptance.

In The Well the attraction Miss Harper feels for Katherine may well be lesbian in character, but the sexual elements are more subdued (as is the humour). Once again both Hester and Katherine are outsiders -- Katherine, as an unwanted orphan and Hester because of her physical disabilities and her lack of interest in feminine pursuits, and her masculine outlook. It is clear that both Hester and Katherine, each in her own way, are suffering from the repression of sexual drives. In Hester's case the lesbian element is evident as she watches Katherine dancing and in the "fashion parades" they arrange with a "little intimate routine displaying the feathery black fragments of clothing, taking them off and putting them on . . ." (VEL 38/9). The bizarre imaginary betrothal to the dead man in the well expresses Katherine's true desire. Although the sexual elements of the relationship between the two women in The Well may be more moderate the loneliness and sense of exile which draws them together is very strong -- possibly the predominant motivation.
Heterosexual love is not absent from the Jolley fiction by any means and the three latest novels which form the "Vera" trilogy are very much concerned with such love. *My Father's Moon* uses the moon itself as a recurring symbol of comfort and love but this is the protective love of the family home and her father from which Vera is exiled first by boarding school, then by hospital demands and finally by the mother's criticism and Vera's pride. The moon is the theme that is always available to link her to her father but it is also the moon that presides over her love for Dr Metcalf. She lies with Dr Metcalf and his wife, Magda, under the moon on the riverbank:

This is the same moon my father can see. In my loneliness now I try to think of my father and his moon, but it is Dr Metcalf I want. I am thinking of him and wishing for his arms and his kisses. I want to feel him close to me again as he was last night (*MFM* 131).

The third book of the trilogy, *The Georges' Wife*, continues with the review of Vera's experience. The notebooks in the Mitchell Library, are the basis of the whole trilogy, confirming the close affinity between Vera and Jolley. The same theme of exile and isolation is strong. Vera is the outsider throughout all that life which so closely parallels Jolley's. Dr Metcalf is less of an outsider but his social status appears to be barely acceptable to his wife's family and there is the problem of his bisexual nature and the homosexual relationship with Smithers ("the rectal orderly") ending in Smithers' suicide (*MFM* 148). There are rumours that Dr Metcalf's death may also be by his own hand. *Cabin Fever* continues with Vera as a single parent who is subject to many problems in her unaided efforts to bring up Helena, the daughter born after Dr Metcalf's death. Vera's isolation is greater than ever
although the love of parent for child in some ways replaces that of child for father of the previous book. The love of Mr George supplants that of Dr Metcalf and with this the love of music is again in evidence. As they lie together in Mr George's narrow bed he tells Vera about his reaction to music. Perhaps this musical interest too, is a compensation against loneliness and the isolation of the outsider. If so Mr George uses it in this case to seduce Vera (or is it in fact Mr George who is seduced?). Manuscripts in the Mitchell library as previously mentioned (p 236) continue with details of the affair between Vera and Mr. George very much as in Cabin Fever.

Most of the themes in the novels derive from Jolley's upbringing and experience in England and subsequently in Australia. Milk and Honey and The Georges' Wife draw heavily on knowledge of immigration to Australia. There are also the references to the exploits of those involved in door to door selling, in being an itinerant house cleaner, in real estate dealings, and small scale farming. And all of these ideas arise from the loneliness to which Jolley herself was originally subject and to her relieving occupations. Nursing in hospitals and nursing homes is a powerful theme and all of these things are within Elizabeth Jolley's own practical experience or observation. But fact is often fantasised and embellished by the constructs of a lively imagination:

I like to stare at people. I can't help staring at people whether they are choosing cereal or meat or matching strands of knitting wool. I nearly cry because, at times, people seem so vulnerable. This vulnerability is in the redness of ears or in the small movement of the wrist and hand... Something quite small and ordinary will release some other stored fragment from other half remembered things, and the magic of the imagination suddenly starts to embellish the truth with fiction (CM 177).
Music itself is one of these associations or themes which arise in the fertile Jolley imagination, under the stimulus of some apparently unrelated observation garnered in one of those "stares". There are references in nearly all the novels and a great many of the stories to the effects of particular compositions and the work of particular composers. These references are mostly of triggered memories and associations.

