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"WRITING TO UNDERSTAND": A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MAJOR
WORKS OF RUTH PARK

Thesis submitted by

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in March 1998

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Languages, Literature and Communications
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J. Greaves

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the major works of the Australian author, Ruth Park, a writer who, it is my contention, has been unduly neglected academically. Ruth Park has written in every medium and every genre for every age group of Australians for over fifty years. She is, arguably, one of our most prolific writers but her enormous output has not been achieved at the expense of quality, as her numerous prizes and awards attest. The body of her work encapsulates a convergence of concerns manifested through an increasingly skilful handling of complex issues, yet her novels have retained their popularity over many years because she writes, not of extraordinary people and events, but of the quotidian concerns of ordinary people, of issues which she finds both culturally and personally significant. In seeking to understand herself and her culture, she has produced a body of work which anatomises both; in representing Australians to themselves, she has necessarily written from within the culture as it has evolved over the years and, simultaneously, has had a considerable influence upon that culture. While her work is personally representative, therefore, it is also both social commentary and social history.

Until comparatively recently, academic attitudes to Australian literature have been dominated by colonial deference to the traditions and the greatness of our English literary heritage. In this post-colonial era, such attitudes are changing rapidly, but there are resultant gaps in our awareness and appreciation of our own literary heritage, the almost complete absence of studies of Ruth Park's work constituting one such major hiatus. Recent academic recognition of Park's contributions to our literature will almost certainly lead to many studies of her work. This thesis endeavours to be an introduction, a reference source, for those that will follow.

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INTRODUCTION

"Human beings have an inbuilt weakness for stories," Ruth Park observes; "a good writer can capture a reader very speedily" (Mitchell ML MSS 3128). Park has been capturing readers (and listeners) for almost sixty years, longer indeed, if her juvenilia are taken into account. "From my earliest days I was a kind of writer," she relates in her autobiography; "I wrote constantly, on butcher's paper and the back of the kitchen door. I didn't know it was writing, I called it 'putting things down'" (*A Fence Around the Cuckoo* 38). Some of these early efforts were published in the *New Zealand Herald's* children's page, and Park has rarely been out of print since. Her most recent major work, *Home Before Dark*, co-authored with her son-in-law Rafe Champion, was published in 1995, and she is still working. Between these earliest and latest publications, she has produced a body of work that, in volume and variety, must be unequaled in the annals of Australian literature. Park has written in every genre for every age group of Australians, and her voluminous output has not been achieved at the expense of quality; she has won numerous awards in various fields of writing both in Australia and overseas, including the prestigious Miles Franklin Award. Many of her books have become bestsellers, again both in Australia and elsewhere, and several have been adapted for film and/or television. A number of her novels have never been out of print since the date of their first publication (in some cases a period of fifty years) and Robert Sessions, Publishing Director of Penguin Australia, acknowledges that she is consistently one of Penguin's best-selling authors (Telephone Interview 5 June 1997). Yet, although literally thousands of articles have been published in magazines and newspapers about Park and her work, she has received virtually no serious or sustained academic attention. This fact alone is an interesting comment on the status and development of Australian literature.

Ruth Park published the bulk of her books for adults (eleven out of fifteen) between 1948 and 1961, a time when, with the exception of a few writers such as Henry Lawson, Miles Franklin, Henry Handel Richardson and Christina Stead, Australian fiction was not highly regarded, academically. Certainly the two major Australian literary journals, *Southerly* and *Meanjin*, had commenced publication in 1939 and 1940 respectively, but Park's "kitchen-sink" novels (McKernan 47), several of which were serialised in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, did not fit comfortably within the criteria of either, as outlined by John Docker in his study of *Australian Cultural Elites*. Docker maintains that *Meanjin*, while professedly egalitarian, saw as its role the fostering of Australian literature through the cultivation of an intellectual élite which would protect culture from such perceived dangers as the low standards and crass commercialism of the mass media (89). The journal was also strongly influenced by the opinions of Vance Palmer who, while extolling the virtues of robust, masculine writing, regarded fiction by women as undisciplined, facile and eminently suited to the "commercial" novel (96, 102). *Southerly*, for its part, promoted literary criticism as an enclosed entity, divorced from such matters as social issues, and concerned with moral evaluations. "The result," Docker maintains, "is one of intellectual narrowness, of undeniable staidness and unadventurousness" (127). Commenting upon the state of Australian literature, in her 1948 review in *Southerly* of *The Harp in the South*, Marjorie Barnard makes observations which are simultaneously original, perceptive, and yet conformable to the literary climate in which she is writing:

Australian writing is still so near its beginnings and so relatively small in bulk that its pattern shows up clearly to the surveying eye . . . The whole is greater than and governs the parts . . . Older literatures, seen in retrospect, eroded by time, come to appear the work of a number of isolated men of outstanding ability. The mediocre but, in their trends, socially significant, writings of their contemporaries are forgotten . . . Thus history inevitably changes by its selectiveness the nature of a literature. It leaves a string of pools where once a river flowed. It changes literature's social value or its relations to society, changes it from expression to comment. This historical weakness reacts on contemporary writing importing into it the "star" system and leading many to assert that without a quorum of

"geniuses" no literature exists; which is rather like restricting geography to mountains. (182)

Barnard sees clearly the distortion imposed by the "star" system or, as it has become known more recently, the canon, and is aware that ideas, literary or otherwise, are not conceived in isolation but emerge from the "river" of thought and ideology constantly flowing through any culture and being reflected in its literature. What she fails to see is that "literature's social value" is not a thing of permanence, enshrined in history. A work's "relations to society", the value and relevance accorded to it, depend not so much upon what that society reads as the way in which it reads. As Laurie Hergenhan observes, "Each generation writes its own literature and should produce its own literary histories" (xiii).

Perhaps because she had been in Australia only a few years before writing her first novel, Park's fiction of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s is not influenced by the "one powerful tradition" identified by Barnard in Australian writing: the "predilection for the bush over the city" (183). Not only are Park's characters urban dwellers, but the major protagonists are women or young girls, and the stories are related from a feminine, even feminist point of view quite alien to that of the masculine bush ethos. During the 1930s, there had been, in Australia, an increase in the number and quality of novels written by women; indeed Drusilla Modjeska maintains that, "Women were producing the best fiction of the period and they were . . . a dominant influence in Australian literature" (1). What amounted almost to an incipient wave of feminism, however, was submerged in the tide of nationalist sentiment accompanying the Second World War and it was not to resurface for several decades. Nor, in spite of showing evidence of a keen social conscience, are Park's books intrinsically novels of social protest, a trend that was strong in Australian literature in the aftermath of the Depression and the Second World War. Further, during the period of Park's most prolific output of novels for adults, Australian literature was not included in university curricula and, by the time that

subjects in Australian literature were initiated, during the 1960s, Park had turned her attention from adult novels. In the sixteen years that elapsed between publication of *The Good Looking Women* and the Miles Franklin Award-winning *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, Park wrote prolifically, particularly when she became the sole support of five children after the early death of her husband. Much of this output, however, was unpublished, being radio scripts and adaptations of novels for film. Her published work, apart from *The Companion Guide to Sydney*, consisted mainly of journalistic articles and books for children, neither of which, at that time, were studied in universities. Thus when, eventually, work by Australian writers, work by women, work for children, and journalistic writing began to appear on university curricula, Park's work did not conform to any identifiable trends or periods; she was difficult to categorise and therefore easy to overlook when courses were being designed. She was, moreover, popular with the reading public at a time when popularity was frequently equated, by the academic élite, with pulp fiction. In recent years, academic attitudes and syllabuses have become democratic in more ways than one. Park was awarded the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies Award in 1992 for *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, the first volume of her autobiography; she also won the Lloyd O'Neil Award for services to the book industry in 1993 and was made an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of New South Wales in 1994. She had already been made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1987 for services to literature.

Apart from the literary merit of Park's work, its "social value [and] relations to society" are of particular interest. No author writes in a vacuum; all are influenced by, and in turn have some influence upon, the culture in which they live. Patrick White, for instance, has had an enormous effect not only upon Australian literature, but also upon the way in which this literature is regarded both at home and abroad. His winning of the Nobel Prize in 1973 gave Australian literature status overseas and it is probably fair to say that the reflected glory of this

recognition gave confidence and impetus to other Australian writers. This, coupled with the eclecticism resulting from post-war immigration, has had a dynamic and vitalising effect on Australian writing. It is no reflection on the quality or value of White's work, however, to say that it is read mainly by the intelligentsia; his attitude to Australia was always ambivalent; his characters are frequently involved in philosophical struggles for self-knowledge and meaning in life; he is not, in Walter Benjamin's sense a storyteller, for "A great storyteller will always be rooted in the people," (101). Park's fiction is less intellectually taxing than White's, it is written about unexceptional people and is aimed at the general public. "A storyteller . . . is all I have ever wanted to be," she asserts in her autobiography (*Fence* 10). While she customarily establishes the setting of her stories quite early in the text (and, in the case of her adult novels this is usually Sydney or small-town New Zealand), her characters could be people anywhere, their lives and concerns are typical of low-to-middle-income Westerners. They are, therefore, characters with whom many readers can empathise. This is, of course, a conscious choice on Park's part, since writing is her livelihood. For much of her writing career, certainly during the period in which most of her adult novels were written, she and her husband, fellow-author D'Arcy Niland, supported themselves and their five children on the proceeds of freelance writing at a time when it was generally believed, as Eleanor Dark declared, that "No one in Australia can make a living from writing" (*Fishing in the Styx* 92). Moreover, Park is acutely aware of her readers: in a letter to Beatrice Davis, editor of Angus and Robertson (18th November 1984), she states, "If I am good at anything, it is with readers. Trust me that I know the questions they ask . . . where they need to be emotionally satisfied, where they need to be teased" (Mitchell ML MSS 3128). As proof of her assertion, she points to the uninterrupted publishing history of many of her works, which we have already noted.

Park is one of very few authors who have written for every age group: small children, school-age children, young adults and adults. Some adults reading her

recent works, her autobiographies and the biography of Les Darcy, would have listened to episodes of the Muddle-headed Wombat stories on radio forty or even fifty years ago, and the books derived from this series are still being republished. Her novels of the Sydney slums are discussed by sociologists and human geographers, and are sometimes set on school reading lists, as are her novels in the comparatively new genre described as "young adult fiction": *My Sister Sif* and *Playing Beatie Bow*. Education authorities in both Australia and New Zealand have commissioned plays and stories. She has written for radio, film and television, and has been a frequent contributor of articles to leading newspapers such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *National Times*. It is probably not an exaggeration, therefore, to say that most Australians, knowingly or otherwise, would have read, heard or watched something written by Ruth Park; she is, as William Fraser remarks, "Something of a national institution" (18).

The "relations to society" of Ruth Park's work must therefore be of considerable significance. In *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, Graeme Turner makes some interesting observations upon the reflexive roles of author and society. Firstly:

Literary production proceeds from sources *within the culture* which are related to those which generate other kinds of cultural production; and although literary fiction is formed in different ways and asks for different kinds of reception, its relation to the culture is no less direct, no less mediated by historical forces outside the author's control. (7. Italics added)

and secondly:

We have long been happy to accept a view of the novel as, in Culler's words, 'the model by which society conceives of itself, the discourse in and through which it articulates the world' . . . Thus the study of film and fiction narrative as the product of culture eventually - and necessarily - becomes a study of representation, for narrative then also has a cultural function of making sense of experience, of filling absences, of resolving contradictions (and generally, of filling the role ascribed to it by Levi-Strauss as analogous to myth). (9)

When the body of Park's work is considered as a whole, it becomes evident that, for her, the narrative "function of making sense of experience, of filling absences, of resolving contradictions" is dual. Through the medium of her writing she has sought understanding of both her culture and herself, each within the other, and has relayed her observations through stories in which the themes are enacted against issues which she finds significant, both culturally and personally. As a young writer, she may not always have done this consciously; in an interview in 1993, she remarks, "Occasionally I will be reading something I wrote years ago and I think, 'yes, of course, that is right, but I didn't know it then'. How was it I put it into fiction?" (Veitch 116). As she has matured, however, her writing has become more reflective, the themes more complex and skilfully handled, the anatomising of both culture and self more conscious. In the same interview, conducted upon the publication of the second volume of her autobiography, she acknowledges, "I am writing to understand" (Veitch 116). Consciously or otherwise, all narrative is inevitably influenced by the culture from which it springs and, in turn, helps to shape that culture by representing people to themselves. In view of Park's prolific output and its continuing popularity, the role of her work in both reflecting and shaping Australian ideology has been and remains an important one. A comprehensive study of her work, therefore, is well overdue.

It is also, within the confines of one thesis, impossible. The volume and variety of the material would provide scope for several such projects; she has, for instance, published in excess of fifty books and her radio work alone runs into thousands of talks, plays and serialized episodes. This thesis will be confined, therefore, to an examination of her major works: the novels for adults, her two-volume autobiography and the biography of Les Darcy. Because, however, of the volume and quality of her work for children (several of her books having won prestigious awards), a chapter has been included on this genre, although it has only been possible to cover a few of the works in any depth. Also, after some

consideration, a small chapter on *The Companion Guide to Sydney* has been included. Park has written a number of non-fictional works about Australia which, again, are beyond the scope of this thesis, but she has researched and written about Sydney almost since her arrival there in 1942; it is where she has spent the greater part of her life and her autobiographies, the biography and many of her novels are set there. Indeed, Sydney and its history have been the inspiration as well as the setting for a great deal of her work, and the brief discussion of the *Guide* has been included because of the city's centrality in her life, her writing and her life-writing.

Even though the thesis is confined to Park's major works, a single critical and theoretical approach has proved difficult since several different genres have had to be considered. Critics and theorists of fiction do not often discuss biography and autobiography, for instance, while specialists in the field of life-writing rarely examine children's fiction. This thesis is not, therefore, an attempt to analyse Park's work in the light of any one particular theory. Rather, in order to examine with academic rigour her writing in different genres, while still presenting a thesis which would form a coherent and consistent whole, I have utilized the various critical and theoretical approaches which seemed most relevant and illuminating to the individual genres while employing theories of narrative, such as those of the Bakhtinian circle, throughout. Over all, Park's work has been considered in relation to the culture and ideologies from which it has been drawn, and which it both reflects and has influenced. As a long-established storyteller to and about Australians, as "something of a national institution", as a major author, highly regarded and frequently awarded both here and overseas, Ruth Park has been unduly neglected academically. This means that there is a conspicuous void in the literary history of our culture, a void that this thesis will attempt, in part, to fill.

CHAPTER 1

ALL A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE: THE UNUSUAL SEQUENCE OF THE
DARCY TRILOGY

The Harp in the South, the second novel in Ruth Park's trilogy about the Darcy family, was published in 1948; the third volume, *Poor Man's Orange*, followed in 1949 but, somewhat irregularly, it was not until 1986 that the first book of the series, *Missus*, made its appearance. In this "prequel", as it has been dubbed, the author has expanded on and elaborated comments and conversations in the earlier novels to fashion the story of Hughie and Mumma, their meeting, mishaps and subsequent marriage. (A reader already familiar with the Darcys is likely to experience a curious mixture of sensations: anticipation, revelation and recognition combined with an odd feeling of *déjà vu*, as these "earlier" events unfold.) *Missus*, however, is not simply a belated explanation or scene-setter, it is a novel in its own right and its themes and emphases are different from those of its precursors. Ruth Park herself objects to the term "prequel" insisting that *Missus* "is only a novel about some of the characters who later appeared in *The Harp in the South*" (Letter to the author. 23 June 1996). More importantly for literary criticism, however, a prequel written almost forty years after its "predecessors" provides a fascinating opportunity to study both the development of a writer and the changing literary and societal climates which inevitably influence her work and, in turn, are influenced by it.

The Harp in the South is set in Surry Hills in the late 1940s. The main characters are the Darcy family: Mumma, Hughie, Grandma, Rowena and Dolour, and their boarders Patrick Diamond, the Orangeman, and Miss Sheily with her illegitimate and mentally-handicapped son, Johnny. But Surry Hills itself is also a character in this novel, and with the Hills comes a teeming, heterogeneous cast of minor characters. Indeed, much of the richness of the book, much of its enduring appeal, lies in the covert

suggestion that the story of the inhabitants of Twelve-and-a-half Plymouth Street is merely one of hundreds that Surry Hills could yield. From the opening lines of the novel, there is the intimation that story upon story has been lived out in these hills "full of Irish people . . . [whose] grandfathers and great-grandfathers arrived in Sydney [and] went naturally to Shanty Town . . . because they were poor" (1). Every one of the once-respectable, now rundown tenement houses is the silent repository of generations of stories of which the narrator has selected only one. Yet within the chosen tale there are tantalizing glimpses of many other stories just waiting to be told in the ongoing saga of Surry Hills: the stories of Lick Jimmy, the Sicilianos, the Mendels, Charlie Roth and his bagman, of Thady, of the nuns and of Delie Stock. Yet the story of the Darcy family is not conventional in having a clear-cut beginning and ending, a premise raised and answered, a hero and heroine, or, indeed, even a plot. As Ruth Park herself says: "With such a group of characters there certainly could be a plot, but I did not want a plot. I just wanted to tell about these people as if they were real human beings. Plots rarely occur in life, and life, as far as I was capable of depicting it, was what I wanted" (*Fishing* 140). So the novel consists of a series of episodes which comprise a segment of the Darcys' story, the chronicle of a particular time in their lives, just as their lives are only one episode, one ingredient, in the story of Surry Hills. In this aspect, the novel is reminiscent of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which recounts the thoughts and actions of a handful of people against the backdrop of bustling activity that comprises a single day in the life of Dublin.

As will become apparent, Ruth Park often employs an episodic narrative form but at the time of the novel's publication the lack of a conventional plot attracted negative comment from literary critics. In some cases this may have been because modernist experimentation with the form of the novel had not received a great deal of attention in Australia. It is more surprising, however, in the case of Marjorie Barnard, whose own work was already displaying modernist tendencies. Reviewing *The Harp in the South*, she commented:

This is good journalism, not good literature. The book is a bit of high-class reporting of imaginary events, a string of human interest stories rather loosely strung together. Some of the stories . . . have nothing to do with the main narrative. The story progresses episodically . . . The "plot" is discursive in the extreme and is not resolved. (184)

Another critic, anonymous but probably Douglas Stewart, who edited the "Red Page" of *The Bulletin* from 1940 to 1961, was apparently also nonplussed by the absence of plot:

It is a confused, disjointed, sentimental work, altogether lacking in the dynamic force of plot and characterisation necessary to hold the reader's interest. Its central theme, insofar as a theme can be detected, is the love-life of the heroine Rowena. (2)

Yet as early as 1925, Virginia Woolf, in her essay "Modern Fiction", had posed a question regarding the traditional novelistic format:

The writer seems constrained . . . to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccably that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour . . . But sometimes . . . we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this? (160)

Woolf's own novels, of course, are quite *unlike* "this".

Critical opinion of the novel was not all negative, however. *The Harp in the South* had won a competition sponsored by *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1946, and the judges commented:

The Harp in the South is a social documentary picturing the life of a worker's family in Surry Hills, with the sociological and ethical values subordinated to the purely human interest. The environment of the slums and the lives of the Darcys are blended with conviction, making this work superior to *Jonah*, Louis Stone's classic of the Sydney larrikin.

Its social realism, handled in the J. T. Farrell manner, is warmed by a sympathetic understanding of the character and by the rich Celtic colouring. The emotional gamut runs from tragic intensity, the horrors of the violent and bug-ridden background, and the pathos of poverty to touches of lyrical beauty and full-bodied Irish comedy of character. Indeed, a striking feature in which this novel was superior to other

competitors was its dash of the saving grace of humour. The characterisation is full of vitality and colour. The dialogue rings authentic. The style, with its Australian idiom and Irish flavouring, is forceful and vivid. (Mitchell, Moore, and Gellert 8)

The publishing firm of Angus and Robertson did not agree. Although, as part of the prize, the first three place-getters had been promised publication, *The Harp in the South* did not appear in book form until 1948, Ruth Park being informed by the senior editor of Angus and Robertson that, "It's not the kind of book A & R cares to publish but we have a gentleman's agreement with the *Herald*" (*Fishing* 151). (Ironically, *The Harp in the South* and its sequel, *Poor Man's Orange*, have never been out of print since their initial publications in 1948 and 1949 respectively.) It is worth noting that in this immediately post-war period national sentiment was running high and "some critics . . . felt . . . that Australian writers had a duty to write great novels of which the nation could be proud" (McKernan 7). Perhaps some critics had expected that the *Sydney Morning Herald's* competition would finally produce the Great Australian Novel that would establish Australian literature firmly within the canon of English literature; if so, a novel about slums, fecklessness and apathy might not have been what they had in mind. The disagreement in literary circles as to the value of the novel, however, was mild in comparison with the vehemently expressed opinions of the general public. The story was serialized in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in January 1947 and caused a furore. Amongst the more virulent comments were: "It is no better than an open sewer, spreading disease and death all around" (Disgusted 2); "Must our literary talent dig into cesspits to produce mental food for the people?" (Another Critic 2); "I am ill, recovering from an accident, but while there is breath left in my body I must protest against such an outrage against decency as is portrayed in the first chapter of the prizewinning novel" (Anderson 2). That a book, which is now considered suitable for inclusion on school reading lists, could have been the source of such controversy in 1947 raises a number of interesting issues about both the Australian literary climate and the social mores and ideologies of the period. It is a fascinating and revealing chapter in

the history of our developing national literature and one that will be examined before the discussion turns to the trilogy novels themselves.

In 1946, World War II had been over for a year and life was returning to normal. It seemed possible, once again, to face the future with confidence, to resume peace-time pursuits and to embark with enthusiasm upon new enterprises both personal and national. In this spirit, the announcement by the *Sydney Morning Herald* of its first literary competition received much publicity; First Prize was two thousand pounds, a very considerable sum indeed, and the novels securing the first three places were guaranteed publication. The prize-winners were announced on the front page of the *Herald* on Saturday, 28 December 1946 under the headline (which, fifty years later, needs no feminist comment): "Woman Wins £2000 Novel Prize", and the event received considerable coverage. The editorial on Page 2 is devoted to the competition, Pages 8 and 9 of the same issue contain the judges' reports and synopses of the first, second and third prize-winning stories, while Page 7 is devoted to a three-part article: "Personal Stories of Prize Winners". It is important to bear in mind the fact that, although *The Harp in the South* was serialised in the *Herald* during January 1947, the outcry commenced before that, i.e. when no one, other than the judges, could have read anything more than the synopsis and the prize winner's "Personal Story". The synopsis, really a book review, is favourable; the author, Shawn O'Leary, declares: "In flat statement, the prize-winner, Ruth Park's 'The Harp In The South', stands upright beside the cream of fiction which has entered the country in the last year". However, he also says: "Miss Park has spun her story about the slums of Surry Hills and smashed out a book which cannot be for the squeamish." He mentions briefly Hughie's drunkenness, Roie's unmarried pregnancy, her visit to an abortionist, the attack on her by drunken sailors, Miss Sheily's self-flagellation, and Delie Stock, "owner of several houses of magdalenes". In spite of his concentration on the more sensational incidents in the story (after all, it is a newspaper review), O'Leary maintains that, "Paradoxical as it seems, 'The Harp In The South', although it is strong meat for the weak-stomached, is a moral

book. . . . If the book is super-realistic, it is never deliberately bawdy." Then, significantly, he offers the opinion that, "'The Harp In The South' will be accepted overseas as one of the finest things out of Australia" (7). (The effect of this final comment will be considered shortly.)

The "Personal Stories" of Jon Cleary and Esther Roland, second and third place getters respectively, are narrated in the third person, with first person quotations. Jon Cleary was in London at the time and Esther Roland lived in Brisbane and could be contacted only by letter and a barely adequate trunk-line telephone connection. Ruth Park, however, was in Sydney and could be interviewed; her story is written almost entirely in the first person, within quotation marks, with only one authorial or interviewer's interjection: "said Ruth Park (Mrs D'Arcy Niland)" (7). Thus, while the stories of Jon Cleary and Esther Roland are biographical, that of Ruth Park is autobiographical. The Australianness and patriotism of both Cleary and Roland are emphasised. The reader learns that Cleary was born and educated in Sydney, and details of his war service are given. The Staff Correspondent comments: "He works hard. 'You Can't See Round Corners' occupied eight months in various New Guinea bases where he served". Cleary says that he has gone overseas to learn more about the craft of writing but, "'I have every intention of returning to Australia,' he said, 'and anything I write will always have an Australian background, or at least an Australian theme.'" In the photograph which accompanies the story, Cleary wears military uniform, epaulets clearly visible on the shoulders; this, it should be remembered, is more than a year after the end of World War Two (7).

The title of Esther Roland's "Personal Story" is "Station Life at First Hand". She is the ideological stereotype of the young Australian housewife of the period, the "angel in the house", albeit one who is middle-class and talented. The reader learns that "Esther Roland . . . is a pen-name hiding the identity of a 28-year-old mother of two young children, Mrs. G. H. Job". The backdrop for her fictional characters is "'Glen

Ribble', at Barraba, a property of some 12,000 acres, which has been in the family since the turn of the century . . . great-grandfather Crowley trekking to the district in a dray about the 1860's [sic] , from the Hawkesbury, where he had previously farmed". She is quoted: "Your glorious telegram arrived when I was busy with the washing - for I am a housewife with two young children and washing takes up quite a lot of my time." She reveals that she intends to use her prize money to employ part-time domestic help so that she may "achieve the difficult feat of being a career woman without neglecting her family". She has the laudable female virtue of self-deprecation: "I don't know if it is self-confidence that leads people to think they can win prizes for novel-writing, but it seemed terribly like conceit to me, and I kept making up my mind to enter, and then unmaking it. I would not have gone on with it if it had not been for the encouragement and help of my mother." Details of her husband's war service are given and the reader learns that she has occupied herself during his absence with raising children and writing. A brief description of her physical appearance is provided and the story is accompanied by a photograph of a pleasant-faced young woman with a steady, thoughtful gaze. It is revealed that, during the telephone interview, her husband interjected the comment that her hair is "mousy" and, the reader learns, he "got away with it" (7). Felicitous domesticity.

Whether by accident or design, Ruth Park's story is quite different. Her photograph is a posed, studio portrait in which she wears her hair in the upswept, glamorous style of the late 1940s; the effect is much more sophisticated than that of Esther Roland's photograph. As has been noted already, she talks about herself rather than being discussed by another, the contrast lending an air of self-preoccupation. Yet it is unclear whether she has written the piece specifically for the occasion or whether it is a series of comments assembled into a monologue by an interviewer. In even sharper contrast to the other two entrants, Ruth Park reveals that she has lived in Australia for only a few years, having been born and raised in New Zealand. Her husband has not served in the armed forces, instead being "manpowered" to work on the outback

shearing circuit. (The article does not reveal that D'Arcy Niland endeavoured to enlist but was rejected because of a heart condition; this health problem, considered insignificant at the time, was to kill him twenty-five years later.) Ruth Park discusses herself and her experiences in Australia from the viewpoint, and in the terms, of a professional writer, observant, somewhat detached and, occasionally, with a callow insensitivity towards the reactions of an Australian reading public. She reveals that she has "made a deliberate study of [the shearers'] conversation and habits of speech", describing the "Australian speech idiom and slang . . . as a hybrid form of speech [which] derives, I think, from Eastside Cockney and perhaps, also, a very old Irish idiom". In the light of the prevalent Australian opinion of New Zealanders' accent, this is not tactful. Worse, Park debunks the great Australian legend of the bushman:

Most of the shearers I met in the outback were illiterate, and they possessed only a very limited vocabulary . . . When short of an appropriate word they unhesitatingly used an obscenity or some startlingly lurid word which gave force and character to their expression. They did not always intend to be profane. Those obscenities were often slipped in as unconsciously as a polite and educated person would use such exclamations as 'dash' and 'bother'. I seldom mixed freely with these men. They are naturally suspicious of 'women from the city' and it is extremely difficult for a woman like me to become a confidante of them. All that I learned from them I gathered from overheard conversations and wisps of talk, usually unknown to the men themselves, and except for their oddities of speech and their profanity they really have very little bearing on my book. (7)

From the viewpoint of an author, this is simply detached observation; from the viewpoint of the Australian-in-the-street, it is patronising and iconoclastic. For many Australians, the colourful nature of the national idiom is a source of perverse pride, evidence of an independent and irreverent nature; the fluency and power of a "bullocky's" language, for instance, has long been celebrated in myth and verse. In the present era, four-letter obscenities are used so commonly as to have lost their shock value but, in most social situations in the 1940s, this was not the case. Sidney J. Baker, author of *The Australian Language*, gives some indication of society's ambivalent

attitude to strong language, citing Will Vernon's opinion, expressed in the *Bulletin* in 1922, that: "The true Australian oath was a thing of beauty, providing a speedy means of relief for depression, exasperation, hard luck . . . It was descriptive, vigorous and decisive . . . It was seldom used in idle or casual conversation" (195). Also, in 1947 in the aftermath of the War, national feeling was still running high and the popular image of the Australian soldier was of a hard-fighting, hard-drinking, hard-swearing larrikin, one who could also, incidentally, "obtain" anything anywhere. Popular literature abounded in stories of their exploits, both verbal and acquisitive; Joe Harman, in Neville Shute's *A Town Like Alice*, is a typical example. While, to some extent, the image may be merely part of a national myth, the verbal aspects at least have Baker's support; he observes: "Few vulgates have left a more emphatic impression upon our language than the Australian soldier" (159). At this time in particular then, a shocked reaction from a newcomer to the colourful local idiom would probably have been a source of amusement; objective criticism, however, could have given rise to resentment.

The poised sophistication of Park's photograph contrasts sharply with the title of her "Personal Story", "Author Lived in Surry Hills Tenement", in which she describes in some detail the substandard accommodation which she was forced to rent in Surry Hills ("The house was infested with a horrifying assortment of domestic insects and an army of ferocious rats") and the violence that was a part of everyday life there (7). She was later to reveal in her autobiography and various interviews that many of the incidents she relates in *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man's Orange* were adaptations of ones which she had witnessed and even experienced herself. However, these revelations were still to come and, although in her "Personal Story" Park relates how she came to understand the people of Surry Hills and to appreciate many of their qualities, some readers undoubtedly found her attitude patronising. Also, in spite of the fact that slum clearance projects had been recommended for some time, with Surry Hills mentioned specifically (Howe 59), many Sydney citizens were outraged by Park's depiction of their city especially, of course, those who did not live in similar conditions.

Since Jon Cleary's novel, which was also set in the slums, aroused no similar antipathy, Ruth Park believes that the outcry against her book stemmed from two facts: she was not Australian and she was a woman. In accordance with the social shibboleths of the period, Jon Cleary, as an insider, was permitted to depict Australian slums realistically while Ruth Park, as an outsider, was not. Also, "In an age when the words *should not* and *ought not*, with or without justification, were profusely applied to women, I had stepped over the invisible boundary line," she declares (*Fishing* 159). There is some evidence to support the latter opinion, at least, amongst the letters to the editor which poured in:

I have five nieces and I am sure I should not like to give them this story to read, even if, from a literary point of view, it is admirable; (Wilson 2)

If the story was really written by a woman, then I am very sorry, for it destroys all the nice things I have believed about women's minds; (R. Campbell 2)

It is difficult to understand where and how a young woman writer could have received an education low enough to enable her to express in such terms of indecency her ill-concealed hatred of certain of her fellow-creatures. (Steel 2)

There is, however, another notable strand in the letters to the editor; one that throws a light on the ideology of Australians in the era that, although post-war, was still not post-colonial. In 1947, Australia was still a comparatively young nation with a small population. As A. A. Phillips points out, we tended to measure our standards and achievements against those of older and more populous countries, especially England, and "the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon achievement" (89). His phrase, "The Cultural Cringe" has become embedded in our social consciousness. The great waves of post-war immigration were beginning and Australians were very conscious of possessing a land of peace and plenty. Richard White, in *Inventing Australia: Images*

and Identity 1688-1980, describes how the focus of Australian ideology was shifting, during this period, from the bush ethos to the urban, or rather the suburban. The stereotypical ideal of manhood had shifted from the bushman and the digger to the surf lifesaver, especially in Sydney, and the "Australian Way of Life" was a much-vaunted, if rather vague, concept (154-65). By and large, Australians of this period tended to believe that the Australian way of life was superior to any other conceivable way, and yet simultaneously to feel that they lacked the culture and sophistication of older nations and might appear, in the eyes of the world and especially of Britain, gauche and uncivilized.

It is in this context that Shawn O'Leary's comment that *The Harp in the South* "will be accepted overseas as one of the finest things out of Australia" is significant. Australians did not want to be regarded as slum-dwellers; suppose overseas readers were to envisage the Darcys' lifestyle as the Australian Way of Life! In her autobiography, *The Missing Heir*, Kylie Tennant, who has also written about the Australian poor, reveals: "I was forced to send all my earlier books to England to be published because, as Ken Prior [editor of the *Bulletin*] told me, they were 'such a bad advertisement for Australia'" (91). Tennant's early books were published during the 1930s and 1940s, and she recalls that, "In those days, perhaps in these days also, writing was considered a branch of publicity - national publicity, if you like. *Tiburon* suggested that something had gone wrong somewhere and that was not the impression a patriot would wish to give in the shining circles of omnipotence in London" (101). Evidence of this attitude is found in the letters to the editor of the *Herald* on 4 January 1947, the day serialization of *The Harp in the South* began and before any members of the public could have read the text: one letter exclaims, "Think what a bad advertisement it is for Australia!" (Pulley 2), while another complains, "It is hard to find any really well-written novel to send abroad which does not convey the impression that we are a lugubrious and complaining race" (Hague-Smith 2). In the days that followed, hundreds of letters poured into the newspaper, some applauding and some reviling the novel. The

Herald exploited the situation by devoting a separate section of the paper to a symposium of these letters and by printing the numbers for and against rather like a progressive cricket score ("The Harp in the South' - Readers' Opinions" 2; "Readers' Views on Prize Novel" 2; "More Praise for Prize Novel" 2). The following are comments from some of those letters (*Italics added*):

To think that in a young clean country (clean as compared with the older countries) such unadulterated filth should be given first prize, *and put out to the world as representing Australian life*, makes my blood boil; (Anderson 2)

Miss Park's novel . . . is also a misleading one and *not a book that one would send out of the country*; (Surry Hills 2)

It must inevitably bring Sydney and many of its citizens into contempt; (Steel 2)

I shall be sorry if the outside world has to hear all this dirt about Australia; (Wilson 2)

The story has no merit, *and can only add to the damage already done to the prestige of the Australian people by the silly Dad and Dave pictures*. (R. Campbell 2)

These comments reveal an almost adolescent hypersensitivity to the opinions of others. It is unimaginable that English people would fear being judged, in their entirety, as exemplifying the characters and conditions in novels by Dickens and Orwell, Americans that they might all be viewed as characters from Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, or that the French would assume that the world would regard them as personifying Zola's creations. At the height of the controversy, Warwick Fairfax, Managing Director of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, wrote an article entitled "Why We Print the Story", in which he applauds the judges' decision and states:

A novel is not a means of recommending its own or any other country to the good opinions of the rest of the world. That is the work of tourist bureaux, diplomatists and trade missions.

The question what anyone thinks of Australia after reading "The Harp in the South" matters as little as what they think of medieval Denmark after reading "Hamlet." What does matter is what they think of Roie and her mother, of Hughie and Grandma. (2)

It is pertinent to note that, only a few years earlier in 1943, the awarding of the Archibald Prize to William Dobell's modernist portrait of Joshua Smith had aroused considerable controversy (J. Campbell 185-202), and also that, a little later in 1949, when Russell Drysdale's *Woman in a Landscape* was awarded the Melrose Prize in Adelaide, a similar furore erupted and letters of protest poured into the Adelaide newspapers, *The Advertiser* and *The News*. In his discussion of the latter incident, Geoffrey Dutton includes a significant quotation from one such letter:

Unfortunately for the Commonwealth it will be necessary to prevent this picture appearing in England and Europe, where the effect would certainly defeat the immigration policy, as any decent person would abhor the idea of his wife or mother appearing like the picture in a few years after arrival in this country. (*Russell Drysdale* 74)

Dutton observes that:

Such a fracas would not be worth recording were it not for the light it throws on the relation between an original artist and his subject matter. Here was Drysdale, who has often been called the most distinctively Australian of modern painters, being told by a large section of the community that he could not tell the truth. (*Drysdale* 78-79)

Prior to having been entered for the Melrose Prize, *Woman in a Landscape* had been "hanging peacefully in Sydney in the Macquarie Galleries" (*Drysdale* 72); the publicity accompanying the award brought the painting to the notice of a public unaccustomed to the modernist movement in art and literature. The episodes of *The Harp in the South* serialized in the *Sydney Morning Herald* are accompanied by a series of illustrations by James Phillips. In black and white, naturally, these sketches are in the social realist style, and have a stark, sometimes Hogarthian quality. Once again, it is unlikely that the trend towards social realism in both art and literature, obvious to those engaged in these fields, would have been apparent to the average newspaper reader, who

might not often buy new novels and rarely, if ever, visit an art gallery. The starkness of the illustrations, therefore, would have heightened the sensational aspects of the work. It is significant also, that, inserted at the head of each episode, there is a brief synopsis of the previous one, in which the sensational is emphasised, e.g.: "Head of the house is the drunken, irresponsible Hugh . . . In two attic rooms of the Darcy's [sic] hovel board Miss Sheily (Christian name unknown) who has an illegitimate idiot son" ("Second Instalment of 'The Herald's' Prize-Winning Novel", 6). It seems obvious that the paper was fuelling the controversy which must have been good for business. It should be noted, of course, that many people in literary circles, particularly other authors, upheld the decision of the judges; Kylie Tennant, Jean Devanney, Christina Stread and Vance Palmer all wrote to Ruth Park expressing support. (*Fishing* 157)

Of her critics, Ruth Park observes: "Because I wrote about poor people I was a Communist. On the other hand because I wrote about poor people I was a capitalist - I wrote about them only to jeer, or, alternatively, to make money" (*Fishing* 149). Ironically, for all the social realism in this and subsequent novels by Ruth Park, in literary and/or political circles she is not regarded as a social realist writer. Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather observes that:

Park, who directly reflected what she saw and transformed it into a conventional novel form, emphasising narrative and without developing theme extensively, is not a social realist as understood by literary critics. Writers of social realism rejected bourgeois fiction with entertainment as its prime aim, and set out instead to explore the nature of, and to expose the factors responsible for, the social crisis connected with the Depression, the rise of Fascism and the Second World War. (209)

Somewhat similarly, Susan McKernan comments that: "Socialist realist criticism of Ruth Park's work . . . noted that she was sentimentalising the national tradition and that her 'kitchen-sink' novels exploited the poor rather than liberating them" (47). Her "novels of city misery could not belong to a socialist realist canon since they depicted a degraded and passive minority suffering poverty", whereas "the social realist theory"

required the depiction of "the working class as protagonists rather than victims" (26). The matter may be simply one of terminology; although not explicitly discussing Ruth Park, David Carter, for instance, draws a distinction between "social realism" and "socialist realism". In his essay, "Documenting and Criticising Society", he notes that there was, from the 1930s to the early 1950s, an international "sense of social crisis [which] was a distinctive response to the Depression, international fascism, and then war" (370). "In Australian criticism since the 1940s," Carter goes on, "the term 'social realism' has overlapped with 'socialist realism'. But while the latter is derived from an explicit theory, the former is rather the result of a *lack* of theory" (381). Marion Zaunbrecher, in "Variations on Red: The Political Ideologies of Australia's Women Novelists", describes Ruth Park as a "moderate" but believes that her political awareness increased between the publication of her first two novels and that of *Swords and Crowns and Rings* (549), the later novel dealing largely with the Depression. The charge of sentimentality in Park's work is usually linked to an observation that she is strongly influenced by Dickens. Whether or not this is the case, it is sometimes forgotten that Dickens had strong convictions about the conditions of the poor in his era, and played quite deliberately on the consciences of his affluent readers in order to bring about social reform. Ruth Park has stated that she did not have reform in mind when she wrote the novel (*Fishing* 86), but it is a fact that slum clearance, which had been mooted for years in Sydney (*Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board Report 1936-37*), was given a sudden impetus in the aftermath of the controversy.

As the commentators on social realism have noted, Park does portray her slum dwellers as victims, victims of "landlords who build tenements: cramming two on a piece of land no bigger than a pocket handkerchief, and letting them for the rent of four" (*Harp* 1). Yet the critics who were so willing to credit Esther Roland's backgrounds of station life as authentic, because described from first-hand knowledge, seem unwilling to extend this credence to Ruth Park. Yet, as revealed in her "Personal Story", she has lived in Surry Hills and her descriptions of substandard housing and exploitative

landlords are authenticated by the *Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board Report 1936-37*. The Board's description of conditions in much of the inner suburb housing perfectly depicts Number Twelve-and-a-Half Plymouth Street:

The Board has found hundreds of dwellings entirely without washing and bathing facilities. The lack of these facilities and of proper water supply for domestic needs is general in houses throughout the inner suburbs. Of the houses particularly inspected, 32 per cent are without bathrooms, 51 percent without washhouses, while 88 per cent are not provided with a kitchen sink or with water laid on to the kitchen. . . . The Board has compiled . . . a list . . . of the names of owners of houses within the five (5) mile radius which have been inspected by it and are classified as being of the slum or sub-standard type. It will be noted that included in the list are the names of members of Parliament, municipal councillors, estate agents, and their relatives, leading business firms, and of well-known citizens. (30)

Park's characters are victims of low wages and exploitative bosses, victims of a housing shortage exacerbated by war, victims of their own ignorance. Yet perhaps what critics and public alike found so unsettling about Ruth Park's slum dwellers, possibly without realizing it, is that they are apathetic. Yet this, I would suggest, *is* social realism. In her autobiography, Ruth Park describes the extremely difficult time her parents had during the Depression when her father became ill and lost his business and the family was forced to live in a variety of very substandard accommodations. Yet her parents would always calamine walls, plant a few vegetables, do whatever they could to alleviate the situation. So when she came to live in Surry Hills, she at first found it inexplicable that if, for instance, a window was broken, the typical response on the part of the tenant would be to tack up a piece of cardboard, and twenty years later the cardboard would still be there (*Fishing* 9). This attitude is reflected in the novel: poverty alone could not prevent Mumma from mending holes in cardigans or having a pair of shoes repaired in time for a special occasion like the quiz show.

Sociologists use terms such as "learned helplessness" and "powerlessness" to describe the state of mind of people who have become convinced that no amount of effort will substantially improve their lot. Ruth Park had witnessed this phenomenon in

Auckland, where, as a journalist, she frequently visited poverty-stricken families in the company of social workers (*Fence* 250-54); she discovered it again when living in Surry Hills. Park's parents engaged with the conditions imposed by poverty because the experience was new to them; they still had confidence in their ability to improve the situation. The Darcys, however, like so many of Park's neighbours in Surry Hills, exhibit the lethargy of disillusionment, engaging, for instance, in only desultory and intermittent warfare with the blood-sucking bugs which infest their bedrooms. Readers in more sanitary habitations might find this indifference inexplicable, but, as Roie says: "'We've done this a thousand times . . . A month later we've got them worse than ever'" (*Harp* 90). The narrator comments: "Captain Phillip brought them in the rotten timbers of his First Fleet, and ever since they have remained in the old tenement houses of Sydney, ferocious, ineradicable, the haunters of the tormented sleep of the poor" (*Harp* 9). It is unlikely that, as a young author, Park had any formal knowledge of sociology, but her first novel, and her comments on it in her subsequent autobiography, give evidence that she was already searching for understanding of herself and the culture in which she lived, the one in relation to the other.

Her characters *are* victims; they *are* apathetic; but this is not sentimentality, the charge levelled by Marjorie Barnard and several other critics. H. M. Green, for instance, describes the novel as "sentimental", "overdrawn" and, curiously, lacking "that primary requisite in the novelist, sincerity", a quality he finds amply displayed in the second- and third-place-getting novels (136). There may be touches of sentimentality in the book, but this is understandable in the first novel by a writer who is still in her twenties. For instance, F. C. Molloy (320) singles out the sentence: "Dolour's hot heart flamed with love for her mother" (18) and indeed it may lack sophistication. Nevertheless, it expresses a depth of childish emotion in which Park has maintained firm belief. More than thirty years later, and as a much more experienced writer, she describes Abigail Kirk as "a hot-headed rag of a child, [who] vibrated with devotion for many things and people, including her parents" (*Beatie Bow* 1). Much later again, and

writing of herself this time, Park comments: "As with a dog, a child has a burning heart when it comes to those it loves. I had this kind of closeness with my mother and father" (*Fence* 5). The sentiment is unchanged, but the writing has matured. It would appear that many of the critics making this charge have confused the author with her characters. The focus for their charge is usually the closing line of the novel: "'I was thinking of how lucky we are,' whispered Mumma" (*Harp* 229). From Mumma this is sentimental and a little pathetic, but it is also admirable in the unworldliness of its values. From the author, it is ironic. A more perceptive critic, Ken Goodwin, notes that Park achieves "a balance between sentimentality and anti-sentimental deflation" (186), a view with which Geoffrey Dutton concurs, remarking that "Humour and few illusions make sentimentality difficult" (*The Australian Collection* 188). Of herself, in a television interview with Peter Ross in 1994, Ruth Park declared: "I'm as sentimental as a taipan!" (*Sunday Afternoon with Peter Ross* 27 Mar. 1994).

Park's portrayal of character is vivid but indirect. In a technical sense, her characters are revealed gradually through assemblages of "various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum" from which the reader infers personality traits (Rimmon-Kenan 59). The strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices, faith, foibles and eccentricities of her protagonists emerge gradually yet clearly in the various episodes that make up the tale, and are sketched with wit and irony but also with sympathy. Early in the novel, for example, through an illustration of the cramped inconvenience of Number Twelve-and-a-Half Plymouth Street, Park ironically suggests Hughie's fecklessness and unreliability. The description of the lower floor of the house ends in "the little flagged yard, where a drunken garbage can stood with its lid over one ear" (2). Immediately afterwards, in an understated analogy, the reader learns that Hughie has hit his head on the sloping bedroom ceiling

a thousand times, both drunk and sober, and it was the main cause of his frequent absence from work; as he pointed out to Mumma, by the time he'd shaken his brains back into their proper place it was past the

hour and no use going to work at all, seeing that a man was fined for every minute he was late. (2)

Simultaneously, of course, the reader begins to suspect the reason for the Darcys' poverty-stricken existence. Hughie, it appears, cannot spare a full afternoon to rearrange the furniture, "for Saturday afternoon he always spent at the pub, and Sunday afternoon he spent sleeping off Saturday afternoon" (2). In these passages, the narrative combines direct, albeit ironic, authorial diegesis with free indirect discourse. Its effect is to make apparent Hughie's fecklessness but in a humorous way that will not alienate the reader's sympathy. Later, however, when Hughie both accepts money from a notorious prostitute for Roie's treatment and then, afraid to explain to Mumma how he came by so much wealth, squanders the lot, there is no such narrative amelioration (120-24). The reader's response to Hughie is being manipulated, held in ambivalence. In *The Drums Go Bang!*, Park says of her own attitude to the people of Surry Hills that although "she agreed with hardly anything they thought or did . . . she felt she understood them. She certainly liked them" (181).

In a novel which focuses largely on the viewpoints, the problems, failures and achievements of women, the character of Hughie is perhaps the most clearly delineated. When Hughie is drunk he feels important; he sees himself as wearing a "red uniform", as being "six foot high and . . . accompanied by the grave and pompous rattle of a drum" (121); this is humorous and a little pathetic. But also, when he is drunk, Hughie hates Mumma, "Because in her fatness and untidiness and drabness she remind[s] him of what he himself [is] when he [is] sober" (62). As psychological insight, this is shrewd; as characterization and narration it is economical, invoking pity for both Hughie and Mumma in the hopeless futility of their existence. Hughie is a coward: when Mumma decides that Roie and Charlie can have Miss Sheily's room, "Hughie's face darkened. He pictured himself coming home drunk as usual on Friday nights, and Charlie's presence damping all his performance" (217). Yet there is pathos in Hughie's heartfelt prayer: "Lord . . . for God's sake give me some encouragement so that I'll have something to live

for, me and me wife" (179). When, therefore, Hughie briefly and mistakenly believes that he has won the lottery, the episode has a poignancy that would be lacking if Park had not managed to keep the reader's sympathy with him, in spite of all his faults.

Yet conversely, in an episode almost entirely centered on Hughie, the reader learns a great deal about Mumma in just a few lines. Poor muddled, untidy Mumma is magnificent as she carries her husband through his despair:

Mumma's eyes shone: "Oh Hughie, a fur coat, and an electric stove!"
She was just as delighted as if she had really received them. Hughie felt proud of his generosity, and expanded visibly ... and he fell asleep in her arms completely comforted. (189)

And then we learn that, "He did not feel the heave of her breast, or the heartbroken sobs that struggled to free themselves from her hungry and disappointed heart. 'It's not for the likes of us,' she breathed. 'Not ever.'" (159) Again, this is a passage which may be open to the charge of sentimentality but, as Geoffrey Dutton has observed, "Few novelists have succeeded in writing about the urban poor without being sentimental - Balzac and Zola did not, for example, and certainly neither did Dickens. If Park does veer rather close to sentimentality, she is in good company" (*The Australian Collection* 188). It is notable that the characters in this novel, in common with those in most of Park's fiction, are neither profound nor, in the conventional sense, heroic; they tend, rather, to be somewhat inarticulate and stoic. Within the limited range of their experience, they know love and hate, joy and sorrow, fear and courage, hope and despair, all no less poignantly for being limited in scope. Their aspirations are low but they endure. They are not epic Australians, just everyday Australians, and are therefore, perhaps, more capable of establishing reader rapport. Some critics, employing a psychoanalytic approach to reader-oriented theory, argue that reading satisfies a psychological need in the reader; Norman Holland, for instance, maintains that "All of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation"

(124). The Darcys are neither taciturn bushmen nor bronzed lifesavers, but then few of Park's readers would fall into either of these categories (particularly the women). The Darcy's lifestyle certainly falls short of the vaunted Australian Way of Life, but it could impart a feeling of complacency, even of comforting superiority, amongst readers for whom the heroic bush and/or beach ideals are unattainable and therefore vaguely belittling. It is worth reiterating, at this point, that Australians have continued to buy *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man's Orange* for fifty years., evidence that, even at this early stage in her career, Park is "good . . . with readers" (ML MSS 3128).

Park frequently achieves her effects through the juxtapositioning of opposites. For instance, the constraint imposed on the poorly-educated slum-dweller by inarticulateness is made apparent through Roie. The girl's exaltation as she experiences first love is described by the narrator, "she found that there had mysteriously developed in her a sort of divine aloofness", and is deflated immediately by Roie's own ungrammatical diction: "'Poor old thing. After all, Auntie Josie's got all them kids to look after" (*Harp* 51). Delie Stock's "interesting face . . . not really dirty . . . but not washed . . . for a long, long time . . . [with] furtive, small eyes . . . brazen with amorality" (48) is the more crude and worldly-wise through contrast with the elegantly austere innocence of Sister Theophilus, whose "clean face . . . had never known powder or even scented soap" (50); Surry Hills is the more crowded and squalid in comparison with the beach where Roie and Charlie spend their idyllic honeymoon, the "Real Australia" so near and yet so far for the inhabitants of Number Twelve-and-a-Half; and, in the last few pages of the novel, Mr Diamond's agony is the greater for his isolation in a house of happy people. Antithesis lends emotive impact to her characters' situations.

Similarly, the graphic detail of some horrific incidents contrasts sharply with the rollicking comedy of other episodes. Johnny Sheily's accident is witnessed by Dolour: "She stood still and stared at the red squashed melon on the road, with little teeth scattered about like grains of bloodstained corn" (29); there are the bedbugs, that hang

"in grape-like clusters . . . thin and flat and starved [which] before the dawn . . . would return to their foul hiding-places round and glistening and bloated" (9); and there is Flo who "took off her gloves and arranged them fastidiously upon the window-sill" before "she sprang upon Molly's broad body, and . . . began to trample her with her high heels, digging them deeply into her soft breasts and abdomen" (99). Yet the appalling detail of these scenes is interspersed with episodes like that of the New Year's bonfire, when firemen retaliate for a fusillade of potatoes by turning their hoses on the crowd and Delie Stock has her first bath for thirty years (8), and the epic battle fought between Hughie and Grandma over the Christmas pudding in which Grandma, having first "dipped her flag without compunction" for a sip of brandy, eventually carries the day, "vanquish[ing] Hughie, and eighty-three too" (59-61).

The episode of the bonfire exemplifies that feature of the novel described by Mikhail Bakhtin as "carnival", a feature that, he maintains, has its origins in medieval practice: "Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act," he observes (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 122). "The main arena for carnival acts was the square and the streets adjoining it . . . for by its very idea carnival *belongs to the whole people*, it is *universal*, *everyone* must participate in its familiar contact" (128). Bakhtin also points out that, "Deeply ambivalent . . . is the image of *fire* in carnival. It is a fire that simultaneously destroys and renews the world" (126). On New Year's Eve, as they do every year, the inhabitants of Surry Hills participate in building a bonfire to celebrate the death of the old year and the birth of the new. Everyone participates: the "foreigners", the Sicilianos and Lick Jimmy, make their offerings and are accepted into the fold, and even the supercilious Miss Sheily contributes two old chairs and joins the throng around the blaze "a look of supreme unconcern on her face, because she thought it beneath her to go to watch a bonfire" (*Harp* 79). Eventually, "down in the dirtiest part of Surry Hills two hundred people linked hands and danced like red-lit gnomes about the fire" (81). During

carnival, normal law and order are suspended, even overturned, and the carnival mood is mocking and subversive. In Surry Hills, although the bonfire is a New Year's Eve, "The authorities always forbade it, and nobody ever took any notice of what they said, but went on lighting New Year bonfires just the same" (*Harp* 76). Authority, in the guise of a lone policeman, watches tolerantly and, when the firemen arrive, determined to extinguish the blaze, they are pelted with potatoes (83). The evening is a huge success; "The New Year was here, and bright and shining it stretched before them, unblemished by any failure, unsmudged by sorrow or ignominy" (84). Bakhtin also points out, however, the characteristic ambivalences of carnival, the combinations of life and death, death and rebirth, laughter and sorrow, wisdom and stupidity, youth and age. Again, this is apparent in the novel: in the midst of the celebration, both Miss Sheily and Mumma remember their sons who will never see in another New Year, and Grandma, having been in the thick of the action, receives a thorough drenching that will result, eventually, in her death. Then, simultaneously with the death of the Old Year and the birth of the New, Mrs Siciliano gives "a shrill scream and [bends] over, clasping her hands to her abdomen" (84); a new little Siciliano is about to be born.

This is, of course, primarily a novel about Irish Australians - The Irish in the Antipodes. Both Ruth Park and D'Arcy Niland come from Irish-Australian families and, although Park insists that her grandmother is *not* the grandmother of *The Harp* (*Fence* 88), all of Grandma's idiom and most of her characteristics are drawn from Park's memory. In this sense, it is a social document, chronicling the lives of Irish settlers and their descendants, not on the land or the goldfields, but in the crowded tenements of a city. The narrator's observation that, "The Hills are full of Irish people. When their grandfathers and great-grandfathers arrived in Sydney they went naturally to Shanty Town, not because they were dirty or lazy, though many of them were that, but because they were poor," is confirmed by Renate Howe. In *Slums and Suburbs: A Social History of Urbanization*, she declares that, "Many of the inner suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney had a quarter or a third of residents who were born in Ireland or were the

children of Irish-born parents" (56). The acute post-War housing shortage, with resultant exorbitant rents, which caused Ruth Park to live in Surry Hills for two years gave her ample opportunity for observation. The novel which resulted is, therefore, a reflection of the lifestyle and the spirit of a large and ultimately influential segment of our population. It is a social document in another sense, as well. In 1994, *The Australian Magazine* featured an article on a small street of tenement houses in Sydney's Balmain during the period 1900 to 1994 (Legge, "Our Street"). Nowadays, these small, historic houses fetch enormous prices and are inhabited mainly by affluent, two-income families. They are small, low-maintenance, inner-city town houses, which have been renovated again and again in line with the latest fashion in home improvements. The inhabitants have little knowledge of their neighbours and there is no such thing as a community spirit. Only a few of the oldest residents can remember when it was different; when everyone knew everyone; the kids all played together; there was not much money but very little crime; people knew each other's business and looked after each other. Plymouth Street may be more rundown than this street ever was, but the community spirit is the same. Both the *Australian* article and Park's novel document an era in Australian city life that has passed. In "Early Postwar Sydney: A Comparison of Its Portrayal in Fiction and Official documents", Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather discusses *The Harp in the South*, *Poor Man's Orange* and Dorothy Hewitt's *Bobbin Up* from the point of view of a humanist geographer. She writes:

Literature is a valid source for geographers. In particular, it can offer the humanistic geographer a source of information about the experience of living in certain environments and about the way people thought about their lives. When writers are dealing with their firsthand experience, literature can also be a source of factual data. (204)

A comparison of the three novels with such sources as the 1947 *Census*, the *CCPS*, Jones (1972), Manning (1978) and Spearrit (1978) . . . indicates that the novels are reasonably sound as to *facts*. However, as far as *experience* goes, they are limited, for they represent the lifeworld of only a few people, and an incomplete picture at that. Nevertheless, it is precisely in their limitation to a specific point of view that the products of imaginative writers are useful to geographers, for they offer access to different dimensions of the same reality. In particular, Park's and Hewitt's novels are valuable in that they present the

viewpoint of women, which are [sic] unlikely to be accessible through official documents relating to early postwar Sydney. (220)

In *Poor Man's Orange*, Ruth Park depicts the closing of the era so vividly brought to life in the earlier novel. In real life, the furore over *The Harp in the South* precipitated the slum clearance over which the city authorities had procrastinated for so long and the fictional inhabitants of Plymouth Street react with consternation to the inexorable approach of the demolition crews. This is probably the crux, the covert theme of all three novels in the trilogy. Although they realise that their living conditions are abysmally substandard, the residents of Surry Hills do not really want change. The sense of being powerless to change anything of consequence, the paucity of opportunities to better themselves and their surroundings, the inherent sense of being just another generation in the long line of tenants who have endured the slum conditions, have resulted in an apathy that is self-perpetuating. Exhibiting what psychologists describe as the "non- and counter-productive behaviours people engage in when they feel that some outside force completely determines what happens to them" (McGarty and Haslam 336), the inhabitants of Surry Hills will grumble, but will do nothing. Just as they have not attempted to improve their living conditions, they have made no effort to move to a better area. They do not save and will never attain financial security nor acquire the material comforts of life, but this apparent fecklessness is rooted in the grim but tacit awareness that, on meagre wages, the period of saving necessary for such a project would be intolerably long. As Teather comments: "It required enormous willpower for a resident of suburbs such as Surry Hills and Redfern to resist accepting the image of slum dwellers with which they were branded, and to resist pressure from the community to conform" (215). But Park's message in these early novels is one that permeates all her fiction: people must take responsibility for their own lives, they must break negative patterns or succumb. In her first two novels, she underlines the tragedy and irony that a new people in Australia Felix, that vast and undeveloped land, should

unquestioningly accept the confinement and deprivation endemic to the overcrowded slums of the world's older cities from which so many of them have come.

The difference between apathy and self-reliance is made apparent in Roie and Dolour. Gentle and loving, Roie is a positive force within the family; after her death, it seems to Dolour "as though the place were falling to pieces without Roie, as though she had been the gentle binder on the toppling walls of their family" (*Orange* 185). Yet Roie does not want to leave Surry Hills. When Charlie goes house-hunting in better areas, Roie insists on accompanying him, even when physically exhausted, knowing that her obvious pregnancy will preclude their chances of obtaining alternative accommodation, when landlords have hundreds of applicants from whom to choose. Roie is a loving mother, but she will raise her children in the slums, killing but never eradicating the rats and bed-bugs that prey on them, condemning them to a life of limited vision and little opportunity, because she feels safe in the confined, slum environment she knows so well. "If Twelve-and-a-half Plymouth Street smelt, at least she knew where the smells came from. If it was rowdy, the row came from those she loved" (*Orange* 54). Although Dolour's passionate love of her family remains undiminished, she becomes aware, as she matures, that Mumma's standards are slipping, that she is "tired of battling against things without making an inch of headway", and, further, Dolour realises that "it would have been the same with Roie. The slums would have sapped her, too" (*Orange* 155).

Dolour is different. Park makes this apparent through the analogy of the poor man's oranges of the title. They are:

marmalade oranges, the ironically christened poor man's oranges that starred the winter orchards. Their skin was so smooth and shiny, their pith so plushy, their juice so tangy that they might well have been little wild grapefruit. But they were so bitter that they made Hughie's face screw up wryly at the very sight of them. Dolour loved to eat them, going round chewing at them, oblivious to the looks of loathing on the faces of her family. (*Orange* 199)

Unlike Roie, Dolour wants to leave Surry Hills, but a prolonged and painful eye condition which prevents her from studying, ends her education and with it her hopes of securing a good job in a better part of the city. It also means that she escapes the attentions of the adolescent boys of the area; a situation about which she has mixed feelings. But through the pain, both mental and physical, Dolour learns her own strength and her powers of endurance. In spite of the dark glasses she is forced to wear, she sees more than those around her. She sees the way life in Surry Hills slowly but inexorably erodes the spirit of its inhabitants, how their moral and behavioural standards adjust to their circumstances, how their self-expectations diminish in tandem with their self-respect. Although, like most adolescent girls, Dolour longs for the admiration of the opposite sex, she realises that her chastity, or rather her prerogative to give or withhold assent, is inextricably bound up with her self-respect. Roie, in her naïveté, had confused Tommy Mendel's sexual importunity with love. Dolour is not tempted succumb to the lure of quick sexual gratification, and is aware that she could never satisfied with a marriage not based on love and mutual respect.

Dolour knows, as Charlie once had done, the necessity of escape from the insidious disease of apathy endemic to Surry Hills. The disease will not be eradicated by slum clearance; like the bed-bugs it will recover to plague the inhabitants because, as the old priest, Father Cooley observes: "There's people here who will make slums wherever they go. They won't be different, even though the shape of the house is changed" (*Orange* 269). In the closing pages of the novel, when Dolour and Charlie come to the realisation that they will make a new life together, they are standing on the cliffs of Botany Bay, "first of the coast to be seen of white men's eyes" (274). Dolour, reflecting on the convicts and their sufferings, concludes that "It was right that this wild and brilliant land, this last, lost fabulous continent should have such a beginning in all that was best and worst, and most passionate and vital in mankind. For the felons, in spite of starvation and flogging and despair, had survived. They had survived" (*Orange* 275).

In *The Harp in the South*, Surry Hills is vital and dynamic, teeming with people, most of them Irish; but in *Poor Man's Orange* that Surry Hills is dying. By the end of the book, the tenements that have housed generations of emigrants and their descendants are being pulled down, and the people are leaving. Throughout the whole of the second novel, the emphasis has been on age and decay: Mr Diamond dies alone and in agony; Lick Jimmy's large family arrives from China and moves in with him joyfully, but Lick Jimmy, his purpose achieved and his work taken over, suddenly becomes old; Sister Theophilus is transferred and Dolour, stricken by the loss of this fixture of her childhood, is astonished to realise that her grief is shared by the nuns who are losing a sister as she has lost Roie; Mumma has become old and is no longer able to cope with Motty's wildness, and the end approaches even for Surry Hills' two old stalwarts of vice and virtue: Delie Stock, suddenly old and ill, is carried from her domain in an ambulance, bequeathing to the assembled crowd the "ten cases of bombo in [her] backyard" (235); and Father Cooley, aging and racked with lumbago, knows that his parish labours are almost over.

Hughie, feeling and dreading the onset of old age, has a desperate love affair with a beautiful, sensuous young woman; but, as is typical of Surry Hills, she is a prostitute and he sickens of his situation even before he loses her (and his teeth in the process) to a pimp. Hughie has come to the realisation that "he could never recapture his youth any more, that time was final, and not all the human pride or anguish in the world could gainsay it" (*Orange* 254). Mumma, aware of Hughie's infidelity, suffers deeply, but it does not occur to her to leave him or to use his guilt to bring about some improvement in their relationship; she simply wants to go on as before: "Oh, Lord, let it be next week, or next month soon, so that we can forget it all, and be like we usta!" (*Orange* 254). When Hughie sees into his future, and realises that "He'd be alone except for Mumma, sticking around as she had always stuck around, wanting to make things comfortable for him, and not much else", he knows that this is more than he deserves

and he feels "his youth leave him for all time, unregretted" (*Orange* 263). And Mumma is content. "We're still together, Hughie," she says, and reflects, "Ah, I don't mind where we go, if only he's with me" (*Orange* 263). Hughie's one attempt to break free of his circumstances is fore-doomed and Mumma has never wanted freedom; Surry Hills is as much a state of mind as a place in which to live.

It is only Dolour, lover of the bitter, poor man's orange, who knows that resignation is not enough, that acceptance of life's hard lessons does not mean giving up, that endurance is not apathy, and that values and beliefs are worth fighting for:

She knew the poor man's orange was hers, with its bitter rind, its paler flesh, and its stinging, exultant, unforgettable tang. So she would have it that way, and wish it no other way. She knew that she was strong enough to bear whatever might come in her life as long as she had love. That was the thing, the backbone of endurance itself, and she who possessed it needed no other weapon. (*Orange* 276)

Dolour, Charlie and the children will leave Surry Hills for the country, but they will not take the slums with them when they go. Like the convicts, they have survived hardship, sorrow and temporary defeat, but they will make a clean new life in a clean new land, the kind of life their immigrant ancestors sought unavailingly. In this early novel, Park is already stressing a theme that will permeate much of her fiction: the resilience, the indomitability of the human spirit.

As has already become apparent in the case of Roie, the inhabitants of Surry Hills are constrained not only by poverty but also by inarticulateness. Their daily experience is almost an inversion of what Bakhtin terms "polyphony", cultural bilingualism. He points out, for instance, that "Latin literary language in all its generic diversity was created in the light of Greek literary language" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 62), and, of course, for many centuries after the demise of the Roman Empire, Latin was the *lingua franca* of the educated peoples of the Western World. The people of Surry Hills are in a position probably not unlike that of the common people in the countries

subjected by the Romans: they do not speak the language of the powerful. They are unable to give adequate expression to their feelings of injustice. Roie and Charlie, for instance, in an increasingly desperate search for accommodation, are reduced almost to fawning upon a repulsive woman who has a room to let. When the harridan realises that Roie is pregnant, however, she becomes virulent on the subject of "filthy women". Roie "wanted to speak loudly in defence of the nobility of pregnancy, of the fact that she was proud and exultant to be carrying a child", but she does not have the command of language: "'It's a pity you haven't had a child of your own, and then you'd know what a silly old tart you are,' she said (68). And Charlie, equally insulted and repelled, is similarly unable to achieve dignity: "'She's probably had one, and buried it under the rhubarb,' said Charlie, trying to be calm and self-contained and only succeeding in being pure Surry Hills" (69). Within the Darcy family, "Only in the little girl, Dolour . . . was the fierce positivity of the Celt, a surging energy that made her long for the world she did not know, for thoughts she could not yet comprehend, for experience she could not yet encompass . . . She was on the threshold of articulateness, and did not know it" (8). Conversely, however, Park believes that while many poor are disempowered by inarticulateness, some first- and second-generation Irish-Australians have inherited from their forbears an agility with the English language denied to many of their compatriots. The impoverished Niland family, for instance, had a reverence for words; on a day when she did not know where their next meal would come from, Barbara Niland bought her son a ninepenny dictionary that he craved (*Fishing* 70), and Niland was to say later, "Other people . . . had pianolas and ate the best cuts of meat, but we had the English language" (Park, "A Great Man for a Walkabout", 50). In spite of the fact that her father-in-law was an irresponsible alcoholic, Park "approved of his bold hand with the English language . . . He . . . used words like addictified, fundamentacious and furiosity . . . and . . . almost won [her] friendship with his term for pregnant - spermatished" (*Fishing* 19). Of her own Irish grandmother, she says:

Early in life she became deaf, and so retained her seductive accent, and a sumptuous supply of picturesque words and phrases. When I married into the

very Irish Niland family, I was able to beat them at their own game any tick of the clock, because of Grandma's vocabulary. (*Fence* 90)

Dolour's Grandma has many of the characteristics of Park's own, including the way with words:

How could Mumma . . . exclaiming at the clouds of dust in old, apt, unique phrases that came to her tongue unbidden as birds, know that those same phrases had been used for centuries, rising out of the brilliant logic of the Irish? She only knew that her mother had used them, and standing there amongst the settling curds of dust she remembered that wicked, invincible little mother who had made them Australian, and said a Pater'n'Ave for her peace. (*Orange* 8)

It is Grandma's inventive approach to language (and, it must be admitted, to veracity) that enables her to best Hughie in the Christmas pudding battle and, when the nuns come to visit Roie, to take control of the occasion and "give the poor locked-up soul[s] pleasure" (133). It would seem, therefore, that both grandmothers have an instinctive grasp of the Foucauldian concepts of discourse and power; or, in Bakhtinian terms, that theirs is a laughing, subversive, carnivalesque way with language, one that enables the traditional Irish underdog to occasionally turn the tables and gain the upper hand.

Despite the pervading sense of futility, of helplessness in the face of approaching age and the relentless advance of the demolitionists' bulldozer, *Poor Man's Orange* is vitalised by humour, that "full-bodied Irish comedy of character" which the judges commended in *The Harp in the South*. Dolour's despair over her acne is an emotion known only too well by many adolescents, but her visit to the Chinese herbalist, and its results, are farcical. Yet the vision of "Dolour's desperate eyes" staring out of the irremovable mask lends such a pathos that the reader is likely to share Mumma's struggle between tears and laughter (66-67). As any entertainer knows, the best clowns are the those who make the audience cry a little. Similarly, when Hughie discovers Dolour improvising a luxurious sunken bathtub from the laundry copper, while ingeniously sitting on the soap to keep her "crankcase off the hot bottom", the result is hilarious (179). Yet the impossibility of achieving a modicum of privacy in the

overcrowded house with its lack of basic facilities adds poignancy to Dolour's mortification.

Dilapidated, inconvenient, poorly-designed and overcrowded, the "cranky brown house" (*Harp* 1) is still, by comparison with the flop-house, a palace to Mr Reilly. Park's concern for the underprivileged, and her scorn for those, including governments, who neglect and exploit them, are even more evident in this novel than in its precursor. The flophouse, constructed of "asbestos sheets, plywood, and hammered out iron" (100), consists of a series of seven-foot-square cubicles:

Each cubbyhole was the home of an invalid or old-age pensioner, most of them once good hard workers, who had committed the mortal sin of living too long. Unable to find anywhere to live for the sum they could afford, they dragged out their lives in cold, misery, and squalidity in places such as this, erected hastily by landowners who saw a good opportunity to clean up regular small profits by charging these people ten shillings a week each for rent. . . .

Two pound two and six a week, and they hadn't been getting that much a short while ago. That meant they had about three bob a day to feed, clothe, warm and amuse themselves. (102)

Hughie, of course, immediately relates the tiny sum of money to the most important thing in his life: he "quickly translated it [three bob a day] into beers, and in horror translated it back again even more quickly. It was plain that a pensioner could never have a beer" (102-103). Yet again Park has used humour to underline her point. Hughie is a poor man but he is affluent by comparison with the pensioners.

Similarly, Park uses humour to emphasise the injustice of the health system. Gentle, modest Roie suffers agonies of shame as she is subjected to the indignities routinely inflicted upon poor women in public, teaching hospitals. Stripped of all dignity, she is regarded simply as piece of demonstration equipment for gynaecological instruction:

She kept her eyes closed tight, hearing what the doctor said to the students with a shame too great to bear. She felt no resentment or anger, nothing but terrible

humiliation, of uncleanness and violation of her innermost womanhood. Her soul crept into a dark corner. (31)

Not so the woman in the next cubicle who possesses a subversive, carnivalesque contempt for the pomposities of hierarchy:

"It's for the good of all women, you know."

"Yeah? Then why not use all women for guinea-pigs, eh? Why only public hospitals? Do you ever go into a posh private hospital out Vacluse or Point Piper with your tribe of pop-eyed young louts and let them have a squint at one of them pampered poodles of women? Nice stinkeroo if you did, eh? But us, we gotta come to public hospitals because we're poor, and so we can be pushed around without so much as a kiss-me-foot. We can't kick. Get outa me bloody way before I let you have it in the eye!" (32)

If the reader experiences a sense of vicarious triumph in the discomfiture of the medical despots, the carnivalesque reversal of hierarchy, it is almost certainly a sensation shared by Park herself. In *Fishing in the Styx*, Park writes of her own experience of a public hospital of the time:

The day of my daughter's birth I sat up in bed in Crown Street Women's Hospital and swore by God I would never again bear a child in a public hospital. I do not criticise the medical care exercised, but the curt, rough, dictatorial way it was exercised. Communication with the patients on a human level was nil. (67)

Nor is this the only instance in which Park, writing from her own experience, reveals the vicissitudes of life for poor women. Roie's death in childbirth results from the fierce battle she fights with a rat shortly before her second baby is ready to be born. The rat has bitten Mottie and Roie, overcome with primitive maternal vengeance, attacks it with a heavy stick. Cornered and desperate the rat runs up Roie's leg and she beats at it frenziedly, injuring herself in the process. In *The Drums Go Bang!*, Park relates that a similar incident happened to her during her residence in Surry Hills, but fortunately without the same consequences (141). Similarly, the painful and protracted eye complaint from which Dolour suffers is, according to D'Arcy Niland, the same as the one Park herself experienced ("Ruth[Harp in the South] Park" 31), and to which she alludes briefly in her autobiography (*Fence* 188). The medical treatment meted out to

Dolour is excruciating and callously performed; Park does not elaborate on her own experience, other than to comment that, "Doctors, in those times, were almost universally non-communicative, riposting anxious questions with 'Don't you bother your head about that. Leave it all to me'". The result, of course, was that young patients and their parents were at the mercy of ill-informed opinions from relatives and friends; "My poor mother's hair stood on end," Park recalls (*Fence* 210). Dolour's Mumma is "terrified of doctors and the very crackle of a starched coat was enough to reduce her to stupidity" (*Orange* 79). The lengths to which Mumma is prepared to go in order to avoid a visit to the dentist are amusing; but any incipient readerly scorn evaporates with the revelation that "a drunken dentist in her childhood had planked her down in a chair and, holding her jaw in a steely grip with one hand, crushed a molar to pieces in complete disregard of her hysterical shrieks" (212). Park herself underwent a similarly agonizing extraction during the Depression, when "Toothache was the burden of many people who could not afford dental care" (*Fence* 110). The tooth "was crushed by the forceps and the pain was so atrocious that I lost consciousness and could not be revived for half an hour," she recalls. "Splinters of that tooth worked out of my gum for years." Yet "the small cavity could easily have been filled, if my parents had three and sixpence to spare" (*Fence* 110). Thus much of what Park writes in these two novels is drawn from first-hand experience, and the humour with which she accents her points has a double irony. This really *is* how things were for the poor in this era and, whether or not Park's fiction served at the time to awaken public and governmental consciences, it stands now as sociological record.

Although *Poor Man's Orange* is narrated in the episodic manner of *The Harp in the South*, it does have a more defined plot and a more readily identifiable heroine: Dolour. Superimposed upon the background theme of the demise of the post-War slum era, the novel chronicles Dolour's development from impetuous adolescent to mature and self-reliant woman. The various incidents in which Dolour's and Roie's experiences reflect those of Park's own seem to indicate that, in considering their differing attitudes

to life, Park is working through to an understanding of herself and of the effects of heredity, culture and environment upon the formation of character, including her own. This supposition is supported by the fact that, in the third novel of the trilogy, Park does not continue with the story of the Darcys, but regresses to investigate the factors in their earlier lives that have shaped the characters of Mumma and Hughie. "It's fairly easy for a people-watching writer to begin with a youthful character and work with him until he's tottery, for the seeds of maturity and beyond are present in every youngster," she has remarked; "But to do this in reverse is back-breaking" (Ahearne 18-19). In the otherwise fairly chronological plot of *Poor Man's Orange*, there is one semi-analeptic episode in which Mumma and Hughie recall the circumstances of their betrothal, which seem, to Dolour's bewilderment and the frustration of her romantic imaginings, to be inextricably bound up with a pudding. This incident, together with one from *The Harp in the South* in which Grandma, on her deathbed, addresses some startlingly intimate words to "Stevie", forms the basis of the plot of *Missus*. Although, as Teather observes, the first two novels in the trilogy "concentrate on the everyday life of women" (204), the character of Hughie is well-developed, delineated ironically but not unsympathetically. His fecklessness and irresponsibility, but also his basic good nature, are demonstrated in *The Harp in the South*, and his resistance and ultimate capitulation to advancing old age are chronicled in *Poor Man's Orange*. In the final novel of the trilogy, *Missus*, the development of the middle-aged, apathetic, slum-dwelling Hughie from the cocky yet vulnerable country boy Hugh is the thread that binds together the various stories.

In *Missus*, Ruth Park gives an ironic twist to the Darcys' tale: *Poor Man's Orange* ends with Dolour and Charlie planning to leave the squalor and apathy of Surry Hills, determined to make a new and better life in the outback; *Missus* is the story of Mumma and Hughie coming from the outback to the "talismanic" city of Sydney, hoping for a better life there. In the almost forty years that elapsed between the publications of *Poor Man's Orange* and *Missus*, many changes took place in Australian society and, inevitably, Ruth Park has been influenced by them. Also of course, as she

has matured in years, her attitudes, beliefs and values have undergone changes, some stark and abrupt, others subtle and gradual, and this is reflected in the tone of the "prequel". For instance, the Darcys, in common with most of Park's fictional characters, are Irish-Australian and their Catholic religion is an implanted, indelible feature of their lives and their consciousness. Ruth Park knows this phenomenon intimately both from her own family and that of her husband, D'Arcy Niland. Yet, in *Fishing in the Styx*, Park describes how without warning and in, of all places, St Peter's Basilica, she lost her faith in Catholicism, "Between one split second and the next, without any shift in consciousness," (*Fishing* 233). The first two novels in the trilogy were written before this event, and *Missus* after it, and the narrator's attitude to matters of religion is noticeably different. When, in *Missus*, John and Rowena Kilker (Grandma) lose a second child, the beloved Kathleen, "They tried not to curse God, but in their hearts they never liked him again" (15). Upon reflection, one notices that Grandma's devotion has always been to the Rosary and the Mother of God and that, indeed, most of Park's Catholic characters tend to pray to Mary and the saints for their intercession, rather than to address the deity directly. Similarly, Park's disenchantment with the Papal prohibition of birth control (*Fishing* 266) is reflected in the joy with which Eny welcomes the menopause; in a passage which has a subversive, Rabelaisian quality the narrator relates:

So the years went on, and Eny had child after child, sometimes as easily as a cat and sometimes in mortal agony. . . . After Josie was born Eny lived with bated breath for a year or so. . . . At last she knew she was safe and she and John had a real Christmas of a time. She used to sit in church listening to the priest raving about the evils of birth control and think he was off his head, and the Pope with him. (*Missus* 45)

Of perhaps greater significance for the overall tone of the novel has been the advent of the feminist movement. Park has always written about women from the woman's point of view, but the author of *Missus* has taken a strongly feminist stance; the book is a study of the traditional connotations, in Australian consciousness, of the title "Missus". Eny (Grandma of *The Harp*), falls passionately in love with a feckless

man, the "Stevie" whom, to the consternation of the family gathered round her deathbed, she asks to "wait till I undo me stays" (*Harp* 142). Pragmatically, however, she marries upright John Kilker, as "solid as the Vatican" (*Missus* 40); and "though she was not in love with her husband she liked him; so it happened that only two or three years passed before she realised she loved him dearly" (*Missus* 43). The marriage is tempestuous but solid; "not a day . . . passe[s] without a fight" (14) but their love-making is almost as frequent. When John suffers a heart attack, and his great strength is gone, Eny finds the courage "never to fuss or cosset" (72), but "in bed she [becomes] the lover; her skill sav[ing] him exertion where she thought it perilous" (73). Their long and loving marriage is a partnership in every sense. As a girl, Eny has been "a beauty . . . skin like a petal, waist as small as a whippet's, blue eyes full of fire" (40) and more than one man wanted to marry her. By contrast, John's sister Alfreda "was as plain as a box [and so] she had ended up as a Presbytery servant" (*Missus* 43); but "I've been a kind of a missus," she reflects in old age. "Spending my life looking after men, putting up with their sulky and funny little ways, making ends meet, being lonely, darning them thousands of black socks, always being there when they wanted a cup of tea, or an ear to complain into, being respectful. Not much different from other women" (*Missus* 147). Auntie Alf's last charge is Father Driscoll, an elderly priest with a dangerous predilection for alcohol; he retains his parish and his respectability only because Alf is able to keep him sober. When his sister dies, she leaves a substantial sum of money to Alf, the unspoken understanding between the two women being that Alf will look after Father Driscoll as long as he lives. The priest is also aware of the tacit agreement and complacently and ungratefully accepts both the sacrifice of Alf's life and the extra comforts that the money provides for life in the presbytery. He is filled with the righteous indignation born of self-preservation when he learns that Alf has been sending some money to the unscrupulous Delia; his sister's legacy should be expended on his comfort until he goes "to his reward"; "there would be a few pounds left to look after [Alf] in her dotage" (120). In his youth, the priest had ministered to the people of the outback with selfless dedication; but in his old age he has reverted to the solipsism of a

small child, whose "right" it is to be taken care of; and Alf, as "a kind of missus", has a duty to do so.

For Hughie's mother, the gentle governess Frances, marriage means a life of unremitting harshness in a dirt-floored shanty with a hard-working but dour and imperceptive man. "It was some years before she understood she had been brought to Aboukir Creek to become a part of her husband's life, not to have one of her own" (*Missus* 2-3). When their second child, Jer, is born deformed, Martin Darcy refuses to believe that the child is his; her husband's bitter resentment, coupled with the pain of a goitre and the laudanum prescribed for it, deprive Frances of both health and reason. She commits suicide. Evie, married to a man twenty years her senior, realises that she is "in bondage" (*Missus* 193); her husband will not allow her to gain purpose and independence through work, is unable to discuss deep issues with her and, above all, is both totally unable to comprehend her sexual needs and shocked to think she might have any, an attitude which is shared by the doctor and the parish priest. Pal is devoted to a man much younger than herself, one who is crippled and dying from the effects of mustard gas in World War I. Although they are not married, they live together on the property which she owns and runs, having inherited it only "because her three brothers were killed in the war" (*Missus* 154). Nevertheless, she refers to him as "the Boss" and insists that everyone else does so as well; she defers to his orders and, apparently because she is older than he and has felt herself inadequate to his sexual needs, sees nothing untoward in his having sired several children by various Aboriginal girls on the property. Because of all this, the people of the district choose to overlook the otherwise outrageous fact that she is living in a *de facto* relationship: "the countryside gave her the title of Mrs Biddle because all respected and admired her" (*Missus* 154). In all but sex she is the epitome of the bushman's mate.

Ambitious Josie marries the town "catch", who turns out to be both a womaniser and an embezzler. Recognizing "the injustice and hypocrisy of [the] moral attitude" she

is expected to maintain, "to stand by him, her hands clasped and her eyes turned up like the Mother of Sorrows", she leaves him, in spite of knowing that "People would righteously condemn her" (*Missus* 136). For all her spirit and determination, however, Josie fails to earn an independent livelihood as an accountant because, as her father predicts: "'It's in my mind that a businessman would not take his books to a young lady" (*Missus* 160); she comes to the conclusion that, "'If you're a woman . . . in the end someone always arranges your life for you'" (239). Josie's brother Dan, initially shocked that she has abandoned her marriage, is consoled by the thought: "She'll always be on hand to take care of Aunt Alf and Ma and Pa. The way things are she'll be in no position to say no" (*Missus* 239). (The customary expectation that one of the females in a family will devote her life to the care of the aged members is a recurrent concern in Park's fiction and her autobiography.) As it happens, Josie marries again, this time for love. Her husband is a "vital, self-engrossed . . . indolent man . . . with that mysterious voluptuousness which irresistibly calls forth the folly of women" (239), who, "now that he was middle-aged, and by nature indolent . . . looked about for a wife" (240). Josie, overwhelmed by love and sexual desire, "in no time at all [has] four children, cystitis, and never a spare moment to brood on her past ambitions for success and a tidy life" (*Missus* 240). "Josie subsided beneath the flood . . . It was hard to go against the approbation of everyone she knew. Josie realised this was called settling down" (*Missus* 240). With a pang of foresight/hindsight, the reader realises that the spirited, ambitious Josie is to become the unseen Auntie Josie of *The Harp in the South*, with "all them kids" and "fallen arches" (*Harp* 49-51), who looks after Grandma for as long as possible before calling upon Mumma to do her turn. From a feminist point of view, Josie's happiness in her capitulation may be a disappointing feature of the novel. But her situation was not an unusual one for the period. In her working notes for the novel, Park comments that Josie "is a far more interesting and intelligent girl than Margaret. Today she would be an executive of some kind. But the mores of her time . . . guarantee . . . that she never gets a fair spin" (Mitchell, ML MSS 3128).

Finally, there is Margaret - Mumma; Margaret "who thought of nothing but love" (*Missus* 17); Margaret in whom "Eny's dauntlessness was muted into the ability to endure and endlessly forgive" (*Missus* 31); Margaret who knows that Hughie "still loves that Bids ... It's up to me, I suppose to take second best or nothing" (*Missus* 220); Margaret who, as Mumma, will take second best all through the Darcy saga, but who closes the prequel "drift[ing] contentedly between dreams and reality. Mrs Darcy. Missus" (247). Margaret's pride in her new appellation has a poignancy for those who have read *Poor Man's Orange*. When Mumma, who has "the true, traditional Irish regard for matrimony" (26), learns of Hughie's infidelity, she is stunned, then anguished. Remembering many things, she is also suddenly aware that:

She had given up her name for that man. Along with all the other things she had carelessly and indeed even joyously given up had been her own patronymic, and yet Kilker had been a name that had fought its way through the famine, and the black plague, and the Troubles, and survived to travel steerage to Australia nearly ninety years before. An unbeatable name it had been, yet she had thrown it away at Hugh's bidding, put it on a shelf and never so much as took it out and gave it a shake and a kind word.

And her own name, her baptismal name, what had happened to it? She was a stranger to it. No one ever used it any more. She was a nonentity, a creature who had entered marriage a person, and within a year was nothing but Mumma, an institution.(206-207)

Names and naming are matters that Park frequently considers within her fiction and will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. The right to name gives power and authority, while to be named is, to some extent, to be disempowered, categorized, as Margaret/Missus/Mumma comes to realise. The novel examines the way in which the title "Missus" confers respectability and a degree of social standing, but simultaneously imposes obligations and a role, and subsumes the individual. On a lighter note, the incongruity of conferring the label "Dolour" upon a child apparently never occurs to anyone in the Darcy family. In a similar vein, Roie intends to name her child Brandon, "if it's a boy", after St Brandon's, the parish church, and all the family approve. "None of them thought it was at all strange to call a child after a church, nor to thank God that

their parish was not that of the Holy Sepulchre," the narrator observes drily (*Orange* 29).

Jeremiah is a scarcely less lugubrious designation than Dolour, even if more apt for its recipient. Elizabeth Butel, who has commented that "The women of *Missus* . . . are so many facets of Ruth Park's exploration of the female role" (30), notes that Jeremiah "is a kind of honorary woman". This is true in the sense that Jer, prevented by his handicap from participating in the hard, physical labour which is the lot of the young bushman, becomes adept in the domestic arts of cooking, washing and mending. It also means that he must live his life vicariously through the experiences of others; in common with the accepted lot of women of the period, he must be kept by a man, going where Hughie goes, waiting stoically in sheds and shanties while Hughie and the other men work, drink and womanize. More intelligent and perceptive than his brother, he has learned, perforce, to please, to serve, to entertain, to exploit his physical weakness and use his disability as a means of moral blackmail; all the age-old means by which women have accommodated to the exigencies of life. And, like all dependants, Jer lives in fear that his protector will tire of the burden and will abandon him.

To readers familiar with the Darcy family from the other two novels in the trilogy, the unheralded appearance of Jer in *Missus* is something of a mystery. It would seem that Park has invented him in order to show that dependency is, like the learned helplessness of slum dwellers, something of an acquired trait, one that can be inculcated into both men and women. Though severely handicapped, Jer is not without resources but, almost from birth, he has been Hugh's responsibility: "From the beginning . . . [their mother] impressed on Hughie . . . that he must look after his brother, love him more than anyone else in the world" (5) and "Hugh never queried his responsibility for his brother" (6). Thus when Hugh first begins to show an interest in girls, Jer is terrified that he will be abandoned and more than once stages "fake suicides" (24). In time, however, "Once Jer accepted that one day Hugh would marry, he saw that Margaret Kilker,

easygoing and religious, was the one who would best look out for him" (111). Jer is more than willing to relocate his dependency when he sees that it is to his best advantage, and, when Hugh leaves to find work, is "as carefree as a bird" (114). It is as if Jer's twisted limbs have an echo in his twisted mind; all his emotion is self-centred. All his life Hugh has borne the responsibility of his brother; now he is both attracted to Margaret and afraid of the ongoing responsibility which he knows marriage will represent. Yet Margaret's dependency is one of helpless, selfless love. She and Jer are opposite sides of the coin, Park once again using antithesis to illustrate character.

Through Jer's intimate knowledge of his brother Park draws a profile of the typical bush larrikin, one "like hundreds of other young rowdies in Trafalgar, or any other country place you could name" (98), and his attitude to life and marriage:

'Oh, yes, I know you all right,' he thought. He placed an affectionate hand on his sleeping brother. He loved him devotedly, but he knew himself superior in intelligence and foresight. Hugh had cheek and courage; you'd never come to the end of his charm. But somewhere in his character he was flimsy. Jer saw him bowling for ever around the State, like one of those uncanny bundles of dry grass and thorns, a rolipoly, rolling this way and that before the wind until it fetched up against barbed wire and fell to pieces. Wherever he and Hugh had worked there were jokers like that, in all stages of disintegration. Drifters, they called themselves, free men, sons of liberty. Jer knew how they felt. Their way of life provided them with one long open door; whenever responsibility threatened they ducked through it. But the barbed-wire fence was always there, always. They came up against it because of age, failing health, too much booze. That's when they looked around for someone to go home to, and found there wasn't a soul in the world. Besides, marriage wouldn't keep Hugh at home, if he wanted to remain a seasonal labourer.