However, in Milk and Honey music is central to Jacob's life. His exile from his father and the winery and his new home with the Heimbachs is to concentrate his life in the world of music. But this music is almost exclusively from the transplanted world of Vienna. It is a culture of the past and even his love for Madge cannot save him from his exile from his own time and land. Although he begins going to school when first with Heimbachs this is discontinued and like the Jolley sisters he learns everything at home. Sometimes this is with the help of Louise, just as the Jolley sisters are guided by their French or German tutors.

Literary quotations, especially biblical, are also frequent and arise in a similar way. They too are frequently central as for example the references to clay in The Newspaper of Claremont Street

Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? (NCS 26 from Isaiah 45,9).

They are often in German or from German literature:

Du der ich nicht sage, dass ich bei Nacht weinend liege. Leopold is setting Rilke to the piano and Louise is standing beside him singing . . . (MH 21).

The influence of early upbringing is evident in much of this.
The family background of pacifism and foreignness, together with the
distrust of the state education system, ensured isolation, both for
Elizabeth and her sister, from the local community. Perhaps this is
one of the strongest formative influences in Jolley's development as a
writer with the most interesting aspect in her early life being the
constant dialogue with her sister. The unhappiness of father and mother
in their uncongenial environment seems to meet with considerable
understanding from the children even though they too must endure and
suffer an experience of personal and family isolation. The outsider in
the "black country" could easily be very lonely and is certainly the
subject of curiosity if not antagonism. But the sisters themselves
supply comfort and their companionship is a constant counter element.

Maybe interest in literature and music is another influence from the
parents which helps. Also very significant and compensatory is the
interest in the doll's houses, the story of their real and imagined
inhabitants, their invented doings, their coming and goings, in an
ongoing continuous story. The development and telling of this between
them encourages the creation and habit of the fictional and imaginative
life surrounding the siblings. This story telling conversation supplies
comradeship with each other for the sisters but also peoples their world
with many varied and extreme imaginary characters:

Nympomaniacs and murderers, perplexed housewives,
greedy spoiled children, unfaithful husbands and angry
maidens aunts inhabited our dolls' houses. Apart from
the endless story from one day to the next and the next,
endless dialogues, situations and incidents, there was the
cleaning. All the tiny rooms were cleared out and cleaned
... the small windows were polished and the curtains
washed. (CM 21).
Their imagination was stimulated by the dolls' houses themselves with their open floors contrasting by their unpretentious frankness with the closed lives of the family. There is one dolls' house for each of the girls and they are placed

... side by side, opened so that the rooms and lives within were all revealed. In the magic of the opening the game was an endless story of our own composing from one day to the next for years (CM 6).

This game of story telling is a continuing one, in writing after Elizabeth goes to Boarding School, and is an apparently unending source of inspiration. So the habit of inventive story telling goes back to early childhood. This continues in the exchange of letters, at any rate in the letters which Elizabeth writes, with the separation of the girls first as Elizabeth goes to the Quaker boarding school and then nursing in wartime hospitals.

The dolls' houses, open to the sisters, nevertheless constitute a further enclave within the enclosure of the family life. Apart from the imaginative stimulation they are a symbol of the shut in isolated lives of the two girls. There is the same feeling of somewhat threatening enclosure and isolation in the houses in Milk and Honey. The foreign foreboding of the Heimbach's house and Jacob's dream house leased from the ophthalmologist with its black velvet walled examination room and even the cramped space of Madge's holiday house all seem to resemble the dolls' houses of childhood. Weekly's room and then her house on the "five acre block", the dream home for the longed for retirement retreat are similarly isolated. The first in a crowded city, the second lonely in the bush both almost oppressive in their restrictiveness.
It is the dolls' houses which are in fact the inspiration for Weekly in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. She is Joan, the loose limbed doll, too big to fit properly into any room in either house but who comes to do the cleaning, then sitting up all night because she is too big for any bed. Other dolls include the twelve small (three inches high) dolls, a present to Elizabeth when touring with her mother and Mr Berrington in Germany. Mr Berrington's presence on the journey is a surprise to the girl and she thinks also to her father. So Elizabeth is difficult and her lack of cooperation in any of the outings of the summer holiday in Germany is her way of protesting. Perhaps the dolls might help.