Jer knew the routine of too many of those: hard workers, but free and easy, back home three or four times a year, get the wife in pod, teach the boy how to pass a football correctly, dig over the garden, tell the young daughter she'll get her teeth kicked in if she goes too far with the boys, lay some new lino in the kitchen, kisses all round and off again grape picking, cane cutting, fencing, or whatever the game was. (111-12)

Barney and Roo of *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* come immediately to mind. It is infinitely more difficult to write a "prequel" than a sequel to a novel, to account in retrospect, as it were, for the characters and situation of the earlier work, yet Park has achieved the feat. In soft, plump Margaret, who "thought of nothing but love" (17), who

possessed an infinite "ability to endure and endlessly forgive" (31), it is easy to see the fat, stoic Mumma of *The Harp in the South*. Similarly, the irresponsible Hughie, taking all her patience and sacrifice for granted, is the personification of the itinerant bush larrikin needing someone to fall back upon when life is too hard.

Naturally, a novel which examines the roles of married women also examines the many facets of love. Ruth Park herself has commented:

It's really all I write about. I am not altogether interested in romantic love, amorous love, any of those things, but love as a very odd attribute of humanity has always absolutely fascinated me. So I write mostly, I think, about all sorts of love. Parental love, love of animals for humans, humans for animals, for flowers, for plants, all kinds of things and, this may sound a shade twee, but it seems to me those things are very much more long lasting than romantic love. They really are the backbone of our humanity. (Veitch 115)

Each of the novels in the trilogy is woven around the concept of family love in all its aspects. The loneliness of the solitary characters, Miss Sheily, Mr Diamond, Lick Jimmy (before the arrival of his extended family) and Steve Tookey, is sharpened by contrast, that antithesis already noted, with the warmth and mutual support of family love, however strained that might be on occasion. It is by contrast also that the absence of love within families is made more poignant. When Martin Darcy's imperceptive and inarticulate love is poisoned by suspicion, the plight of Frances, "dancing in her cherry blouse, skeletal and mad" (*Missus* 73), and the two little boys is severe. Hughie, for all his failings, is a loving father; Dolour, therefore, though growing up amidst the squalor and violence of Surry Hills, is shocked into hysteria in the Kilroy house when Suse's father thrashes her "with all his strength, a sort of demoniac lust on his face" (*Orange* 73). Because of the intensity of Eny's emotions, her inability to love her youngest daughter "had filtered through to Josie. She was aware she was a cuckoo in the nest and the awareness made her sad, clever, and spiteful" (*Missus* 17); "Though she longed obsessively for her mother's favour, she rubbed Eny up the wrong way with everything she did. The unhealed wound within Josie bled every day" (32). It is not until Eny is

old and Josie has experienced a loveless marriage and the defeat of her ambitions that she can see her relationship with her mother more objectively:

Josie felt pity for this woman who had impaired her sense of worth, left despoiled her childish pride of self, but had no comprehension of the damage she had done. It occurred then to Josie that she had always expected her mother to be more than human. She had confounded the woman with her motherly function. She had given no scope to the wrongheaded, wilful spirit that inhabited this familiar body (*Missus* 238).

As Margaret/Mumma comes to realise, the confounding of woman and function is yet another concept of the role of *Missus*.

The unrequited love of a girl for her mother, and the resulting sense of inconsolable desolation, run like a leitmotif through Park's fiction, as do abandonment and the fear of being alone. When questioned about this, in 1993, Park commented: "It is, I think, a very deep fear, not just in children, but all of us, that we should be abandoned and alone. I feel this is really the terror of classic examples of being marooned alone, like *Robinson Crusoe* and so on: it strikes at one of the ultimate horrors of the human being" (Veitch 115). *Missus* is the last of Park's adult novels, published approximately thirty years after the novels to be discussed in the next chapter, in which the theme of the abandoned girl will be examined more closely. As her remarks to Kate Veitch indicate, Park seems, in the interval, to have extended her consideration of the fear of abandonment to include both sexes and all age groups, again working through her writing towards understanding. Jer becomes hysterical whenever he fears that Hugh may leave him but regards with complacency Hugh's marriage to the selflessly loving Margaret, knowing that his own position will then be secure. For his part, Hugh does not love Margaret, but he fears both a lonely old age and ultimate death: "He felt alone; he could not speak to the other men of his fear of death. Death made everyone embarrassed. Margaret would listen. He sensed in her a great deal of kindness and sympathy" (*Missus* 93). Thus both brothers see the role of a wife, a *Missus*, as that of a mother rather than a lover and partner, an insurance against abandonment.

Park's first seven adult novels, published between 1948 and 1961, all deal with women's concerns and are related from a woman's point of view. When, after a gap of sixteen years, she publishes *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, the major protagonist is male. In her only subsequent novel, *Missus*, the characters and attitudes of men feature more prominently than in her earlier works. This may indicate a development in Park's authorial compass; if so, it has been accompanied by an increase in feminist consciousness. From her autobiography, it is obvious that, intellectually and temperamentally, she has been a feminist since before the term was current. Yet, while her earlier works feature women's concerns, it is in her later texts that the situation of women in society is interrogated, a development which undoubtedly has been spurred by the feminist movement of the last two or three decades. No author works in a vacuum, and as Park's own consciousness of feminism has been increased by the societal climate, so also her writings, which have been hugely popular, must have had their affect upon that climate. Similarly, the change in her own religious beliefs is reflected in the characters' attitudes to divorce and contraception. The Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope is interesting here; as Michael Holquist has observed, "The chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Glossary, 425-26). In the last of this trilogy of novels, the author of the first two works, at a later stage of her development as person and writer, and living in a more recent era, portrays people and their attitudes in an even more distant past, from the perspective of her own altered consciousness. Apart from the author's attitudes to religion and the concerns of women, there have been, of course, other changes both in the writing and the society: any dedicated author must hone her craft over years of practice and endeavour, and *Missus*, for example, shows no trace of the sentimentality that some critics have discerned in *The Harp in the South*. The issues addressed in *Missus* are more complex than are those of the earlier two novels, and are handled with greater skill and perception. Park has used her characters to explore and express changes in culture and ideology. It is interesting, though probably futile, to

reverse the perspective and speculate about the reception that, in the Australia of 1947, might have been accorded to *Missus* with its feminist perspective, its religious questionings, and its deflation of that Australian icon, the itinerant bush worker.

CHAPTER 2

THE YOUNG GIRLS: SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE PERSONAL AND
THE CULTURAL

Ruth Park does not regard herself as a novelist, but as a professional writer, and her prolific output of work in virtually every genre of literature justifies such a self-concept. The nine adult novels which she has written were produced over a period of almost forty years, from *The Harp in the South* (written in 1946 but not published until 1948) to *Missus*, published in 1985. Thus her first and her last novels, together with *Poor Man's Orange* (1949), all deal with the Darcy family and have been discussed as a trilogy in the previous chapter. During the 1950s, Ruth Park produced four novels at two-yearly intervals: *The Witch's Thorn* (1951); *A Power of Roses* (1953); *Pink Flannel* (1955) and *One-a-Pecker, Two-a-Pecker* (1957). These were followed in 1961 by *The Good Looking Women*, but a further sixteen years were to elapse before the publication of her major adult fictional work, the Miles Franklin Award-winning *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, in 1977. It should be noted that the intervening years were not unproductive; they saw the publication of twenty-six children's novels and the monumental *Companion Guide to Sydney*, in addition to a large volume of journalistic articles and other work. The bulk of Ruth Park's adult fiction appeared between 1948 and 1961 and, since *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man's Orange* have already been discussed, I intend to concentrate, in this chapter, on the five novels published between 1951 and 1961. In these works, several of the issues which Park is to pursue throughout the course of her life's work become apparent, as she examines and defines her own concerns and attitudes in relation to those of the culture and ideology of the time in which she writes and of the times in which the narratives are set.

In each of the first four of these novels, *The Witch's Thorn*, *A Power of Roses*, *Pink Flannel* and *One-a Pecker*, *Two-a-Pecker*, the central character is a young girl who has been abandoned by her parents. Almost forty years later, Ruth Park begins her autobiography with a recollection of her own anguish when, as a child, she almost loses her own mother. As adult narrator, she longs "to comfort the little girl . . . but there is a wall of glass between us. The child is lost in an inexpressible grief which marks her for ever" (*Fence* 4). Later in the same volume, Park returns to the episode, again stressing the totality of her desolation:

What I experienced during this critical time was pure, inconsolable grief. I did not recognise this until, as an adult, I suffered it again. That my mother did not die made no difference. Her return to me did not erase what I had already endured, and which made ineradicable changes in my character. (64)

That four consecutive novels, published within the space of six years (1951 to 1957), should deal with the theme of abandonment suggests a definite phase in Park's development both as a person and as an author, and therefore warrants closer examination. The theme of abandonment is not central to *The Good Looking Women*, although Ann Coleman and her father are almost strangers to each other after her parents separate. Indeed, the events of the novel are generated by an antithetical situation: the mutual determination of Mrs Pond and her youngest daughter, Geraldine, *not* to be separated. All five novels delineate aspects of love, which, as we have seen, Ruth Park herself observes, is "really all I write about" (Veitch 115). *The Good Looking Women*, however, is virtually an analysis of the many facets of love, especially within a family: warm, family love; the love of parents for children and children for parents; siblings for each other; romantic love; sexual love; religious love and the love of friends. It is also about the reverse side of the coin: mutually-destructive love between the docile and the dominant; cannibalistic, possessive love; the soul-destroying effects of the rapacious demands of family life and responsibilities and,

above, the ruthlessness of love. The novel examines the intricacies, the inconsistencies, the contradictions and the power of family love.

The presence and absence of family love and loyalty are the bases upon which Ruth Park has constructed the stories of Bethell Jury and Jenny Hood, the two young girls at the centre of *The Witch's Thorn* and *Pink Flannel*, respectively. Both novels are set in the 1920s in the same North Island village of New Zealand, Te Kano, and several of the townspeople appear in both stories. By utilizing the same setting and several of the same characters, Ruth Park has underlined the antithetical nature of the fates of the two little girls, one happy and one almost tragic, like the two faces of one coin or the two masks, one of laughter and one of grief, often used to represent drama. It is as if the author is exploring the possible consequences for a child of being abandoned by its parents. Each novel begins with a lyrical description of New Zealand which, in the case of *Pink Flannel*, sets up the atmosphere of the story that is to follow, the "piece of light music" as it is described by its narrator (4). The opening passage of *The Witch's Thorn*, however, is deceptive: "It is a little country, that one," the narrator observes, sketching the isolation, the mystical quality of the three islands in the vast southern ocean, before telescoping to the little town of Te Kano "which pulls the hills about its shoulders like a coat from the rain" (1). The fairytale quality of the opening lines evolves into a colloquial description of the local geyser, so typical of the New Zealand landscape, which "goes off like a rocket three times a day . . . up she goes, wheesh! wheesh!" This in turn leads into a humorous anecdote about "some interfering fool [who] fed it a dozen bars of soap"; so that, while still perusing the first page, readers have been forced to adjust their expectations several times before the shock of discovering that "Johnny Gow . . . dived into it three seconds before it erupted" (1). The narrative tone then becomes gratingly unpleasant, even racial, as it relates that "the Maori dummy . . . saw it happen, and nearly went mad . . . gabbling 'Booyer, booyer, booyer'" until the station-

master yells, "'What's up now, you silly bastard?'" Finally, there is the horrific image of "the arm-bone leaping and gleaming in the water as the fountain sank lower and lower" until the mudhole subsides "mumbling gently on Johnny Gow's empty coat" (1). The curious mixture of beauty, humour and horror is to continue throughout the novel.

Bethell Jury is illegitimate, the love-child of Queenie Jury, who is pretty but selfish and immature, and Johnny Gow. Already married at the time of his affair with Queenie, Johnny is now drunken, irresponsible, impoverished and self-pitying, incapable of retaining steady employment to support his ever-increasing legitimate family. Bethell is raised by her grandmother and is ten before she finds out what all the town knows: the identity of her parents. After her grandmother dies and Queenie deserts her, she is passed from one relative to the next; some are unwilling to keep her, some are unable. Not only is Bethell passed on; she is, in the social sense, passed down. Her first custodian is her ultra-respectable Aunt Amy, Mrs Minogue, who having married the local grocer, feels that she has moved up in the world. She has, therefore, "passed her old mother for years in the street without a look" (9) and is mortified by her younger sister's disgrace in having an illegitimate child. Mrs Minogue takes in Bethell only as the result of some judicious moral blackmail on the part of the local priest. When her sexually-preoccupied teenage son is caught attempting to rape the child, she is only too willing to believe his story that Bethell has been the instigator; like mother, like daughter. With Mrs Minogue refusing to keep Bethell any longer, the priest arranges for the little girl to be taken in by her uncle, the mayor and local publican, Wedesweiler. Widower of another of the Jury sisters, Wedesweiler has two adult daughters of his own: Bruna, plain and capable, and Sieglinde, beautiful but timid. Johnny Gow, wallowing in drunken self-pity after Queenie's death, publicly taunts Wedesweiler for harbouring an incestuous love for Sieglinde. The scandal spreads rapidly through the small community and, disgusted and humiliated, the two sisters

leave Te Kano. By way of revenge however, Wedesweiler assures them that, were two unmarried young women with a child to arrive in a strange community, the general assumption would be that the child was the illegitimate daughter of one of them.

Sieglinde is too cowardly to face such a situation and Bethell, deserted once again, goes to live with the last of her aunts, the scandalous Mrs Hush. Years before, having been left a widow with several children to support and no hope of assistance from relatives or society, Mrs Hush had resorted to prostitution with the result that her family has expanded considerably. She is, however, a woman of strong character, loving and generous, and Bethell is happy and well-cared for until her father claims her. Johnny Gow's motive is one of pure malice: he bitterly resents his wife and his entrapment within marriage and takes Bethell home simply to torment Ella with the constant evidence of his real love for Queenie. The Gows live at the Sump, the town's garbage dump, and their situation is desperate: Ella is worn out with childbearing and the knowledge of Johnny's hatred; with the Depression worsening there is no work even for reliable men; and, as Johnny drinks all the Government sustenance money he receives, there is insufficient food. Here, as a pawn in the family's emotional battles, Bethell is severely ill-treated: starved, tormented and beaten by both husband and wife. Finally, battered senseless, she is rescued and cheerfully, albeit quite illegally, adopted by Georgie Wi and his family. As Maoris, they are social outcasts, beyond the pale of respectable society, yet they are members of a race that, in the opinion of the local priest, possesses a pagan-Christian mentality "concerned with the things God put it on earth to be concerned with, rather than with the superficialities a civilized society has created by its own laws and within its own limitations" (210). Here, at the bottom of the town's social scale, or rather outside it altogether, Bethell at last finds love and security.

The title of the novel, as Lachie Gow explains, comes from an old Highland myth of a poisoned thorn tree, "a bad magic thing . . . whoever it pricked could pass on the poison to someone else, just with a touch"; or, more simply, "one bad action influences everyone else" (163). Yet, in this novel, Park seems to regard the poison as being endemic to society, to conventions, to social mores, even akin perhaps, to the biblical notion of Original Sin and loss of innocence. Only children and pagans remain untainted in the prelapsarian state: "I haven't been pricked by the thorn. Mr Wi hasn't. Hoot Gibson hasn't," Bethell observes (163). In the civilized, "Christian" community, Bethell is evidence of transgression not only of the law of God but, more importantly, of the proprietaries. In Bakhtinian terms, the novel exhibits a carnivalesque, subversive attitude to the hypocrisies of apparent social and religious respectability. This is most obvious in the chapter which deals with Queenie's funeral.

The day of the funeral coincides with the expected flyover of the pioneer aviator, Charles Kingsford-Smith, an event which has the population of Te Kano agog with excitement. It will be the first opportunity for most of them to see an aeroplane and, for some of the older residents, probably the last opportunity also. Not only does the event signal the dawn of a new era in human achievement, but that marvel of technology, the heavier-than-air-machine, will connect tiny, remote New Zealand with the vast continent of Australia and thereby with the rest of the world. The juxtaposition of the two events, funeral and flyover, therefore, illustrates the ambivalent aspect of medieval carnival identified by Bakhtin: the co-existence of opposites and, particularly, regeneration, birth in death. As Queenie's body is lowered into the ground, the pioneer aviator flies high overhead. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin observes:

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it . . . All *distance* between

people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *Free and familiar contact among people* . . . People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square. (122-23)

Queenie's funeral cortège is disrupted and solemnity reduced to débâcle as townspeople of every age, occupation, social class and race pour out into the streets. Initially, they scatter in embarrassment upon becoming aware of the funeral; but as the great moment approaches, "a scream of intense excitement ripple[s] along them" (134) and they become united in excitement and oblivious to all else, including the frantic Johnny Gow, "half mad with exhaustion and grief amongst the crowd" (134). They "move . . . away from his flailing arms, their faces still upturned, spellbound, to the tremendous rolling roar of the plane that [is] yet invisible", and, when he falls to the ground, "writhing and weeping, his fingers trying to dig into the asphalt", they "step . . . over his body as they rush . . . this way and that in concerted movement like a shoal of fish, trying to catch sight of the plane" (134-45).

Johnny Gow is the only true mourner at Queenie's funeral and he is there unlawfully. Thus, in the spirit of Bakhtinian carnival, the hierarchies are reversed: Johnny's grief is genuine and intense but, ragged, dirty and drunkenly maudlin, he is refused permission to attend while the town's respectable citizens, who would have nothing to do with Queenie in life, follow her coffin with society's blessing. Johnny's pain and degradation, together with the indignities inflicted upon Queenie's body, provide the pathos that often coexists with the laughter of carnival. "Bruna thought, 'That man, he should have been allowed to come. It's all wrong.' She could not work it out, but in her deepest sense of logic she knew that everything was wrong" (132). It should be noted, however, that although the funeral is reduced to a farce, the religious ceremony itself is not mocked or parodied, as might have been the case in medieval carnival; the target is the hypocrisy of the socially respectable mourners. Although

much of the irreverent humour in the episode is conveyed, usually inadvertently, through the multiple voices of the townspeople, in a further deviation from the medieval carnivalesque they do not participate in the mocking, subversive laughter. This is reserved for the reader and, oddly enough, the timid Sieglinde and Queenie herself:

A hysterical giggle came out of Sieglinde. "Wouldn't Queenie laugh at all this if she knew," she gasped to her sister.

Mrs Minogue gave her an awful look through the thick veil that fogged her face, and Sieglinde, knowing the enormity of her words, subsided against Bruna's strong shoulder. (132)

As is usual in Park's work, *The Witch's Thorn* is, in Bakhtinian terms, polyphonic, in that a multiplicity of voices are represented in dialogue with each other and with the narrator; it also epitomises heteroglossia, a term coined by Bakhtin and discussed by him in "Discourse in the Novel":

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) - this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types . . . and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia . . . can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (*Imagination* 262-63)

In *The Witch's Thorn*, the advent of aviation is discussed in voices typical of the era. Many New Zealand residents of the period were immigrants, or the children of immigrants. The self-important and conservative Mr Minogue, who has "not seen Ireland since he was three years old" (40), persistently employs what he believes to be the accent of the old country: "I rarely don't accept the heavier-than-air machine," said Mr Minogue firmly". He is answered by the chemist, who is "naturally progressive": "You're going to look mighty silly sitting on your cayuse watching the flying-machines go over by the drove by the time you're eighty, podner, ' heehawed Mr Freestone" (122). The chemist, the reader has already learned, "had once been to Hollywood and met Gloria Swanson, and had spoken with an American accent ever since" (23). Not only does Mr Freestone speak with a pseudo-American accent, his vocabulary is drawn from another innovation of the era, the moving picture show with the ubiquitous Western.

Many other voices and opinions are heard: Bethell's, Pearlie Gow's, Father Flynn's, Georgi Wi's. Throughout the narrative, Sister Mary Egyptus is always referred to by the narrator as Sister Eucalyptus, the children's nickname for her since she is Australian; thus, in a sense, Park achieves the effect of representing a voice-within-a-voice. However, the general opinion of the townspeople is conveyed in what Bakhtin would describe as hybrid construction or double-voiced discourse in which "the speech of another is introduced into the author's discourse (the story) in *concealed form*, that is, without any of the formal markers usually accompanying such speech, whether direct or indirect" (*Imagination* 303): "And now something marvellous had happened. The Tasman Sea had been flown, and all at once the great clay-coloured continent of Australia, packed to the doors with kangaroos and sheep and tinned peaches, had moved a step closer to New Zealand." (122). The voice of the narrator, "The Tasman Sea had been flown", merges almost imperceptibly with the townspeople's vague impression of Australia, "the great clay-coloured continent" (probably gained from

perusal of a school atlas), before sliding into their colloquial phrase, "packed to the doors with kangaroos and sheep and tinned peaches", a concept equally vague and also evincing school-geography derivation.

Entwined with the voices acclaiming the birth of a new era are various reactions to Queenie's death. Initially overjoyed to think that Queenie has come back for her, Bethell has been vehemently rejected, and now dons "a cynical, adult composure". "Queenie said she didn't want me. Well, now I don't want her," she states flatly (124), the words thinly disguising her pain. For her part, "Mrs Stretch loved funerals. She would rather have a funeral than a wedding any day . . . A grave, pleasurable satisfaction filled her. 'I'm not dead yet,' she said complacently" (130). Jellicoe Minogue, conscripted as a pall-bearer, is simply "frightened stiff" (129), and babbles to his usually-ignored Maker, "Oh, God, I'll be good . . . I won't think bad things no more. Don't let me die for a long time, God", while his father, in pseudo-brogue, snarls "through his side teeth . . . 'Get your blardy feet moving'" (130). Sieglinde "struggle[s] unavailingly and weakly against the knowledge that she would never know either lust or love, and with the chill of that knowledge [is] suddenly and bitterly envious of the girl in the hearse" (132). Ella, Johnny Gow's hated wife, can "hardly believe that Queenie [is] dead, and with a deep vindictive joy she imagine[s] that fair face blotted with corruption, and the greenish hair wet and clotted with mould. 'Yes, she's dead, and she won't get up no more,' she repeat[s]" (126). And, in stark and pathetic contrast, when adjured by the scandalized undertaker to "'Remember . . . the dead!'", Johnny cries, "in a voice of such anguish that Father Finn close[s] his eyes and [feels] sick, 'I don't want her dead . . . I want her alive!'" (131).

The carnivalesque coexistence of laughter and pathos, birth and death, are underlined more than once by the ambiguity of pronouns, causing the reader momentary confusion. For instance, Johnny Gow is "exhausted and floundering":

"My darling, my dearie!" he sobbed. "I gotta see you go."

The atmosphere in Te Kano was electric. The telegraph operator had come out into the street and yelled, "He's comin' this way!" (133)

It is not until several lines later that the reader realises that the second 'he' refers not to Johnny but to Kingsford-Smith: "Old grannies whose knees wouldn't bend were lifted out bodily, piping, "It's me last chance! I'll never see no aeroplane again" (133). A similarly disconcerting ambiguity is caused the use of 'her' to refer to both Queenie and the *Southern Cross*, so that, after the funeral has "proceeded at an erratic pace towards the cemetery", Hoot Gibson Wi reports breathlessly, and ambivalently, "She's gone" (135). Some of the humour has a Rabelaisian quality: "The little church was filled with the smell of the yellow and orange jonquils that the children called rotten eggs. The sweet, sickly smell destroyed all the fresh bush airs that came blowing new each hour from the hilltop forests" (130); while "a poor old man who had been left shut up in his bedroom like a canary" (133) during the fly-over, vents his frustrated rage by "throw[ing] his walking-stick at the chamber and smash[ing] it to smithereens" (135). Meanwhile, in deflationary contrast to all the emotion and commotion below, "Kingsford-Smith passed away from Te Kano without noticing more than a double ribbon of railway lines and a huddle of houses small enough to put in his hat" (135).

There are two funerals in *The Witch's Thorn* and the contrast between them is marked. Without the carnival crowd watching the flyover, Queenie's funeral would have been a poor and stilted thing with a handful of black-garbed hypocrites in attendance to preserve the social niceties. Yet, when Uncle Pihopa, an ancient Maori chieftain, dies, his people come from far and near for the customary three-day feast and,

during this time, "Uncle Pihopa was never lonely. There were people around the coffin, peering in and admiring him" (79). The commercial population of Te Kano, although normally disdaining the Maoris and their customs, on this occasion makes urgent and cynical preparations to profit from the influx of naïve customers. Shopkeepers hastily clear and restock their windows with items calculated to appeal to Maori taste while, as publican, law-abiding mayor Wedesweiler regrets not having "put more methylated spirits in that last batch of sly grog" (78). Mr Minogue, "working at frantic speed", crams his window "full of pyramids and towers of sardines, salmon, herrings in tomato sauce, and vast glittering piles of condensed milk, which the Maoris loved to suck out of the punctured tin". He also makes up "dozens of packets of tea, always an ounce short"; as the narrator observes, in another feat of ironic hybrid construction, "He prepared earnestly and conscientiously for the great invasion" (78). In contrast to the respectable, ritualized sterility of Queenie's funeral, "The tangi was a weeping, a crying. But it was not like that really. Though their Christianity was a bashful, ignorant thing, these people had the inborn knowledge that death did not matter much . . . Death was a part of life, always to be expected, never to be feared" (79-80). In true carnivalesque fashion, Uncle Pihopa, who abhors washing, has "died" at the moment of his birth into Christianity: his baptism by Bethell. When, at the height of the tangi, an earth tremor upsets the coffin and Uncle Pihopa is tumbled out, he revives briefly, "swearing horribly with the shock" (84). This, not unnaturally, puts an abrupt end to the proceedings as the mourners flee in terror, and only faithful Georgie Wi is left cradling the old man's body, "Tears of fright and horror . . . already lost in tears of sorrow for Uncle Pihopa" (84). Thus, though utterly different, both funerals have been a mixture of laughter and pathos, the hypocritical and the genuine, of birth and renewal, and both Queenie and Uncle Pihopa have, finally, only a single mourner.

Bethell does not attend Queenie's funeral. She had approached her mother's sickbed, timorously eager to be reclaimed, only to hear Queenie cry, "Take her away! I don't want her near me! It's all because of her!", before collapsing "blood spurting through her nose and mouth and splashing on her nightgown" (120). So on the day of the funeral, Bethell, determinedly "push[ing] all the terror and disgust of Queenie's dying back in her mind, back, back, until it took on the blurred fantastic quality of a dream" (125), goes fishing with Georgi Wi and his sons. The Maoris' prey is a giant eel which has lived for many years an "undisputed emperor" in the "castled darkness of [an] old snag", defying "the successive efforts of fishermen who had grown from boys to men in the hunt" (137). They succeed in gaffing the eel, dragging it to the bank, watching exultantly as it dies and taunting it with the "fierce old phrases" of their ancestors: "'Old grandfather eel, old king tuna, you are dead meat now! Where are all your victories, old eel? Where are all your wives and your sons!'" (138). "The sight of the thing, stripped of its agility and lordliness, feebly twitching in the bloody buttercups" (138), releases the pent-up emotion in Bethell, and she sobs for it, for herself and for Queenie. Bakhtin notes that, at the end of the medieval carnival the temporary king "is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over . . . Abuse is death, it is former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into a corpse" (*Rabelais and His World* 197). The comic-tragic carnivalesque farce of Queenie's funeral is over and life in the community returns to normal.

Opening her autobiography at the point where her mother almost dies, Ruth Park, as adult narrator, notes that "The child is lost in an inexpressible grief which marks her for ever. Not knowing how to live with it, she retreats into near-silence, an obedient, compliant silence" (*Fence* 4). She also recalls that, "No one tells her anything. No one has explained so that she can comprehend . . . 'Don't you worry your head about it, darling' . . . She can hear her aunts conversing quietly; she must listen, for

how else will she find out anything?" (3-4). Thus Park is well aware, from her own experience, of what psychologists have confirmed from research:

Those who have worked in this field and especially the clinicians are clear that nothing but confusion and pathology results [sic] when news of a parent's death is withheld from children, or glossed over, and when expression of feeling is discouraged either implicitly or explicitly. (Bowlby 272-3)

When Bethell loses her grandmother, the only parent she has ever known, the pain is all-encompassing: "Bethell could not imagine living in a world where no Gramma lived any more. She was dazed and confused to the point of speechlessness" (9). Much of her subsequent hurt and confusion, however, stem from her bewilderment, her intuitive knowledge that there is much that is being kept from her. When Pearlie Gow triumphantly and maliciously tells her who her parents are, it is in front of all the other schoolchildren, who already know:

She had always known that Queenie was her mother. Yet it had been uncomprehended knowledge . . . The great mystery of it, and her inability to understand it, had driven the knowledge deep into the recesses of her mind . . . it had seemed so wrong and strange. (27)

Park's success as a writer of and for children is evidence of her perceptive awareness of the youthful mentality. In this case, the ability of an illegitimate child to know, while simultaneously refusing to know, the identity of the natural parent, is confirmed by Bernard Smith in his autobiography, *The Boy Adeodatus*: "Little Bennie . . . knew what the man meant. He had always seemed to know" (4). Bethell goes immediately to watch Johnny Gow at his work. "She had seen him often before. But he looked different now . . . She looked intently and ravenously at the man's sullen, handsome face, his curly hair, the hairy backs of his knuckles as he twisted the ears of the sacks" (29). But when she asks, "'Are you my father?'" Johnny cruelly threatens to have the police lock her up for spreading such a story. Bethell longs to know about Pearlie, her half-sister: "Whether her mother kissed her, and how her father spoke to her when he came home at night" (61). When Queenie returns to Te Kano, mortally ill, and is taken

in by Mrs Hush, it is Pearlie who breaks the news to Bethell, "Your mother's back", and Bethell is hurt and bewildered. "She thought, 'Why didn't nobody tell me?' The hurt was so great that she could barely stammer, 'I know that. Course I knew'" (117). She does not understand what it is that Jellicoe accuses her of and why her aunt furiously rejects her; she does not know why Bruna and Sieglinde leave her behind; why Mrs Hush allows Johnny Gow to take her; why Johnny and Ella hate her and, most of all, why Hoot Gibson Wi has abandoned her.

When the novel opens, Bethell is nine and, at its close, she is thirteen and aware of "the thirteen-year-old changes which were going on in her body, filling it with vague aches and a constant, dragging languor" (193). As her body matures, so does her mind. She knows that Pearlie's suggestion that she should run away and live under a hedge is impracticable: "When she was twelve Bethell might have believed that, and been excited at the adventurous idea, but now she was thirteen she knew that nobody could live under a hedge" (214). In spite of the vicious treatment she receives in the Gow household, she knows that there is nowhere else for her to go and that, in order to survive, she must endure. Nevertheless, the constant physical and mental battering are beginning to take their toll on her spirit: "The great courage and indomitability of her grandmother had subsided and lay dormant in her heart, and the fatalistic resignation of her father's family had taken their place" (213). Bethell is in danger of succumbing to the "learned helplessness" of the slum dweller. The appeal for both half-sisters, however, of living in the natural world, rather than seeking more conventional shelter, is interesting. Simone de Beauvoir maintains that the adolescent girl "will devote a special love to Nature: still more than the adolescent boy, she worships it. Unconquered, inhuman, Nature subsumes most clearly the totality of what exists" (*The Second Sex* 385). In *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, Annis Pratt and

Barbara White also discuss the relationship of women with nature. They note that many female authors emphasise women's instinctive empathy with nature, the "green world": "In most women's novels the green world is present in retrospect, something left behind or about to be left behind as one backs into the enclosure - a state of innocence that becomes most poignant as one is initiated into experience" (22). Bethell, conversely, escapes from the harshness of her experience into the natural innocence of the green world. As a child herself, Park spent much time amongst Maori people; she always portrays them as spiritually at one with their land; when Bethell first leaves her companions and the township and walks alone with Hoot Gibson Wi into the surrounding countryside, it is a mystical experience: "Almost at once the magic crept into Bethell" (167). Hoot Gibson introduces her to the wonders of the forest, the creek, the animals, and the limestone cave where, formerly, the Maoris had lain their dead and where the faraway sea can be heard in the tunnels. Again the novel partly conforms to the findings of Pratt and White who identify, in many women's novels, "an archetype that [they] have termed the green-world lover. This figure is closely associated with the naturistic epiphany, a vision of the green world that calls up from the feminine unconscious the image of an ideal lover" (22-23). Someone answering to the name of Hoot Gibson Wi might seem an unlikely candidate for such a role, but the pseudonym has been borrowed from a star of the silver screen, the boy's Maori name being virtually unpronounceable. Bethell "saw the pure line of his brown cheek, and the outline of his lips that was raised ever so slightly in relief, like a sculpture. All the beauty of his race was in his profile, and the girl, her mind untrammelled by comparisons, accepted that beauty with wonder and pleasure" (168). Bethell realises that her childhood has come to an end but Hoot Gibson is aware that she is still sexually immature; they simply plan, therefore, to be together at some time in the future. Hoot Gibson is too young to wrest Bethell physically from Johnny Gow in true heroic fashion, but Georgi Wi does it for him. Park thus reverses the trend noted by Pratt and White in that Bethell, rather than

retreating into the enclosure of society's expectations for young women, escapes into the green world, the natural and unpretentious world of the Maoris.

Te Kano, in which both *The Witch's Thorn* and *Pink Flannel* are set, is a fictional village, but the river upon which it stands has been "born in the rainbow slime of the big bog at the back of Te Kuiti" (*Thorn* 126), the real township in the King County in which, as a child, Ruth Park herself lived for a number of years. *Pink Flannel* is written in the first person and has a certain amount of autobiographical fact mixed in with its fiction. When still very young, Jenny Hood loses her mother and is sent by her father from Australia to New Zealand (thereby reversing Ruth Park's own odyssey) to be raised by her mother's sisters, the "Four Radiant Aunts". These "exquisite, giggly creatures with swathes and waves and kiss-curls of brown and flaxen and bright bay hair [who] wore their waists round their hips and their hems round their knees" (2), are obviously based upon Ruth Park's own four maternal aunts, those "exquisite, giggly, capricious creatures" whose frequent descents upon Te Kuiti assumed, for their small niece, the aura of "a shower of gold or twinkling beads" (*Fence* 50). Further, the author in the narrator occasionally intrudes into the text, as when she comments: "The other picture was one I found in some nameless settler's letters when, years later, I was preparing to write a book about the New Zealand goldfields" (*Flannel* 35-36). The book in question is *One-a-Pecker, Two-a-Pecker*, a novel which, as Ruth Park notes in her autobiography, "required much historical research in a poorly documented period" (*Fishing* 206). The novel is thus fictional but with autobiographical undertones which lend a sense of authenticity even to those episodes where comedy approaches farce; they are like frequently-told family tales which, over the years, have become a little tall in the telling. The novel is not divided into chapters, and the narrative is discursive. Thus the incident of the pioneer aviators, which has a

marked influence on Jenny and her story, is recalled in piecemeal fashion, interspersed with accounts of a record flood, the aunts' monumental decision to have their hair "buskered", the Irish priest's blistering sermon on immodest fashions and a penetrating sketch of the local schoolmistress. This does not mean that the narrative is disjointed; rather, it simulates the way in which memory works, the recounting of one incident involuntarily bringing to mind, by association, details of another. On the surface, the incidents recalled are those which would have most relevance for a child, not those that an adult would necessarily regard as important. Simultaneously, however, each episode not only has pertinence to the story, but reveals something of the characters involved as well as the customs and ideologies of the period.

Pink Flannel is a nostalgic and humorous account of childhood in the little town of Te Kano where, as the narrator muses, "looking back life . . . seems to have had all the smiling delight of a piece of light music" (4). Jenny Hood's sense of abandonment surfaces only occasionally in an otherwise happy childhood because she is still at the centre of a loving household and knows that she is genuinely wanted; her aunts are devoted to her and to each other: "When I got to know them I could understand very well how, when their eldest sister, my mother, died in Australia, and my distraught father, Tom Hood, was all for putting me in an orphanage, they instantly wrote a letter hardly readable for tear-stains, asking if they could have me as their very own" (3). Nevertheless, when Jenny learns that the name of a pioneer aviator is Hood, she fantasizes that he is her father: "Perhaps the deep unrecognized longing had been there all the time, to have a father I could be proud of, that I could boast of, even if it were only to the mossy encircling boughs of the peach-tree" (91). In a somewhat similar scenario to that of *The Witch's Thorn*, the people of Te Kano anxiously await news of the airmen who are attempting the first, perilous crossing of the Tasman Sea by air; their safe arrival is to be announced by the ringing of the town firebell. As Jenny's

fantasy takes firmer hold of her imagination, she confides in her best friend who, in turn, reveals the news proudly to their classmates and Jenny realises that her "lie" will soon be known to all, including her aunts. Horrified and panic-stricken, with childish unreason she blames the airman Hood for her predicament:

No longer the centre of a cloudy dream, he was unreasonably the reason for all my grief. The sick coldness in my stomach uncoiled, and in a rage I glared at the firebell and thought passionately, savagely, "I hope the bell never rings. I hope you never get here. I hope the wings tear off your plane." (99)

When a sensitive schoolfriend commiserates with her, saying, "I know how you feel. I got no father, either," she punches him in the nose (101).

Faith H. Leibman, writing on the effects of abandonment on a child, notes that:

When the relationship between a parent and child is disrupted through death, divorce, rejection or neglect, the child experiences a multitude of feelings, including sadness, rage, fear, shame and guilt . . . To the child, the act of leaving has immense impact. It is viewed as a deliberate abandonment. Such abandonment produces an intense amount of anger in the child, the extent of which is seldom recognized until after an act of violence has occurred. (57)

Jenny's reaction is entirely consistent with this. Significantly Pearlle Gow, not abandoned but neglected and despising her parents, also contemplates cursing a pioneer airman whom all the other schoolchildren admire: "He better be careful, or I'll put a spell on him and his aeroplane will break in the air and he'll fall into the sea, and the fish'll eat him up" (*Thorn* 123); in self defence against the injustices and powerlessness of her life, Pearlle has decided to be a witch when she grows up (105). Her anger gives her an immunity, which Bethell lacks, from their father's violence. When he demands, "You want what she got?", Pearlle simply shrugs: "You dassent touch me, because you know I'd stick the big knife in your throat while you was drunk," she said casually" (197). When the pioneer airmen of *Pink Flannel* fail to make the crossing safely and are never seen again, Jenny believes it is her fault: "I could hear nothing clearly but that unendurable drumlike voice within me. 'You did it. You killed them'" (109). She

becomes hysterical, then depressed, and her aunts decide to send her away to relatives for a holiday, by the end of which a new convent school will have opened in the town; Jenny can enroll there and thus escape an embarrassing confrontation with her former schoolfellows.

Jenny's emotional breakdown is real, but it is experienced as a child, coloured by and staged to fit the expectations of both her aunts and her own rather melodramatic imagination:

All day long I tried to die, but I felt too well. By evening, the shock had died down and I was ravenously hungry. But I knew, after the day's commotion, that it would be mean to eat. It seemed to make all the aunts' anxiety wasted and unnecessary. So, although it was an agony, I sent away untasted the glorious supper Francey brought in to me.

I felt a little better when I heard her say, out in the kitchen, "She didn't even *peck* at it, poor little dear." (111)

Typically, the adult narrator's tone combines irony with sympathy; the events of *Pink Flannel* are described from the viewpoint of a child, but with an underlying adult perspective. In this way the pretensions and hypocrisies of a small town are, in carnivalesque fashion, revealed and subverted but the mocking humour is gentle; the child is unaware of the absurdities she observes. For instance, the chamberpot "we pronounced strictly in the French way, and I must have been twelve before I got over my conviction that teapot should really be pronounced teapo" (65). Meanwhile:

The whole of the white population of Te Kano went round trembling indecisively on the verge of what was and what was not Nice. This varied from class to class, and on the whole the fourteen-bob-a-day man was a darned sight more proper than his medical or solictorial brother. His taboos were steely.

The Admiral girls freely borrowed from all classes. With Grandpa in their background like an evil old spook, they adopted every taboo in sight and felt safe. One of these by-laws was: No Nice girl shall go with a young man of unsuitable occupation. (14)

Louisa's romance with the Pig Man is, obviously, a flagrant breach of the proprieties.

There is, however, no laughter in the narrative voice when it turns to the attitude of the white population towards the Maoris: "Maoris were *common*. Who knows the idiomatic meaning of this word now?" the narrator muses. "Yet it demonstrates exactly the attitude once, and perhaps still, held toward the native New Zealanders" (23). This passage, in which the narrator examines and undermines the ideology of a period as revealed in its idiom, illustrates the Bakhtinian concept of centripetal and centrifugal forces within discourse. Bakhtin observes:

Such is the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school and so forth. It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language. (*Imagination* 272)

The adult white colonists, the narrator observes, expected the Maoris to comport themselves in the manner of Europeans and to accept the customs and ideologies of the white population, while denying them entry into white society. Subversively, the narrator (young Jenny grown up) notes that, amongst children, such hypocrisy did not exist; Maori children were accepted simply as "nice kids". Subversive, mocking humour returns to the narrative with the comment: "When they left school, however, they discovered they had put on social inequality along with the long trousers" (24). The targets of the subversive laughter are not confined to the characters in the novel; readers themselves are not immune:

My aunts were under the common illusion that a very small child is part of the furniture and doesn't notice. The truth is, of course, that children miss nothing and understand almost everything. What they don't understand they store away in their memories for future reference, and many a mother would blush if she realized what her children will comprehendingly recall about her in five years' time. (17)

Religion features less prominently in this novel than it does in much of Park's work, but it does not escape a gentle deflation. The Radiant Aunts, "modest to a pre-war degree", nevertheless, as dressmakers, feel obliged to keep abreast of fashion. Arriving late for Mass, in their twenties-knee-length satin coats, they are obliged to sit in the front row, where the sight of their "six glittering knees and six shameful shins" brings down the wrath of the parish priest from the pulpit. After enduring a blistering sermon on feminine modesty, Francey vows, "'I certainly won't do it again.' And, all credit to her, she didn't. She never sat in a front seat in church again her whole life" (87-89).

While the priest's fiery shaft may have scored only an indirect hit upon its fair vestal mark, the authoritarian relationship of minister to his congregation, in a small town in the 1920s, has been amply illustrated. It is one of Park's strengths that she can bring a period to life vividly and evocatively and in this novel she achieves it with a combination of nostalgia, understated finesse and comedy bordering on farce. For instance, in those days of limited entertainment, the moving picture industry had great impact: we have already noted its influence upon Mr Freestone, and Jenny's Aunt Francey becomes engaged to the cinema pianist, whose occupation is now long defunct (188). Jenny herself is of the opinion that her aunts, in their decadent satin coats, look "frightfully like three Norma Shearers" (87), while her best friend, whose "real name, of course, was Vi'let", has "renamed herself after Miss Negri, whom we had heard was a creature of transcendent beauty, which Pola thought she was, too" (2). When the Pig Man "Supposes" to Louisa with a La Gloria, the "first phonograph seen in Te Kano without a horn" he almost wins her sisters' approval (18). "How can I explain," the narrator ponders, "the terrible starvation for music which afflicted us all in those days?" (19) The aunts' irascible and domineering father, descending upon Te Kano to render judgment on the Pig Man's "Supposal", is equally captivated by the innovation and

promptly appropriates it for himself. "Nowadays it is difficult to imagine the grip a man like old Syver Admiral had on his family," the narrator observes. "He was one of the vast number of moral incompetents who found that the physical fact of fatherhood gave them authority over a number of people" (28-29). Syver's widowed sister also attends the family gathering accompanied by her four unmarried daughters who "had perpetrated a sentimental fraud common to those times. Irretrievably on the shelf even before the outbreak of the Great War, they had, in the course of it, one by one appeared in deepest mourning. They had 'lost someone'" (20). The Great War has also been accountable for the Radiant Aunts' elegant surname: Admiral. The irrationality to which patriotic enthusiasm can lead during wartime will be mocked subversively in a later Park novel, *Swords and Crowns and Rings*; in *Pink Flannel*, the narrator reveals that Syver's patronym had been the Scandinavian Albrechtsen, one which he is aware is likely to be mistaken, by New Zealanders in a fervour of patriotism, for German; he changes it, therefore, for one reflecting his nautical calling (4). This causes some unexpected complications when his unmarried sister, Fedora, comes to keep house for him: "Until people learnt differently, some pretty scandalous rumours about Miss Albrechtsen and old Mr Admiral went about Kawhia. Sodom and Gomorrah, it seemed, were in full fling at Te Maika" (126). It is to this unlikely couple, living in a cliff-top house far to the north of Te Kano, that Jenny is despatched to recover from her ordeal; and it is here that one of the most graphic events of the novel takes place: the death of a whale.

The whale has beached itself and takes several days to die and Jenny and her grandfather watch over it in its agony. Overcome with pity, Jenny is frantic in her powerlessness to help the gigantic, gentle creature. She lies awake at night, listening to its futile convulsions, the frenzied thrashing that gradually becomes weaker. Crowds gather: the white intruders "greedily taking in all the details of this strange castaway"

(138), and the native inhabitants, Maoris and their dogs, birds, fish, and crabs, all waiting patiently for the end. And her grandfather gloats. As a boy he had gone to sea on whaling ships, a "young ship's boy, his body covered with sea-boils, his bleeding hands daubed with Stockholm tar, asleep in all his sodden steaming clothing in a pig-pen fo'c'sle" (35). All his working life has been spent in mortal combat with the giant whales, and now he is old, and his enemy has been laid low. Its suffering and death vindicate his suffering and his peril, and salute his survival. The passage is unusual in the dialogic sense; for one thing, there is very little dialogue. The whale is mute; Syver does not have the vocabulary in English (or any other language, for that matter) to express his triumph; and Jenny is trapped in the helpless inarticulation of childhood. Each is in the grip of intense and prolonged emotion, yet there can be no verbal communication; the three protagonists are caught up in the same event yet separated utterly by nature and experience. Yet dialogue does take place. The whale, of course, has no desire for communication, it can only signal unconsciously its fear and despair. But Syver squats beside its head, "staring at it all the time as though to fix it immobile with his gaze . . . his yellow teeth bared in a grin of pleasure . . . a sleepless gloating gobliness form"" (138-39), willing it to sense his triumph. Jenny, equally silent, but goaded beyond endurance, communicates effectively:

Grandpa broke into a raucous laugh. Harsh and malicious, it seemed to me the laugh of a devil. All my sorrow about Ailie, . . . my homesickness and distress, centred on this cruel pagan old man. His hand dangled beside me, a gnarly block of wood. I dug my teeth into it so far I almost felt them meet.
(141-42)

The interlude with the whale has been a kind of carnival, a time of gathering for a spectacle with all normal activity, all laws of behaviour suspended temporarily. At the centre of the carnival has been pathos, and at the edges, the grotesque. Only Syver has laughed mockingly at the decrowning of a king but now the situation has been reversed and the reader can laugh at Syver's downfall at the hands of a child. Death, approaching

death and regeneration have been brought together in the whale, the old man and his granddaughter. For Jenny, as for Bethell, the death of an innocent creature, a submarine creature dying upon land, has been the catalyst for an eruption of emotion pent up in the unconscious.

Park's accounts of the slow and agonizing deaths of the giant eel and the whale evoke recollection of the death of the elephant in George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant". In the story, Orwell is a subdivisional police officer in a town in Lower Burma in the time of the British Raj and is therefore, as a doubly visible symbol of oppression, "hated by large numbers of people" (91). Though secretly sympathising with the Burmese, he is goaded by his own guilt and the rancour with which he is surrounded into reciprocating the hatred. One day he is called upon by the unarmed townspeople to deal with a working elephant which has "gone 'must'", that is into a condition of frenzy to which male beasts of burden sometimes succumb. By the time he reaches the elephant, the frenzy has passed; the huge beast is placid once again and he has no desire or need to kill it. Nevertheless, a crowd of several thousand has followed him to witness the shooting, and he knows that he will be an object of ridicule if he reneges. He shoots therefore, and, due to his inexperience and poor markmanship, the great beast takes more than half an hour to die. Miserably aware that he has "done it solely to avoid looking a fool" (99), Orwell gains an insight into "the real nature of imperialism - the real motives for which despotic governments act" (92). The elephant is a metonym, a symbol drawn from within the thing itself, for Burma; the creature's needless death is symbolic of the colonisation and despoilation of nature by humans, whether British or Burmese. Almost before the huge animal is dead, the villagers are hacking at its body for the meat, just as the bystanders carve up the inoffensive whale in Park's account. The whale has beached itself but no attempt has been made either to refloat it or to put it out of its misery. It too is a metonym, a representative part of the

hordes of gentle creatures slaughtered for profit by mankind, just as old Syver is a representative of all the boys who have suffered and sometimes died in the whaling ships and whose fear and suffering have been forged into hatred. For the Maoris, the giant eel is a metonym for the way of life they have lost, since being colonised by the white man. They risk their lives in order to kill it and, in so doing, briefly regain their status as warriors and hunters: "Where are all your victories, old eel? Where are all your wives and your sons!" (138).

Old Syver does make one attempt at meaningful dialogue with his granddaughter. He fashions a wooden whistle and, after much practice, is able to reproduce the sound of a nightingale, a Northern Hemisphere bird which she has never seen and knows only from books. Then he tells her that once, as a small boy, he was taken into the garden of a grand house where he met an old man and, together, they listened to a nightingale; the old man was Hans Christian Andersen (149). At the time, Jenny is unimpressed, preferring, as did the young Ruth Park, the stories of the Brothers Grimm (*Fence* 83), and the attempt at dialogue is abandoned. It has not failed completely, however; in *Reading Dialogics*, Lynne Pearce argues that "The telephone . . . is a uniquely suggestive metaphor for coming to terms with the central tenets of dialogism . . . the caller can speak only when the person being dialled picks up the receiver" (1-2). The narrator of *Pink Flannel* picks up the receiver as an adult, saying, "But now it seems to me a wonderful thing that my very own grandfather saw Hans Andersen when he was dying of cancer at the home of the kindhearted Melchior family, and that together they listened to a bird that might have inspired *The Chinese Nightingale*" (150). She has taken up this idea of a dialogue across the years earlier, noting that "the little town of Te Kano is full of history, not the sort in books, but the sort which sits round on verandas in rocking chairs, or squats on the marae before the Pa, or goes to church and kneels on faithful, rheumatically knees and thanks God for each hour of grace and favour" (5).

Syver's attempt at dialogue with his granddaughter indicates a chink in his armour of irascible malevolence, a sign of his awareness of approaching death, perhaps a remembrance of the frightened, frozen cabin boy he once has been. Morally incompetent he may be, but his harsh life has not broken him; he has the resilience and indomitability typical of Park's characters. True, this is not proof against the rigours of Mrs Cuskelly's nursing but Mrs Cuskelly herself has triumphed over a childhood of heavy labour, followed by marriage to an idle man which has necessitated the running of a boarding-house in order to support him and their children, and, above all, the tragedy of bearing and raising a son who is a dwarf. As for Syver's daughters, "it was a miracle that the docile, bullied girls had grown up as delightfully as they had. That miracle was my Auntie Barbie, innocent, gentle, and brave, who had bowed like a tree to the blast of his dirty temper and savage unreasonableness, but never broken" (29). Jenny's happy, secure childhood is the result of her aunts' acceptance of responsibility; Bethell's tormented childhood is the result of her parents' refusal to accept theirs.

At the close of the novel, all Jenny's aunts but one are married or about to be married and Jenny and Pola are in the peach tree, replete with wedding-breakfast delicacies. The adult narrator recalls that: "I wanted the warmth and the contentment and the shut-in-ness to be with me for good. I wanted to be nowhere else, ever" (221). The two little girls make scathing comments on the folly of adults and congratulate each other on their immunity to the absurdity of falling in love. However, "Strange and melancholy misgivings stole into my heart, a sad loneliness I had never felt before. I glanced quickly at Pola, and found that she was staring at me with wistful doubt. We were growing up. The pink flannel petticoat was already becoming too short" (223). In spite of their determined complacency, a sense of vulnerability is creeping in, the first

intimation that a girl's own mind and body may betray her into the enclosure that waits within the apparent autonomy of adult life.

Park more than once depicts the confusion experienced by a girl at the onset of puberty, when the body she has taken for granted all her life suddenly declares its autonomy. In *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* she recalls her own resentful awareness that "probably I should never sleep on my stomach again. It hurt the bumps on my chest too much", and her irrational and impotent fury when her family commented upon her developing figure: "I could have killed them for even noticing" (176-77). For Miriam McKillop, raised from infancy by a modest, elderly granduncle, the onset of adolescence is even more bewildering. She "did not want to become a woman, a soft shell-less thing . . . again and again she passed her fingers over her own taut shiny little face to make sure that female-ness was not catching up with her. She wanted to remain flat and hard and independent of nature and the world, herself and herself alone" (*Roses* 162).

A Power of Roses was published in 1953, between *The Witch's Thorn* and *Pink Flannel*. For the setting of this novel, Park has reverted from the lush beauty of rural New Zealand, to the overcrowded Sydney slums of *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man's Orange*. Miriam and her Uncle Puss live in two rooms of the Jerusalem, formerly a hotel and now a dilapidated residential, with a laundry and a fish shop on the ground floor and an assortment of impoverished tenants above. When the novel opens, Miriam, "whose father was dead and whose mother had run away" (27) is twelve. She and her Uncle Puss are adept in the complicated process of staying alive on an old age pension: Miriam begs fish backbones for a nonexistent cat (2), while Uncle Puss invents even more pets to explain buying catsmeat, "juicy pieces of rabbit, liver, and all sorts of rag ends of good meat", for a nourishing stew (28). They know where they can

buy broken eggs and spoiled fruit, stale hamburgers and sugar sweepings, but the staple ingredient of their diet is crumbs from the Sweeties cereal factory. "Oh, the strange things these two lived on!" the narrator observes. "For in a country bursting and overflowing with meat, milk, butter, fruit, and wheat, these beggars on the Commonwealth's charity lived on the sweepings" (27). Park's work is not political *per se*; rather it evinces a strong social conscience and thus serves both as a reflection of and an influence upon cultural ideology. In the above passage, the narrative segue into rhetoric subversively emphasises, in Bakhtinian terms, "the fundamental liberation of cultural-semantic and emotional intentions from the hegemony of a single and unitary language, and consequently the simultaneous loss of a feeling for language as myth, that is, as an absolute form of thought" (*Imagination* 367). The poor, the ill or deformed, the very young and the very old, in short the very sectors of society usually overlooked by novelists are those from which Park most often draws her characters. In this novel she again takes up the cause of the inadequacy of old age pensions, which she introduced in *Poor Man's Orange* with Bumper Reilly and the flophouse, while the detailed accounts of "snagging" (scavenging for edible handouts) are drawn from her own experience during the Depression (*Fence* 115-118). As an author, Park exhibits, in the words of Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, "a deep commitment to ideas, balanced by an esthetic commitment to the art of narrative" (108). In most cases, therefore, Park's characters do not see themselves as victims and their resilience and her ironic humour dispel any aura of didacticism.

Perce McKillop (Uncle Puss) is a case in point; he attacks poverty with resourcefulness and verve. At the Protestant Jumble Sale, unable to buy an overcoat for the sum he can afford, he unerringly singles out an inexperienced young clergyman, "a pink and gentle boy whose soul yearned in sympathy towards these poor old ladies and gentlemen" (32); in no time Uncle Puss has acquired the young man's own raincoat.

However, when unmasked by an older, more worldly-wise minister as an "old humbug", who has recently been "over at the St Vincent de Paul . . . rattling [his] rosary beads . . . and saying [his] auntie founded the Sisters of St Joseph", Uncle Puss admits it cheerfully, "an irrepressible grin" on his face (34). Just as his pathos has appealed to the young man, his cheeky resourcefulness succeeds with the older, for while his methods may be unorthodox, his need is genuine. Uncle Puss leaves the sale not only with the coat but also with a pair of boots, a shirt and a large slice of cake, all free (34).

Park accentuates Uncle Puss's indomitability by contrast: another tenant of the Jerusalem is the elderly Mr Frazer who shares a room with his crippled grandson, Dunkie Cantavera. Mr Frazer is timid; he is bullied by Dunkie, by his daughter-in-law, by cheap Billy Ketchel, by the authorities, by shopkeepers, in short by life. He lives in constant terror that the authorities will discover that he earns a few shillings as a part-time gardener and will revoke his pension and possibly even charge him with a criminal offence. One incident serves to illustrate the difference between the two old men. Early on the morning of his fortnightly gardening stint, Mr Frazer lacks a penny for the gas meter and is unable, therefore, even to make himself a cup of tea. He is almost in despair until he notices an empty bottle in the yard far below, "the kind of bottle you get twopence for" (37), and runs downstairs to secure it before anyone else can. His pride, however, prevents him from taking the bottle to the shop himself, and so he asks a child to do it for him, promising one of the pennies for the favour. The slum child, of course, is street-wise and spends both pennies on sherbet which he consumes leisurely and disdainfully in front of the old man; Mr Frazer can only retreat to his room, "trembling with rage and frustration and defeat" (38). Unlike Uncle Puss, who has come to terms with his poverty and accepts handouts with alacrity, Mr Frazer is deeply ashamed when offered charity. He experiences a "terrible feeling of inferiority" whenever he meets Uncle Puss, knowing that, in the other's estimation, he is "a poor silly old bee" (45).

When offered a job washing dishes in a cheap café, he is torn between need for the money and terror that he might lose his pension. In spite of Dunkie's furious recriminations, he can only turn his face to the wall, saying, "I'm too old, too old" (49). He is painfully aware that "Mr McKillop would not be afraid to take the job", and, of course, Uncle Puss does (49).

Park makes it obvious that Uncle Puss's resilience stems, in a large part, from the loving, mutually supportive relationship he and Miriam share: "loyalty so great it was never considered; a companionship which had intertwined as tightly as a vine since the long ago day when Uncle Puss had taken charge of her, an ugly, solemn little girl whose father was dead and whose mother had run away" (27). This is something that Mr Frazer lacks, Dunkie, his crippled grandson, being utterly self-centered. As is usual in her fiction, Park makes much in this novel of the power of love, the strength it gives and receives. Mr Monkey, the Chinese laundryman, has a mentally handicapped daughter, Anna, around whom his whole life revolves. He takes devoted care of her, thereby, although otherwise "incomprehensible", earning a place in the community, "for these poor people cherish . . . their children, too" (13). When Anna is killed, Mr Monkey is devastated, fading visibly, and only one purpose remains in his life: revenge. Having achieved this, patiently and anonymously, he simply departs. Unknowingly, Mr Monkey has exacted vengeance upon the wrong person; nevertheless the results are beneficial as, with the demise of the bullying Cheap Billy Ketchel, Mr Frazer is at last able to pay court to Mrs Ketchell, Cheap Billy's mother. The two elderly people find comfort and delight in each other and Mr Fraser's self-respect, dignity and courage are restored (176-79).

Park depicts the need to love and be loved as something endemic to human nature, and the loneliness of her single characters is frequently emphasised by contrast

with the completeness of those in loving relationships. In *The Harp in the South*, for instance, Mr Diamond is the more alone for living in a family home but outside the family circle. Auntie Con is overjoyed to find her brother Perce after so many years, yet realises, with pain, that she cannot simply attach herself to the loving relationship of Miriam and Uncle Puss; acceptance comes slowly and must not only be awaited but earned (186). Miriam both resents her aunt's intrusion and yearns for the womanly love she has never known (161-4). Yet when Uncle Puss dies, and Miriam, through her own pain, realises the depth of the older woman's anguished isolation, their roles undergo a reversal and she feels "the scalding warmth, the yearning to protect that had once been hers when she held Mrs Cantavera's baby" (215).

Bethell, abandoned and ill-treated, focuses all her love on the "queer little boy", one of the Gow's children, who can neither walk nor talk: "She knew . . . that was what she wanted, the comfort of something warm and alive pressed against her, something that wanted her caress and was happy with her nearness" (*Thorn* 198). Miriam fiercely loves a battered baby, the illegitimate child of Mrs Cantavera, and yearns to protect him. When Mrs Cantavera abandons the baby, with a luggage tag around his neck reading, "You can have him" (134), both Miriam and the baby are blissfully happy: "'You're mine, you're my very own,' [Miriam] breathed, 'and no one's going to take you away'" (145). Authority soon intervenes, however, in the form of Auntie Con, and the baby is taken into care. Miriam is heartbroken and although, with dawning maturity, she realises that the baby needs special attention that she is not equipped to give, this is small comfort. She makes her way to the foot of the Harbour Bridge where a young man works whom, with the aid of Uncle Puss's telescope, she used to watch but the tenuous link has been severed because Dunkie has broken the telescope. The young man, of course, is oblivious of her existence but he has become the focus of her

fantasizing. Now she cries silently: "I gotta have something! I gotta have something! There's no one left but you now, and I can't see you any more" (149).

The young man on the Bridge in some ways resembles the green-world-lover of Pratt and White, albeit somewhat incongruously as he is a worker in the heart of a great industrialized city. Nevertheless, as one of the maintenance men on the great structure, he rises, quite literally, above his surroundings, standing high up on the catwalk of the arch itself, "treating the giant structure with scorn and carelessness" (63). He has, therefore, an other-worldly image, representing courage, indomitability and progress, an escape from the world of the sordid and mundane in the old city huddled below. When Uncle Puss dies, Miriam runs instinctively to the Bridge and, in an ending which strains credulity a little, the young people meet. Miriam and Bethell both, therefore, accept the inevitability of growing up; yet they find not entrapment but freedom and fulfilment in the state of womanhood.

The narrative tone of this novel is neither as polyphonic nor as carnivalesque as those of *The Witch's Thorn* and *Pink Flannel*, nevertheless the humour is often subversive with the most frequent target being not so much religion itself as the abuse or failure of religious practices. Mr Creepin' Christmas, the proprietor of the fish shop, grows his hair and beard long, in imitation of Christ, abstains from his husbandly duties, and longs for the days of martyrdom. His abject terror, however, upon being questioned by the police about Anna's murder, reveals to him that he lacks saintly fortitude and he resumes life on a more earthly plane (93-94). The young minister, who yearns to succour the poor and needy, lacks the courage to confront Mrs Cantavera when Miriam appeals to him to save the baby (67). The faith healer to whom the sick flock in hope of cure is a charlatan, making a comfortable living by trading on desperation and hysteria; he enlists those two other performers, Mrs Cantavera and

Dunkie, to assist him in duping the gullible. When Miriam's fervent prayers for the battered baby seem to go unanswered, she turns accusingly on the Mother of God: "'You've got a lot to do, Our Lady . . . How'd you like to have it happen to your Baby, I'd like to know?'" (21), and drops her St Christopher medal down a drain (56). Yet the baby is eventually saved; the young minister intervenes gently but effectively in the plight of the tuberculour Mrs Simich and her children; and when Mr Creepin' Christmas shears his abundant auburn locks, Miriam salvages them from the garbage tin, sells them to a doll factory, and thereby acquires enough money to buy "a towel, a tablecloth, and some new cups and saucers" to impress Auntie Con (133). All of which would seem to confirm William Cowper's observation that, "God moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform" (316).

It is through the influence of Auntie Con that Miriam comes to terms with her approaching womanhood. Having no recollection of her parents and knowing she is loved by Uncle Puss, Miriam does not suffer the pain of abandonment. She is, however, conscious of a feeling of inferiority in comparison with children living in intact families, a psychological reaction common in such circumstances (Mishne 484). Apart from the "hairy little bumps on the forehead Uncle Puss gave her every Christmas" (17), physical demonstrations of affection are quite unknown to her, as she realises when taunted by Dunkie Cantavera (16). Therefore, although she is resentful of her aunt's overbearing intrusion into their lives, she "retrace[s] over and over in her mind the feel of the squeeze" she receives on their meeting: "'Oh, she must like me, or she wouldn'ta done it'", she reflects (137). For her part, Con McKillop, "who would so gladly have taken Miriam to fill the empty spaces in her heart" (150), has the maturity to realise that she must temper her enthusiasm for her new-found family and allow Miriam time to adjust. Never having had female companionship, Miriam does not realise, until she leaves school and tries to find work, that her manners are gauche and

her appearance unkempt. Under Auntie Con's influence, she gradually learns to take pride in her appearance and her speech, and, in general, to behave like a young woman rather than a scruffy, undisciplined child. The unquestioning innocence of childhood is gradually replaced by previously unconsidered notions of propriety. She is indignant to discover that she may no longer sleep in the same room as her granduncle, in spite of his "exquisite modesty, his delicacy of mind" which has ensured that "she'd never in all her life seen even his knees" (143). Yet, confusingly, she discovers that her embarrassment at sharing a room with her aunt, her reluctance to undress before her, is a source of affectionate amusement: "'We're both women, aren't we?'" (162). At first fearing the "loss of her independence" (163), she comes to accept that the restraints placed upon her behaviour stem from her Aunt's genuine concern and, with this more mature insight, is able to accept the combination of authority and affection (186). Finally, when Uncle Puss dies and Auntie Con is bereft, the roles of the two women are reversed and Miriam, in promising to take care of her aunt, finds compensation for the loss of her independence in acquiring a dependant, a receptacle for the love and protection she has always longed to give (215).

The choice of a nurturing, protective relationship rather than a romantic, sexual one is taken up again in *The Frost and the Fire*, a novel set in the gold rush era of the South Island of New Zealand. In a preface to the novel, Ruth Park acknowledges the receipt of a grant from the New Zealand Government to assist in the research for the novel and explains that, while some characters and locations may have been modified or relocated slightly, the background detail of the story is genuine and thoroughly researched. Once again, Park's love of her native land is evident in the haunting descriptions of its natural beauty, but the stark grandeur of the mountainous Otago region is in sharp contrast to the watery, rainforest-covered landscapes of the North Island in which several of her other works are set. In this novel, nature itself becomes a

protagonist. In their discussion of *Archetypal Patterns in Womens' Fiction*, Pratt and White note that, in ancient mythology, "the pursuit narrative . . . often involved a green-world locale, an island, 'well', or grotto, invaded by men who rape the beneficent women residents - followed by an account of the destruction and theft of the area's natural value" (25). In Park's account of the gold rush, the devastation of the countryside in the pursuit of gold is simply another episode in the ravaging of the pristine New Zealand landscape by humans. The Polynesians had "from the jasper arteries of the land wrenched out the greenstone they coveted" (6); white men followed who "bludgeoned the round-headed, astonished seals who had not seen men before" (6), and they had been followed by whalers plying their equally destructive trade. Later, when settlers arrived to take up land for sheep and cattle, the first unusual sight to greet newcomers to the fledgling city of Dunedin was "the flare of sunbleach on a seawall of whales' headbones" (8). But it was the discovery of gold that brought men in their thousands from all over the world until "the blue rivers [ran] thick as soup from the debris of mankind's wild scurry for riches in their banks and floors" (38). The brooding, snow-capped mountain peaks and the extremities of the weather are ever-present threats to the huddle of tents that is Calico Town and, when blizzards and flashfloods from melting snow take the lives of thousands of nameless miners, it is as if Nature is taking revenge.

As usual, Park conveys the atmosphere of the period convincingly: the swarms of miners of every description; the excitement and folly of gold-fever; the cynicism of those who follow the miners, determined to make their own fortunes by supplying whatever is in demand; and the privations endured by all. In a sense, the whole period covered by the novel is one of carnival: all classes mix indiscriminately; all normal occupations are abandoned; all normal rules of propriety and even law are suspended or ignored and any successful prospector can be king for a day only to be dethroned

abruptly when his money runs out or is stolen. The heterogeneous mix of nationalities, classes, occupations, religions and ideologies result in a polyphonic narrative discourse to which the somewhat ambivalent nature of the narrator is added.

Ostensibly, the narrator is Tattie Law, now an elderly woman, who, in recalling the scenes and events of long ago, frequently slips back into the idiom of her Scottish youth. The narrative is thus in the first person, yet, in spite of Tattie's explanatory assertion that, "many of the scenes and the people in this story I was told about by other folk" (31), events, thoughts and emotions are described of which Tattie could not possibly be aware. For instance, when the taciturn old washerwoman, Mother Jerusalem, has her first intimation of physical weakness, "all at once she felt something go inside her, like a little bubble bursting . . . it seemed to her that her clothes sagged a little, and her strength was seeping out through her toes like water" (4). Mother Jerusalem does not complain to Currency but, as she contemplates the girl, "a small regret touched her. She thought: 'I've turned the lass into a washerwoman like masel' and she's but a bairnie". Aloud, she simply orders Currency to fetch more charcoal (5). Later, in the pandemonium of gold-fevered Dunedin, a young drayman eyes Currency admiringly but sadly: "'Wed in a week,' he thought, and a sadness as incomprehensible as hunger to an animal swept over him and made him jerk his horses viciously around the crowds that blocked the street" (9). This is unquestionably omniscient narration. The presence of an eye-witness narrator lends a story verisimilitude, of particular advantage in bringing to life an historic era, while the presence of an omniscient narrator enables thoughts and actions of characters other than the narrator to be revealed. Park is not the first novelist to have employed a multi-faceted narrator: "The novelist's determination to have the benefits of eye-witness narration without accepting its limitations has been indefatigable," Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg observe

(259), citing Sterne, Flaubert, Dickens, Conrad and Proust as authors who have, on occasion, insisted on "having it both ways" (259-60).

In his 1958 review of the novel for *Southerly*, R. G. Geering expresses puzzlement as to "why the autobiographical method has been chosen", maintaining that "We rarely feel that the book is a genuine expression of the narrator's personality, because the novelist fails to stay inside the character" (54). Forty years later, in the era of postmodernism, readers are less nonplussed by a narrator with Protean tendencies, an unreliable narrator having become almost *de rigueur*. David Lodge has observed that, "The point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter. This need not be a conscious, or mischievous, intention on their part" (*The Art of Fiction* 155). In this way, Park makes further use of the ambivalent nature of her narrator. The novel begins in what appears to be standard, third-person narrative, but the reader is forced to make a quick adjustment of perspective on Page 3: "She had the austere singlemindedness of the Highlander. Should I not know, who have it likewise?" Reading on, now aware that the narrative is in the first person, the reader comes to the point where the narrator and the young woman, Currency, meet:

That was my first sight of Currency, whom I was to love so much and hate so much, a young girl in an ivy-coloured gown, pushed this way and that, and at last thrown panting against the wheel of our wagon as it stood helpless in the crush.

"Are you all right, lass?" I cried, but my mother pulled me back, saying coldly, "What is it to us?" (14)

Shortly afterwards, Mother Jerusalem is seriously injured in an accident, and the narrator says: "Then I was down on the ground, regardless of the screams of horror, and had my arms about the girl. "Come awa' lass, dinna be looking!" (15) The impression given by the manner in which the two brief incidents are related is that the narrator is a

young male. The two characters part, and the story continues to centre around Currency for almost forty pages until they meet again at the death of Billy Figg's wife. The reader then has to make another adjustment as the narrator recalls that, "My mother . . . turned to me. "Come now, Tatty my girl. Get the fire going and a hot drink inside the poor man!" (54) Nevertheless, as Tatty continues to describe their reunion, she says: "I looked with love into that dirty blubbered face, half hidden by loops of sweat-soaked dusty hair, for something within me told me even more strongly than it had in Dunedin that this girl would mean much in my life" (54). This love-at-first-sight is typical of the sudden, violent emotions to which adolescents are prone, the intense, schoolgirl crushes which do not necessarily indicate a permanent tendency to homosexuality. Such emotions, experienced for the first time and, in the case of both these girls, in the absence of normal, loving parental relationships, have an immensely strong impact. This explains why Tatty continues to love Pigallo, though fully aware of his weaknesses, and the overreaction of both girls to the physical presence of the charismatic Shannadore.

Geering makes another point with rather more justification: "Certain sections, notably the early chapters, are overwritten, with images piled up in great abandon", citing passages such as "Now was the time for the golden hair of the tussock to be combed by the wheel of the wagon" (54). The description of Mrs Figg's burial is another case in point: "She who had known the douce brown streams of Ireland was buried above the kingfisher waters of the trampling river. The glisk of the sun showed but faintly amongst the smoking hills" (54). Nevertheless, the narrator is supposed to be an elderly woman, in the 1890s, recounting a tale in what she deems to be a proper storytelling manner and trying to capture both the grandeur of the scenery and the pathos of the humans dwarfed within it. As Bakhtin has observed, discussing the polyphonic quality of Dostoevsky's novels, it is "as if the character were not an object

of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word" (*Dostoevsky* 5). Elaborating upon this point, Lynne Pearce remarks that "The multiple voices and characters of Dostoevsky's novels are not subsumed in the world-view of the author-narrator: they are fully independent" (45); so, in this sense, is the elderly Tattie Law independent of Ruth Park. It may be justifiably argued, of course, that this is scarcely feasible, since Ruth Park has created Tattie Law, but Bakhtin maintains that

There is no contradiction. The characters' freedom we speak of here exists within the limits of the artistic design, and in that sense is just as much a created thing as is the unfreedom of the objectivized hero. But to create does not mean to invent. Every creative act is bound by its own special laws, as well as by the laws of the material with which it works. Every creative act is determined by its object and by the structure of its object, and therefore permits no arbitrariness; in essence it invents nothing, but only reveals what is already present in the object itself. (*Dostoevsky* 64-65)

In her unpublished and, as yet, uncatalogued working notes on the novel held in the Mitchell Library, Park comments that "the looking back technique allows a lot of good things . . . For instance, the mention of customs and oddities gone out of style, as comical to a person living in the nineties as to us now" (Mitchell, ML MSS 3218). Thus Tattie, in describing Currency, observes complacently that: "No pride or false shame or that which is nowadays called 'early Victorianism' cut short the natural growth and blooming of her mind and heart. (Although in very fact we early Victorians were much broader in our outlook than the people of these days, the nineties.)" (67). In a similar vein, a reader of the 1990s might be inclined to find some passages sentimental, for instance Tatty's grandfather's devotion to the grave of "Somebody's Darling", the nameless young prospector. If so, it should be recalled, from the Preface, that "The graves of Somebody's Darling and the man who buried him may still be seen at Miller's

Flat"; it would seem that the late Victorians were more sentimental in outlook than the people of these days, the nineteen-nineties.

Similarly, the mysterious character Shannadore is more a figure of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature than of contemporary fiction. He is the epitome of the overwhelming male presence of the female *Bildungsroman* which Pratt and White have identified: "the figure of Eros . . . the green-world lover" (16). They cite as examples: "In *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Heathcliff, whose name suggests a natural landscape, takes on erotic and mythological fascination for Catherine. [and] The green-world lover archetype may inform the mythological overtones of the Great Corn God, who carries Cather's hero Alexandra away in a dream passage in *O Pioneers!* [1913]" (22). Even Virginia Woolf, in an early novel, *Night and Day* (1919), has her heroine, Katharine, imagine herself in a wild and beautiful landscape, where "The man, too, was some magnanimous hero, riding a great horse by the shore of the sea. They rode through forests together, they galloped by the rim of the sea" (Pratt and White 23) (Woolf 87). Woolf's heroine, however, wakes from her reverie to contemplate a real-life, loveless marriage. Shannadore is portrayed as a person of considerable presence, a man whom others trust and are prepared to follow, but whom only the two teenage girls and Billy Figg (who is essentially immature) regard with hero-worship. When Currency first sees him, he appears as "a solid figure against the impalpable fuzziness of the atmosphere, a man on a black horse . . . Through the halation of her lashes he was the dark centre of a burning bush" (11), and his eyes have "the piercing look of a wild bird's" (26). Tatty is of the opinion that, "His voice was first something to listen to with pleasure, so soft and rich it was, and then something never to forget, and last of all a music to charm a bird off a bough . . . but I could never get over the frowning falcon look of those light eyes . . . I kept wanting to drop my gaze before his" (145). Billy Figg regards Shannadore as "his master", crying at a time of peril, "I can't live without

him any more! I'd rather die by his side than rule a prince in heaven" (113), but then, as the narrator has already commented drily, "Some men are born to be dogs and Billy Figg was surely one of them" (32). Tatty and Currency experience love for the first time amidst the hardships and hysteria of the gold diggings; the emotion is genuine but they are ill-prepared to cope with its intensity, having little experience of life and no peers for role models. "And so we talked, as girls do, knowing little of life and making nonsensical guesses at it, but getting comfort out of our romancing just the same", the older Tatty recalls (130). The overblown, "overwritten" language in which their emotions are expressed is the narrator's attempt to recreate their feelings for the purpose of her story and as Lodge has pointed out, using the butler from *The Remains of the Day* as his example, an unreliable narrator is not always conscious of distortion (*Fiction* 155).

Currency is another of Park's heroines who is abandoned as a young girl. The novel opens with the statement that, "On the field of Bendigo one day, an old woman called Mother Jerusalem bought a child for three sovereigns and a green linsey bodice". When the child attempts to follow her mother, the woman "struck her in the face with a fist and staggered on. It reminded Mother Jerusalem of a cow kicking away a weaned calf" (1). As the girl grows, she sometimes wonders, "'Why was I born? Why didn't she want me?' and then she would think of Mother Jerusalem and whisper: 'And why did *she* want me?'" (4). Mother Jerusalem has no ulterior motive in buying the child; she simply wants a servant. Shocking as all this might seem today, in the previous century it would not have been at all remarkable as children often were put into service at a very young age. Tatty Law still lives with her widowed mother and young brothers, but she is almost as starved for affection as Currency:

So much did I long for a word of love or praise from my mother that sometimes in bed at night I would repeat to myself the things I wished to hear

from her: Tatty, my dawtie, you've a fine light hand with the bread, or What would I do without you, my big lass? I would have worked myself to the bone, as a dog will, for one word of endearment. But it never came. My poor mother! I was not old enough to know that I was never, in her mind, her daughter. The little lads were her family and I was only another woman, clumsy, and often foolish. (71)

The anguish of a daughter who is unloved by her mother is a subject to which Park returns in *Missus* when Josie suffers similar pain. Just as Park's temporary loss of her own mother seems to have triggered a desire to explore in fiction the possible outcomes for an abandoned child, so the cause of an unloved child may be an extension of her own experience of a mother's somewhat ambivalent attitude (*Fence* 66). Eventually, the tension between Tatty and her mother erupts; Mrs Law strikes her daughter, accusing her of being jealous of Currency, then is immediately repentant. The older Tatty recalls:

I might have been dying, the pain there was inside me . . . She put her arms around me then, but I was past caring. I just stood there while she . . . murmured all the words I had longed to hear all my life and now came too late. . . . She had stopped being my mother. Indeed, she was never to be so again. We were to be two women living in the same house, oft times on each other's nerves, as women are bound to be, but destined to end as the dearest friends. (172-73)

In both episodes, the narrative begins in desolation but ends in tranquillity. Yet another young heroine has survived the pain of rejection and, with dawning maturity, has found fulfilment in giving love and receiving love of a different kind.

Although the story is that of the two young women, in some respects Mrs Law is the most interesting character in the novel and certainly the one most sharply drawn. In *Fishing in the Styx*, Park recalls that, although her marriage was a happy one, D'Arcy Niland was, like many young men of his age and of the period, self-centered; indeed, "the self-centredness of young men seemed to be a major cause of discontent in marriage . . . Women of my mother's generation mostly accepted it . . . They had not

much choice. In the early postwar years there were observable stirrings of revolt" (123). This period, of course, saw the beginning of the feminist movement when young women, having been required to develop new capabilities and independence during the war years, were reluctant to revert to the role of domestic dependant. Mrs Law is a woman ahead of her time, but not ahead of the 1950s in which the book was written.

Tatty says of her:

My mother was a professional woman and she had the impatience with interruptions that a professional woman has. I think we were all interruptions to her. She had lived her life as a breadwinner and pillar of the family, for my father had been very often ailing. I was born when my mother was sixteen. I must have hurt her sorely, for she had no more children until I was ten, when whate'er had gone wrong righted itself, and she had these five wee lads as quick as a cat. (71)

Mrs Law is a midwife and also the unofficial, unlicensed medical practitioner of the goldfields where the nearest qualified doctor is several days' journey away. Far from being overwhelmed by the responsibility, Mrs Law revels in it, "secretly pleased that no doctor yet lived in Calico Town, so that she could manage things on her own" (590). A natural physician, she takes a keen, clinical interest in the systems of disease and the dispensation of the limited supply of pharmaceuticals at her disposal. In spite of all her brother's shortcomings, she is fiercely proud of him, because "Alick had always the brains. I'd ha' been like Alick if I'd not been a woman! I dearly wanted to ha' learning, and freedom, and roam the seas like Alick, and be able to pick up a book in the Greek and read it right off as if it had been Bobby Burns" (196). When Calico Town grows from a temporary settlement to a town of fifteen hundred permanent residents, petitions for a doctor and a schoolmaster are sent to Dunedin and Tatty recalls that her mother "was darkly, secretly angry, though her name was nigh the top in both petitions" (213). Tatty and her mother are, by this stage, closer than they have been previously, and much more aware of each other's motives and emotions. Tatty is surprised therefore when, endeavouring to comfort the older woman with assurances that the petition for a doctor

is no reflection on her work, she discovers that this is not the only reason for her mother's dismay: "It's just that when the doctor comes, a settlement becomes a town" (213). For the first time it dawns on Tatty that her mother, in common with most mothers of teenage girls, is not the strait-laced martinet she appears and that, in fact, the "queer contrary little body, had thrived on the make-do and adventurous hardship of her colonial experience" (213). Josephine Donovan has pointed out that, although Bakhtin virtually ignores the issue of women's writing, his "concept of the novel as the locus of a counterhegemonic resistance to the centralized authority of official disciplines is a particularly attractive one for feminists" (85-86). Mrs Law needs the freedom of carnival, the overturning of the restrictions governing class, gender and social mores, in order to be herself. In the absence of a doctor, she has been "in her glory" (73), but with his arrival her temporary reign will come to an end. Moreover, in spite of her somewhat flinty exterior and her insistence on the proprieties, especially where young women are concerned, she has not only "had the name of a great flirt as a girl" (148) but also enjoys a subversive laugh at the absurdities of humankind (76). The chaotic, topsy-turvy world of the gold rushes has allowed her to relax her stern demeanour and to be more of her natural self; with the resumption of formality, restrictions will return.

It is, however, an observable characteristic of many who are constrained within a hierarchy of power that they are frequently the ones most anxious to preserve that hierarchy. People who identify themselves with their roles must constantly defend and reinforce the legitimacy of those roles in order to preserve a sense of self-worth. For instance, Frank E. Huggett has documented the rigid hierarchy and the snobbishness of servants in the Victorian and Edwardian eras (35-53). In fiction, Kazuo Ishiguro's butler, Stevens, is a case in point: to admit that much of his life has been spent in regulating the petty and frequently superfluous activities of a small army of underservants, all in the service of a weak and ineffectual man, would be devastating.

Similarly, women who have been confined within the limits of the role prescribed for them by society, may lack any sense of identity outside of that role. They tend therefore to make a fetish of domestic and moral virtues, insisting that girls, especially their own daughters, should emulate their "respectability" and they strongly condemn those who do not comply; thus the circle is perpetuated. Simultaneously, of course, mother/daughter tensions are established. As Nancy Chodorow has observed:

Mothers feel ambivalent toward their daughters, and react to their daughters' ambivalence toward them. They desire both to keep daughters close and to push them into adulthood. This ambivalence in turn creates more anxiety in their daughters and provokes attempts by these daughters to break away. (135)

Mrs Law, although loving her invalid husband, has nurtured, consciously or otherwise, a "long-hidden resentment of [him], and the weight he had been on her back when she was young and uncertain and ill-equipped to bear such a burden" (172). She is irritated by her daughter's plain appearance and consequent low chances in the matrimonial stakes; yet she forces Tatty to witness the pain of childbirth, as though simultaneously to gloat that Tatty must suffer what she herself has endured and also to prevent her from taking the same course:

My mother was one of the best midwives ever born. She would get up at any hour of the night to help a cryin' woman, but perhaps the flaws in her character showed in the way she would take me along with her. From the age of twelve, before I knew the pleasure of getting children, I knew the pain of it as keenly as if I suffered it myself. And as long as I could remember I suffered a panic at the thought of undergoing this ugly indignity myself. (71)

The strengthening of the feminist movement during the 1950s was due, in part, to the introduction of effective oral contraceptives. This instigated a period of great debate within the Catholic Church on the question of birth control, a matter which is featured in Park's next published novel, *The Good Looking Woman*. It is not, obviously, a matter which could be raised in a novel set in the previous century, but

Tatty, a Scots Presbyterian, more than once expresses supercilious astonishment at the childlike dependence of Catholics upon their priests, "as though they were a set of particularly light-headed children and he their ever-patient parent" (94). It should be noted that, again, the subversive derision is not aimed at religion *per se*, or at the men and women who devote their lives to it, but rather to some practices upheld in the name of religion. Similarly, although Tatty is unaware that Shannadore is a lapsed priest and this is why he cannot marry Currency, she observes that, like her mother, "I believed that any minister of God was better off with a wife and children to comfort and help him" (135). Park herself was still, at this time, a practising Catholic, but the tone of the narrative comment echoes that prevalent in the period of publication.

As for the period of the story itself, Park has captured not only the feverish excitement of the gold rushes, with huddles of tents becoming towns and fledgling towns becoming seething cities almost overnight, but also the everyday life of women and children on the fields. Although, as she makes clear in the Preface, the book makes no claim to be history, still "All important events, and the vast majority of trivial ones, even down to the weather on specific dates, are accurately recorded". Particularly graphic are her descriptions of the blizzard that costs so many foolhardy prospectors their lives:

And there was another man who found a little cleft in the cliff face and squeezed himself into it. He might have lived except that the ice walled him in, and he suffocated. They said he was a terrible sight, standing up, with a blackened snarling face and open eyes, staring out through the ice like a beast locked in a glass cage. He had no name. In the thaw they buried him in the pass, and his epitaph was: SOME POOR BLOODY PERISHER, 1864. (193-94)

Tatty and her family are safe in the wattle and daub house that Alick Swan has built with foot-thick walls. Nevertheless, as is the custom in a township without glass, the windows are glazed with calico and, "You could feel the cold coming through those

windows in oblong blocks extending far into the room" (120). However, Alick has prudently made provision for wooden shutters which are fixed in place and closed, and the family spends the remainder of the winter in lamplight. Knowing the improvidence of those bitten by the gold bug, Alick has had Tatty and her brothers collecting driftwood all summer; now this is made up into bundles that sell for "half a sovereign, and glad enough they were to get it" (121). To add to the problems of the women, this is also the era of the crinoline and, when Mrs Law decides that enough "decent women" are now in Calico Town to "have an evening", these ladies arrive, "comical to see . . . swaying up the steep mud path, skirts held high so that masses of petticoats and the flounced edges of their drawers were visible" (97). In that improbable setting, wattle-and-daub walls papered with "pages from the *Argus* and the *Australasian*, and even the *Scots Magazine*" (74), all the rituals of polite society are preserved, as ladies with "sleek netted hair" select delicacies from the cake stand, the fiddler plays tunes from the Old Country, and "the cutting of *rosa damascena* bloom[s] out of season in the brass pot" (98). *One-a-Pecker, Two-a-Pecker*, therefore, is a novel which vividly evokes the period in which it is set but reflects the ideologies of the period of its publication.

In Park's next novel, *The Good Looking Women*, set in Sydney in the late 1950s, narrative time and publication date coincide. Once again, the theme mirrors the concerns and ideologies of the period, in this case as they affect an average suburban Catholic family. Wally and Rosa Pond have lived in the same street for "almost forty years" (33) and still retain the habits and ideologies of an earlier generation. Wally and his partner, Arthur Gosling, have run a successful coachbuilding business for many years until, "unwilling to convert from coach to motor bodies, they closed the yard" (36). In the living room of the Pond home, the oppressively Victorian design of which is quite unsuited to the Australian climate, Rosa has created an "innocent, faithful reflection of the Edwardian period of her birth - the dark, obese furniture, the cut-glass

treasures, the gilded mirrors, the silk fringe on the lampshade, the mantelpiece loaded with a procession of teak elephants in diminuendo" (3). Even the street in which they live is an anachronism; a row of Victorian houses with "ironwork in archaic English patterns", it is "broad [and] graceful, a misfit in [a] grimy industrial place" (34). The house and the street are symbolic of Wally and Rosa: decent, honest, solid, reflecting all the virtues but also the narrow horizons, the inward-looking self-sufficiency of an earlier age. "Only two or three miles away was the sea . . . [but] Wally did not care; he felt a stranger to the sea" (34). Now working for wages as a furniture-removalist, Wally is vastly contented with his lot, rejoicing in the great strength which enables him to support and, if necessary, defend his womenfolk. He is, in his own eyes, the man of the house, the head of the house. When a stroke deprives him of his strength he is temperamentally unable to adjust to the change in his lifestyle and his self-concept. Longing simply for things to be just as they were before, he makes no effort to resume life. As for Rosa, she has been a wife and mother for so long that she has no existence outside her role: "She had no life outside her family's. For her the world stopped, stone-dead, at the farthest fence that enclosed the farthest relative. But within that close, parochial, clannish world which was hers, she lived everyone's life with far greater sympathy and vitality than she lived her own" (3-4). Rosa, however, is quite determined not to be deprived of her role; single-mindedly, though unconsciously, selfish, she plans to keep her youngest daughter at home as insurance against a lonely old age (236).

However, just as the busy, industrial city surrounds the quiet street, change surrounds Wally and Rosa: the feminist movement, temporarily submerged in a wave of nationalism during the Second World War, is re-emerging; in the wake of the war, immigrants of many nationalities are flooding into Australia to change the culture irrevocably; Australians have fought another war in Korea, in which the Ponds' son-in-

law has been engaged (160); television is reaching into the home of many Australians (albeit not the home of Wally and Rosa) and, with the convening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, many of the pious but semi-superstitious religious practices so dear to the faithful of Mrs Pond's ilk will disappear. In this novel, Park provides a detailed and perceptive depiction of people of a particular class, religion, society and time, encapsulating a transitional period of Australian culture and society in suspension, rather like the fish in the glass paperweight that Dette so longs to emulate (50).

The novel opens on a hot day with Mrs Pond trudging home, laden with groceries; her daughter arrives almost simultaneously by bus. "Mrs Pond had walked a long way," the narrator relates, with gentle irony, "for she had a streak of noble meanness which forced her to wear out shoe leather looking for penny savings" (1). Instantly a picture begins to emerge of woman who takes her role to the point of petty martyrdom, a fact which receives subtle emphasis when Mrs Pond reviews her minor ailments, one by one, "like a geographer over a globe" (1), in unconscious imitation of Donne's "Physitions" (436). The subversive quality of the humour continues as the narrative slips into what Bakhtin refers to as a hybrid construction, the mingling of the narrator's voice with that of another, in this case of Mrs Pond herself: "She was making a novena to St Philomena for her backache, but really Doan's Kidney Pills had done her just as much good" (1). Thus, in the space of a few lines, the reader has acquired a good deal of information about Mrs Pond: she is a determinedly-conscientious housewife; she is not young; she is a devout Catholic but one whose attitude to her faith is homely and matter-of-fact, rather than spiritual or intellectual. It is interesting, though probably of no great significance, to note that in more recent editions of the novel the brand-name "Doan's" has been replaced by "her". Doan's Kidney Pills were frequently advertised, particularly in women's magazines, in this era when the generally accepted panacea for any housewifely ailment was "a cup of tea, a Bex and a good lie-

down". Similarly, the cheap, Plaster-of-Paris statue of the Virgin Mary, an omnipresent fixture in Catholic homes of the period, is described as having, "meek, meaningless, Reckitt's blue plaster shoulders" (3). Reckitt's Blue-bags were an indispensable whitening agent in the days when the weekly wash was done by hand (usually on Mondays) in rough, concrete tubs, with white articles being boiled in a wood-fired copper. The formerly commonplace brand-names are evocative of a period, a social class and a way of Australian life which have passed.