My mother bought them, little bendy dolls, a dozen of them All were about three inches tall and dressed in sailor suits. Immediately I was drawn into their movements, their wishes, their hopes, their endless conversations -- into their lives as they roamed in the folds of the travelling rug or when they sat, nestled together, in the palms of my hands (CM 43).

There is a general character of innocence about the way in which Elizabeth Jolley writes about life, especially about sexual desire and experience, apparently beginning with stories of the prostitute doll and the nymphomaniac doll, two of the inhabitants of the dolls' houses. The fantasy of the sisters' play with such characters seems the start of the use of the Jolley black humour. Their little drawings and the written stories, the letters to the home, though lost now, would doubtless help our understanding of the writer's development. In the anthology *Inner Cities* (202) Jolley writes about her letters to her father:

I developed the habit in my letters to my father of describing in detail the places where I lived and through which I journeyed. Wherever I went I was always composing, in my head, my next letter to him . . .
My Mother, who loved order, cleared up her house as she moved steadily into old age. Before she died she had, in a sense, tidied up, thrown away and burned up her household so that nothing remains of my descriptions posted home every week during all the years.

No doubt the stories for her sister are unavailable for the same reasons which seems particularly unfortunate as it would be most interesting to compare with the writing of the young Brontë sisters and their brother Branwell. Though in quite different circumstances both families experience a similarity of an isolation and enclosure. Both are very much dependent on their siblings for companionship and both share a vividly imaginative life of story telling. Their mutual enthusiasm for the games with toy dolls (soldiers in the Brontë case) are the source of their tales of childhood. For the Brontë young people the lives of the soldier models are a stimulus and well spring for tales as the dolls’ houses are for Elizabeth Jolley and her sister. The little books the Brontës make in such tiny editions fortunately survive and it is obvious that as the adventures of their soldier heroes and their fantasy kingdoms develop, so do their writing techniques.

Anne's soldier is called "Waiting Boy" and Branwell's "Buonaparte". Together they were either "The Twelve" or "The Young Men". They each develop personalities and characteristics of their own. Each has a country such as Parrysland, Sneachisland etc and Branwell mapped this world. There are also little books with very tiny writing, title pages and sewn bindings. They are about five by four centimetres and the writing is so small that it is hard to read. (No doubt too small for father's eyes).
Perhaps Freudian ways of dealing with repressed desires, fantasies and daydreams denied outlet in the isolated world of the Yorkshire vicarage on the moors are responsible both for this adolescent activity and for the subsequent passionate outbursts in *Jane Eyre* from Charlotte's pen (together with the Brussels experience) and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Charlotte's interest in love, Branwell's revolt, Emily's love of freedom are all in evidence in the early writing.

It would seem Elizabeth Jolley and her sister did not develop the complex systems of imaginative constructs like the principalities of Gondal and Angria, yet the writing of this early period seems quite likely to be the stimulus for continued writing through letters and diaries which built in the skills and habits of writing in a way not dissimilar to that which was so effective with Emily, Charlotte and Anne Brontë. The practice was a means of polishing writing skills and stimulating imagination to develop adventure and romance out of an enclosed and restricted life.