Similarly, many of the devotions and rituals of Catholicism, as practised at suburban parish level during this period, have ceased. Discussing changes in devotional habits since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Margaret Hebblethwaite notes that, "The general thrust of post-Conciliar spirituality has been characterized by a widespread collapse of the older devotional system" (240). Statues of the Virgin Mary and the saints, novenas for special petitions, medals, scapulars, holy water, sodalities, all the accumulated minutiae of centuries that once made up the warp and weft of lay religious observance, and of the lives of families like the Ponds, are rarely to be found today. Since Vatican II, the emphasis in Catholic religious practice is placed more upon Christology and the scriptures, upon community and discussion, informed individual conscience and responsibility for one's own actions rather than prayers for assistance and intervention (Hebblethwaite 240-43). Mrs Pond's attitude to her religion is typical of that held by many of her generation and class: she has made "a delicious fairytale . . . of the terse, cold realities of Christianity, a fairytale of medals, holy water, enormous faith and small, pious superstitions" (5). Yet, although the naïveté of Mrs Pond's attitude is subverted, the genuineness of her faith is not. Cliff says of her: "She always was a very religious woman . . . The other world was just on the other side of the wall to her. Remember how she used to come out with things about Our Lord and the saints that would just about embarrass the pants off us?" Yet

he also observes, of those claiming greater sophistication, that "people aren't half as shocked at the four-letter words as they are at the three-letter words . . . sin, and God, for instance" (149). A particular style of religious observance was passing and the novelist has recognized this and recorded it. The late 1950s and early 1960s were periods of restlessness and of questioning within the Church and the novel is both a product and a reflection of its period. As Andrew Milner has observed, "our art, our religion, our morals, our knowledge, our science, are not simply matters of private preference . . . we belong to our culture very much more than it belongs to us" (*Cultural Materialism* 7).

During the first half of this century, the cult of the Virgin Mary was very strong within the Catholic Church, largely as the result of a number of reported appearances to young girls. In 1858, a French peasant girl, Marie-Bernarde Soubirous, claimed to have had a number of visions of a lady who announced her identity with the words: "I am the Immaculate Conception". Marie-Bernarde was canonized in 1933 and is now commonly known as St Bernadette. The waters of the spring at Lourdes, where the visions are said to have occurred, have been credited with a number of miraculous cures, and the shrine is still visited by millions of people each year. One of the largest Catholic Churches in the world, second in size only to St Peter's in Rome, has been constructed there. In 1943 an enormously popular Hollywood film, *The Song of Bernadette*, won five Academy Awards. The Ponds' granddaughter Dette, in company with many other young Catholic girls of the period, has been named after St Bernadette. Similarly when, in 1917 at Fatima, three children claimed to have seen a number of visions of a lady who identified herself as the Lady of the Rosary, a large basilica was constructed on the site. Pope Pius XII had a particular devotion to Our Lady of Fatima; in 1950 he declared the Doctrine of the Assumption, and designated 1954 as a Marian Year, a year of particular devotion to the Mother of God (Walsh 23). In 1967, on the

fiftieth anniversary of the appearances at Fatima, a mass celebrated there by Pope Pius VI attracted a congregation estimated to number one million. In the light of this fervour, the declaration of a Marian vision by Geraldine, the Ponds' youngest daughter, would not have seemed as improbable, in 1961, as it might to readers in the 1990s, nor would the credence given to her story.

During this period, the emphasis upon the virginity of the Mother of God, upon the Immaculate Conception, further exacerbated the divisions within the Church on the question of birth control. Elva and Des McNair are typical of many young Catholic couples who are torn between genuine religious faith, with its concomitant belief in the authority of the Church, and the enormous physical and emotional strain of complying with the adamant prohibition of any form of artificial birth control. At the time of the novel's publication, the contraceptive pill had recently been developed as an effective and convenient method of birth control and debate over its use was a major issue within the Church. Park herself is of the opinion that the eventual decision of Pope Paul VI, in 1968, that the use of the pill contravened Catholic belief and practice, changed the nature of the Church profoundly (*Fence* 266). Thus the topic was particularly pertinent for a novel of the 1960s, but Park's treatment of the theme, while obviously endorsing contraception, is not merely provocative; nor is it dogmatic. The mental agony experienced by couples caught in the impossible situation of holding two mutually exclusive beliefs is treated with sympathy and insight, which may in part explain why, upon the novel's publication in the United States, it became a Catholic Book Club Choice there (*Fishing* 224). Bakhtin points out that "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (*Imagination* 280), and Park's tacit support for contraception obviously met with an affirmative answer from the reading public. In any era, people look to the media not only for entertainment but also for reflections of themselves and their

concerns, and the way in which they perceive these reflections helps, in turn, to shape the self-concepts and concerns. In this regard, Dollimore and Sinfield define the word "culture", when used in the analytic sense, as one which "seeks to describe the whole system of significations by which a society or a section of it understands itself and its relations with the world" (vii).

The advent of reliable contraception also brought about basic changes in the pattern of family life. Many women had joined the workforce as a matter of national necessity during the War and now, able to control pregnancy, were no longer obliged to remain at home to care for small children. They joined the workforce in increasing numbers either to achieve financial independence or to earn extra money for the new commodities flooding the post-war market:

In the 1950s and 1960s, with the rapidly expanding economy and with more money available for family consumption (most particularly coming from women's increasing involvement in the commanding economy), these products were actually bought rather than simply desired. A new market was then required, and created. . . . The very notion of self-fulfilment was commercialised and expanded. (J. Matthews 90)

The era of the one-income family, with husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker, was drawing to an end. The 1950s, therefore, were a period of social restlessness and change and, while the novel does not address all these matters specifically (some of them only becoming apparent to the critic with the hindsight of later decades), it does reflect the varied and sometimes ambivalent attitudes of the members of one family to the altering social pattern.

Rosa Pond is a case in point. Having raised her own family, including a daughter born thirteen years after her nearest sibling, has uncomplainingly taken care of her granddaughter Ann so that Carrie, separated from her husband, can have a

successful career. However, when Carrie boasts that motherhood has not made her a frequent absentee from work, Rosa retorts swiftly (but silently): "Thanks to the fact that I was here to look after Ann" (171). When Elva, with eight children, and Carrie, with only one, quarrel over the morality of the issue, Rosa listens "impartially . . . seeing both points of view as though they were her own, as indeed they were . . . her daughters were but extensions of her own personality" (11). Rosa is completely subsumed in her role as wife and mother yet

she had a deep comprehension of Elva's bitter, inarticulate resentment of her formalized, virtuous slavery. She had felt the same thing. Once she had stood in this very house, when she was twenty-two, and glared with an honest though temporary hatred at a squalling Carrie until the child fell asleep with exhaustion. "You didn't win after all," she had whispered spitefully to that mysterious grub who had come to tyrannize over her nights and days. Yet she loved all her children ardently. (12)

Rosa conscientiously visits her dirty, miserly sister-in-law, Han, taking her food, cutting her hair, cleaning up after her. Han is "family" and Rosa acts out of both duty and compassion, but, in another double-voiced passage, the ambivalence of her feelings becomes clear:

This abominable old woman had no one but her, and she could no more desert her than she could desert one of her own daughters. Her own good nature wouldn't let her. Dumb rage against Wally filled her breast. Why couldn't he keep an eye on Han? Full of sympathy he was, at the accident which had turned a dolly little girl into this monstrosity, but he never thought of all the trouble she was to other people. (82-83)

The unreliability of Rosa's representations of herself to herself becomes apparent a few lines later when the narrator reveals that Han has expressed her intention to leave her considerable wealth to her nieces, Rosa's daughters: "With this in mind, Ma had the greatest difficulty in keeping a placating tone out of her voice" (83).

Rosa frequently sees things as she wishes to see them, rather than as they are. When Carrie leaves her husband and, with her infant daughter, comes home to her

family, she offers no explanation. This does not deter Rosa from coming to her own conclusions; she "had never forgiven Cliff for whatever it was he had done to Carrie" (2), and she takes a vindictive pleasure in knowing that Cliff's religious beliefs will prevent him from remarrying. In fact, Carrie has undergone an illegal abortion rather than persist with an unwanted pregnancy, and has announced it triumphantly to her husband: "No one will make me do what I don't want to" (14). As a result, Cliff has turned her out. Carrie, like all her sisters, is a "good looking woman", and, typically for a girl of her era has believed that physical beauty is all-important. Girls do not need to be trained for any profession; they will marry, pretty girls more easily than most (38). Now, thrown upon her own resources, she not only manages to maintain herself and her daughter, but achieves something of a career as an interior decorator. Nevertheless, her feelings about her situation are mixed; after twelve years, she is aware that she hasn't any "real flair for her work. The creative flame [is] not in her. The best she could do [is] to bone up on the latest trade magazines and adapt the ideas of others as her own" (131). Carrie also feels guiltily responsible for the barrenness of Cliff's life, and for depriving father and daughter of each other. When she loses her job, as a result of the publicity surrounding Geraldine's "visions", she accepts Cliff's offer to resume their marriage and is soon pregnant once again. By the end of the novel, she believes that, although she is not happy, she is "content" (236-37); she has tried independence and has willingly relinquished it. This is not a happy ending by contemporary feminist standards, but does reflect the ambivalent attitudes of many women in this period of changing values.

All the Pond women are caught in the struggle to maintain individuality in the face of obliterating roles, roles imposed by society, religion and themselves. Elva has a religious faith which is genuine, if somewhat shallow, and is determined to abide by the teachings of her church. But as one pregnancy is followed, all too soon, by another, she

becomes "conscious of her body as an enemy. Within its secret chambers what mischief was it plotting . . . She could almost hate Carrie for her freedom and good health, her ability to be an *individual* instead of a fertile *nonentity* like a queen ant" (24. Italics added.) Des, struggling with the impasse between his religious convictions and his guilt over the condition of his wife and children, despairingly contemplates the future of his eldest daughter: "Would she have to go through it too, his little girl, and lose her health and her *identity* and all joy of life, and become the tearful mass of hopelessness that Elva had become?" (233. Italics added.) Ivy, who has left home to join a religious nursing order, is only too aware that the independence and serenity she has achieved are not proof against the roles of daughter and sister: "It was as though Sister Polycarp existed only in the convent. On the front steps of her old home she was transformed into a sort of uneasy wraith that existed for a minute or so, and then took off with a bleat for nowhere, leaving poor Ivy Pond dressed up in a nun's habit and completely unable to defend herself against the emotional assault of her family" (39). It is the loss of her identity, her self-concept evolved through a lifetime of family service, that Mrs Pond fears in a future without the responsibility of children: "How could she live without Geraldine in the house? Her little girl, the only one she had left?" (8). Similarly, Geraldine is aware that maintenance of her self-concept is dependent upon remaining within the family home: "You brought me up to be Daddy's little girl, Ma's faithful shadow, and now I don't want to be anything else. . . . You've wanted me to be a little girl all my life, and that suits me!" (242). Meanwhile Dette, who has never had the opportunity to be a little girl, finds security only in her self-concept as helper and carer, and longs to remain protected within the glass paperweight of an unchanging but stunted existence (50).

The novel explores the intricacies of interfamilial relationships, of understanding and misunderstanding, of love and jealousy, of responsibility and

resentment. It is the relationship of Geraldine with her parents, however, that provides the catalyst for the plot. Park has written more than once of the "problem of the old and frail", of the "all too common situation, where a willing and loving young woman's life is chewed up in support of others with no future" (*Fishing* 294), of the tacit expectation, in so many large families, that one of the daughters will not marry or have an independent life, but will stay at home to look after the parents. Wally Pond is aware that, subconsciously, this is the intention not only of his wife Rosa but also of their youngest daughter, Geraldine. "He knew only too well how easily women fell into this trap. Especially a woman who had a child as late as his wife had had Geraldine. She longed to keep her daughter with her, and the daughter longed to stay. And before they knew where they were, their lives were inextricably and tragically tangled, the elderly yoked to the young, the docile to the dominant" (18). Again, the novel reflects a social phenomenon of the period; Jill Julius Matthews observes that many elderly women, having outlasted their role as mothers, became instead "the recipient of maternal care - if available . . . women needed to have daughters . . . who were willing to accept the maternal mantle of three-generational family responsibility. (A study in 1954 revealed that one in four elderly windows were beneficiaries of this system and lived in their daughters' households)" (195).

Wally has no doubt that he is head of his house and, initially, the narrator seems to support this view:

He came into the room and all was changed. The spiritual smell of women, sharp and sly and acid, vanished in a twinkling before the gust of masculinity that came with Pa. The chairs, those velvety monsters, dwindled and became almost fragile before his vast size, his vast gentleness. (12)

It soon becomes clear, however, that Wally's supremacy is more a matter of form than of fact; when he announces his decision on Geraldine's future, "Pa's face took on an expression he thought was majestic and unyielding, and which was known among his

womenfolk as looking like a duck" (16-17). Commenting on *The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Matthews observes that:

The core of [the] ideal of the good woman was mothering. Before the 1880s, a woman's social value was judged at least as much from her activity as wife, as sexual partner, economic assistant, companion, servant. By the 1960s, this aspect of woman was returning to high valuation. In the years between, mother reigned . . . The ideal mother's decision-making and disciplinary powers increased, to the detriment of father's, until, by the 1950s, sociologists were proclaiming the overwhelming dominance of mother as the heart of the Australian family, with father's headship becoming increasingly nominal. (87)

Wally is astounded, therefore, when, contrary to his wishes, Rosa spreads the news of Geraldine's "visions": "The astonishing thing was that Rosa had defied him. Certainly, she had always wheedled and complained and resorted to devious ways to get her own will, but this was the first time she had come right out and contradicted him" (60).

Wally is at an even greater disadvantage when dealing with his youngest daughter, Geraldine, failing to recognize, beneath her gentle and compliant exterior, the same intransigent determination that characterizes her mother. "Wally Pond knew his dreadful vulnerability in regard to this youngest daughter. He loved all the others, but this one was his life" (19). Nevertheless, he is sometimes dimly aware of the similarity: "For a moment all his joy and pride and wonder in this frail translucent girl . . . were swallowed up in the same exasperated fury he felt for her mother, when likewise bent upon getting her own way" (17). (It is worth noting at this point that, when the novel was published in the United States, it carried the title *Serpent's Delight*, with an epigraph, wrongly attributed to Saint Alphonsus Roderiguez (Thurston and Attwater 225), of a nature sufficiently inflammatory to start a whole new wave of feminism: "The Serpent's delight is a woman who wants her own way".) Geraldine has become subsumed into the role of the baby of the family: "the smell of her body was like that of a young child's, sexless and gentle" (18), and her older sisters feel constrained to protect

her (43,121). Like the aging but determinedly girlish Char Gosling, she resembles a case study discussed by Matthews: "In the transition from girlhood to womanhood, she has got stuck. She is unable to take the first step into the world of strange men that will eventually take her from her father's to her husband's house" (121). Charlotte Gosling, psychologically frozen in her youthful persona, has regressed from younger sister to overprotective mother of her older brother; she is a caricature of what Geraldine will become and a warning of the fate in store for Dette.

In a curious way, their very different upbringings have produced one similar result in Geraldine and her niece Dette: they are both afraid of the outside world and want desperately to remain within the shelter of the family. When Pa assures Geraldine that, in a new job, she will soon become accustomed to strangers, "she look[s] at him in dread, as though he had suggested getting used to a pack of wolves" (17). Similarly, "Dette was afraid of the world. It was enormous, sinister. The other side of the street was far, far away" (50). Yet where Geraldine, the baby of her family, has been cosseted and petted, shielded from all unpleasantness and allowed to evade responsibilities, Dette's childhood is being swallowed up by her mother's self-pitying inability to cope with a large family. As the eldest in a family of eight children born in the space of twelve years, "Dette, just home from school, [is] put in charge of the three young ones, two scarcely walking, so that her mother could get out for a breath of fresh air. Dette peeling the vegetables, setting the table, rushing around with that tense, solemn expression on her thin rabbit's face" (11). Weighed down by adult responsibilities, Dette is, as Carrie accuses Elva, "like a little old woman" (11), yet she finds her only sense of self-worth in her role as helper. As with Geraldine, her love for her father is disproportionate, "a passionate . . . ardent disturbing love", yet her salvation may lie in her father's uneasy recognition of the fact (198). When Des makes the difficult decision to ignore his church's prohibition of artificial birth control, a major factor is his

awareness that Dette is "the scapegoat, the innocent sacrificed on the altar of their unhappiness" (232).

Des's decision, one that faced thousands of Catholic couples during this period, will have a profound effect on the lives of all the family members, but Dette is oblivious of her problem and does not long for liberation:

Once she had seen a paperweight, a crystal globe with a tiny fish inside, a *real* fish, preserved by some miraculous Japanese skill, metallic as a coin, complete down to the last scallop on its golden cobweb of a fin. Its eye - translucent, circular, with a fairy-sized blob of black velvet in the middle! Dette always felt happy when she thought of that little fish, safe for ever in its crystal world. That was where she wanted to be, inside a paperweight like the fish. (50)

There is a curious echo of the paperweight image in an article, which Park was to write fifteen years after this novel, about another young woman who had had a difficult and unusual upbringing. Reviewing *The Flight of the Mind: Letters of Virginia Woolf 1888-1912*, edited by Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann, Park comments:

But what a complicated, secret, perilous little animal looks out of these early letters . . . All her life Virginia was elitist and xenophobic, incurious about and insensible to life as it was lived outside her own group. She was a swimmer in a dewdrop and we are fortunate that she was. Who else has described so well the inside of a dewdrop? (18)

The *belle époque* was to be shattered by the First World War; in the 1960s, the narrow, familiar world of suburban Australians was poised on the brink of great change as television and jet-travel were to link our remote continent to the global community. When Ruth Park wrote *The Good Looking Women*, the feminist movement and the changes in the Catholic Church were yet to come. The novel is poised, as it were, just before the moment of fracture and captures the thought and ethics, the spirit of an Australia that is no more. In her interview with Kate Veitch, Park says: "Writing is a great mystery to me . . . Occasionally I will be reading something I wrote years ago and I think, 'Yes, of course, that is right, but I didn't know it then'. How was it I put it into

fiction? Of course, all writers may do this, I don't know. I don't talk to writers very much" (116). The ability to encapsulate and transmit the essence of an era is, in fact, rare, yet it is one of the strengths of Park's writing.

It is apparent, in these novels, that Park's engagement with the issues and ideologies of the period is neither narrow nor shallow. Her approach is not simply realistic, sociological, feminist, historical or cultural but rather a combination of all these viewpoints. The themes of her novels are ones which she finds personally significant and she explores them in and through the culture of the 1950s and 1960s; yet her ironic, subversive sense of humour, coupled with an acute awareness of the significant detail, be it of setting, speech, manner or idiosyncrasy, enables her to project the characters and the periods with a vividness and immediacy that precludes didacticism or authorial preponderance. It is, as Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky, "as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word" (*Dostoevsky* 5).

CHAPTER 3
OPENING WINDOWS: WRITING CHILDREN'S BOOKS "THAT GET
WORN OUT IN ALL THE LIBRARIES"

"My idea of a successful children's book is not one that wins prizes, but one that gets worn out in all the libraries," Ruth Park has stated (McVitty 166). As more than one commentator in the field of children's literature has observed, the children's books admired and awarded by adults are not necessarily those that young people want to read; this is not the case, however, with Park's books for children which are both acclaimed by critics and immensely popular with young readers. Regardless of genre or generation, the acclamation and popularity she has achieved are less the result of inspiration as of effort, experience and reader empathy; Park's writing for children is a craft, long-practised and finely honed.

Ruth Park has been writing for children for more than fifty years. Before coming to Australia, she had been the editor of the children's section of the *Auckland Star* (Fence 280) and, on arrival in this country in 1942, she was soon busy writing scripts for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's *Children's Session*, a trickle of early works that developed into a prolific and sustained flow which ceased only with the demise of the *Children's Session* in 1972. In addition to this, she has written thirty-six books for children and young adults, the most recent of which, *Things in Corners*, was published in 1989. This means that generations of Australians have grown up listening to and reading Ruth Park's work; indeed, several of my colleagues admit to having been Argonauts (members of the *Children's Session* listeners' club) and fans of the Muddle-headed Wombat. Writers do not work in isolation; consciously or otherwise they are influenced by the circumstances of their lifestyle and society, and their work both reflects and helps to shape the ideology of their times. As Peter Hunt points out, children's books "cannot help but reflect an ideology", and it follows therefore that "Children's

literature is a powerful literature, and . . . such power cannot be neutral or innocent, or trivial. This is especially true because the books are written by, and made available to children by, adults" (3). The same cultural forces which have influenced Park's adult fiction, and many of the same concerns which she has examined in the light of those forces, are evident in her writing for children. In view of the volume, scope and, in particular, the years spanned by Park's work for children, her influence on Australian society and its ideologies must have been considerable.

An indication of the influence of the *ABC Children's Session*, particularly in the days before television, will be found in the *The Golden Age of the Argonauts* by Rob Johnson, published in November 1997. In an article, "Once an Argonaut", published in the *Australian Magazine* in the same month, Johnson declares, (facetiously?):

Sceptics take note: you can no longer dismiss conspiracy theories about a secret club reaching into the highest echelons of business, politics and the cultural industries in this country. It does exist. Its members are known to each other only by cryptic code names drawn from classical literature. They possess a body of knowledge and shared memories that colour the way they see the world . . . The Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer is one, as are several cabinet members, and Federal parliamentarians on both sides of both houses. The chair of the ABC is another, along with several ABC board members. So is the former chair of the Australia Council, Hilary McPhee. Several of this country's leading broadcasters, journalists, writers, composers and visual artists are members, as are many leading figures in the business world.

The club is called The Argonauts. (28-29)

Over the course of twenty-five years, Ruth Park wrote many stories and plays for the *Children's Session*; several of which were serialised ran into hundreds of episodes, some into thousands. In her autobiography she acknowledges that, for city children, radio was displaced by films and television, but feels that the decision to end the session was a blow for isolated inland children. She also acknowledges that her writing for children's radio had been the "family's basic source of income for

twenty-five years" (*Fishing* 275). While Park's writing for radio is beyond the scope of this thesis, its influence in both reflecting and shaping Australian culture and ideology should not be overlooked.

Park herself is always very conscious of her readers, and nowhere is this more apparent than in her writing for young people. "I feel very fierce about children's writing," she has stated; "A writer for children has a significant responsibility" ("The Difference" 70). When she writes for children, her research and professionalism are as rigorous as they are for her adult fiction. When, for instance, she rejected an editorial suggestion for some minor changes to the text of *James*, she explained in a letter: "This story was written very carefully, word by word. It was read to groups of small children four times, and each time emendations were made where the audience asked questions. I always do this where texts for young children, who will most likely be read to, and shown the pictures, before they are able to read easily for themselves, are in question". (Mitchell ML MSS 3128). She also treats her young readers with respect, never patronising their opinions or belittling their problems. Guided not only by her ability to recall vividly the joys, woes and bewilderments of her own childhood, she more than once acknowledges having received sudden insight from the comments of her children. For instance, the Muddle-headed Wombat had his genesis in the wistful observation of one of her daughters: "I don't think there's anyone in the world I'm smarter than" (*Fishing* 276); similarly, a child's acute need for a modicum of privacy was brought home to her by a request from one of her sons that a big old wardrobe be moved out under a tree so that he could live in it and be a "herbert" ("Desperate in the Togetherness Trap" 2).

This finely attuned consciousness of the levels and processes of children's thought is evident throughout Park's work. For instance, many of Park's stories for younger children, such as the Muddle-headed Wombat series and *The Runaway Bus*,

are highly anthropomorphic. This is to be expected; children's attitudes to the things around them are both anthropomorphic and animistic, a fact that may be the result of either nature or nurture, but is probably a combination of both. Jean Piaget has observed that : "Parents instinctively use easy expressions, of a concrete and even animistic or anthropomorphic nature, so as to come down to the mental level of the child" (98). Bruno Bettelheim, discussing this aspect of children's thinking in the light of Piaget's work, observes that: "To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life has life very much like our own. If we do not understand what rocks and trees and animals have to tell us, they reason is that we are not sufficiently attuned to them" (46).

Park's awareness of this aspect of children's thinking, and her incorporation of it into her writing for them, are almost certainly amongst the reasons for her long and continuing popularity with young readers. Thus children are quite at home with characters like the Muddle-headed Wombat who lives a very suburban type of life, albeit in the Big Bush, going to school, riding a bicycle, having clean-up days and going on holiday. They can feel superior to him when he mispronounces words; they can empathise with him in the subversive quality of his not-so-very-bad naughtiness; and they can participate in the thrill of his many misadventures, secure in the knowledge that he will come to no great harm with sensible Mouse to look after him. Maurice Saxby has observed that, "Children of this age [middle primary], because they are vulnerable, need characters whom they can inwardly ridicule, and situations which are preposterous, to help make them feel superior" (253), a fact that Ruth Park had already gleaned from her daughter. Bettelheim has made the further comment that, "the child's thinking remains animistic until the age of puberty" (46), and Park is also attuned to this. While the characters in her books for older children and young adults are not, of course, talking animals, she nevertheless makes considerable use of animal imagery and personification in the texts. *Come Danger,*

Come Darkness, for instance, opens with a description of Norfolk Island as it appears to two young boys approaching on a sailing ship:

When daybreak came, Norfolk Island was already in view. It lay on the sea like a gull with wings folded, and the sun sent up light from under the rim of the world, and turned its feathers to gold. For this little island was covered all over with pine trees, each as straight as a quill. (1)

Callie's brother Dan is "as thin and pale as a whitebait" (*Callie's Castle* 3), and "fury burst[s] out of Callie's chest in a terrifying squawk" (5-6) when her younger siblings interfere with her possessions, including a little glass turtle. "When the wind arose . . . [Riko] could hear the banana plants clapping their hands in gardens all over the island" (*Sif* 42). An old Maori woman in *The Hole in the Hill* is described as having "a face like an old brown pelican's, with pouchy black eyes, and a blue-scribbled chin and lower lip", but when she speaks it is "in a soft beautiful voice that had the 'cello note of a warbling magpie's" (10). "Magpies" is the name of the shop which Abigail's mother opens to support herself and her daughter when her husband leaves. After "a last decisive sniff, [she] washed her face, which was somewhat like that of a fat-cheeked finch with a finch's shiny dew-drop eyes" and rented small premises. "She called the shop Magpies, and soon other magpie people flocked around to shriek and snatch and buy" (*Beatie Bow* 6). The tall building in which Kathy and Abigail live "haughtily slic[es] up" the wind (9), while the Harbour Bridge "bellow[s] with the home-going traffic" (23). The animal imagery which is so pervasive throughout this novel is noticeably absent, however, from the final chapter when a gap of several years has occurred and Abigail, at almost eighteen, has become a young woman. The escapades of the Muddle-headed Wombat ran to 3129 radio episodes broadcast between 1952 and 1972, with repeat broadcasts until the mid-1980s. While the volume and longevity of the series is evidence of its continuing popularity with younger children, *Playing Beatie Bow* has enjoyed similar success with older readers having achieved sales in excess of 321,000 copies by April 1996, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Gripper 3). It seems likely, therefore, that Park's young readers experience, consciously or otherwise, an

affinity with the animistic and anthropomorphic content of the stories and with the imagery which plays such a significant part in the telling.

That Park is also conscious of the helplessness of children, their feelings of vulnerability in an adult world, is another source of reader empathy. For instance, many of Park's younger protagonists either wish to change their names or nicknames, or have to contend with a certain amount of difficulty because of them. As Barbara Du Bois points out, "In science as in society . . . naming defines the quality and value of that which is named" (108), and naming is a male prerogative. In our society it is usual for a girl to be identified by her father's name until she marries and by her husband's name after marriage when, very often, she becomes somebody's "mum". In her autobiography, Park recalls both the teasing she endured at school because of her unusual given name, Rosina (*Fence* 18), and her later struggles in the male world of business to have contracts made out in the name of Ruth Park rather than Mrs D'Arcy Niland; she would point out that the latter was not her name but her marital status (*Fishing* 199).

When Weyland Kirk leaves his family to live with another woman, his daughter rejects all the names he has given her: Lynette, Linnie and "the many pet names her father called her" (*Beatie Bow* 2), and vows "as soon as I'm old enough I'll change the Kirk, too" (3). The very term "pet name" is double-edged: on one level such names are terms of endearment; on another they are belittling. We give our pets names which are often humorous comments on their physical appearance: Bluey for a ginger cat, Omo for a white terrier, Stubby for a Great Dane. Even the withdrawal of a pet name is an empowering device. When Brownie's father is displeased with her, he indicates this by using her correct name: "Brownie's cheeks burned at the memory of that remark. To be called Susan, which, although it was her real name, was used only in moments of terrible formality, such as the discussion of a bad school report!" (*The Hole in the Hill* 9). Significantly, when

Lynette chooses a name for herself, it is the subversive Abigail, a witch's name, to spite her grandmother and the whole concept of authority (*Beatie Bow* 3).

Those with the power to bestow names are often oblivious of the consequences. In *Airlift for Grandee*:

"Antonia did not like the look of herself very much. Her father . . . sometimes called her Ant for short, and whenever he did, Antonia could feel her spectacles turning into the round, many-windowed eyes of an insect, and feelers beginning to sprout from her head. She hated to be called Ant. She would much rather have been Tony for short." (7-8)

When informed of this by his more perceptive employees, Antonia's father is amazed: "But she likes it!" he declares (90). Such paternal blindness may be benevolent in intent but, all too frequently, to be named is to be disempowered by categorization. Conversely, while naming can bring something into existence it can also deny or obscure that existence. As Riko protests of the older sister, into whose charge the girls are given and who wishes to hide their heredity, "She calls herself Joanne instead of Johanna, and Sif Sarah, and me Erika . . . She wants to forget about Rongo and Mother and everything" (*Sif* 3). Yet when Sif is dispirited and enervated by misery and homesickness, Riko upbraids her: "Sometimes I think you *are* Sarah. Something Joanne's made up" (7).

In renaming herself, Abigail rejects authority for autonomy. On the other hand, Theo Dove, who "couldn't stick either end of his name" (*Things in Corners* 8), attains maturity and self-knowledge in coming to terms with it. An adopted child, he loves his parents fiercely and gratefully and, although his adoptive patronym causes him to be the butt of name-calling by his peers (Lovey Dovey for example), "The name . . . had served a good purpose. It had made him unwilling to stand any kind of teasing or shoving around . . . he had been in so many fights that one teacher warned the other kids, 'This Dove pecks'. Theo had been proud of that,

and still was" (9). Similarly, although "When young, he had always liked hearing . . . that his real mother thought he was a gift of God" (9), Theo comes to regard this as a bitter irony when he believes that she has abandoned him unfeelingly. Later, when he recovers the repressed memory of her love and recognizes her sorrow, he can believe in his name, his mother and himself again: "He was Theo Dove, and there had never been anyone exactly like him, and never would be again" (26).

If children are disempowered through naming, they are also at the mercy of adult curiosity, interference and obliviousness to their need for some degree of privacy. This is a concern to which Park refers time and again both in her autobiographies and her works for children. "When I was young, children had their privacy violated almost by tradition," Park recalls (*Fishing* 221), and her short story, "The Travellers", is an hilarious account of the downfall of a busybody who exercises her adult "right" to cross-question two little girls during a train journey. Park has Riko describe the situation when Henry Jacka occupies the vacant seat beside her on a plane flight and endeavours to force an acquaintanceship:

In the usual adult way he began at once to ask me questions about myself, did I have any brothers, what was my favourite sport, and such garbage. Grown-up persons cherish two great myths: firstly that kids want to be friendly with them, and secondly that all the conversation they desire is chitchat about themselves. Can't they remember how secretive all children are? And as for being friendly, what person of thirteen or fourteen really wants to pal up with an oldie? They are the Them in the anxious game of Them and Us. (*Sif* 16)

In *The Environment and Social Behavior: Privacy, Personal Space, Territory, Crowding*, Irwin Altman notes that, in our society, the degree of privacy to which a person is deemed to be entitled is in direct proportion to perceived social status and that children and low-status persons are accorded very little privacy. Children, for instance, are usually aware that they should not enter their parents' closed bedroom door without knocking, yet parents assume the right to enter children's rooms at will (41). Altman asserts, however, that "social development involves the growth of

autonomy and an individual's learning when and how to be with or to be separate from others" (20). Denied such autonomy, children seek refuge in secretiveness and subterfuge. Park recalls that, "My mother, when she wished to know something her child intended to keep private, was a skilled and merciless tracker", which resulted in the young Ruth's discovery "that lies were the only alternative to castor oil" (*Fence* 33). When Abigail is desperately unhappy about her father's desertion, "Her chief concern was that no one, not even her mother, should know what she was like inside. . . . So she cultivated an expressionless face . . . [and] carefully laid false trails until she herself sometimes could not find the way into her secret heart" (*Beatie Bow* 4-5).

Abigail and Riko are concerned, of course, for their mental and emotional privacy but when many people occupy a house of only average size, the need for some private physical space can become acute, even for adults. Dolour suffers agonies of embarrassment when Hughie comes upon her taking a bath in the laundry (*Orange* 179-80), and Elva, locking herself in the bathroom to cry, is forced to vacate it hurriedly when her daughter urgently needs to vomit into the toilet (*Women* 29). Most adults will be able to recall (or may currently experience) occasions when the lack of privacy has caused frustration, anger or despair, but it rarely occurs to them to extend this basic right to children. It was the desire of Park's six-year-old son to live in a wardrobe which brought home to her his plight: "The fact that there was no moment of his day when he was alone, no minute when there was silence, made him desperate" ("Desperate" 2). Many young readers will empathise, therefore, with Callie in her predicament: the eldest in the family, she shares a bedroom with her sister and there is nowhere she can be alone, no way she can keep anything private and safe from the younger children, not even her diary. Callie's unhappiness causes her to quarrel with her best friend and generally, and uncharacteristically, to behave badly, but she herself is not really aware of the root cause of her problems: "I don't know why I feel miserable," she said. "There just

seem to be too many people around.'" (*Castle* 15). When her wise old grandfather not only diagnoses her problem but converts the cupola of the old house into a tiny, private place for Callie, she is the envy of all her friends. However, Callie's castle has an inbuilt irony: the narrow, spiral staircase is impassable for adults, ensuring that the private space is only for children, but Callie is growing and, inevitably, one day she will be unable to enter this private room which will then become the property of her younger brother. Callie's siblings will inherit the private place as, in fact, Callie has inherited it from earlier generations of occupants of the old house; thus the cyclic nature of life is brought home to her with both its inevitability and its rightness. It is not only Callie's peers who feel a pang of envy for her private place; the eyrie touches a nostalgic chord in adult hearts as well. A taciturn tradesman is heard to remark, "in heartfelt tones, 'I wish I had one for meself'" (75) and to assure her: "If I'd had one at your age I would have been a different boy, I can tell you that" (84). Callie's mother and teacher, having climbed a ladder for a last look into the room, before the installation of the impassable staircase, leave wistfully. "'It's a bit like a last good-bye to your childhood'" Callie's teacher sighs (83).

The concept of a private castle, an ivory tower, an impenetrable fortress, is a fantasy in which most of us probably indulge occasionally and one to which numerous writers have retreated in fact (usually in order to write fiction). Although we would probably be embarrassed to reveal our private fantasies, psychologists insist that they are beneficial for our emotional well-being. Bruno Bettelheim is of the opinion that:

The unconscious is the source of raw materials and the basis upon which the ego erects the edifice of our personality. In this simile our fantasies are the natural resources which provide and shape this raw material, making it useful for the ego's personality-building tasks. If we are deprived of this natural resource, our life remains limited; without fantasies to give us hope, we do not have the strength to meet the adversities of life. Childhood is the time when these fantasies need to be nurtured. (121)

Bettelheim works with severely disturbed children and has made a study of folk fairy tales which he believes are extremely valuable in the upbringing of children (4-6). This is a theory to which educators and psychologists are beginning to subscribe after a period in which fairy tales were out of favour because of the violence which is so often found in them. Bettelheim points out, however, that psychoanalysis and child psychology have revealed "just how violent, anxious, destructive and even sadistic a child's imagination is" and that fantasy helps him to cope with his anxieties through vicarious identification with the protagonist (120). Some teachers and children's literature specialists deplore the "sanitised . . . Disney version" of fairy tales which is frequently offered to children as lacking in vitality and variety (Foresheew 11), and others, like Jack Zipes, believe that, "Reading as a physical and mental process involves identification before an internalization of norms and values can commence". He adds that:

Identification for a child comes easily in a Grimms' fairy tale. There is hardly one that does not announce who the protagonist is, and he or she commands our identification almost immediately by being the youngest, most oppressed, the wronged, the smallest, the most naive, the weakest, the most innocent, etc. Thus, direct identification of a child with the major protagonist begins the process of socialization through reading. (57)

The conception of the Muddle-headed Wombat, someone whom every child is "smarter than", comes immediately to mind. Park has stated that, when she was a child, *Grimms' Fairy Tales* was one of the three books which she possessed and which she read over and over. "They did me an immense amount of good," she declares. "Whenever I wallowed in adjectives I had an uneasy fancy that the Grimm Brothers (I fancied them whiskery, stout and severe) stood beside me shaking their heads" (*Fence* 83).

Possibly as a result of this early saturation in the fairy story, fantasy is never far beneath the surface in Park's writing for any age group, from the anthropomorphism of the Muddle-headed Wombat, through the supernatural in

Things in Corners, to the fairy tale Jack-the-Giant-Killer motif which is very evident in *Swords and Crowns and Rings*. She would appear to agree with Bettelheim that, "Gaining a secure understanding of what the meaning of one's life may or ought to be . . . is what constitutes having attained psychological maturity", and that "An understanding of the meaning of one's life is not suddenly acquired at a particular age, not even when one has reached chronological maturity" (3). Nevertheless, it is in her work for children and young adults that she makes most use of fantasy, not only to catch the reader's attention and fire the imagination, but also to help young people to attain self-understanding and with it the ability to cope with life's dilemmas. We have already noted the fairy-castle solution to the problem of Callie's lack of privacy.

Fantasy plays a more central role, however, in some of Park's other novels for young people. In *The Big Brass Key*, for instance, Elizabeth with her parents and older sister has just moved into a large old house with an overgrown garden; previously they had lived in a unit. Elizabeth, always known as Eliza, is somewhat lonely, missing her best friend in particular. Therefore she submits to a good deal of bullying from her older sister Paulina, and Paulina's best friend Vivien, in order to be included in their games. When, for instance she finds a big, old brass key under the house she is thrilled but, in spite of a "sickish feeling inside", surrenders the key to her sister on demand because, "the habit of her whole life was hard to break" (19). Paulina, quickly losing interest in the key, returns it only to demand it back again when she sees it polished and hung on a silk thread around Eliza's neck. This is the turning point: "'No,' said Eliza. Paulina was thunderstruck. So was Eliza. It was the first time she had stood firm and not let Paulina have her own way" (21).

The key opens a heavy door in an old garden wall that, from time to time, mysteriously replaces a modern paling fence "topped with spiteful barbed wire" (14). By this means Eliza is able to walk through into a previous era where she

instantly forms a close friendship with another little girl, Bethie: "'We're both Elizabeth!' they cried out together" (56). The concept of a secret, magical, walled garden is, of course, a staple of both folk tales and children's literature. Eliza and Bethie spend only one afternoon together in this garden of former times, but the key has provided a solution to a number of problems. Not only does Eliza find the self-assurance to stand up for herself but, after her defiant refusal to hand the key over to Paulina, her sister "Never again ... pinch[es] Eliza or pull[s] her hair", realising that, "Instead of a sunny, willing child, half slave and half pet, she saw a girl who, in three years, would be as old as she herself was now" (22-23); thus the sisters achieve a much more equitable relationship. Additionally, the shared secret of their strange experience forms a bond between the girls and, when Eliza mourns the inevitable loss of Bethie, Paulina comforts her. Eliza "did not know why Paulina was being so kind, but she liked it. It was nice to have a big sister" (67). Her loneliness is further assuaged by the conviction that, one special friend having been found and lost by means of the key, such friendship will find her again one day. "'That's it, I know it is,' said Eliza, full of bliss. 'I only have to wait'" (71).

In *Playing Beatie Bow*, when Weyland Kirk leaves his family for another woman, Abigail suffers the pain and bewilderment of an abandoned child and retreats into angry self-sufficiency in an attempt to cope. In her hurt and resentment, she is oblivious of her mother's suffering, furious and scornful when Kathy is prepared to accept her husband back. Then, by means of a time-slip, Abigail is transported back from modern Sydney with its Harbour Bridge and towering buildings to the Sydney of 1873. The token which has made this possible is a piece of Victorian crochet which identifies her to Granny Tallisker as The Stranger, one with second-sight, who will perform some vital service for the family. Granny therefore hides the crochet to prevent Abigail from returning to her own time until this service should be revealed and performed. Displaced and bewildered, Abigail is both dependent on the people around her and forced to

concentrate the occupations, emotions, proprieties and problems of their daily lives. In this earlier age, when physical life is simpler but also harder and more dangerous, she realises that people are kinder, less self-centred. Without the safety net of modern medicine and social security organizations, they help each other in times of trouble, and responsibility to both family and neighbours is taken very seriously. Faced with their example, Abigail is ashamed to recall her own failure to offer her mother any support in their mutual bereavement and realises how completely self-centred she has become. "'I'm not kind,' [she] said . . . with sickish surprise . . . 'Maybe I've never been really kind in my life'" (76). As the result of a war injury, Mr Bow is subject to periods of disorientation and violence, and sickness has carried off several other family members. Therefore eighteen-year-old Judah has taken on the responsibilities of the man of the house. Abigail realises that: "The difference between him and boys of eighteen in her time was that Judah was a man. She thought of the likeable, aimless brothers of many of her friends, without discipline or ambition, and wondered uneasily how it had come to be that they were so different from this son of a poor family, who had done a man's job, and thought it a right rather than a burden, from his fourteenth year" (120).

Abigail falls in love with Judah, and he is strongly attracted to her. He is, however, always conscious of his genuine affection for his gentle cousin Dovey and the obligation he feels to marry her because, as the result of a childish prank in which he had been involved, she is lame and therefore the prospects of her marriage to anyone else are negligible. Thus Abigail not only has a vivid illustration of her father's dilemma and her mother's pain and emotional needs, but is herself placed in the position of "Miss Thingo", the young woman with whom her father has fallen in love, the outsider who represents a threat to the family circle and of whom she has been so disdainful. When Beatie, who realises the situation between Abigail and Judah, is furious and bitterly resentful, her childish behaviour mirrors that of the twentieth-century Abigail. Although

initially doubting her own ability to be unselfish, Abigail gains strength and maturity with her new insight, and finds that she loves Judah enough to relinquish him. Upon her return to her own century, she discovers that his ship has sunk with all hands and tries desperately, by means of *The Gift*, the second-sight which she does indeed share with Granny Tallisker, to warn him. Unable to make herself heard across the void of time, she must accept the fact that, although we may learn from history, we cannot change it. The crochet, however, still acts as a token. Several years later she revisits the friends who have given it to her and meets a descendant, a virtual reincarnation, of Judah. This is the young man who will fill "the empty place inside" (6) of which she has been conscious for so long. By means of her sojourn in the previous century, Abigail has learned not only a good deal about herself and an awareness of the needs and emotions of others, but also about the courage and resilience of the human spirit. She is also aware that "the theory she had had . . . - that time was a great black vortex down which everything disappeared - no longer made sense to her. She saw now that it was a great river, always moving, always changing, but with the same water flowing between its banks from source to sea" (195). "The book really is a demonstration of continuity," Park asserts. "I have the hope that it may awaken in some of them [young readers] a genuine curiosity about their own families, their own locality, and eventually their own country" (McVitty 167).

Like Abigail and, indeed, a number of Park's adolescent protagonists, Riko also suffers the pain of abandonment. Not only has her father died, but years ago her mother had left husband and children to return to her own people, the mermen and mermaids of legend. Riko can understand the almost irresistible pull of the sea for such people but, like all abandoned children, suffers the inconsolable grief of being inadequate, incapable of inspiring sufficient love to keep the parent. "Always when her arms were around me I forgot that Matira had run off to live with her own people when I was four, leaving me to my father

and Dockie to bring up" (*Sif* 20-21). Now Riko is confronted with another abandonment: her older sister falls in love, something which Riko has never anticipated. "My mother had abandoned me, my father had died, I had withstood Joanne's coldness and impatience, and I had not cried. But now I did. A true black hate arose in my heart for Henry Jacka" (41). Riko is in the position of many young people who want the world to go on exactly as it is, without change, a Peter-Pan-like wish for the impossible. Like Abigail, she gradually reaches a more mature understanding of her own feelings and those of others and realises that, instead of trying to possess those we love, we must be prepared to part with them when that is necessary for their happiness.

Thus *My Sister Sif* is another novel in which young readers can identify with a character and realise that their own problems, though real, are neither unique nor insoluble. Park uses fantasy in this story, however, for an additional purpose: to make young people aware of the desperate need to conserve the world's natural resources. Riko and Sif are half seaperson; their father a Scandinavian seaman and their mother a merwoman. The seapeople live in a magnificent underwater city and can communicate telepathetically with sea creatures such as whales and dolphins. Also, the remote island of Rongo, where Riko and Sif live with their adoptive parents, is inhabited by menhune, troll-like creatures who live beneath the earth. Riko explains that "all over the planet humans have done the same thing when extinction threatened": they have gone under the sea or under the earth; "this is why there are legends of elves and mermaids everywhere" (34). Riko gradually becomes aware that Rongo, seemingly a tropical Eden, is in fact rapidly becoming polluted. When an old dolphin communicates with her telepathetically:

Pictures came into my mind. . . . I saw a coral reef, dead as a doornail after a thousand years of gorgeous life, poisoned by herbicides and fertilisers leached from farm soil and sent down rivers into the sea. I saw penguins so sludged with chemical waste that they were no more than

blind suffering bundles of congealed tar. And seals and dolphins and whales ill and dying, bearing freakish young, because they are on the end of the food chain and the fish or krill they must eat are polluted with lead, mercury, and other destroyers. (56)

This is a description calculated to have an impact on young people with their affinity for animals and nature. Similarly, when the dolphins beg Riko to speak for them, and she replies "bitterly", "I'm too young, . . . They don't listen to me any more than they would listen to you" (56), this will almost certainly strike an empathetic chord in the mind of a young reader. Other descriptions are even more graphic:

From the beginning of time these warmer, fresher flows were used as highways by all the sea beasts.

But now they were deadly streams. They churned with death - rotten vegetation, harbour debris, a half-eaten crocodile, a swollen groper, all head and gape. Also there was another dead thing with nightmare head and a ropey body twenty metres long. (137)

The horror of these passages is increased by contrast with the beauty of the yet uncontaminated natural world: "Pale blue shimmered through the water. The sea bloomed with colour - golden and grape-green fish, a seabed shark freckled like a foxglove, and hordes of fairy shrimps as clear as glass" (115); "When I went to the lagoon, shoals of sprats were already fizzing through the pearly water. Gannets, their wings furled about their legs, lanced downwards after them. The world was pure, innocent, rapturous" (42).

Park also makes the point that it is not only thoughtless pollution that is devastating the oceans and destroying sea-creatures. The harmless, majestic whale is still being hunted, a situation which the novel depicts emotively: "For they are angels, the whales, holy creatures that during their long majestic lives, do nothing except what their Creator planned for them. Their world is the Garden of Eden, unless man enters it" (33). One such whale saves Riko from a shark and she recounts: "I can't describe what love rushed out of me with those

tears. I wanted everything that was good for that old whale - a long life, wide wanderings in sweet seas, no wicked ship sneaking up on her to send an exploding harpoon into her guts to blow heart and lungs to pulp" (88). Once again, Park has heightened her point through contrast; after the lulling beauty and sentiment of the first half of the sentence, the latter half comes as a shock, an anagnorisis for the complacent reader. Otter has a somewhat similar experience in *Come Danger, Come Darkness* when he joins enthusiastically in the whale hunt, carried away by the excitement and thrill of the chase; but his reaction is very different when he observes the butchery of the gentle mammal: "It had been necessary for the settlement to kill it, yet Otter remembered the creature alive, carefree, rollicking along its historic highway from the South Pole. And the dead whale seemed to be yet another part of the sadness and cruelty of Norfolk Island" (60). The reader may remember the savage joy of Jenny's grandfather as the stranded whale dies slowly in agony, and also perhaps having shared vicariously in her "barbarous exaltation" when she bites him until her teeth "almost . . . meet" (*Flannel* 142). Riko is forced to accept the inevitable: the whales must change their ancient migratory routes and the sea-people must leave their fabulous city to reside in a cold, remote location near the tip of South America.

Abigail gains a perspective on her own times, her life and her problems from the viewpoint of a previous era; Riko, on the other hand, looks back at "these things [that] took place in 2000" from a time in the twenty-first century (166). Although Sif has died, her chest weakened by the pollution that has killed so much of the sea-life, and although Riko never sees her sea-family again, there is hope for the planet. Mankind, however, has left the matter almost too late: "A little way into the twenty-first century, as though it were tired of the long battle against mankind, the earth began quietly to die. Like a baby will when you have no real love for it" (168). A growing surge of awareness and concern is fuelled by the writings of Henry Jacka, the biologist who had loved Sif, and, as

Dockie insists, "There's nothing more powerful than the idea whose time has come" (171). Not only do like-minded people all over the world unite to save the environment but new generations of children are born with enlightened attitudes:

They're born knowing that the planet loves them as they love it. Of course children always were born knowing that. It was just that in the past people stuffed their heads with greedy ideas, so that they forgot their own good sense and grew up seeing life the wrong way. But you know all this, because, like me, . . . you belong to the generation that woke up. (172)

In making her fantasy plausible to the reader, Park exercises considerable craftsmanship. She provides, for instance, a wealth of well-researched factual detail around which the fantasy is woven. The old house whose cupola becomes Callie's castle is the Old Manse, a house in which Park and her family lived for years and which "was indeed a fantasy house", complete with haunted room (*Fishing* 170). Park has studied Sydney and its history for many years and has written extensively about it, including a major work, *The Companion Guide to Sydney*, in which she describes the city prior to the mid-seventies, when much demolition took place. But the old city had fascinated her for years before that and she spent much time in the Public Library poring over old writings and photographs. One photograph in particular, that of a "pale, sharp-faced" girl with "hair chopped close to the scalp" stayed in her mind for thirty years to emerge as Beatie Bow (*Fishing* 64-65).

Park's descriptions of The Rocks and their inhabitants in 1873 have, therefore, the ring of authenticity: "Dwellings were propped up with tree trunks and railway sleepers; goats grazed on their roofs, and over all was the smell of rotting seaweed, ships, wood smoke, human ordure, and horses and harness" (34). The vision of an earlier Sydney is made all the more authentic by being viewed through Abigail's bewildered eyes as she tries to locate her surroundings in the context of the city she knows: "The enormous stone arch of The Cut . . .

was different. It was narrower . . . Where the Bradfield Highway had roared across the top of The Cut there were now two rickety wooden bridges" (34); she looks out on "a gas-lit street", searching in vain for her own towering apartment building and "the flower-like outline of the Opera House"; "'The Bridge has gone, too,' she whispered" (44). As Margery Hourihan points out, by telling the story from the viewpoint of a reader's contemporary, Park not only avoids the pitfalls of "obvious anachronisms or self-conscious archaisms" but also puts the reader in a position similar to that of Abigail, "a time traveller observing the past, but not experiencing it as those who lived there did" (171). The clothing and occupations of these early inhabitants are described as they appear to a girl of this century while she struggles to come to terms with their speech, their ideologies and the manner of their everyday life. For instance, the Bow family operate a small sweet shop and live directly above it; the many varieties of popular sweets (now quite unknown) and the methods of their making are described in detail; Abigail finds her borrowed garments outlandish, particularly the many-layered underwear, while Dovey describes Abigail's own as "Just a few queer rags and drawers the size of a baby's" (62); confined to a bedroom with a sprained ankle, Abigail is mortified to be obliged to use a chamber-pot: "Even though Dovey was matter-of-fact about it, Abigail hated it" (54). Fantasy grounded in such everyday detail acquires plausibility.

Conversely, in *My Sister Sif* plausibility is achieved by means of a first person narrator, someone who is actually part of the fantasy. It is Riko's matter-of-fact account of her life among the sea-people and the menehune that lends their existence possibility. Her direct address to the readers, in the closing stages of the novel, again makes of them time-travellers and is a surprising final twist; readers are, in effect, jerked from the "believable" events they have been vicariously experiencing to the realisation that, "in fact", these have not yet

occurred. One is reminded of Puck's final speech, made directly to the audience, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Again, it is the wealth of detail that Park provides, particularly of life under the sea, that makes the fantasy of *My Sister Sif* seem plausible. This is supported by the matter-of-fact, albeit less than detailed, accounts of the technology that makes underwater life possible for the seapeople. Riko is unable to answer some of Henry's questions about such technology because she "is vague about it, not being interested" (124), and in other cases she refuses to divulge information because "that technology belongs to the sea tribes . . . It is their secret" (123). She is therefore utterly deflated, upon illicitly reading Henry's notes, to learn that he has divined the ancient mystery of mermaids' tails: "To facilitate constant swimming, they have invented a tail. This appendage is really an unknown kind of wetsuit", he writes. "You can read every book there is about mermaid sightings," Riko observes, "and not one gives you a hint of the simple secret. Perhaps it is too simple" (80).

Park's research not only sets fantasy within believable frameworks, it enables her to open new realms of possibility for her young readers. She has commented that, "The whole aim of writing for children, surely, is to open the magic casements . . . or unlatch them a little, so the kids can open them themselves. Fantasy often does that, where a blunter approach does not" (O'Neill 38). *My Sister Sif*, *The Shaky Island*, *The Sixpenny Island* and *The Road Under the Sea* are all set on exotic tropical islands and give vivid descriptions of the underwater world with which Park herself is familiar (Gascoigne 15). In *Ring for the Sorcerer*, the reader is given a guided tour of Rome, both modern and ancient, as two children search for a lost cat. While *Airlift for Grandee* is set on an Australian sheep station, *The Hole in the Hill*, *The Ship's Cat*, *Uncle Matt's Mountain* and *Nuki and the Sea Serpent* are all set in New Zealand, and give

insights into Maori life, history and legends. *The Ship's Cat*, *Uncle Matt's Mountain*, *The Gigantic Balloon*, *The Road to Christmas*, *Merchant Campbell*, *Come Danger*, *Come Darkness*, *Playing Beatie Bow* and *The Big Brass Key* are all historical novels, helping young readers to develop a sense of history, an awareness of heritage and nationhood. While several of these works have been specifically commissioned by education authorities, all are educational in the broadest and best of terms, and again the rigour of Park's research and her attention to detail should be affirmed. For instance, *menehune*, the improbable, night-working dwarf masons of *My Sister Sif*, are actually to be found in Pacific Island mythology; structures that predate memory and oral history are believed by many islanders to have been built by *menehune* (Luomala 1-2). When writing *Playing Beatie Bow*, Park worked from a map of The Rocks made in 1871; she also researched the Orkney Islands, where the Bow family comes from, and regretfully came to the conclusion that she could not use the genuine Orkney accent which, even today, is almost unintelligible to Australians. She used a modern Scottish accent instead (McVitty 14-15). Similarly, perusal of Park's notes for *The Big Brass Key* reveals that she has calculated the hours of daylight and the time of moonrise so that these would be accurate for the garden scenes; this became necessary because the time of year in which the novel is set is different from the time at which she visited the location (Mitchell ML MSS 3128).

All of this would be irrelevant, however, if children did not read Park's books, and what catches and holds a child's interest (or an adult's, for that matter) is a good story. The action in her children's books is always fast, the plots are exciting, her character's thoughts, actions and speech patterns are typical and believable and through it all runs the piquancy of humour. This comes in many forms, from broad to subtle: there is *The Muddle-headed Wombat's*

"terribubly" tangled diction, and there is the scene where James, who hasn't been told that it is impossible, walks on water:

He waved to the people on distant ferries
and to old men fishing from rocks;
but they didn't wave back.

Some people took off their glasses and cleaned them. (*James*. N. pag.)

As Maurice Saxby points out, "Middle primary children . . . delight in quirkiness, the absurd, the exaggerated, the impossible and the grotesque" (253). This is further borne out by the popularity of Park's *When the Wind Changed*, a picture book illustrated by her daughter Deborah Niland. This is a brief and simple tale based on the time-worn admonition to a child who is misbehaving: "If the wind changes while you're pulling an ugly face like that, your face will stay that way forever!" Children of this age group delight in the sheer vulgarity of the impossibly hideous faces with which Niland endows young Josh and relish a carnivalesque triumph when, on the final page, Josh's father is hoist with his own petard.

For the young adult reader, there is subversive empathy when adult interference comes undone as in Henry's "rescue" of Riko when she is sitting on the sea-floor minding her own business (*Sif* 25), and the entertainment provided for the islanders by the "Earth tremors [which] were a way of life in the Epiphanies. No one minded except tourists, and sometimes they minded in dramatic ways, picking themselves up after a little shake had rolled them out of bed, and haring down to the jetty in their pyjamas, screeching for a boat" (22). In the playground to which Abigail takes Natalie and the appalling Vincent one cold afternoon, warmly clad children are "brawling thunderously inside the concrete pipes, or fighting like tom-cats inside the space rocket." When Abigail releases "Vincent's hard, sticky paw, ... he flit[s] off to torment a group of fat bundles climbing the stone wall . . . Let the fat bundles look after themselves, Abigail thought callously. Likely they'd have parents with them . . . who would pluck

Vincent away . . . and, with any luck, half-strangle him in the process" (*Beatie Bow* 9). Any teenager who has reluctantly undertaken the supervision of younger children will share the sentiment. Humour both alleviates the didactic element in the stories and, in serving to render characters both human and believable, promotes reader empathy.

There is also the sheer joy of reading Park's prose. It will be recalled that some critics claim, disparagingly, to have detected a Dickensian influence in her writing and certainly her descriptions of *The Rocks* in 1873 have a Dickensian and/or Hogarthian flavour. But poverty and sentiment apart, Dickens is synonymous with Christmas cheer; his descriptions of good food and drink and the comfort of family and friends by warm firesides are memorable. Here Park equals him, albeit in her own antipodean way. On *The Sixpenny Island*, the "new chum" Swift family dine off the land, tropic-island-style. Mr Swift has returned from the mainland with supplies, including the traditional Australian steak; the island has prolific, if neglected, orchards and Mrs Swift has collected fresh oysters from the rocks, which she cooks in thin batter and hot oil, piling up "a huge platter of golden bubbles":

Everyone was starving, and the meal was of Ancient Roman splendour. Dad crunched his teeth into an oyster, rolled up his eyes and made small rumbling sounds. Paula, eating delicious steak, caught herself greedily looking towards the dessert, ripe sliced mangoes soured in orange juice and piled with fresh grated coconut. Mother spooned more oysters on to her plate. Sam waved a fork. (64-66)

Having escaped the drabness of city life, Riko is welcomed back to exotic Rongo with an equally flamboyant meal:

We sat down to supper. That night we ate a pineapple stuffed with crisp pork and macadamia nuts, clam fritters and sweet potato pudding. We also had a fruit salad which Mummy Ti called 'a muddle'. It was composed of seven equatorial fruits and some peppery flower petals to give it zing. I went to bed full to the earholes. (*Sif* 23)

While such passages may be appetite-provoking for adults, their succulent bounty is calculated to appeal to young people, most of whom notoriously exist in a state of semi-permanent hunger.

There are also subtleties in the richness of Park's prose. Both *My Sister Sif* and *The Road Under the Sea* feature sunken treasure, a tried and true ingredient of sea adventure stories. Matira, the sea-person mother who has deserted her human husband and children is "of chiefly rank"; when Sif and Riko visit her after learning of the imminent departure of the sea-people, Matira sits "in her big chair, . . . pearls glossy amongst the folds of her green garment. One hand idly twisted locks of Sif's hair into curls. She did not seem disturbed by my sister's tears" (*Sif* 126). When Riko returns dreamily from the fabulous underwater city, which is lavishly adorned with jewels and treasure from sunken galleons, she muses: "There is a poem somewhere that speaks of such a city. Ceilings of amber and pavements of pearl, it says, and I often wonder how that poet knew" (*Sif* 38). That poet is Matthew Arnold and the lines are from "The Forsaken Merman", a poem which retells the story of an old Danish ballad (one also adapted by Hans Christian Andersen), of a young woman, Margaret, who is lured to the bottom of the sea by a merman. They have five children and she lives happily with them there, "Where great whales come sailing by, / Sail and sail, with unshut eye, / Round the world for ever and aye" (97). Margaret, like Matira sits, "On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea / And the youngest sate on her knee. / She combed its bright hair, and she tended it well" (97). One day, however, Margaret hears the church bell on the land far above and abandons her family for her old life, refusing to return in answer to her husband's pleas and her "Children's voices, wild with pain" (96). Park has thus reworked an ancient folk tale into her fantasy of the future.

In a somewhat similar vein, there are subtle allusions to Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* in the passage of *Playing Beatie Bow* which describes the life that Abigail and her mother make together after Weyland Kirk's desertion. *Goblin Market* is, of course, an elusive poem with probably as many interpretations as there are readers and it would be presumptuous to assume Park's interpretation; nor is this necessary. The poem is a fantasy, with goblins and magic, birds and animals, fabulous fruits, temptations and acquisitiveness, and a profusion of images piled breathlessly one upon another. The sisters, Laura and Lizzie, are closely bonded, "Like two pigeons in one nest / Folded in each other's wings" (Rossetti 16), and are deceived by goblin men. In their new life without Weyland Kirk, Abigail and Kathy "fought and hugged and scrambled their way through to a close friendship". Kathy opens a shop, not "in the glen / In the haunts of goblin men", but in "a black hole of Calcutta in a Paddington lane", where she offers for sale not a bewildering assortment of delicious fruits, but "a treasure-house of trendy trivia . . . twinkles, spangles, seashells, faceless calico cats; old shoes; a real clown suit still stained with red and black grease-paint; Victorian postcards, some rude; and books and books of dried ferns, painted rosebuds, and autographs with silly poems" (*Beatie Bow* 6). The goblin men, including the one who "had a cat's face (13), . . .chattering like magpies" (20), urge their wares upon gullible humans "With their shrill repeated cry, / 'Come buy, come buy'" (13). Kathy "called [her] shop Magpies, and soon other magpie people flocked around to shriek and snatch and buy" (6). Like the home-life of Laura and Lizzie, Kathy's business enterprise and her clientele are depicted as distinctly, exclusively, feminine; "(Men sell not such in any town)" (25). The poetic allusion in this novel is not as explicit or sustained as that of *My Sister Sif*, but the passage gains richness and complexity from the implicit reference to Rossetti's fantasy.

Giving her reasons for leaving New Zealand and her family, Park states: "Though a well-qualified journalist . . . I had a fatal defect. I was a woman . . . I had ample evidence that I would never be allowed to hold a prestige position, or indeed be given a quality assignment . . . Also I was deeply, permanently insulted by being paid what was called two-thirds of the male rate - though it was more like half - solely because I had ovaries" (*Fishing* 16). The majority of her novels, for both adults and children, have a female as major protagonist and are narrated from a feminine point of view and, in her historical novels for young people, she makes clear how the social status and expectations of women have changed over the years. Beatie Bow, for instance, is in despair because, as a girl, particularly one from a poor family, she will never get a good education: "I want to learn Greek and Latin like the boys. And geography. And algebra. And yet I'll never. Gibbie will learn them afore me, and he's next door to a mumblepate!" (58).

It is interesting, therefore, that in a paper entitled "'Lineaments of Gratified [Parental] Desire': Romance and Domestication in Some Recent Australian Children's Fiction", Leonie Rutherford interprets *Playing Beatie Bow* as an anti-feminist text. She regards it as one of a genre of "narratives intended for an adolescent female readership in which an 'anti-social' female child, disruptive or potentially disruptive of family, is domesticated and rendered safe by means of an initiation into romantic love" (3). "The moral narrative of the novel equates growing up (for the young female) with the repression of emotional autonomy or self-sufficiency and any aggressive or self-assertive articulations of emotional need," Rutherford maintains (4). This is not tenable; it is in recognizing her own emotional needs that Abigail becomes aware of similar needs in others. Rutherford observes further that, in depicting Abigail's perspective on her father's absence, "The text is less a representation of childhood aspirations as of parental anxieties about the frustration of adult desires" (5). Rutherford seems to have overlooked the passage in which

fourteen-year-old Abigail recalls her desolation: "She could sometimes almost cry with pity for that woebegone, puzzled kid who used to go to bed and pray that her father would fall off a scaffold on one of his inspection tours, and the next moment sweat in terror in case he did" (5-6). Neither does she seem to have considered the well-documented bereavement and subsequent rage experienced by abandoned children, and the subsequent traumatic effects (for example, John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*). Like Theo Dove (whose story does not have a romantic ending), Abigail comes to see that, in allowing her pain to paralyse her emotional life, she is prolonging her own unhappiness and that of others.

Rutherford goes on to make some valid points about the frequent expectation that the females in a family will be subservient and nurturing, but overlooks the fact, emphasised by Park, that in Victorian times women had few alternatives. As Abigail is "glad to be able" to assure Beatie, in late-twentieth-century Sydney, "girls could become doctors, teachers, [and] do good and useful things" (82). Rutherford's weakest point is her assertion that: "Female suffering within the family, the martyrdom of women to the process of child-raising (and particularly to the raising of tyrannic and violent male children) is dramatised in the domestic harassment suffered by Abigail's neighbour, Justine Crown" (4). However, as Park makes abundantly clear, the "harrassment" Justine "suffers" is largely the result of her own inadequacy: "That unit was in its customary state of theatrically awful mess. Justine Crown didn't believe in housework. She said the children came first; but she hadn't made a gold-medal job of them either" (7). In this novel as in most of her work, Park's emphasis is less upon victimization as upon responsibility for one's own actions; Beatie, it should be remembered, goes on to become the headmistress of a school (191).

Just as Park uses the fantasy of a time-slip to make young readers aware of the changing status of women, so also she uses it to highlight other social changes. The absence, in the previous century, of such buffers as social security

has already been noted, and the overcrowding and lack of sanitation are also graphically depicted. When Abigail pursues Beatie through the maze of narrow streets and crooked alleys that make up The Rocks in 1873, the houses are "like wasps' nests . . . piled on top of each other . . . and heaps of foul debris [lies] around their walls" (*Beatie Bow* 32). A child throws "something stinking at her; it was a rabbit's head, half decayed" (32). Abigail is kidnapped and narrowly escapes the fate of Doll, an educated but impoverished orphan forced into prostitution at the age of thirteen (94). More poignant is Beatie's realisation that, in the future world which Abigail inhabits, many virulent diseases such as smallpox and diphtheria have been conquered by medical science: "Beatie broke into a passion of sobbing: 'Then Mamma would still be alive, and the babby, and Gibbie wouldn't be so sickly'." (60). Park's time-slip fantasy is thus not merely a romantic adventure story but a reconstruction, solidly grounded in authenticity, of an era in Sydney's past and her "facts" are likely to be remembered by young people long after more conventional history lessons have been forgotten.

Literature for young adults, that is for people in the early to mid-teenage years, is a comparatively new phenomenon, indeed *Callie's Castle*, published in 1974, was one of the first novels of this genre in Australia (Saxby 197). Currently, however, there is considerable debate amongst authors, teachers, librarians, parents and the young people themselves, about what is perceived to be a wave of pessimism, of bleak social realism, featured in much of the writing for this age group today. In "Life Sucks, Timmy", Kate Legge notes that, "Three new books in which the central character attempts suicide go on sale around Australia this month [March 1997]" (10). Proponents of such realist writing maintain that many young people come from broken homes and/or have to cope with violence, crime, neglect, and drug and alcohol abuse on a daily basis and that authors have a responsibility to show young people life as it is, not a

saccharine, sanitized version of it. One of the foremost proponents of such writing is John Marsden, who maintains:

The continuing repression of the young and the denial of power to them is one of the great scandals of industrialised western society. . . . Books for the young which perpetuate this situation are part of the conspiracy. . . . When a book appears which shows life as it really is, the earth trembles. Wise and honest adults nod their heads: they're not necessarily comfortable with the book but they're forced to admit its truth. Neurotic and fearful adults react hysterically. Young people read such books goggle-eyed. They can hardly believe that someone has been honest in print. They're shocked, excited, nervous, grateful. They start to see, to understand. (104-105)

There is a good deal of truth in Marsden's comments, but in this passage his argument subverts itself. Books for young people, which employ foul language, violence, sex and drugs, may shock many adults, but this fact alone probably lends them a subversive appeal for young people. Most adolescents fondly believe that they are less naïve, more worldly-wise and unshockable than were their parents at a similar age. It is the pessimism which dominates so much of such writing that is more likely to be problematic. It is true that many children live in appalling conditions, even in apparently respectable homes; some are permanently damaged, both physically and psychologically. Yet, as Park maintains, "brutish, jeopardous or socially dubious situations . . . are not the norm, and should not be made to appear the norm. To grow up believing the world is out to get you is to have as lopsided a view as a child brought up entirely on Disney" ("The Difference" 70). It is an unfortunate fact of the publishing industry that, when a certain type of book is seen to be popular, and therefore profitable, the genre becomes self-perpetuating. Maureen Stewart, author of *Shoovy Jed*, one of the three novels dealing with suicide mentioned in Kate Legge's article, has commented: "Seeing most of my other (100) books are funny, I didn't want to do this one"; she was, however, commissioned by Random to write a book about suicide (Meade 3). In *Literature, Culture and Society*, Andrew Milner notes the description by Coser et al, in *Books: The Culture and*

Commerce of Publishing, of publishers as "gatekeepers . . . people who, by virtue of their position in an organization, operate sluice gates for ideas, deciding which will be offered and which will be excluded" (*Books* 4)(*Literature* 96); yet even this, Milner maintains, "radically underestimates the extent to which publishers as capitalists predominate over and often actually initiate capitalist literary production" (96-97). If sensational and pessimistic books for young people sell well, then more will be published in a self-reproducing cycle until such views do appear to be "the norm" and a situation is indeed perpetuated.

Adolescents are conscious of their vulnerability in an adult and often uncaring world and the relentless pessimism of much of the so-called realistic fiction currently being published tends to be demoralizing, seeming to negate the possibility of assertiveness, self-acceptance, self-reliance and responsibility. Several of Park's novels already discussed deal with typical adolescent problems, thus enticing reader empathy, but the protagonist always finds a way to deal with these, usually through developing a heightened awareness of self and others and the concomitant acceptance of responsibility. The solution of the problem may not be ideal, it may be something of a compromise, but it is one that the protagonist both works out and accepts. In her writing for young people, as in her writing for adults, Park celebrates the resilience and indomitability of the human spirit.

In an article published in the same anthology as Marsden's essay, Veronica Brady writes about "rescuing the delights of reading", a phrase that would surely delight Ruth Park. "The texts you have to study in school shouldn't be seen as textbooks, mere exam fodder," Brady maintains. "They should blow up in your face, provoke, inspire, trouble and help you to discover all kinds of new possibilities about yourself, other people, the world in which we live and the

world of the future which we are in the processing [sic] of making" (71). Brady also insists that:

One of the reasons why literature matters is because . . . it reminds us that the great task in life is to live, to know who we are from the inside, not just as others see us, and what we might be, to understand how our lives are bound up with, and enriched by, those of others, with the world we live in and with the larger life of this small and vulnerable planet suspended in infinite space. That, of course, is why it sets us free - since the free person is someone who knows how to choose for her/himself.
(73)

As Mrs Oliver says to Gideon: "Choices - heavens, we make them all the time. But every choice brings consequences that may be disagreeable for ourselves or other people. A truly free choice - well, that's one where you're prepared to take what's coming, good or bad. . . . That's where freedom is" (*Corners* 58).

CHAPTER 4

JACK THE GIANT-KILLER: AN AUSTRALIAN ODYSSEY

One day, Ruth Park saw a one-metre-tall young man walking down a busy Sydney street. "'He was so small and yet brimming with confidence,' she said. 'He had a plucky, unstoppable look about him as he moved down Pitt Street, like a tiny dynamo among giants - he seemed oblivious to his size. I had been planning a work on the period in Australia from Federation to the highpoint of the Depression in 1933. And I thought that's it, this man is the ideal expression of Australia as a struggling little country in a giant world economic crisis.'" (West 3). The book, of course, was to be *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, which would win the Miles Franklin Award in 1977. It is a complex work, one in which many strands are woven together, many facets imbricated like "dragon-scales" upon the structure of an ostensibly simple, albeit unusual, love story. While, for instance, it is a *Bildungsroman*, an account of the hero's development of mind and character as he progresses from childhood to full, confident manhood, it also relates the simultaneous, if less fully achieved, development of a gentle young woman. However, the progress of these young people is set in the context of yet another, parallel *Bildungsroman*: that of the new nation, Australia, struggling from the status of colony towards that of mature independence. Similarly, the emergence of a new people from old stock, is reflected in the intertextual quality of the narrative which draws upon the ancient legends and fairy tales of Europe to tell the story of Australia. The boundaries between fact and fiction, appearance and reality become blurred as people and events from Australia's history are worked into a tapestry of fairy tale romance woven on the raw canvas of the Depression. The theme is idealistic, but it is firmly grounded in realism. The novel is a study of the individual in society, of the courage, tenacity and resilience necessary to withstand the centripetal pull of collective ideology in order to attain true independence; and through it all runs the subversive laughter of Bakhtinian carnival.

The novel begins: "In a red weeping dawn the child was born at last". Jackie Hanna is born a dwarf, born to be regarded by society with discomfiture, a freak, grotesque. Nevertheless, he is strong, healthy and intelligent, and his mother is determined that he will see himself, not through the world's eyes as Other, but as "special": "I must make his soul grow, to make up for the other" (6). In this she succeeds admirably. Tales of dwarfs are a feature of our European literary heritage, in folk-lore, myth and fairy tale. As the young Jackie learns, they are fabulous creatures who inhabit subterranean caverns, skilfully mining and working precious metals in order to produce enchanted swords and crowns and rings. In contemporary literature, dwarfs are less prominent, if somewhat more realistic; works such as Walter de la Mare's *Memoirs of a Midget*, Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Haxby's Circus* and, more recently, Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* spring to mind. It should also be remembered that, throughout the history of our literature, dwarfs have also been used in satire: Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies; or, The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*, for example, and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. A hint of satire, of subversive post-colonial deflation, is introduced in an early episode of *Swords and Crowns and Rings*. Jackie and Cushie Moy, at six years old too young to differentiate between fact and fiction, set off to find Jackie's "people" in the shafts of the abandoned goldmines that surround the town. Gold rushes have been the genesis of numerous Australian country towns, many of which, like the older section of this one, have been abandoned when the gold has run out. The miners who flocked from overseas to plunder the new land soon moved on, and the resultant fate of the virgin countryside around this town is typical: "The ground up there was so torn, so pig-rooted and blighted, that it was now useless for anything but lean sheep pasture, and that only in a good season" (15). Much of the profit from Australian goldmines has gone, of course, to the colonial power, Britain. Now, in the infant years of the new nation, two of her

children seek fruitlessly for the enchanted little people who traditionally mine and work the precious metal into ornaments and weapons for their noble patrons. The children are, naturally, oblivious of the despoilation of the landscape, seeing only what they want to see: puddles reflecting the light are, Jackie tells Cushie firmly, "Dragon scales" (16). They are similarly unaware of the irony that the name of the small town that is their home, set in the centre of the blighted landscape, should be Kingsland, named in honour of a colonial sovereign.

As Jackie matures, of course, he sheds his childish notions about dwarfs, but the fairy tale *leitmotif* continues throughout the novel; there are, for instance, evocative traces of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Frog Prince* and *The Princess and the Goblin*. Jackie's childhood playmate and lifelong sweetheart, Cushy Moy, is beautiful, with masses of golden hair. As children, they frequently enact the fairy stories which they have heard: stories about brave dwarfs who rescue beautiful princesses ("Jackie says I'm a real princess because of my hair," Cushie tells her mother shyly [13]), and of princesses who, by means of a spell, can turn a dwarf into a handsome prince. While Jackie is the son of a shopkeeper, Cushie, on her mother's side at least, is descended from a very wealthy and influential family. At first, the supercilious Mrs Moy, an archetypal Evil Queen, thinks it charming that her beautiful child should play with the dwarf boy: "There was something there of a baby princess playing with the court jester" (12). When, however, the boy and girl reach adolescence, and are lovers, Cushie's parents are horrified by the prospect of such a *mésalliance* and send their daughter away. Nevertheless, after a long separation and many vicissitudes (including an episode in which Jackie must play the role of Giant-Killer), the couple is reunited, in true fairy tale fashion, at the end of the story. There still remains an ogre for Jackie to "slay", in order to fulfil the wish of Cushie's grandmother, before the combination of Cushie's wealth and Jackie's political ambition will ensure that the son of a poor shopkeeper does, indeed, turn into a prince.

Upon the fairy tale motif, the narrative superimposes elements of the Gothic, which M. H. Abrams defines as "a type of fiction which . . . develops a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror, represents events which are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states" (78). When Jackie leaves school and is unable, because of his deformity, to find employment, he goes to work, for a time, in an orchard belonging to relatives of his step-father. Originally from Bohemia (gentle old Martin Linz, the patriarch, still speaks only "a Hottentot German" unintelligible even to most of the family [71]), the Linz family had taken up farming land two generations before. Partly because of differences of language and temperament, however, they have kept apart from their neighbours, who can tell Jackie little about them: "Big men, five or six of them", they are "close as hell about their own affairs, very tough on their womenfolk, it was said"; they stay "close to the farm . . . only [coming] to town for stores" (67). In her discussion of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, Ellen Moers notes that, "Distortion of scale was the first visual effect employed by Gothic novelists in creating monsters, particularly gigantism" (101). The Linz brothers, when they appear, are enormous, giants in proportion to the diminutive Jackie: the eldest, Blind Hof, is "a slab of a man . . . his ponderous features . . . marred by a long scar that dented the left eyebrow and dug into the cheekbone below a milk-glass eye" (67); a second brother has a metal plate in his head, the result of a war wound, and tries to drink himself to death; a third has also been wounded in the war, in the area of "his crotch" and is enormously fat ("After he came out of hospital, he blew up," Mrs Linz explains to Jackie's bewilderment [90]); the fourth brother, "the dark brother, whom Jackie detested most of all, because in his hatred he discerned apprehension" (77), is simply and purely malevolent. There is a girlish younger brother, Ellie, whose "left foot turned in at an uncouth angle, as though the ankle were deformed" (69), and a gentle, over-worked and frequently beaten sister, Maida, "about [whose] face there was something flat-planed, almost medieval, that

made Jackie remember the Dutch pictures in his dwarf books" (73). Remus Linz, the father, never appears in the story, but his spectre is always, menacingly, in the background. "He's a blacksmith and wheelwright, travels around the countryside mostly. A booze-artist, and the most brutal hound you could ever hope to find dead in a ditch. I seen him break a calf's backbone with an axe. And he belts the old lady worse'n a dog . . . The story is that's why Ellie's foot is crooked. He gave her a slamming while the kid was still in the bag," a harvest-hand tells Jackie (74-75). Maida later reveals that, "Father made Hof blind, you know. He hit him with a tool, I don't know what, down at the forge. It was hot, and all the water-stuff came out of Hof's eye, and then he was blind" (87).

Maida also discloses that there have been "four, five maybe" dead children; "Father buried them up beyond the peach-trees. My mother sometimes said that he killed them, but I don't know . . . perhaps she was just talking" (87). This would seem to be an instance of one aspect of the Gothic, identified by David Punter, that it is "intimately to do with the notion of the barbaric" (404-405). Yet, in discussing the high mortality rates of Australian infants during the final decades of the previous century and the early decades of the present, Jill Julius Matthews states that: "Until well into the 1900s, all such mortality rates must be treated with extreme caution, since registration and compilation were extremely haphazard" (33). Therefore, although the Linzs may be alien and their ways bordering on the barbaric, it is more than likely that, in the Australia of this period, a row of small, forever anonymous graves might be a familiar feature of any farm homestead. In the midst of the most Gothic section of her novel, therefore, Park has recorded a feature of Australian country life made alien only by time. As Punter observes "Gothic writers work - consciously or unconsciously - on the fringe of the acceptable, for it is on this borderland that fear resides" (409-10). Not surprisingly, considering what he has heard, "Talk of the absentee Remus Linz made Jackie feel queer, as though Maida's father were some dread mythical creature. Over the weeks he had even developed a

certain dread of the unknown man, and Remus often slipped unbeckoned into his mind - swollen to an immense size like a smoke-genie" (87).

The fear that is palpable in the atmosphere of the High Valley farm, infects the reader with concern for the diminutive Jackie. For Jackie is constantly in a state of helpless rage, taunted almost beyond endurance by the brothers, other than Hof and Ellie, who tease him unmercifully about his shape and lack of stature, and audibly debate his probable virility. They find endless amusement in the small stratagems he employs, matter-of-factly, to cope with everyday life in a disproportionately large world, such as jumping up to snatch what he needs from a shelf or swinging on a door handle. The protective shell of pragmatism which he has cultivated is not proof against their ceaseless taunts and it is a long time before he realises that "the teasing arose from a peasant humour so simple it was almost innocent" (77). Yet when, foolishly, he succumbs to his rage and leaps onto the back of the fat brother, endeavouring to throttle him, he is lifted off effortlessly by the drunk brother, "as easily as if he were a bug, and amidst lacerating laughter he [is] borne outside and hung on a peach bough by his braces" (78). Punter has observed that, "Gothic takes us on a tour through the labyrinthine corridors of repression . . . and the phantoms, vampires and monsters of Gothic are for the most part recognisable embodiments of psychological features" (409). For Jackie, psychologically, the Gothic gigantism of the brothers, emphasised by comparison with his own dwarfism, and their almost sub-human insensitivity, are symbolic of the disproportion and prejudice against which he must constantly struggle in the everyday world. Yet it is part of his *Bildungsroman*, his journey towards maturity, that he must learn that courage is not always enough; it must be tempered with rationality. When he waits for the brothers to return to the farm from a drinking bout in the town, he is aware that they are "murderers, in desire if not in fact, and as he stood on the veranda he was so afraid his mouth was dry" (94). Like the other inmates of this perverted Hall of the Mountain Kings, he could simply keep out of

sight until the brothers have sobered up, but, in his pride and stubbornness, he rejects this alternative and the result is sickening humiliation and, almost, death. He returns to his parents' home, justly outraged, but knows that this is a capitulation. He must face the fact that he is afraid of the brothers and that his fear is justified, but, if he is to retain his self-respect, he must overcome the fear. Because of his dwarfism, life has been hard for him in the past and will be in the future, but he knows, as he always has done, that "that doesn't mean I can't lead a full-sized life, and I will" (109). He returns to the farm. In 1978, the judges of the National Book Council Awards, in which the novel was highly commended, stated that, "For its exploration of courage alone, apart from its other qualities, Ruth Park's *Swords and Crowns and Rings* . . . earns high commendation" (Nicholson et al 30).

The Gothic atmosphere is maintained in descriptions of the Linz' dwelling and occupation. On arrival, Jackie is "escorted into a huge cavernous kitchen with a coved, sooted ceiling, hanging brass-roofed lamps, a black cooking range that filled even the far corners of the room with a comfortable warmth" (69). In the chill of pre-dawn, the men light oil fires to protect the young fruit from frost:

The orchard on frosty nights had a theatrical beauty unlike anything he had ever seen before. To see, in the countryside's Babylonian darkness, suddenly bloom the rolling clouds of smoke, the serried trees like dancers, rose-red, mysterious! Even Hof was a pleasure to the eye, a black phantom revealed as a delicately flushed half-human creature, pink running across his moist whiskers, ebbing and flowing in his one half-seen eye. (80)

Yet, in spite of the beauty, the sense of fear, or rather the sense something unknown but menacing, is all-pervasive: "Strange undertones and cross-currents of emotion seemed to run in the house, like artesian streams. Jackie . . . heard his Auntie Eva, several times, cry out as though someone had struck her. And he saw Hof, always slow to anger, slam Ellie across the head so that the boy sobbed piteously" (79). One of the brothers beats Maida savagely with a belt and locks her out in the freezing night. That which Jackie does not know, but fears, has to do with what Punter describes as "the taboo quality of many of the themes to which Gothic

addresses itself" (19), in this case, incest. Maida and Ellie, as the youngest and weakest members of this warped family, have clung together for comfort and protection but Ellie, though physically, psychologically and morally immature, is sexually developed. As Maida later tries unavailingly to explain to Jackie, "Before you came he was the one they teased, because of his foot. I was all he had, Jackie, I had to do something" (248). Punter observes that, "Those writers who are referred to as Gothic . . . bring us up against the boundaries of the civilised, . . . demonstrate to us the relative nature of ethical and behavioural codes and place over against the conventional world a different sphere in which these codes do not operate, or operate only in distorted forms" (405). The entire Linz family, even the huge brothers, has awaited with dread the return of Remus and his discovery of the incestuous relationship. "He can still lay about them with his fists, even Hof. They just stand there like dummies and take it, you know. It's their way back in the old country or suthink," a worker tells Jackie early in his stay (80). In this distorted Gothic sphere, the arrival of Jackie is seen as the solution of the problem: Maida is coerced into going to Jackie's bed; the inevitable happens; and Jackie is forced into a shotgun marriage.

With Maida, Jackie leaves High Valley to go to a job which has been arranged for him on a cream boat on the Dovey River; this will be a crucial stage in his *Bildungsroman*, another episode in an antipodean version of *The Odyssey*. Jackie's Cyclops, Blind Hof, is a friend rather than a foe, but Jackie's attempt to escape from the land of Linz is brutally forestalled and, as Odysseus is imprisoned for seven years by the sea-nymph Calypso, so Jackie is tricked into an ill-fated marriage with Maida. Their life on the River Dovey is happy however, and in attaining fatherhood, Jackie matures, aided by the gentle warmth of Maida's devotion, the succour of a beautiful, if unlikely, "princess at the river". "In later years when Jackie Hanna looked back on his life on the Dovey, he felt that it had all been a dream" (227); yet he is aware that his contentment has only been possible

because he has made a conscious decision to block all thought of Cushie from his mind, an intentional, rather than a *lotus*-induced euphoric lethargy. In a kind of reversal of the Odysseus and Telemachus situation, the final stages of Jackie's journey of self-discovery are made in the company of his devoted step-father. When Jackie and Jerry, forced onto the road like so many people in the Depression, join a group of fellow-wanderers on a bitterly cold night, they are all obliged to take shelter in a pig-sty, reduced to this condition not by a wicked enchantress but by misguided government policy. And finally Cushie, like Penelope, having remained faithful throughout the years of Jackie's absence, is forced to set a day for acceding to the importunate demands, not of suitors but of her financially rapacious uncle. She is saved just in time by Jackie's return in the guise, not of a beggar but of a dole-recipient, and at first she fails to recognize him.

David Lodge, discussing intertextuality in, amongst other works, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, points out that, "Some theorists believe that intertextuality is the very condition of literature, that all texts are woven from the tissues of other texts, whether their authors know it or not" (*Fiction* 98-99). Lodge also observes that, "Intertextuality is not, or not necessarily, a merely decorative addition to a text, but sometimes a crucial factor in its conception and composition" (102); and it is worth noting that the etymological root of "text" and "intertextuality" is the Latin *texere*, to weave. All the fairy tales, myths and legends which Park has woven into her text are part of Australia's cultural heritage and were more particularly so in the period of the novel's setting, prior to the Second World War, when the population was very largely of European descent. Park's use of them as a structural background against which to set the story of a new nation is both evocative of that heritage and symbolic of the emergence of a people with a culture, a literature and ideologies of its own.

In an essay entitled "Quests", Anthony J. Hassall takes up this point:

Quests celebrated in European literature include those for the Golden Fleece and the Holy Grail, the recovery of Eden, the refounding of Troy in Rome and, after the replacement of the epic by the novel, the quests for a new and just society, and for personal maturity and sexual identity. In more recent colonial and post-colonial literatures, quests of discovery into the interior, and quests in search of the cultural 'home' have recurred. The quests in Australian literature draw upon these earlier quests, while also taking on individual qualities in a country that was itself mythologised as the object of questing before its discovery by Europeans. Literature which aspires to mythologise such experience reinterprets and reinforces the nation's inchoate self-image. It turns to the half-realised beliefs buried in the nation's folklore and collective unconscious, and seeks to draw those beliefs into conscious prominence, to work them into shapely narrative, and to privilege them with the status of art. (391)

Hassall goes on to discuss the fate of many explorers and visionaries in the harsh Australian environment, noting that, "The legend of failure and disappointment is deeply ingrained in the Australian imagination . . . what [Douglas] Stewart calls 'the great ancestors of the tribe' experiencing failure rather than success" (391-92). "The expectation of disappointment," Hassall observes, "entered into the national mythology, to be laughed at by Joseph Furphy, made tragic by Henry Handel Richardson, and mournfully celebrated by Henry Lawson" (393). Jackie Hanna is conscious of this heritage. When he attempts to escape from High Valley and his enforced marriage with Maida, he is caught and severely beaten by the brothers. Shut up in a disused storeroom to make a slow, painful recovery, he has time for reflection:

Had the physical savagery he had suffered broken his spirit? He felt honestly that this was not so. The whole mythos of his childhood was studded with tales of people and animals who had dropped their bundles . . . men beaten by drought, turning their faces to the wall, dying by their own will. Great horses turned into shivering victims that bowed their heads and fought never again after they had been brutalised by the breaker. Women who lost one child after another and at last just sat there, silent, unweeping, unmoving - docile, perhaps, but absent for ever.

Jackie knew that the beating had not touched him, wherever he lived. (128)

Jackie does not succumb to the temptation to expect disappointment; at this point in his odyssey, as he has done many times before and will do again in the future, he

accepts what has happened to him and moves on. Through his resilience, Park celebrates once again one of her central themes: the indomitability of the human spirit; and, in using an indomitable dwarf as a symbol of the new nation in a world of giant powers, she underlines the qualities necessary for true post-colonial independence. Considered in the light of Australian literary tradition, of "'the ancestors of the tribe' experiencing failure rather than success", the novel is, therefore, iconoclastic.