The need to think at length, to embroider, to investigate seems very strong in Elizabeth Jolley and even though the diary of actual events may not survive she still keeps little notes on matters which seem significant and reflect truth. Perhaps at root there is a social purpose, a reformist zeal which is the real well spring, even though this in no way denies the cathartic effect of the written word in relieving emotional tensions. It would be difficult to say that this kind of purpose is always overt or always conscious. In *The Georges' Wife* the increasing sense of guilt drives a search for forgiveness, absolution and redemption for the errors of life.
The reformist purpose may be similar to the consciousness of injustice and exploitation so strong in Dickens. Perhaps it is this driving force which gives so much vitality to Dickens' novels, arising as it frequently does from the childhood experience of his father's insolvency. Most potent undoubtedly would be his sojourn in the blacking factory. Surely this is the strength which overcomes those qualities some critics regard with reservations as flaws, faults or weaknesses in Dickens. This underlying message so graphic and sustained is the means of overcoming what might otherwise be regarded as excessive, making easier the acceptance of the idiosyncracies such as the unrealistic weakness of the virtuous heroes and heroines and the caricature grotesqueries of others such as the tyrannical Mr Squeers, the hypocritical Uriah Heep or the incredible goodness and perpetual optimism of Mr Micawber.

Elizabeth Jolley is also idiosyncratic, and is close to caricature in characters such as Miss Peycroft, Miss Harrow and Miles in *Poxybaby* or Matron Price and Miss Hailey in *Mr Scobie's Riddle*. Dr Thorne is larger than life and leaves the same lasting impression, though rather more benign, of inept pedagogy, as does Mr Squeers. Some episodes display the same grotesque quality as occurs in Dickens, such as Pip's introduction to the upside down world at the beginning of *Great Expectations*, or Nicholas' introduction to the Squeers teaching methods in Chapter 3 of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Miss Hailey's Wagnerian performance outside the men's toilet with her subsequent nude midnight sunbathing, or the reports of unregistered nightnurse Shady, in *Mr Scobie's Riddle* are examples. The "Bathroom Dance" in *My Father's Moon* shares the same
"over the top" characteristics. Arabella Thorne and the newly reconciled Edgely revealed in all their uncovered charms by the innocent Gwenda and many other scenes all partake of the quality of the grotesque and of course so does the strange cruel scene at the end of The Newspaper of Claremont Street where Weekly abandons Nastasya to freeze to death stuck in the clay beside the pear tree. These bizarre scenes, and there are many others, are typical of Elizabeth Jolley's fiction. Its nature is that of hyperbole, exaggeration and extravagance, which, like that of Dickens is in the interest of a better, kinder world. Often there is further emphasis from the strange, rather black humour which both writers share.

The "better, kinder world" is not something openly admitted as a purpose but it is certainly suggested by some of the themes. In Mr Scobie's Riddle the serious purpose may be improved treatment of the old; in Miss Peabody's Inheritance perhaps it is a concern with problems of love and loneliness and sexual diversity. In fact the toleration of sexual behaviour that departs from the generally accepted norm, especially lesbian love is a prominent theme central to the first published novel, Palomino.

Jolley admits to some social consciousness, while at the same time acknowledging the limitations of the novelist's methods:

I do not think I lack social awareness. In my earlier writing I am aware of themes which, now widely discussed, were mostly avoided. Imaginative writing can increase awareness but it cannot demonstrate the need for specific programmes. (CM 7)
As well as a concern for raising social awareness there is the interest in character itself, which Jolley feels is an important part of the reasons for writing: "There is an excitement in exploring characters and in seeing how they react with each other in different situations" (CM 6). The way in which characters appear and reappear in novels and short stories often under different names, their relationships and interactions, indicate the importance of this interest. Jolley mentions particularly a concern with survival which she believes is prominent in her work:

In my own writing I have been interested in the exploration of survival (perhaps emotional survival) resilience and responsibility. (I only know this now after several books are written) (CM 104).

In the trilogy, especially in The Georges' Wife the consciousness of guilt and desire for consolation and redemption is strong:

I am a shabby person. I understand, if I look back, that I have treated kind people with an unforgiveable shabbiness. Without understanding something of myself, how can I understand anyone else. Every day I am seeing people living from day to day, from one precarious day to the next, from one despairing week to the next without any vision of any kind of future. I understand that I, at various times in my own life, have been unable to see anything beyond the immediate (TGW 3/4).

There is the constant interest in music, even to the extent of dictating the form taken in the construction of the novels. Love is prominent; often it is sexual and may take a variety of forms not all of which are regarded as normal. The love of the father in the trilogy is a strong feature in Vera's attitudes. The love of children is almost of a negative kind in Palomino and practically absent altogether in The Newspaper of Claremont Street. It is rather contradictory in the
trilogy where Vera refuses to be parted from Helena though her mother, no doubt correctly, believes she could provide a better home for the child than Vera can, yet when going to Australia both Helena and Rachel are left for ever with Mr George's sister. The figure of the outsider is prominent in many ways but especially as immigrant. Vera is herself always on the fringe of things. The role of literature and art is important with many references both to classical works of art and to the bible and to books of the main English tradition as well world literature especially, Russian -- Tolstoy is a favourite.

Humour is very important also in the overall impression of Jolley's writing yet sometimes there are suggestions of an elusiveness, even a lack of this quality, or at least the recognition of it, in novels like, Palomino, Milk and Honey and The Well. There are ingredients of wry humour in the trilogy though perhaps rather more subdued than many readers would prefer. There is little in these three books of the cheerful rollicking nature of the fun in Miss Peabody's Inheritance and Foxybaby.

These are all factors which contribute to the appeal of Elizabeth Jolley's writing. Overall there seems to be a desire to understand the motivations and the origins of character and the strange collection of apparently haphazard experiences in life which is the lot of the Jolley creations just as it is for most people. As the Author's Note explains in the story collection Five Acre Virgin "The characters appear to inhabit a crazy world. I think it is our world" (FAV 9).
The contribution to the cause of feminism is considerable through the questioning of the standards of the patriarchy, especially in the challenge of sexual "deviation" and the recognition of lesbianism. Though Jolley does not think of herself as a feminist and disclaims any association with the movement she is none-the-less very much involved in defying any acceptance of standards of conduct which limit the rights and freedoms of the individual. Sexual behaviour itself has attributes of humour for Jolley, in whatever form, including the "normal" heterosexual activity of married "couples". This word is of significance to Vera, anathema to Miss George and so to Oliver George: "Why do you bother, Vera, ... with such an ugly word" (7GW 182). Words are important to Elizabeth Jolley, as is the construction of her novel, yet Jolley appears to debunk postmodern literary theory. She does this very gently, through the thoughts of Miss Thorne when she arranges the slices of cold meat in neat rows on the school platters recalling, still without comprehension, her reading on the flight back from Europe:

... The discussion falls on the concept of structuralist reading and the exposure of the artistic process as being an achievement, on semantic levels, of harmonious surfaces built on insoluble conflicts, for example, the lexical, the grammatical and syntactic levels, with an ideological solution to the contradictions in the mode of discourse, the angle of narration and the symbolic structure of a culture ... (MPI 151)

The use of fantasy, of musical forms and constructions, of situations concerned with writing itself, as in Miss Peabody's Inheritance and Foxybaby exploring the relationship of writer and reader (and their interchangeability) suggests that Jolley supports postmodernism and feminism in a similar way -- denying that she ever does anything of the
kind, refusing to classify or be classified. The changing and
developing tastes of the Jolley readership may well be on a converging
course with that pursued by Jolley herself. She is an author who has
given both poststructuralist writing and feminist freedoms a wider
acceptance in contemporary society.

Whatever may be the situation about Jolley the feminist and Jolley
the postmodernist she is clear in her own refusal to be labelled as
belonging to the feminist group and appears reluctant about association
with postmodernism. But she does make a modest statement about her
objectives. Through her writing Jolley hopes to help make the patterns
of living a little clearer and if possible the lot of others a little
better:

It seems to me that pleasure in living must come
from within. There are certain thoughts and feelings
and experiences which are consoling. Over the years
in my fiction I have tried to put these things in
particular and known places in my fiction. . . . a sort
of scattered catalogue of consolation (CM 113).
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