Jackie's quest breaks with those of the national mythology in another way, also: he neither dies in the vastness of the outback, nor finds his true spirit in the grandeur and simplicity of nature. Jackie comes into his own in the city. In company with thousands of other jobless rural workers, forced to move continually from town to town in order to receive the bare subsistence of the dole, Jackie and Jerry MacNunn make their way to Sydney in search of work, possibly on the great Harbour Bridge which is nearing completion. (For the same reason, Hugh and Margaret of *Missus* are drawn to Sydney [234] to become Hughie and Mumma of *The Harp in the South*.) The Nun is, as a countryman, one of the older generation, symbolic of the new nation's past. For him, the city is both alien and demoralising: "His sense of hopeless dismay was so profound it was near panic. He wanted to get up, run like blazes out of this place, jump any train anywhere. The city noises clacked in his ears, his head. He couldn't think. Everything was wrong" (375). When he does get a job, it is as a groom for the draughthorses of a brewery stables; already something of an anachronism in the noisy, bustling city, there is, however, "something wholesome and old-fashioned about the place", and Jerry, lodging in a small room over the stables, is immediately at home: "'I feel like all me Christmases have come at once,' he thought" (397). Jackie's reaction to the city is utterly different: "In a daze of delight, he walked around the streets" (375), revelling in the noise, the activity, the lights, the industry, experiencing an acute sense of affinity. "He could feel the fierceness and swagger of the city . . . unlike anything

he had ever known, and yet uncannily familiar. 'This place is like me. Like what I used to be when I was a kid, before High Valley and all the rest'" (377). "He thought, 'Oh, God, this is for me. If only I had come years ago!'" (376).

The city is for Jackie in another way as well: for the first time in his life he is anonymous, indistinguishable, just one more element in the hurrying throng. A born-and-bred country boy, able to turn his hand to a multitude of rural occupations, he has nevertheless always been conspicuous, different, and because of that, suspect. Because of his difference, even the people of Kingsland, his hometown, are more than willing to believe that he has killed his wife and child in a murderous rage. Because of his difference the media has depicted the case as bizarre, so that he has been a marked man in any small community into which he has ventured. But in Sydney, "Scarcely anyone stared at Jackie, not even children. Not did they look at each other. They were shabby people, but the shabbiness was not humble but brazen, devil-may-care" (376). Jackie buys a paper from a "newsboy" and then is astonished to realise that the "boy" is a dwarf, older than himself. Even more astonishing is the fact that the other dwarf is too busy even to notice that Jackie is one also. "The occurrence delighted Jack. He felt that he had in effect become invisible. He was just part of a Sydney crowd" (376). Before long, Jackie begins to study politics and economics to equip himself for the future in the metropolis that he knows, intuitively, will be his: "The city had spoken to him, and he did not know how or why. There was nothing seductive about it. Its haggard Victorian dilapidation was not picturesque. With a native hardihood, it sprang from its cruel past with an unquenchable joy. This was its charm for him" (383-84). Thus, while Jerry is symbolic of the rural and pastoral productivity of Australia's past, Jackie and Sydney are equated with the future, the industrial and mercantile future of a modern, progressive nation, and with the rugged self-confidence to make that future great. This is another iconoclastic break with Australian literary tradition. A national ideology is both echoed and reinforced in its art, literary and

visual, and in Australia the values of the outback way of life have been celebrated since the writings of the Henry Lawson era and the paintings of the Heidelberg school. As Graeme Turner has pointed out: "The preoccupation with the land and its communities is so strong in Australian narrative as to be remarkable . . . The longevity of the pastoral ideal, surviving as it does Australia's urbanisation and suburbanisation, suggests that its survival is due to its ideological and mythic function rather than to its close relation to historical conditions at any point or series of points in Australia's past or present" (32). At the close of the twentieth century, in one of the most urbanized countries in the world, the image of the lean, taciturn horseman is still used to sell real estate, cigarettes and ride-on mowers.

There is, therefore, more than a hint of Bakhtinian subversion in the casting of a dwarf as the antithesis of the Little Aussie Battler, doomed, before he even begins, to failure in the pitiless Australian environment. Various other ideologies, especially those founded in colonialism, are also derided, often through the agency of Cushie's well-to-do relatives whose loyalties, and financial and social interests, lie in the Mother Country. In this way, the typical attitudes of Australians to involvement in a war being fought by Britain, on the other side of the world, are examined. Early in the novel, for instance, although "The War had begun, and young men disappeared from Kingsland in small flurries of beer, tears, and band music" (27), the actual fighting seems remote and faintly unreal. Jackie's "pantomime idea of 'The Front' . . . populated erratically by camels, Arabs sitting around the wells of Beersheba, Huns in spiked helmets, and our brave boys" (27) is probably typical of that shared by most of the townspeople. At first, life in the small country town goes on largely unchanged but, inevitably, the carnage begins to have an effect. When, for instance, the youthful brother of Cushie's father is killed, the narrator relates sardonically that, "Mrs Moy, who had brought her indifference towards the young man to a high level of unkindness, was able to squeeze out a tear every time she spoke of his gallant death, and Mr Moy thought this most becoming

of her" (27). Later, when the son of John Nicolson, the town's hard-drinking steamroller driver, is killed, Nicolson, in a fury of drink and grief, uses the steamroller to smash the new Gallipoli monument. In the noise and confusion, while one member of the horrified crowd is heard to sob, "No respect for the dead . . . why doesn't he go and flatten Dr Zimmerman's surgery then . . . dirty Heinie", Nicolson continues the attack, howling "Hypocrites! Damned bloody hypocrites!" It is finely ironic that it should be Mrs Moy who demands "in a stricken voice, 'Is he talking about *our side*?' (30). There is also a strong sense of carnivalesque subversion in that the same people, drawn from all social classes in the town, who would have attended the dedication of the monument, should be drawn so soon out into the streets again to witness its destruction. This is underlined when the supercilious Mrs Moy is moved by the attack upon their common ideology to appeal to her social inferiors.

Catherine Belsey maintains that ideology "exists in the behaviour of people acting according to their beliefs" (46), a notion that is scrutinized when Kingsland celebrates the Armistice. A huge bonfire has been prepared, shop windows are decorated with tri-colour bunting and pictures of War leaders, fireworks displays have been readied and all regular occupations come to a halt as the eagerly anticipated announcement is awaited:

A large crowd shifted restlessly outside the telegraph office, which had, without precedent, remained open for news. The operator and his assistant, now the most important men in town, made the most of it - appearing mysteriously at the window, scribbling notes, putting on grave looks, and refusing to answer the crowd's chattering. (43)

These petty kings-for-a-day, however, suffer the typical carnivalesque dethronement:

So it was justice, the Kingsland people felt, when the north-bound express brought the news before it was confirmed by telegraph. (43)

Throughout the ensuing festivities, Jerry MacNunn, the only townspeople to have seen active service, wanders somewhat bemusedly. The schrapnel in his leg, a legacy of the Boer War, is causing him considerable pain which he has attempted to alleviate with such anodynes as are available in the period: "a medicine^s glass of painkiller . . . [which] . . . some said was laudanum", and a pocketful of "Hean's Tonic Nerve Nuts, which promised nerve health for threepence a day" (46). Feeling sorry for the shy and lonely parish priest, hovering on the outskirts of the celebration, Jerry gives him a nerve nut; this results in a gently satiric subversion of clerical propriety as Father Link soon joins a circle of singing revellers, "hand in hand with the blacksmith on one side and Mrs MacNunn on the other" (47). A comparative newcomer to the town, Jerry has been assimilated into its community, the townspeople are "his tribe now, their involved folklore part of his own life and history" (48). Yet, from his experience of a wider and less insulated world, he is also conscious that, "They were all part of the poor silly bloody human race, pitiable, mindlessly stomping around in the dust, off their heads because some other silly bloody humans had been killed, pauperised, bereaved, humiliated, beaten" (48). Jerry's awareness that the enemy are "just people . . . like you and me" (41) is, however, a totally alien idea in the "hysteric sentimentality" prevailing at the celebration (46):

In the park, closely watched by the Fire Brigade, the flames licked up the post where the effigy of the Kaiser hung, his withered arm pinned across a chest heavy with jam-tin-lid medals. People threw things, clods, potatoes, dried horse manure, at the smouldering figure. Jerry, though he felt foolish and shaky with good will, thought it was an ugly scene, and he was glad when some moron hit the dangling dummy fair and square with a bottle of kerosene and the whole thing exploded in a pillar of fire. Some were burned, some knocked off their feet by the hoses being dragged here and there. . . .

But of course the Fire Brigade didn't dare put the bonfire out, in spite of the captain's bellowed threats. They would have been mobbed if they had. (47)

The scene is somewhat reminiscent of the New Year's Eve bonfire of *The Harp in the South*, with the happy, heterogeneous crowd celebrating, and law and order, as

represented by the firemen, temporarily suspended; but the ugliness of the underlying sentiment is in sharp contrast. The coexistence of opposites, of hatred and hilarity, of goodwill and vengeance, of the end of war and the beginning of peace, is typical of carnival. In the midst of collective rejoicing, the piper John Nicolson is a solitary mourner; as he plays the "Lament for the Children" (51), his sorrow is a reminder of the real cause for rejoicing. Long after the celebrants have retired, exhausted, he continues to pace and pipe inexorably until, in carnivalesque deflation, "someone finally douse[s] him with a bucket of water from the pub verandah" (54).

Park has an eye for the significant detail that will bring an era to life; the telegraph operators, the "Salvation Army march[ing] past, all six of them" (46), the laudanum and Hean's Nerve Nuts, the effigy of the Kaiser with his withered arm, all vividly evoke the atmosphere of a small country town on Armistice Night, 1918. Yet any author must write out of her own time and culture and this will inevitably affect her perception. Discussing various aspects of what he terms the "chronotope", the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented in a novel, and the effect of this chronotope on the representation of "actual reality", Bakhtin observes:

The chronotope in a work always contains within it an evaluating aspect that can be isolated from the whole artistic chronotope only in abstract analysis. In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values (*Imagination* 243)

Park's subversion of the colonial ideology, which caused so many young Australian men to be killed or maimed in the service of a powerful foreign nation, may be a reflection of the ideology of a later generation of Australians. *Swords and Crowns and Rings* was written during the mid-1970s, only a few years after the moratorium movement against Australian involvement in the Vietnam War, an involvement indicating support of and dependence upon another powerful foreign nation.

Jerry MacNunn's war experience has given him a different perspective on warfare from that shared by his neighbours, and the combination of painkillers and alcohol gives him a sense of detachment so that he is an observer rather than a participant during the Armistice festivities. Similarly, Jackie's lack of stature, his different appearance, his Otherness affect his viewpoint, and both cause and enable him to be an outsider, an observer of human nature and ideology and of the events and causes of the Depression. He realises that adverse reaction to him often stems from a subconscious fear, fear of the Other, the different one, fear of discovering that, under the surface, the difference does not exist. Because one is different from another, that Other must be less worthy, have characteristics that are less desirable, and the more undesirable they can be conceived as being, the greater will be one's own worth by contrast. Thus the willingness, even eagerness, of "normal" people to believe Jackie capable of murder. The bolstering of one's self-image by contrast is especially gratifying if one's self-confidence has been threatened, as so many people's were during the Depression. When, for instance, on a bitterly cold night a farmer refuses to allow a group of unemployed wanderers shelter, even in an empty pigsty, Jackie realises that "the man was scared of them; he had been forced by fear to make a stand" (344); the farmer, struggling to keep his family and his land in the harsh economic environment, "hated and despised them because they represented something he was afraid of becoming. They were a phantom threat" (347). Later, a senior clerk not only refuses to consider him for a book-keeping position for which he is qualified but, with "careless brutality" admonishes him: "Your own brains ought to tell you you're unsuitable. I'm a busy man" (388). Jackie's initial fury is quickly tempered by his recognition that the man "is in a funk for his own job . . . He's like that pig-cocky . . . Every time he sees a man without a job he sees himself. Poor bastard, he's haunted. They're all haunted" (388). This insight and his hard-won maturity enable Jackie to turn rage into somewhat cynical compassion and he accepts, "with grave thanks", a handout, aware that "the man needed him to accept

the money, either to prove himself humane or to prove that the unemployed had no pride" (388). Louis Althusser has stated, famously, that "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (152). In his position as outsider, as Other, Jackie is able to see that the clerk's 'generosity' has been spurred by fear, fear of having to acknowledge the illusory nature of his self-image. The fear of those who are different has yet another aspect: it is not so much fear that they will be unable to cope, but rather that they will and it is we who will not. As Jackie fails, time and again, to find employment, he becomes aware of this fear in prospective employers: "All they saw was a funny little sawn-off fellow *they felt they couldn't cope with*. His body was odd, freakish, so his mind and abilities had to be the same way" (59. Italics added). As the judges of the National Book Council Award observe, the novel is "a story which explore[s] the ways in which society regards moral and physical disabilities, deriding or fearing the one while tolerating the other" (Nicholson et al, 30).

If the Depression is thus a crucial stage in Jackie's *Bildungsroman*, so is it also for Australia. In his discussion of various types of chronotope, Bakhtin identifies "the chronotope of the *road* associated with encounter":

Encounters in a novel usually take place "on the road". . . . On the road ("the high road"), the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people - representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages - intersect at one spatial and temporal point. . . . Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course: "the course of a life," "to set out on a new course," "the course of history" and so on; . . . the road is always one that passes through *familiar territory*, and not through some exotic *alien world*. . . it is the *sociohistorical heterogeneity* of one's own country that is revealed and depicted. (*Imagination* 243-45)

The description is pertinent to the wanderings of Jackie and Jerry when forced, by the requirements of the dole regulations, to take to the road during the Depression. Forced, by the stringent requirement of the dole regulations to move constantly from town to town, they meet a cross-section of fellow Australians also condemned to

vagrancy. They encounter fear and courage, avariciousness and generosity, despair and resolution, love and hatred, loyalty and dishonour. It is a time of hardship but also of learning, about themselves, each other, their fellow Australians and, in Jackie's case, political and economic *savoir faire*. Yet, once again, Jackie's progress is a metaphor for that of Australia. In the first volume of her autobiography, Ruth Park gives a graphic account her own experiences as a child in New Zealand during the Depression. She also reveals that it was at this time that she became interested in politics. Telling her that she "won't find any real life in those bloomin' poetry books", her father, Mera, takes her to some meetings of the Unemployed Workers' Movement, "a loosely strung angry semi-union of people who had come to the end of their tether". Here, Park recalls, "Politics broke over me like a high surf. In the top echelons it may have been a matter of economic manoeuvring and theorising, but down amongst the rank and file, where I was, it was all people, hungry, baffled, impotent people" (*Fence* 202).

Her experiences during this period have obviously made a deep and lasting impression, one that she believes is shared by many of her generation. In an article published after the announcement that *Swords and Crowns and Rings* had won the Miles Franklin Award, Bill West writes:

Mrs Park [sic] said she believed the Depression had shaped the attitudes of Australians in a greater way than either of the World Wars.

"It made people realise they couldn't rely on the British as an umbrella of protection," she said. "And most of all it brought them face to face with the fact that they couldn't depend on their politicians." (3)

In 1974, three years before the publication of *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, Park wrote a two-part article for the *National Times Magazine* entitled "The Great Depression: Why It Must Never Happen Again". Many of the people, ideologies and incidents featured in the article have been woven into the text of the novel: homeless men turned out to make room for pigs; families evicted without notification; the Battle of Rothbury; rattler-jumping; the Prime Minister, James

Scullin; and John Lang (interestingly referred to as Jack the Giant Killer) (12). Outlining the causes of the Depression, many of which she acknowledges were beyond Australia's control, Park is scathing, nevertheless, in her opinion of the mismanagement of the situation by Australian politicians and financial institutions:

During the boom years of the 20s, there had been certain crepitations, faint crackles of alarm at the excessive inflow of overseas capital, the nation's vulnerability because of limited, rigidly controlled export markets. Toadying, or easily intimidated, politicians had in the past granted preference and tariff protection to British imports, yet failed to obtain reciprocity in the British market.(4)

In the novel, through avid perusal of newspapers and a course of night-study in economics, Jackie comes to understand the situation which is totally bewildering to most of his compatriots: property, labour, even money, are all simply commodities. "I could learn about all this, learn how to protect myself. Strength! That's what would come out of knowing such things. By heck, I will learn about it, too"(349-50). The article goes on to describe the terrible effects the situation had on the lives of so many ordinary Australians: unemployment, evictions, demoralisation, even starvation, all of which Jackie and Jerry experience and/or observe at first hand. Thus Jackie and the young Australia simultaneously learn a hard lesson.

After outlining the enormity of Australia's debts, mainly to Britain, the article continues:

The Premiers, and the Prime Minister, James Scullin, spoke with some dignity of the inexplicable harshness of Britain's attitude towards Australia, but apparently lacked the pride or nerve to demand that Britain at least extend her daughter colony the leniency given to her by America. American had, without much pressure, reduced charges on Britain's huge loan debt from 5 per cent to 3 per cent rising to 3-1/2 per cent, spreading the payments over 62 years. ("Don't Let Nothing Beat You", 20)

The article goes on to discuss NSW Premier John T. Lang and his recommendations for a solution for Australia's predicament, which included a proposal for a moratorium on overseas loan repayments, a proposal which shocked his fellow

Premiers and those politicians, financiers and well-to-do Australians shielded by wealth and position from the privations of their compatriots: "Obscene words such as repudiation dishonour, theft and so on flew between Great Britain and the horrified Commonwealth. . . . 'It is apparently a much more heinous offence to default to English rather than Australian bondholders,' [Lang] said" ("Don't Let Nothing Beat You", 21). In the novel, this attitude is reflected, subversively, in the outraged reaction of Cushie's wealthy relatives:

'Say what you will about Herr Hitler,' cried Aunt Anna . . . 'But what about this beast in our own State, this Lang, this Bolshevik, who has had the gall to *repudiate*!' . . .

Anna's military husband, who could turn his face red at will, turned it red: 'And announces that he is going to do it *again*, the scoundrel!'

There was a hush at the blasphemy, broken only by the agitated tinkle of a Waterford wine-glass against Aunt Adela's gold tooth. (369)

Cushie (now always known as Dorothy), reflects subversively that she "could just imagine Jackie Hanna taking him off, his bogus English accent, carefully acquired in some inferior Calcutta club, the lip, the nostrils constantly on the move as if the straw itched" (369). Now, when Dorothy, who has been taking a keen interest in politics, asks "Why not *repudiate bondholders' interest*?", her reply comes in the form of a Bakhtinian hybrid construction, the polyphonic discordance of which mirrors the degree of her relatives' consternation:

Aunt Anna's husband outdid himself, turning ruby. The air was full of agitated talk, to each other, themselves, scarcely to the girl at all. Dishonour. Mother Country. All we owe. Hardly hold my head up. Bounder. Foundation of whole monetary system. Only young woman. Can't expect. We'll be ruined. If this goes on. The newspaper. The Shop. Australia [another aunt] so foolish. So obstinate. Bonds. Shares. Terrible times. (369)

Thus the ideology which Park attacks in the article is subverted in the novel, while that to which she subscribes is validated.

While, undoubtedly, her own experiences during the Depression, together with her intensive research, have shaped Park's opinions on cause and effect, culpability and colonialism, the vociferous public debate over the Vietnam moratorium movement, in the years prior to the writing of both article and novel, may also have had considerable influence. According to the *Australian Encyclopaedia*, when Australian troops were finally withdrawn from Vietnam, Australians had been fighting there, in support of the United States of America, for more than ten years ("Vietnam War", 2957), and 43% of Australian casualties were national servicemen ("Vietnam War", 2960). In the *National Times* article, Park quotes Bertha MacNamara (mother-in-law of both Henry Lawson and Jack Lang):

We have 60,000 dead men - who died defending not their own homeland, but England - shouting that much of the loans Australia owed Britain were raised to support her troops overseas. No other Dominion except New Zealand was asked to do this. And those dead men might well ask why Britain sold at a huge profit wheat bought from Australian growers at a low fixed price. Or why Britain wiped large percentages of other countries' war debts, including those of her enemies, but insists that Australia pay hers in toto. Dead men ask but the Scullin Government does not. The Scullin Government agrees that the overseas bondholder is on top of the totem pole and that to pay his dues on time is a sacred contract. Are those dead men's wives and children not sacred?" ("Don't Let Nothing Beat You", 20)

In *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, when Jackie contemplates the hordes of unemployed, "Disgruntled, shabby men . . . abraded [of] their self-respect as bread winners and independent people", he is grimly aware that:

Most of these men were of an age to have been to the War. They had fought for their country, but their country, at least as represented by the Government, would not fight for them: gutlessly it had kowtowed to overseas financiers, promised faithfully to be good, to keep up interest payments, and prune wages, pensions, and the public works regardless of human suffering. (293)

One of the interviewees whom Park quotes in the article says that the most demoralising aspect of the Depression experience has been "'finding out that your own can do you down'" ("The Great Depression", 4). Park comments:

To my mind this last sentence is the clue, not to the causes of the Depression, but to the consequent radical change in the Australian character. The Australian has always been sanguine, but now he is sanguine about different things. He believes in his own ability to cope, but is wary about trusting the other fellow to do the same, especially if the latter represents government, management, authority - anything that sounds as if its prime interest is the defence of money.

It may fairly be said that during the Depression the man in the street woke up. ("The Great Depression", 4)

The average Australian's notorious disrespect for authority is usually attributed to: our convict beginnings, the anti-British sentiment of many of our Irish immigrants, our laid-back lifestyle and/or the Tall-Poppy-Syndrome. Park's emphasis on the Depression experience as a major influence in the shaping of our national ideology is an interesting one.

While Jackie and Australia have been coming to grips with their respective giants, Cushie has also been striving towards maturity and independence. Cushie and Jackie have come into the world almost simultaneously, in houses on either side of the same road in the same small town, yet their circumstances are utterly different. Indeed, Cushie is introduced into the novel through Mrs Hanna: in trying to empathise with her husband's "shame and suffering" over the dwarfism of their baby son, she exclaims, "But it hasn't been easy for me, either, you know. Last month when Mrs Moy over the road had her little girl, like a doll, perfect like a doll, I was so jealous I could have chewed rope. But it wasn't to be" (7). From the beginning, the physical and emotional differences between the two are markedly different: while Jackie is "muscular and extremely active" (7), Cushie is plump and yielding, leading her father to observe, "'She's just like a little cushion'"(12). The nickname, Cushie, "suited her physically - for she had remained chubby, a little golden-haired Britannia - as it did spiritually, for she was easily bullied, and had an obsessive desire to be loved" (12). Jackie, however, "was as outgoing and mad-headed as a young dog, and because of his great strength and agility always leader

of his peers" (12). As Jackie develops the bodily disproportion characteristic of dwarfism, the physical contrast between the two children becomes more apparent. Cushie's parents, having married in passionate haste, have leisure to repent: he is a toadying bank clerk while she is the resentful, exiled daughter of an affluent and powerful family. Cushie is brought up in an atmosphere of genteel hypocrisy while Jackie, whose weak-spirited father has died, is raised by his mother and step-father, Jerry MacNunn, surrounded by love, laughter, enthusiasm for life and earthy practicality. Thus, ironically, Jackie is full of the self-confidence which Cushie lacks and, from their earliest days, evinces a "fatherly kindness" towards his playmate (12). As they mature, Cushie develops into a tall, beautiful young woman with an abundance of golden hair, while Jackie's dwarfism becomes steadily more pronounced. Simultaneously, while Cushie remains timid and submissive, desperate for love and approval, Jackie's self-assurance and self-reliance are consolidated. Superficially, they are grossly ill-matched; essentially, they are "two sides of one coin" (384).

Unlike Jackie, Cushie does not embark on a physical odyssey, the story of her development is not as starkly dramatic, yet her physical and emotional experiences are severe and therefore formative. Once again, Park explores the trauma of a girl who is unloved by her mother. With her "obsessive desire to be loved" (12), Cushie suffers keenly from her mother's indifference and her father's shallow self-absorption, evidenced, if evidence were needed, by her consignment, at barely eight years of age, to a boarding "Academy for Young Gentlewomen" (34). Therefore when, several years later, during one of her periodic visits home, Jackie contrives to send her a letter via their special hiding place reading, "I love you, . . . I really do", . . . "A wild unchildlike exultation filled her . . . She was loved for the first time" (39). To both, the physical consummation, which occurs years later, seems the simple, natural development of the love they have always shared. As was typical of adolescent girls of this era, particularly those of Cushie's social standing,

she is largely ignorant of sexual matters and, although aware of the consequences of sexual intercourse, does not relate them to herself. She still regards herself and Jackie as children and feels vaguely that pregnancy is something that can only happen to an adult. When she is confronted with evidence to the contrary, her ignorance and her fear of her mother are overwhelming; outwardly impassive, inwardly she is "gibber[ing] with terror and dismay" (137).

When Mrs Moy discovers her daughter's condition, Cushie's pent-up emotions erupt into screaming hysterics; her father, panic-stricken at the thought of scandal, strikes her face, causing her nose to bleed copiously and Cushie runs from the room, still screaming:

In a frenzy of fury at herself, her parents, life itself, she rubbed her bloody hands along the wall, tore into her mother's room and dripped blood all over the lace counterpane carefully folded across the chair. She smeared blood on the mirror, opened the wardrobe, and bled over as many of her mother's dresses as she could reach. (141)

When the hysterics subside, so too does Cushie's fury and she reverts to her "easily bullied" childishness; but this has been a breaking point in more ways than one: her long-dormant anger and resentment, her recognition of the short-comings of her parents and the injustices of her situation have forced themselves into her consciousness. Sent away to Sydney, to the custody of a disreputable (and normally repudiated) aunt, in order to have a secret abortion, Cushie suffers but matures. Neither Jackie nor Cushie has been prepared for parenthood and neither is aware, initially, that Jackie loses two children. After Carlie's birth, "Jackie was hit by fatherhood as a man might be hit by a tidal wave. He was lifted off his feet, unresisting" (241). Idolising his baby son, glorying in the doctor's opinion that the boy will "top six foot" (240), Jackie is devastated by the child's death; it is the blow that almost finishes him. Cushie never knows her baby, does not experience fierce maternal love and exultation, but her grief has its own poignancy. Although her healthy young body convalesces satisfactorily, "the baby stay[s] in her mind, crying,

playing", and she wakes in the morning "with an uncanny sensation that the little creature [is] asleep next to her, its head on her pillow" (171). As her mother refuses to communicate directly with her or allow her to return home, even when her father is gravely ill, Cushie's anger and resentment grow.

The novel is not overtly feminist, but hypocritical propriety and the double-standard applied to sexual morality are probed. Walter Hanna suspects that Jackie's dwarfism may be the result of "the warm-blooded Peggy's passionate disposition as disclosed in the marriage bed . . . It wasn't natural for a woman to be the way Peggy was, was it?" (5). At the Mount Rosa Academy, every effort is made to keep the girls ignorant of puberty and bodily functions; the girls exchange such snippets of information that they have been able to glean and some protest: "'What a lot of utter rot it is! All these filthy things have to happen to us, and we can't even talk about them!'" (136). Cushie's father, appalled by her insistence that Jackie has not seduced her, reflects on "the secret, ineradicable carnality of these young girls! . . . It was insupportable what parents of girls had to suffer" (151). Even the tolerant Jerry MacNunn is horrified by the attempts of a lonely, love-struck farm girl to communicate, through Jackie, with a youth in the township: "The agitated Nun put the truck into first with a sound as if the gear-box was full of bottle-tops. The lorry kangaroo'ed forward and nearly destroyed a home-going fowl . . . 'Gawd!' he said. 'I wouldn't have daughters for quids'" (303). Intimidated by her mother's fury over her pregnancy, Cushie ponders: "What had she done wrong? It seemed to Cushie that it was not that she had made love with Jackie, but that she had become pregnant" (148). Yet the elegant Mrs Moy, who accuses her daughter of "behaving like an animal" (147), is sexually attracted to her own supercilious brother Titus, a feeling which is obviously reciprocated. As Eugenia C. DeLamotte observes, "Incest, as is often pointed out, is an emblem of solipsism - the narcissistic love that is merely another version of confinement in the self" (55). Possessed of wealth, Mrs Moy will be able to live with her brother as his "chatelaine" (145) while retaining her

respectability; also because of wealth, Cushie's reputation will be saved by an abortion and alternative not available, because of poverty, to Bede Moy's sisters when they were young.

Cushie's Aunt Claudie lives in a lesbian relationship with Iris Pauley in a squalid area of Sydney. Vain and immature, Claudie petulantly refuses to be constrained within the bounds of one relationship. Almost nightly, she prowls the streets and bars of the city in search of admiration and sexual gratification, tormenting Iris in a situation somewhat reminiscent of that in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*. Both Claudie and Iris have had tragedies in their lives, the dimensions of which the sheltered Cushie can barely imagine; each longing to be loved, they are locked in a mutually-destructive situation. Both women drink too much and Cushie, devastated both by the loss of her baby and by learning that Jackie has married someone else, begins to follow their example, deciding that "an intelligent person could manage to keep a thin veil of alcohol between herself and the sharp corners of life" (195). In a sense, Claudie and Iris are Cushie's Sirens, luring her to a land from which there is no return. Cushie is, of course, too young, inexperienced and miserable to restrict her alcohol intake to a "thin veil" and she wakes, one night, in the drunks' cell of a city prison. It is an awakening in more ways than one. Sick but sober the next day, she is aware that, however humiliating the memory, she must face it, "otherwise she would do it again, as those women in the concrete room did it again and again" (204):

She surveyed as if from a height her behaviour since she discovered that she was pregnant. She had, in effect, co-operated in creating this misery and degradation. She had used neither ingenuity nor intelligence.

To be innocent and trusting was sheer stupidity, she could see that now.
(204)

Self-reliant for the first time in her life, Cushie writes to her mother, refusing to accompany her to London where Mrs Moy intends to live, probably incestuously, with her brother Titus. Cushie also announces that she intends to break her promise

to keep the pregnancy secret; she will confide in her grandmother and, hopefully, live with her. She concludes her declaration of independence with the words: "And please don't call me Cushie any more. My name is Dorothy" (206).

Ironically, Cushie's grandmother is an alcoholic, and Cushie becomes her nurse, companion and protector until the old lady dies. Gothic and Odyssean overtones return to the novel in the description of the vast mansion, peopled with ghosts of former generations, in which Cushie lives alone, Penelope-like, except for the servants:

The house was of a style often seen in the older-settled Sydney areas, a fanciful Gothic castle with flat roof and corners enriched with turrets prickled like lobsters and encased in verdigrised copper. The small-paned windows were set in deep embayed arches, and here and there on the sandstone walls were niches as though to hold statues instead of the wind-sown ivy that tumbled or stirred like green banners. (356)

The room which she has taken for her own had been built as a boudoir by her grandfather for his mistress, a Frenchwoman, "whose romantic taste it had been to dwell, as it were, in some remote eyrie"; the sunlight filters in through the "Rossetti-like clovers" of the "rose windows as though it had once been a chapel" (361). At the rear of the mansion are the wharves and go-downs, "immense forsaken caverns" (411) still faintly fragrant from the exotic produce of the Jackaman trading empire. It is the wish of Cushie's grandmother, expressed in her will, that these should be turned into shelters for the homeless, but her son Titus, Cushie's uncle, is determined to use the money for his own ends. Cushie is caught between her desire to carry out her grandmother's will and her fear both of her own inadequacy to perform the task and of her inability to withstand Titus's domination. The narrator intimates that Cushie is stronger than she gives herself credit for being. She has accepted, unjudgmentally, that her adored father "had been a slender character" (361); she has rejected her mother's authority, reclaiming her real name and taking charge of her life and she has earned the respect of her Aunt Australia, astute businesswoman and head of the vast Jackaman emporium. Nevertheless, unlike

Australia, Cushie is not attracted to the world of business, of commercial and legal manipulation and scrimmage, she is made for softer (though no less important) things, for loving and being loved. Jackie's reappearance at the eleventh hour will mean that she is not called upon to undertake, alone, a life of work for which she is not emotionally equipped. The two sides of the coin, rejoined, will make one complete unit, Yin and Yang, anima and animus.

Dorothy Moy, however, will be an Australian woman of the future; like Jackie, she feels an affinity for Sydney, not the Sydney of "fashionable streets . . . and . . . palm-shadowed drawing-rooms" (195) familiar to wealthy and idle women of her mother's class and era, but for the "warmth and squalor" of the mercantile old city with its "back alleys" and "warehouses so tall and narrow" (195). She takes a keen interest in politics, listening, like Jackie, to speeches by the fiery Jack Lang; she sees very clearly the snobbery and hypocrisy of her relatives and their ilk; she dispenses coffee and soup to the homeless in the Domain. Her metamorphosis from chubby, easily-bullied princess to modern woman is underlined symbolically when, after many years, she and Jackie are reunited: opening his eyes, he sees a "young woman, golden hair bobbed" (434). Nevertheless, it is her utter belief in him that will enable Jackie to succeed against the giants that still lurk in his future:

'Dwarfs make swords and crowns and rings,' she said.
 'Do they, Cushie? Still?'
 'Yes.' (435)

The plot of *Swords and Crowns and Rings* is linear and the novel is divided, not into conventional chapters, but into six segments delineated by years and by protagonist:

- 1 Jackie Hanna, Cushie Moy 1907-1918
- 2 Jackie Hanna 1924
- 3 Cushie Moy 1924-1925
- 4 Jackie Hanna 1924-1929
- 5 Jackie Hanna 1931

6 Jackie Hanna, Cushie Moy 1931-1932

Thus the chronology of the *Bildungsroman* is clearly set out, like a history. This underscores the fact that, as the reader follows the developments of Jackie and Cushie from infancy to young adulthood, the changes in Australia during this period are also being chronicled: changes physical, historical, social and ideological. As always, Park's text gives evidence of meticulous research. As Jackie develops from infancy to adulthood, the physical aspects of his dwarfism become more pronounced; what is apparent, at his birth, only to the midwife and doctor, "pudden limbs" and "bulging frontal and parietal eminences" (4) becomes steadily more perceptible: "At six the bulging of his forehead was more noticeable, his belly protruded a little, a certain massivity began to show in his short legs" (12). By the time he is seventeen, "Even in the stiff, well-brushed suit, the short massive legs with their slight angular peculiarities above and below the knees were noticeable" (58), and, at maturity, he has all the usual physical characteristics of achondroplastic dwarfism: "The large, muscular calves and thighs, the pot belly, and the backside that curved out as if to balance it. The angular deformity above and below the knee-joint was now very pronounced" (387). When, at the end of the novel, Cushie finds him sleeping, she sees that his face is "no longer handsome; it [has] set in the lineaments of the dwarf family, formidably strong" (434).

Similarly, the changing facets of Australia and Australian life during the period are chronicled while being deftly woven into the story. The story of the gold rush era is adumbrated in the story of Kingsland, which "had been born as the mining camp of Paddy's Leak . . . at the end of the corduroy road that led to the diggings" (49-50). Old Martin Linz, who "had no interest in gold" (75), is representative of those emigrants who followed the diggers to the new land at the bottom of the globe; he has "taken up a selection of four hundred acres" to which it was necessary to "cut the track as he went", and has "planted fruit-trees from seeds and rooted slips brought in pots from the old country" (75). The devastation of the

Depression and the hardships and hopelessness of the unemployed, both in bush and city, are revealed as Jackie and Jerry MacNunn tramp the outback and finally make their way to Sydney, hoping to find work on the nearly-completed Harbour Bridge. In Sydney, both Jackie and Cushie are caught up in the political dramas of Jack Lang's repudiation of interest on overseas loans, of food queues, forced evictions and riots. Park demonstrates the logical simplicity of the appeal of "this new thing, communism" (298) to the vast numbers of unemployed who would "snatch . . . at any straw, any ideology that promised a better pie in the sky" (299). World War Two begins to cast its shadow as Cushie's affluent relatives deplore the success of "that Austrian blackguard" in the German elections of 1930 (369), and Jackie, student of both economics and human nature, reflects that "There was always something to take advantage of . . . [human] vulnerability - Marxism, Fascism. Soon the nations would blow the bugles and involve them all in war for some trumped-up ideal, kill off the surplus, whip up the money-making industries, fill the coffers" (425).

Yet, while the main plot unfolds chronologically, there are, in typical Park fashion, numerous episodes interspersed throughout the narrative, episodes in which the stories of a host of other people are adumbrated. The story of the lengthy courtship and eventual marriage of "wild and humorous" Peggy and the "glum and silent" Walter Hanna is quickly sketched in (5-6), as is that of Jerry MacNunn before his marriage to Peggy. There are glimpses of the story of the wealthy and powerful Jackaman family, a story which, incidentally, is told more fully in a radio play, *One Man's Kingdom*, written by Ruth Park and D'Arcy Niland. There are the stories of Claudie and Iris and of Virgie, Claudie's beautiful sister, now a drunken and violent vagrant. There is the poignant vignette of the old woman on the train who takes an inquisitive but maternal interest in Cushie. Looking "like a little toad, speckled with liver-spots, yellow and cream with fatigue" (156), she is travelling to look after her son-in-law and four grandchildren while her daughter is treated for "a

lump in the breast - God knows what, they had to hope for the best" (157). On arrival in Sydney, Cushie is too distraught, too preoccupied with her own problems, to notice the *dénouement*: "the shabby man who met the little toad, or the old woman's painful, scanty tears" (158). There is the respectable old man, too fair-minded to evict his tenants, who dies in the pigsty; there is the scarred, mentally-handicapped Milly, whose sexual favours her father sells, a combination of carnival emphasis on the grotesque and bodily functions. Nevertheless, in the reversal of normal standards also typical of carnival, Milly's father loves her and cares for her well. There is the story that Het tells of her husband's business acumen in order to conceal their abject poverty; "'Poor as abo. fleas,' as Jerry MacNunn observes, 'But they got pride. And you can't lick people like that'" (335). In this novel, as in so much of her work, Park gives a voice to many people, ordinary people with everyday stories; Australians.

That Jackie and Cushie, symbols of the generation that will take Australia forward in the post-colonial era, should find each other again at the foot of a statue of Sir Henry Parkes, the Father of Federation, may strain credulity a little, but the improbable and the realistic are tightly interwoven throughout this novel. Park has employed a dwarf as protagonist and a fairytale structure to interrogate cultural mores. Rosemary Jackson maintains that:

Fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'. . . Since this excursion into disorder can only begin from a base within the dominant cultural order, literary fantasy is a telling index of the limits of that order. Its introduction of the 'unreal' is set against the category of the 'real' - a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference. (4)

The theme of the novel is strongly idealistic, but it is an idealism firmly grounded in pragmatism. The basic human (and national) option is laid out squarely

in the opening pages: to succumb to life's adversities, to the seductive temptation of despair, and to exist in apathy and dependency, or to accept life's challenge and fight, gaining strength and self-confidence in the combat, to not only endure but to use adversity, to surmount and to triumph, forging for oneself a life of dignity and self-respect. As the novel closes, Jackie, symbol of the young nation, has been stripped by the Depression of everything; Lear-like, he faces the elements and, also Lear-like, this is when he attains his greatest stature through clear self-knowledge:

It seemed as though everything had been leading up to this moment when he was disarmed of everything but knowledge of himself.

To dismiss dwarfism as a burden was one thing; but to make an asset of it was a challenge, tomorrow's challenge. He felt a salty joy in his own toughness. (432)

CHAPTER 5
COLLABORATION: THE STORY OF LES DARCY TOLD TO AND BY
AUSTRALIANS

In the introduction to *Home Before Dark*, biography of the boxer Les Darcy, the narrators state that the book is a "collaboration" (ix); this is something of an understatement. Obviously, any work by two authors must be the result of collaboration but, as Ruth Park and Rafe Champion acknowledge, there is a third partner in this undertaking, D'Arcy Niland, who, in the course of many years of research, not only amassed a vast quantity of information on his subject, but also left "many notes on the book's theme, structure and even its genesis" (vii). Collaboration on this biography, however, has been more extensive still: more than one hundred and sixty voices, including that of the biographee himself, combine to tell the story. By allowing Darcy's contemporaries to speak directly to the reader, to express their feelings, beliefs, ideals and concerns in the idiom of the time, the authors have captured and preserved ("snap-frozen" in a sense) the essence of a significant period in the story of all Australians. The ability to bring a period to life is a notable feature of Park's writing, whether the text is historical or contemporary, fact or fiction; she conducts extensive research and she has an eye for the significant, evocative detail. However, the text of *Home Before Dark* is more complex than this; it is an amalgam not only of voices but of voices from different periods: the brief years of Les Darcy's life, the years much later when D'Arcy Niland conducted interviews and research, and the years in the mid-1990s when the biography was being written. Bearing in mind Sir Frederic Bartlett's observation that all recollection is "reconstruction" (Bruner 5), that the selection and juxtapositioning of recorded recollections are at the discretion of the authors, and that, inevitably, the authors must reflect and utilize their own contemporary perspectives, it is apparent that the text, though not fictional, exemplifies several of

the aspects that Bakhtin discerns in the novel: heteroglossia, polyphonia, and the chronotope.

When interviewed about her autobiography, Ruth Park mentioned that her daughter, a librarian, helped her to overcome some initial difficulty with the project by suggesting that she should relate the facts of her life through the techniques of fiction (Veitch 118). This approach to life-writing has the approval of Virginia Woolf who has asserted that, "If we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and ... personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility", then a successful biography should "weld these two into one seamless whole", achieving a "marriage of granite and rainbow" ("The New Biography" 473, 478). Woolf's analogy of granite and rainbow is often cited by contemporary biographers and critics, as the current trend in biography moves away from the linear, fact-filled, purportedly-objective, historicist approach towards one that is usually described as expressivist or literary. "There are biographies that are mere compendiums," Leon Edel declares, but "the biographer, after all, is as much of a storyteller as the novelist or historian; indeed, he is a specialized kind of historian" ("The Figure Under the Carpet" 19-20). No accumulation of facts, however relentlessly researched and scrupulously recounted, can capture the personality, the essence, the physical and mental presence of a human being. Skill, imagination and even a touch of daring on the part of the biographer are necessary to breathe life into the creation. Yet, while writers of fiction are bounded only by the limits of imagination, biographers cannot invent; they are constrained by the facts of the life they are revealing. Nor, whether writing of someone personally known or of someone recreated from researched evidence, can any biographer know the innermost thoughts, motives, compulsions and inhibitions of the human subject. Thus deduction and interpretation become necessary, and key decisions must be made which are based, not only upon research into and reflection upon the life-facts of the biographee, but also upon the historic, social, political, economic and moral

forces that influenced the life and the time in which it was lived. Then finally, the whole must be presented both interestingly and convincingly so that the reader becomes a willing accomplice in the reconstruction of the life.

Thus the biographer walks a literary tightrope. "The excitement and interest in composing (and reading, I would argue) a biography derives not so much from the facts themselves but from the form of their presentation", Ira Bruce Nadel asserts. "The result of these compositional forces is what I call 'authorized fictions', the alteration of facts into new forms which, despite their original or inventive presentation, do not lose their authenticity" (156). Brian Matthews, author of *Louisa*, a biography of Henry Lawson's mother, employs a more succinct and physical analogy: "Biography", he declares, "is unnatural in the field of creative writing in the same way that the golf swing is unnatural in the field of physical action" (7). Recounting his initial difficulties and numerous abortive beginnings as he grappled with the problem of adopting an appropriate authorial voice, a narrative persona, Matthews reveals that he had an additional problem in reassembling the life of Louisa Lawson: "paucity of hard evidence". "The act of writing biography is stalked at every point by the temptation to invent," he observes, in order to fill in gaps in the available information (6-7). Park and Champion, however, were confronted with the opposite dilemma, an overabundance of material. Though faced with occasional gaps, they more often had to edit, to select from the "immense collection of 'Darcyana' amassed by ... D'Arcy Niland" (vii) those "facts" recalled by his contemporaries or gleaned from newspaper archives which would best illustrate the life of Les Darcy, and then to interpret them against their historical setting.

Such inclusions and exclusions, juxtapositioning and interpretation can never be entirely objective; every biography is subjective to a certain degree. The authors must, in the course of research and writing, form certain opinions and recount the story in the light of these convictions. Indeed, a biographer must have

some opinions, some interest, some strong curiosity about the subject in order to undertake the project initially. Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom have pointed out that "Biographers often have special affinities with their subjects, not the least of which is gender, and they sometimes discover further confirmation of what attracted their interest in the first place ... It is not surprising that they develop in the course of their research and writing a strong sense of identification with the chosen subject" (3). One of the collaborative authors, D'Arcy Niland, makes no secret of his life-long fascination with his eponymous hero. Niland's father had been an admirer of the young boxer and had kept a photograph of him in the family home beside a picture of St Joseph, with the result that the young D'Arcy Niland prayed impartially to both saint and boxer. In time, Niland's youthful idealisation of his hero took on aspects of transference: he rejected the popular myth that Darcy had died of a broken heart because, "As I knew perfectly well that I would never die of a broken heart, I objected strongly to this slur on one I considered a mate" (viii). Similarly, years later after having interviewed Winnie O'Sullivan, the girl Darcy wanted to marry, Niland observed: "I've never felt Les around more strongly than I did when speaking to Winifred" (343). Throughout most of his life, Niland collected material on the boxer and, as a mature man and an author, determined to write a biography which would "show [Les] as he was, not as legend made him" (ix).

Niland's identification with Les Darcy was rooted in more than simple hero-worship. Each young man was, in effect, the eldest son of a large, impoverished, Irish-Australian Catholic family in which the father was an alcoholic. (Darcy in fact had an older brother but the young man was semi-crippled and, apparently, retiring.) Both Darcy and Niland assumed the role of provider and head of the family while still only boys. They shared a somewhat similar build, short and solid, and Niland had done quite a lot of boxing himself. Most of Darcy's earnings went to support his mother and family and he eventually bought them a farm and had a house built

on it which he designed personally (130). Niland continued to support his family, both morally and financially, even after his marriage and at last he and Ruth Park bought his parents a house (anonymously to save their pride), the nominal "rent" for which came out of the allowance he made them (*Fishing* 173). Park recalls that, during an arduous research expedition in the United States which severely taxed the strength of Niland, known by then to have a serious heart problem, she tried to persuade him to abandon the undertaking. He refused, saying: "No. If anyone is going to tell the truth about Les, I am. Ned Kelly and me, we understand him. I was my mother's husband when I was 12, too." Park comments that, "He had given the word its classic meaning - the householder, the provider, the one who shouldered the responsibilities" ("Death of a Hero" 20). It is interesting that Park has ascribed to Judah, the young man from the previous century with whom Abigail falls in love in *Playing Beatie Bow*, the same precociously adult characteristics. "This son of a poor family, who had done a man's job, and thought it a right rather than a burden, from his fourteenth year" causes Abigail to regard the young men of her own era as rather shallow and irresponsible by comparison (120).

Niland discerned identification of another kind in the story of the young Australian boxer. Les Darcy was born in Maitland; a typical poor country boy, he attended school barefoot, herded and milked the family cows and was employed on another family's milk run until he obtained an apprenticeship as a blacksmith. Like many of the boys of his generation, he was caught up in the boxing craze sweeping Australia at the time, and by combining natural talent with hard work and determination, became a champion. Like many of the boys of his generation, also, his life was altered, inescapably, by the First World War being waged by powerful nations on the other side of the world. Darcy was thwarted in his desire to secure the world championship, and thereby earn enough money to make his family secure, because the boxing world was dominated by the United States of America, whose promoters refused to acknowledge titles won in other countries, and whose top

fighters, therefore, refused to travel overseas; contenders were forced to go to them. As the conscription debate raged, Australia was split largely along class and religious lines and Darcy, star of the local boxing scene, was caught in the controversy and refused permission to leave the country. For various reasons, not all of them clear, he chose to leave illegally for the United States, only to become embroiled, haplessly, in the political and financial battles being waged there, mainly over American involvement in the War. Before any bout was actually staged, Darcy died from a streptococcal infection which was the result of having two teeth knocked out in a fight before he left Australia. However the myth popularly accepted in this country was that, "like Phar Lap" another Australian champion, he had been "poisoned by the Yanks". Thus, Niland believes, he came to represent, in the minds of most of his countrymen, the whole generation of young men who went overseas to fight in the interests of powerful foreign nations, were betrayed and died:

I don't think all those hundreds of thousands of people, millions really, were mourning for Les alone. Somewhere in the air was a vast silent lament for all the dead and ruined boys, the generation that had gone away laughing and singing and just vanished into thin air. In some mysterious way he was one of them, not a soldier but a battler, someone who did his best, came a cropper and didn't winge about it. There's something profound, perverse if you like, in the Australian psyche that feels most love for the good loser. That's why Gallipoli means more to us than any victory.
D'Arcy Niland (353)

Les Darcy was only twenty-one when he died and his namesake also died at a comparatively early age, leaving the planned biography unwritten. Almost thirty years were to pass before Ruth Park and her son-in-law, Rafe Champion, collaborated on the project, their stated aim being "to do what D'Arcy Niland would have done; make Les Darcy a real man, and his troubled, raging wartime world, so full of grief and dissension, a real world" (ix-x). The scope, tenor and technique of the originally contemplated, single-author project can only be conjectured now, but the result of the collaboration is a work that not only tells the story of the young

man, Les Darcy, but also tells the story of the young nation, Australia, during a difficult and formative period in the history of both. I have said, advisedly, that the work tells the story; the most notable aspect of this biography is the number of people who participate in the collaboration. The biographers have allowed Darcy's contemporaries to tell his story and theirs in their own words, and this is important.

Mikhail Bakhtin has pointed out that "In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language" (*Imagination* 290). Because the picture of Australian society in the early years of this century is portrayed *verbatim* in the accounts of the Australians who comprised it, the essence of the epoch is captured in a way that no single narrator, contemporary or modern, could achieve, as the narrators of this biography are well aware. For instance, in those less permissive times, Les Darcy had two close but chaste relationships with girls. The nuances of the similarities and differences in the relationships are made clear:

Les and Mary were only kids, I don't think there was anything serious there, but she was generally known as Les's girl. We didn't say girlfriend then.
Harold George Lane (63)

In those times an adult woman referring in the modern way to a male intimate as her boyfriend would have been considered slightly crazy. The terminology of another era inevitably seems quaint. Nevertheless, it was significant in its own time, especially when it was the terminology of courtship and marriage.

[Narrators] (63)

It has been customary for journalists writing about Les Darcy to call Winnie O'Sullivan his fiancée. She was not. ... On the ground that she was too young, her parents forbade it. Also the word fiancée was not commonly used in those days except amongst the pretentious. Before an official engagement was approved, though it was evident to both families that affection was mutual, Winnie would have been Les's young lady. Les and Winnie themselves settled for the word 'sweethearts', a pleasant old term now unfortunately vanished.

[Narrators] (64)

In a similar vein, the narrators refer, on occasion, to Darcy's "pals", an American colloquialism that may grate on the ear of an Australian reader more accustomed to "friends" or "mates", until it is realised that Darcy himself employs the term on more than one occasion. This was, of course, the era of the early, silent moving pictures imported from Hollywood with their subtitled dialogue. In fact, Darcy played the hero in a locally made, "hilariously bad film *The Heart of a Champion*" (170), which would appear to have been on an intellectual and dramatic level comparable with that of *The Daughter of Te Kano*, the epic in which Jennie Hood co-stars with Blackleaf Forty in *Pink Flannel*. As the narrator of that novel explains:

Some enterprising man with a film camera decided to make a quick sixpence by barnstorming through the Auckland Province, making one-reel films of each hamlet as he whizzed through. He would cook up some appalling little story, call upon the free services of the eager native talent, shoot off a few hundred feet of film, and the result would be *The Hero of Kopaki*, or *One Dark Night in Otorohanga*. Later the picture would be screened in the local theatre, the latter packed to the doors, with resultant largesse for the canny camera-man. (169)

In the case of *The Heart of a Champion*, another contemporary boxer recalls that "All the Darcy family fell off their seats when Les, smirking like an idiot, rescued the heroine from Wallis Creek, which is only knee deep as everyone knew" (170). These episodes may be lighthearted, but the advent of the moving picture was changing Australian society in more ways than one: not only was "going to the pictures" a new social and entertainment event but, for the first time, the question of film rights and their inclusion or otherwise in the incomes of professional sportsmen and promoters was raised:

Mr McIntosh was the first Australian promoter to realise that, with the growth of the public's ardent appetite for 'the pictures', had come a splendid new opportunity for making money. Snowy improved greatly on the primitive fixed camera method of photographing fights, and found a ready market in the movie theatres. From the beginning Dave Smith, always a battler for his colleagues, objected. ... He had an undefined notion of subsidiary rights, but was not sure how to implement it. (150)

In these days, Australians routinely sit in their living-rooms watching sporting events on the other side of the world at the exact time that these events occur. All are aware that, for a professional sportsman, the prize money for the occasion is merely the key to greater earnings, in sponsorships, advertising and other associated areas. It is salutary to realise that such a "basic" matter as film rights was once an innovation. Similarly, it is surprising to learn not only that the Rushcutters Bay Stadium in Sydney was "at one time the largest boxing arena in the southern hemisphere, and comparable in capacity with any in the world", but also that, until only a few years before Darcy fought there, "it was open to the sky". . . . "The O'Sullivan family . . . on Boxing Day 1908 watched the Burns-Johnson fight in comfort from their pub verandah in Paddington" (43-44). This was the only way in which the O'Sullivan women could have witnessed a fight since, at the time, respectable women did not attend boxing matches. The narrators give credit for the demise of this social taboo to the American entrepreneur Tex Rickard who was motivated not by feminist sympathies but by the "simple principle that two tickets are better than one", and who therefore set about improving both the accommodation and the atmosphere of the stadiums (251). Such details may have little direct bearing on the story of Les Darcy but, by including them, Park and Champion have painted in the details of the era, giving the reader the background against which the story is set. These now-forgotten facts, together with the multiplicity of contemporary voices, have an animating effect on the story, bringing it alive in rather the same way as is sometimes employed in films, when a still picture of a bygone era, projected on the screen, suddenly breaks into movement. Interestingly, Dudley Andrew, discussing signification within the medium of film, explains that the purpose of focusing the camera on apparently extraneous details is "to put us at rest within a known world that surrounds the tale" (65). In literature, Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued, our interpretation of a previous era is ineluctably linked with our experience and understanding of our own time and culture:

"*Understanding is always the fusion of . . . horizons supposedly existing by themselves*" (306). The past becomes the living present for the reader/viewer, who is caught in something of a time-warp, so that it comes as a disorienting jolt to realise that one of Darcy's early opponents in the ring had started his career as a bare-knuckled fighter (70) and that Darcy's own original boxing stance was not the ducking, weaving style with which we are familiar but the old-fashioned, upright posture now seen only in faded photographs of pugilists (usually arrayed in singlets, long-johns and bushy moustaches): he "began professional life as an upright, walk-up boxer, and ended as a modified croucher" (97). Even more startling is the realisation that one of the American sportswriters who castigated Darcy during his time in the United States was none other than the legendary Bat Masterson, erstwhile deputy to Wyatt Earp, marshall of Tombstone, Arizona, hero of many a Hollywood Western melodrama. Discussing the ability of talented biographers to convey a sense of immediacy, Park Honan observes that, "We have no single word for the sense of experiencing life not just today, or this hour, but on the curious moment-to-moment knife edge of time. Life seems to depart as soon as it begins so that there is no stasis and every present is a present-that-was." Honan himself, however, captures the essence of such biographical finesse when, considering its successful achievement, he notes: "The extraordinary strategies [which] are used to initiate us into presents-that-were and ways of feeling that are not normally our own" (117). *Home Before Dark* accomplishes such an initiation.

The voices heard in this biography come from all walks of life, all age groups. We hear, for instance, from Mary Riley, that when Darcy's coffin was solemnly paraded through Sydney's streets, "I was only ten and the mournful music made me cry. A bigger girl slapped me. We were supposed to be dignified and keep up the honour of the school" (2). Lily O'Rourke, an aunt of Darcy, describes her father and his siblings and Catholic-Protestant relations among early Irish migrants:

The brothers went this way, Terence, Michael, Thomas, and John.
 . . . Michael was the fighter and John and my father were the dancers.
 They used to take a smooth piece of board to wherever they were working
 and knock out a jig or so for practice and the fun of it . . . There were lots
 of Orangemen about then, and if they weren't the scrappy sort, the
 O'Rourkes would go to Cessnock or Newcastle looking for them, Father's
 favourite tune was called 'Thrashing the Protestants'. Isn't that awful? (19)

The views of two prominent politicians on Australian involvement in the First
 World War are recorded:

We will help defend the mother country to our last man and our last
 shilling.

Andrew Fisher, Prime Minister

The most generous of men with other people's lives, Mr Fisher. A great
 patriot. He is a Scot.

John Curtin, future Prime Minister (94)

We hear from men and women, young and old, friends and foes, priests and boxers,
 dentists and doctors, and writers as diverse as Damon Runyan, Paul Gallico, James
 Vance Marshall, Leon Gellert and Donald Horne. The biography exemplifies what
 Bakhtin has described as "the unfolding of social heteroglossia *surrounding* the
 object, the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object"
 (*Imagination* 278). Bakhtin's editor, Michael Holquist, defines heteroglossia as:

that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in
 any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical,
 meteorological, physiological - that will insure that a word uttered in that
 place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have
 under any other conditions: all utterances are heteroglot in that they are
 functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and
 therefore impossible to resolve. (Glossary, 428)

In this biography, the beliefs, concerns, emotions and ideologies of the period are
 not described, they are presented by the people who experience them as they
 experience them.

In addition to these many and varied voices, the authors have employed a curiously protean narrative style. There are numerous examples of what Bakhtin terms a "hybrid construction" (*Imagination* 304), when the narrator slips into the idiom of one or more of the characters. For instance, when discussing Father Coady, curate of East Maitland, aficionado of boxing, and lifelong mentor of Les Darcy, the narrators reveal that, "When Les Darcy came to him for instruction for Confirmation, *the child was already mad keen on scrapping*" (25 Italics added). The sentence begins in formal narrative style, but ends in Father Coady's own colloquial idiom. There are numerous instances in which the narration segues in and out of the Irish-Australian dialect, reminders that many of the characters are emigrants or first-generation natives, whose emotional ties to their homelands are still strong. The line, "Convenient to the town end of Pitnacree Road still stands an ancient inn" (34), for example, is a whimsically evocative combination of "Phil the Fluter's Ball" and Rudyard Kipling's "Recessional". Similarly, when the topic is boxing, the narrative is studded with sporting colloquialisms: "Rumours raged that the fight was to be a schlenter (modern usage, slinter)" (153); while the rampant corruption of the American boxing scene is reflected in the ganster-jargon employed to describe it: Dave Smith "predictably, was given the runaround. Once he was even paid with a dud cheque" (98-99). By contrast, Memphis, where Darcy was to die, is considered by Park and Niland to be very much like Maitland, Darcy's hometown: "What a right place for the old Les to die in. It's just like home," is Niland's affinitive exclamation (311). Therefore Memphis is described in formal, almost epic terms: "Then as now, the great plain swept to the horizon, needled with steeples and tall isolated trees. The Wolf River, a tangle of slate-blue thread, flowed in a vast semi-circle east and north of the city until, swollen to a significant waterway in its own right, it surged into the incomparable Mississippi" (312). As Seymour Chatman observes, "Language is an extremely versatile [sic] tool, and clever authors can deploy a wide range of verbal underlinings and concealments, promotions and deceptions" (209). Chatman discusses, for instance,

"presupposition", which he defines as "a portion of a sentence . . . that is offered as a *datum*, something that "goes without saying", already understood, perforce agreed upon by everyone including the listener" (210). The biographers, indeed, cite an example of such literary legerdemain when discussing the average American's attitude to the European war:

It was not, in fact, until the American people were convinced by the most blatant and persistent propaganda that this was a Holy War, that America at large developed any emotional commitment to the idea of conflict. The irresistible slogan first thundered from the powerful Hearst newspaper chain was 'This War Is To Save Democracy'. What red-blooded man would not battle for democracy? The occasional pale-blooded university professor who pointed out that the nation was not a democracy but an oligarchy soon retreated into silence. (256)

Park and Champion themselves, however, are not innocent of employing the device to magnify the importance of their biographical topic: "Any serious Darcy researcher sooner or later comes to the conclusion . . . " (38); "No one who studies the life of Les Darcy can fail to wonder . . . " (172); "yet another small Darcy puzzle which must be left to further researchers" (108). The chameleon nature of the narrative voice, added to the multiplicity of recorded voices, the open or implicit use of analepsis and prolepsis, all reflect the evolving cultural and ideological mix that was and is Australia.

But, even as the authors are aware of the value of heteroglot discourse in capturing the essence of an era, they are also aware of the fallibility of biographical sources of information. Mark Schorer has ruefully identified some of the problems that biographers face when conducting research interviews: "The first problem with living witnesses is simply human vanity. It is natural enough that anyone who knows that he is to appear in a book will wish to appear to the best advantage. . . . Then there are those who wish to be memorialized as having had a more important association with the subject than the facts will support . . . A more serious difficulty with living witnesses is the simple fallibility of human memory . . . A

prominent man is, in many ways, a mythological man" (80-81). Park and Champion are aware not only of these problems but also of another, wryly observed by D'Arcy Niland: "Old men love to pull the leg of an earnest inquirer" (vii). Indeed, from the very first pages of this biography, the authors draw attention to the discrepancies in eye-witnesses' accounts. When Darcy's body was returned to Sydney, "at least 300,000 people filed past the coffin", in the estimation of Police Inspector Turbet (5), and various descriptions of the body's apparel have been recorded. James Vance Marshall, journalist, recorded that "The body was dressed in a neat dark suit, and brand new patent-leather shoes. The shirt and collar were Persil white . . . a band of black crape encircled one arm above the elbow, as though Darcy were in mourning for himself" (3). Yet, as the narrators point out, "No one else, amongst the thousands who viewed Darcy's body, recorded seeing the black crape band. Most witnesses say the body was clad in a rough brown garment variously described as his boxer's robe and a dressing gown" (3). Immediately after this, and without comment, they place the description given by Maurice O'Sullivan, friend of Darcy, brother of Winnie, and future Minister for Health: "His robe was green, like his shorts. The brown garment, which I saw myself, was the habit of the Third Order of St Francis, to which he belonged" (4). Thus the reader is made aware, from the beginning of the story, of the fallible nature of human memory, especially where emotion is involved. Undoubtedly all these witness believed that they were speaking the truth; there would be no reason to lie.

There are very obvious reasons, however, for some other discrepancies in the descriptions of the lying-in-state and the funeral. Friends and Darcy-sympathisers described the proceedings as well-ordered, solemn and melancholy; pro-conscriptionists and newspapers owned by Darcy's enemies describe a semi-hysterical mob, inflamed by morbid curiosity and a thirst for sensationalism:

There were no fights or scuffles. Some prayed.
Police Inspector Turbet

The mob which raced and scrambled to peer at Darcy's corpse ... The hideous jam of curious fools, the squeezing and the scuffling, the extravagance of feeling and the lamentable lack of reverence, all this was but a manifestation of deplorable morbidity. There was a majority of women and girls in those gaping crowds. It symptomises an unwholesome attitude of mind. There is something wrong with our womanhood.

Sunday Times, 8 July 1917

It wasn't bloody like that at all.

Mick Hawkins, trainer

There were very few women amongst the vast crowd, as anyone can see from photographs.

Police Inspector Turbet (4-5)

The *Sunday Times* was sharply critical of the State Railway's decision to schedule extra trains "to enable a curious huddle of outsiders to follow a body to Maitland" for the funeral (8), an event which the Rev. Arthur Killworth, Anglican Rector, Maitland, described as an "exhibition [which] was an insult to our boys at the Front" (9). Australian society had been torn by the contentious issue of conscription, support for and opposition to which had largely followed class and religious lines. This is discussed later in the biography, but the issue is raised on the opening pages in the voices of the people who experienced it. On Page Two, Maurice O'Sullivan recalls that, as Darcy's coffin was unloaded from the ship, he "could hear children's voices reciting the rosary", and the narrators inform us that, "The children were from St Brigid's Convent school in The Rocks, a dockside slum area." Thus the issues of class and religion enter the story with Darcy himself and contention follows immediately. Still on Page Two we learn from Mrs Ruby Knight, onlooker:

I took a handful of white feathers to throw on the coffin ... Why? My mother said it was my duty because of my brother being killed by the Turks. No, I don't know how that would have helped but it was the kind of thing people often did. They said Les Darcy ran away, that he was a deserter. How would I know whether he was or not?

The inclusion of this particular memory serves an additional purpose: white feathers as a symbol of cowardice belong to an earlier era than our own. The practice of presenting them to men who refused to enlist or fight seems to have been prevalent during the Boer and First World Wars and has been the genesis of innumerable adventure stories and films. However, the heavy loss of life in the military debacles of the First World War had a disillusioning effect on the peoples of the nations involved and the presentation of white feathers to men who avoid conflict seems to have withered correspondingly. It is possible that the majority of younger Australians would be ignorant of the practice, and the inclusion of this incident is emotively evocative. In the course of the biography, the narrators will tell, in tandem, the stories of Les Darcy and of Australians at war, and the stage is set with the last sentence in Chapter One: "All these conflicting emotions tore Australia apart in the last year and a half of Darcy's life, 1916 and 1917, the time of the *conscription referendums*." The italics are mine, but the placement of the two final words is significant; Chapter Two begins: "Les Darcy was born . . ." (14).

The opening lines of Chapter One are also significant, from the point of view of narrative style: "On the morning of 26 June 1917, the American mail steamer *Sonoma* took aboard the pilot at Sydney Heads . . . On board the fine passenger vessel were Miss Winifred O'Sullivan and Mr Mick Hawkins, companions in misfortune" (1). There is an old-fashioned, almost once-upon-a-time quality in the diction; the passage has the tone of both an official report and the typical beginning of a period novel of mystery and/or adventure - almost a Boys'-Own-Album quality. Readers are being told, subliminally, that they are being told a story, a well known story that they must "unknow" in order to enjoy hearing over again. This is a mental feat, similar to the willing suspension of disbelief which seems to come naturally to young children, settling down to hear, yet again, their favourite bedtime story. Most Australians have some knowledge, however vague, of the not dissimilar stories of those two national icons, Les Darcy and Phar Lap,

and the invitation to listen once again to the tale, manoeuvres readers of the biography into the position of accomplices in its unfolding. This story begins at the end with a funeral, and the readers are drawn into the process of research and deduction in order to ascertain how and why this ending came about. By revealing, even highlighting, conflicting evidence and differing points of view, by admitting the fallibility of human memory and of gaps in the available facts, the narrators involve their readers in the deductive, interpretative process and thereby increase the persuasive power of the logic behind any assumptions they make. "The biographer . . . takes . . . fragments and creates a mosaic, and his art resides in making you feel that you are creating it with him," Leon Edel asserts. "A biography is a kind of endless summary, in which the reader is made a party to a weighing of evidence" ("The Poetics of Biography" 55). Thus, when the authors have an opinion that cannot be substantiated by hard fact, they rely on persuasive rhetoric to carry the point. Seeking to attribute to Sully the scheme to leave Australia illegally, D'Arcy Niland avers, "*Of course this must have been the way it was.* [Sully] was a con man by instinct" (217 *Italics added*); similarly, Park and Champion maintain that

In spite of Kearns's boasting cables to the States, he had no contract with Darcy ... Kearns kept telling everyone and his dog that he had a contract. But he never showed it to anyone. *Of course he had none.* Not only was Les careful not to tie himself up, but Mrs Darcy flatly refused to co-sign if he did. (179. *Italics added*)

There is also the rather confusing insistence, in spite of an absence of evidence, that Darcy did not die intestate:

Most researchers conclude that Darcy died intestate, but there is credible testimony that he made a will, leaving everything he owned to his mother, Margaret. The present writers found no one who had seen this will, or had any knowledge of where it could be found. (345)

Then, after pointing out that any will Darcy made before leaving Australia would have been invalid because he was still a minor, they go on to state:

The writers have always come back to the *basic truth* that Les was not the type to go away without leaving a will. He knew that he might well go on to Canada or Britain and enlist and be killed . . . Let us suppose instead that the will was a simple form will picked up by the boy at the post office on his way home to Emerald Street . . . If such a will existed, Mrs Darcy must have had it in care, not knowing it was invalid. Otherwise she would have had Les make another while he was in America. (346. Italics added)

This insistence on the presence of a will is puzzling: (a) because Mrs Darcy could hardly be unaware of the invalidity of such a document since the writers have already cited her refusal to sign on Darcy's behalf as "proof" that a Kearns contract could not exist; (b) because it has earlier been stated that, at the time of leaving Australia, Darcy had no plans to enlist overseas but intended to be home within six months (229), and (c) because of Winnie O'Sullivan's conviction that Darcy's dying intestate was proof that he expected to live: "Of course he did. He died intestate. He would never have done that if he hadn't believed he was going to live. He just idolised his mother, and he knew she would never get the property unless he made a will leaving it expressly to her," Winnie has insisted in an interview with the Nilands ("Death of Hero" 34). It is as if the biographers are reluctant to admit a degree of fecklessness in one who, after all, was little more than a boy. As Sigmund Freud has noted, idealization of the subject is a tendency not uncommon amongst biographers; they are "fixated on their heroes in a quite special way . . . they tolerate in him no vestige of human weakness or imperfection," he observes (130).

However, as Ira Bruce Nadel has noted, "Objective biography is logically and artistically impossible" (10). The biographer selects the pieces of evidence to be presented for weighing, and controls the manner and narrative style of their presentation. When, for instance, the authors describe the difficulties Darcy experienced in endeavouring to fight in the United States, their bias is obvious; Darcy is referred to as "the boy", and his detractors are villified:

Alfred Lippe's attitude . . . was vengeful and unjust . . . He embarked upon a vindictive campaign against Stadiums Ltd and Australian boxers. His

opportunity for spectacular revenge - spectacular because he was an insatiable publicity seeker - came when Les Darcy arrived in the States . . . He used every publicity channel open to him to blacken Darcy's name, although his libels reveal that he knew very little about the boy. (149-50)

Sam Austin of the *Police Gazette* ... blackgarded Les Darcy from the time the boy's name first appeared in Snowy's newsletters, though he knew nothing about him and was determined not to learn. (189)

In 1917 the bitterly vengeful Snowy Baker regretted that, because of different defamation and libel laws, some of the American sportswriters' foamings at the mouth about Les Darcy could not be republished in Australia. (244-5)

The biographers have also emphasised Darcy's "honest and non-manipulative character" (218) by the use of a contrasting foil: Sully. "Known variously as O'Sullivan or Sullivan . . . also known as Ted, Ed, Tim and Tom" (215), this is the young man who not only made the arrangements for Darcy's illegal departure from Australia but who, indeed, accompanied him. The authors acknowledge that there is a good deal of uncertainty as to whether Sully was ever Darcy's manager (265) but, in any case, the two young man had a disagreement whilst in America and Sully was vindictive. While the openness of Darcy's character is constantly stressed, virtually every mention of Sully increases the aura of mystery apparently surrounding him: the "general belief was that is you wanted something done secretly you contacted Sully, who had plenty of dubious contacts" (237); "pictures of Sully are very rare indeed . . . like a moth with confused markings, he could vanish into light or shade" (237); "his was the kind of flashy, bragging, dodgy character which was the perfect antithesis of Darcy's own" (277). While the authors are of the opinion that, "Any serious Darcy researcher sooner or later comes to the conclusion that either because of lack of imagination, or an inborn and singular candour, this young man (if correctly reported) can always be believed" (38), they attest to Sully's numerous prevarications, including those heard personally during the course of a telephone conversation (337). The use of a foil in portraying character is effective, if not innovative; (Nadel, for instance, points out the use made of it by Lytton

Strachey in his biography of *Eminent Victorians* [163]); the reader's response is manipulated contrapuntally by the juxtaposition of contrasts.

Although the authors have made little overt use of metaphor in telling this story, there is a notable exception. Describing the eagerly anticipated fight between Les Darcy and Eddie McGoorty, the authors note that, "Shortly before the *battle* commenced, a group of *wounded returned soldiers* climbed into the ring". Their appearance had been arranged by two politicians who followed them into the ring and attempted to address the crowd which did not let them speak, being "frenziedly keen for the *battle* to begin" (156. Italics added.) Thus an analogy is being drawn between the fight and the war and between young Australian men engaged in both; also, the exploitation of the soldiers by politicians reflects the cynical opportunism with which capitalists and politicians manipulated the lives of Darcy and his whole generation. As McGoorty was an American, the Australian flag was placed in Darcy's corner, his habitual trademark when fighting against opponents from overseas (85). The fortunes and misfortunes of Les Darcy and the young Australian soldiers are recounted in parallel throughout the book. Chapter Five, for instance, recounts the early days of Darcy's boxing apprenticeship under Dave Smith when he "spent the happiest months of his life at The Spit, Sydney", an idyllic, isolated spot with "its dreaming waters, the silent bush, the unalterable apartness" (115). While he trained hard there, improving his fitness and technique, other young Australian men were training in the desert:

National hubris dictated that the troops who represented Australia and New Zealand should be the flower of their countries' manhood. The legend of the tall, powerful, bronzed Anzac was to begin. (126)

The authors note, with sad irony, that "Regio Delaney, a young boxer in superb condition" was rejected because of "a slight overbite". However, "Later, when enlistment dropped off and the Army became desperate for recruits, Regio was accepted, sent to France, and killed within days of his arrival" (126). From his base

at The Spit, Darcy wins virtually all his fights, for prize money that increases proportionally, is able to buy a farm and build a house on it for his family and also to achieve the dream of most young men, his first car. Yet, as the distant war gathers momentum, Darcy is matched with an experienced, and possibly unscrupulous, American boxer, Jeff Smith, and rumours of gambling syndicates and bribes enter his formerly untainted world. Darcy loses his first fight against Smith as the result, many spectators believe, of a foul blow, and wins the return match when Smith is disqualified for punching low. Thus the dishonesty and treachery of the sophisticated overseas boxing milieu begins to impinge on Darcy's consciousness, harbingers of the fate that awaits him and so many his contemporaries in their different destinations overseas. Chapter Five ends with a brief, proleptic account of the death of his younger brother Frosty, also a boxer, from "pneumonic plague, the so-called Spanish Flu", just two years after Darcy himself is to die. Chapter Six begins, "In mid-April 1915, rumours were flying that the AIF had departed from Egypt for an unknown destination": Gallipoli (141). Thus, in a sense, the authors have employed Darcy and his story as a metaphor for the young Australian soldiers and their story, and the boxing world as a metaphoric microcosm of the globe, with the young nation, Australia, still existing in a prelapsarian state about to be contaminated by the evil abroad in the world.

Peter Pierce has observed, acutely, that *Home Before Dark*, "enriched by testimonies that resound with the idiom of an earlier, supposedly more innocent age in Australian history . . . is a determined piece of myth-making" (10). The biographers, on the other hand, have asserted that their intention has been not only to make "Les Darcy a real man", but also to make his "troubled, raging wartime world, so full of grief and dissent, a real world" (ix-x). Possibly, in dispelling some myths the authors have reinforced others, but they have succeeded in making the ideologies current in this era in Australia very "real"; myths *are* real to those

who believe them. *Home Before Dark* contains many anecdotes and, discussing the nature of anecdotes and national ideology, Frank Lentricchia observes:

An unpublished little story, funny and biographical, apparently stands in for a bigger story, a socially pivotal and pervasive biography which it illuminates - in an anecdotal flash the small story reveals the essence of the larger story and in that very moment becomes exegesis of a public text; the hitherto unpublished items become published. The teller of anecdotes has to presume the cultural currency of that large, containing biographical narrative which he draws upon for the sharp point he would give his anecdote . . . In evoking the master biography, anecdote helps us to remember. And remembrance, so triggered, is the power which sustains, by retrieving, our basic cultural fiction. (429)

The narrators, with wry humour, deflate one myth at least. Discussing the fate of the two teeth which Darcy had knocked out in a fight shortly before leaving Australia, they present several "authoritative" and mutually contradictory accounts before observing that:

Arguments about the lost teeth seem likely to go on. Myth has multiplied them, as it multiplies sacred relics amongst the devout. If beloved saints are credited with two skulls and fifty fingers, we can expect Les Darcy's teeth to vanish and reappear in an increasing number of locations as the decades roll on. (202)

Mikhail Bakhtin wrote his lengthy essay, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", in 1938-1939 and, in 1973, affixed to it some "Concluding Remarks" (*Imagination* 258). In the latter section, he makes a number of observations, some of which have already been noted in connection with *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, which are cited here more fully because they are pertinent both to *Home Before Dark* and, ironically, to Bakhtin's own essay:

A literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope. Therefore the chronotope in a work always contains within it an evaluating aspect that can be isolated from the whole artistic chronotope only in abstract analysis. In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values. . . . art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values* of varying degree and scope. (243)

Bakhtin is a notoriously unsystematic, almost self-contradictory, theoretician. His "Concluding Remarks", however, are not a refutation of his earlier opinions, but a later perspective upon them, a perspective inevitably influenced by all that has occurred during the intervening years. Similarly, although D'Arcy Niland left "many notes on the book's theme, structure and even its genesis" (*Home* vii), and although the authors "have tried to do what D'Arcy Niland would have done" (ix), the biography is not the one that he would have written. For one thing, Park and Champion cannot share the affinity with the subject that Niland experienced, and, for another, during the thirty years between Niland's death and the publication of the book, the culture and ideologies of which the authors are inextricably a part have been evolving. In December 1978 and January 1979, the *National Times* published a substantial article by Park, "Death of a Hero: In Search of Les Darcy in America", in which she relates both the story of Les Darcy and the story of the research undertaken by herself and Niland in the United States during 1961. It is apparent from the article, the biography and from *Swords and Crowns and Rings* that Park is horrified by the human tragedy of war and is vehemently opposed both to conscription and to the slaughter of young Australian men in the war interests of another nation. Les Darcy was castigated for refusing to enlist at a time when Prime Minister Hughes was determined to introduce conscription for a war in which Australia had no direct interest other than loyalty to the Mother Country. In the newspaper article, Park writes:

Even in judging Prime Minister Hughes (and, like poor Father Coady when describing Hughes's ruthless sacrifice of young Australians, I freely confess, "I could minch him"), one has to understand Australia's unavoidably mimetic relationship with Great Britain - that just after a tiny Australian population had lost 28,000 of its sons killed and wounded in the idiotic Battle of the Somme, the British Army Council really could demand over 30,000 reinforcements immediately or it would disperse the Australian survivors of the AIF among British divisions. (32)

These are sentiments with which D'Arcy Niland may very well have concurred, but they are expressed in 1978-1979, more than eleven years after his death but only a

few years after the Vietnam moratorium debates when young Australians, conscripted into national service, were sent to fight in support of the United States of America. Thus Park's concept of the time and space of 1916-17 events in Australia has a dimension inaccessible to Niland. Similar adaptations of perspective, almost certainly unconscious, have been experienced by the people interviewed by Niland years after Darcy's death: old boxers, "people who'd gone to school with Les, or been neighbours, or ducked him in the waterhole", people who "sought out" Niland in America, people who "all wanted Les to be shown as he was, not as legend made him" (*Home* ix). Knowledge of the legend cannot be eradicated from consciousness; the influences of the intervening years cannot be sloughed.

Bakhtin observes:

Of course these real people, the authors and the listeners or readers, may be (and often are) located in differing time-spaces, sometimes separated from each other by centuries and by great spatial distances, but nevertheless they are all located in a real, unitary and as yet incomplete historical world set off by a sharp and categorical boundary from the *represented* world of the text. Therefore we may call this world the world that *creates* the text, for all its aspects - the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, the performers of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text - participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text. (*Imagination* 253)

As Bartlett observes, "The secret of history is forever lost" (Bruner 5).

The last few pages of this biography have a curiously written-on-the-wind quality. This is partly because the final chapter deals with the wasting, by his alcoholic father, of all Darcy's hard-won assets, the financial security which he had been so desperate to provide for his family. It also derives partly from the recounted deaths of various family members - the dissolution of the family as well as of the property. Then there is the parallel which has been drawn, throughout the book, between Darcy and that whole generation of young men who left Australia, full of hope and courage, to fight and die far away - that desolate, unfillable gap in our society. This analogy is extended to take in Australia itself, "a little nation, a nation often poor and never rich" (352), divided by war, exploited and betrayed by its

elected leaders - an echo of the abandoned child motif of the early novels. Yet the sense of aporia, of vacancy, is still not wholly accounted for. The young man about whom three hundred and fifty-three pages have been written remains, somehow, elusive. Biographies are rarely written about young people; it is more usual for authors to trace the development of their subjects' character traits throughout the course of more protracted lifetimes, sketching light and dark, indicating cause and effect. This has not been possible in the case of Les Darcy who died at twenty-one, the traditional year of coming-of-age, ending at the beginning of his story. This is reflected in the biography with the return of the coffin, the coming home through Sydney Heads, at the beginning of Chapter One. The authors stress Darcy's cheerfulness, courage, honesty, modesty but the descriptions have a prelapsarian quality: "He [Father Mogan] told me that he believed Les had never committed a serious sin in his life," Winnie O'Sullivan recounts (332); "Primal innocence like that is disconcerting. It gives us a glimpse into country we've forgotten or never seen," the authors reflect (353).

Perhaps, however, there is yet another reason for the curious sense of vacancy in these final pages. People tend to read biographies in order to learn all about the subject, to find out what he/she was really like, the inside story; in a classic Derridian move, the authors of this biography thwart that desire for a centre, a presence. They acknowledge that, "Whatever was submerged in Les Darcy's character we do not know. Probably there was nothing" (353). At the end of the book, that distillation of the "immense collection of 'Darcyana'" researched and amassed by D'Arcy Niland, biographers and readers alike know very little about the young man himself. Yet ignorance did not prevent his contemporaries from seeing in him a kind of icon, a representation of all the young men they had known and lost; perhaps, indeed, it helped. Frank Lentricchia has observed with regard to a "famous person whose biography's broad outline has long been a matter of public record . . . [that] this biography is often - when the famous person is also exemplary

- a concentrated representation of the idealized story that a culture would like to tell about itself" (429). Perhaps then, by concluding the story of Les Darcy not with the finality of his death, or even of his burial, but with the inconclusive aftermath of his life, the authors have, conversely, achieved D'Arcy Niland's ambition to show "Les . . . as he was, not as legend made him" (ix). No real person can achieve the dimensions attributed to a mythical hero, least of all one who dies on the brink of adulthood. For all his fame, in spite of the many words written about him, Les Darcy was, and remains, a virtual *tabula rasa* upon which many people have sought to inscribe stories. The authors themselves seem finally to recommend a Keatsian attitude, "negative capability", the inclination that refrains from "irritable reaching after fact and reason" (768): the biography closes with the words of Henrietta Cheal: "Ah, he was a lovely fella ... and that's the beginning and the end of it" (353).

CHAPTER 6

THE "CONFLUENCE OF TWO STREAMS": RUTH PARK'S STORY OF
RUTH PARK

"With me there had always been a confluence of two streams, literary and personal, and I had taken great risks for both," Ruth Park muses towards the end of *Fishing in the Styx*, the second volume of her autobiography (301); this almost, but not quite, summarises both her life and the telling of it. On one level, her story is a *Künstlerroman*, an account of the lifelong evolution of a polished literary artist from the little girl with a vivid imagination writing in chalk on the back of the kitchen door; on another it is a *Bildungsroman* the story of the development of the mind and character of a woman through war and peace, poverty and plenty, childhood, marriage, motherhood, widowhood, love, joy and grief, striving not only to achieve but to rise above her "own totality" (55). The first woman news journalist in New Zealand, she left both family and homeland in the midst of war when she realised that there was no future for her there as a writer; within three weeks she was married to a young man who, although they had corresponded for years, was physically almost a stranger; together they embarked on careers as freelance writers at a time when earning a living from writing in Australia was said to be impossible, raising five children and achieving fame and modest affluence in the process; many years later, widowed and realising that she had become "Mum Emeritus" (277), she once again left family and homeland to concentrate on writing and to rediscover selfhood while living on an island. In latter life she began to practice Zen Buddhism and her philosophy is expressed in the words of the Zen masters which she quotes: "Have you climbed to the top of the ladder, to the last rung? Then step off" (274). Park recounts all this as she reviews her life as a writer and as a woman. There is, however, a third strain in her story of her life, one that is not concerned with the concept of the self: this autobiography is a document in the social and literary history of Australia. In chronicling her own story in relation to the story of

her generation, Park has acted as spokeswoman for an era; she has told a story "a lot of people would identify with and . . . they have", as she observes. "I just happened to be a voice for a whole lot of people" (Veitch 118). Although, chronologically, Park's autobiography is not her last published work, it is, in effect, the culmination of that "confluence of two streams, literary and personal" in which, throughout a lifetime of writing, she has sought to understand and amalgamate self, self writing and the writing self in interaction with history and culture.

As more than one critic has noted, many autobiographers relate their earliest recollections to a garden, an Eden, a state of innocence to which return is never possible and which, viewed in retrospect, has always been vulnerable. Consider Jill Ker Conway's lyric depiction of the landscape of the western plains, "a tapestry of delicate life"(3), before the advent of the white man with his hard-hoofed herds, "a physical and spiritual landscape which is outside the imagination of the Christian West" (6); the safe, enclosed, fertile garden in which Mum Keen raises the young Bernard Smith, in *The Boy Adeodatus*, where innocent fecundity contrasts with the rigidly formal front garden where little Bennie is not allowed on the grass (3); and the similarly curbed and clipped front garden of Robert Dessaix's adoptive parents, separated by "viciously beautiful climbing roses" from the back garden with its "warm jungle of honeysuckle, never trimmed and rustling and creaking with small animals and insects dealing death to each other" (188). Ruth Park's earliest memories are of an even more Edenic state, the towering primeval rain forests of New Zealand where she lived as a "forest creature", she and her parents forming a tiny, human nucleus in the damp green world. The "solemn light, as faintly green as a glow-worm's still inhabits my mind," she muses, reflecting that it must have been the same light that "illuminated much of the earth, before mankind, that fractious, fidgety species, began to change it" (*A Fence Around the Cuckoo* 5).

Discussing the mythical quality with which autobiographers frequently endow their early childhood, David McCooey maintains that "The primary myth . . . of childhood autobiography is loss . . . Eden is important not just as a place, but as a state of mind. Eden is a place which exists in the state of innocence, and is lost with the gaining of experience" (135-36). For Bernard Smith, the loss of innocence begins within his Eden when an insurance salesman calls and, serpent-like, alludes to forbidden knowledge about Bennie's parentage: "Little Bennie knew what the man meant. He had always seemed to know; and to know was to know the world. To know everything. *And now behold, my infancy is dead . . . yet I live still*" (4). Drought, the effects of which are exacerbated by grazing herds, causes the death of Jill Ker Conway's father and the family retreats to the city. Ruth Park's removal from her Eden is precipitated by the approaching blight of the Depression which prompts her family to move to a small town in the hope of obtaining regular work. Accustomed to the unity of the nuclear family within a quiet vastness, and knowing only adult ways, each girl is astonished by the behaviour of other children *en masse*, dismayed to discover that she has no idea of how to play, bewildered by the plethora of unspoken conventions that regulate school life. As McCooey notes: "To lose Eden coincides with an adult perception of the world as multiple and alien rather than as a single and stable extension of the 'self'" (136). Yet while, in company with many other autobiographers of childhood, Park may mourn the loss of her Eden (the very title *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* suggesting an elegiac reflection), she is aware that she has retained something both valuable and unique that can never be taken from her:

I cannot emphasise sufficiently the importance of my early life as a forest creature. The mindset it gave me has dominated my physical and spiritual being. The unitive eye with which all children are born was never taken away from me by the frauds of civilisation; I always did know that one is all and all is one . . . that the bittern and the python are of the same stuff, and are of equal value to the planet . . . that 'entire and perfect chrysolite'. (7)

The concept of the self as part of the whole is evident throughout Park's autobiography. Towards the end of the second volume, describing the desolation she endured after her husband's death, she observes, "None of my experiences of widowhood is peculiar to me; I suggest no uniqueness. It is because my experience is universal that I write as I do" (*Fishing* 270); "I am opening my heart to readers who are, or have been, in that dark, roadless country" (267). Park's comments evoke recollection of Valentin Voloshinov's observation: "A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (58). This is an expression of the tenet, central to the Bakhtinian circle's philosophy of language, that utterance is social interaction, meaningful communication depending as much upon the listener as the speaker. Joy Hooton, however, is of the opinion that the "characteristic trait of defining the self as a self in relation [is] a major historical difference between men's and women's texts", much masculine autobiography being "grounded in individualism" (27). Certainly, Park defines herself in relation to others; she states firmly that, "It was because my parents were who they were, because they were poor, that I became a writer. The first fact meant everything to me and the second nothing at all" (*Fence* 61). Of her father she says: "He was my best friend for much of my life, and I think he was the reason why I have had such great good luck with men" (*Fence* 46). Yet, in spite of this and of the fact that her father was a loving husband and a hard-working one, Park is aware that for her mother marriage had been an almost claustrophobic experience. Frequently living in straightened circumstances, in small provincial towns or remote settlements which she detested, she was denied the creative outlet of her considerable dressmaking talents, and therewith the ability both to contribute to the family's finances and to achieve a modicum of personal independence, because of her husband's masculine vanity, his angry refusal to be "kept by a woman" (*Fence* 57). Her ambition was a modest one, "a little shop selling pretty clothes for children" (60), but "She was shut out forever

from the exercise of her craft by the obstinacy of a man good, honest and tenderhearted" (57). Nor, in spite of the fact that he and his brothers often boasted cheerfully, "All the Parks are bad businessmen" (*Fence* 49), would he consult his wife or listen to her advice on business matters (*Fence* 60). "'Never forget,' she said to [Park] many times, 'that in marriage a woman and her children are paupers. Always make sure that you are independent. Somehow. Independent'" (*Fence* 54). Her mother's admonitions, and later the marital tragedy of her friend Eve Langley, made a deep impression on Park, causing her to fear marriage, regarding it as a form of benevolent imprisonment for women. Of her mother's situation, she says that at first, "I did not realise that the problem was universal. Thinking it was my mother's private tragedy, I pitied her with all my heart . . . I knew that she had expected to share a new life with this admirable man, but found instead she was to be added to the one he already had" (*Fence* 54). The sentiment is echoed in *Missus*, where Hugh Darcy's mother, Frances, also marries an older, conservative man (albeit one not at all like Park's father): "It was some years before she understood that she had been brought to Aboukir Creek to become a part of her husband's life, not to have one of her own" (2-3). Years later, Park in New Zealand and D'Arcy Niland in Australia conducted a somewhat unorthodox courtship by correspondence. When Park endeavoured to explain why she was "so wary of marriage", she received a reply by cable: "'Don't be a ginger bonehead.' How impossible to describe why such a cable was so reassuring," she muses, "But it was" (293). Park's belief, therefore, that she and D'Arcy Niland achieved a true partnership in their marriage is a source of joy and pride for her; but undoubtedly the genesis of the equal partnership lay in Park's early experiences.

Although, as a child, Park adored her pretty mother, she did not enjoy the same rapport with her as she did with her father; they were not confidants and Park remarks, "I have always felt deprived of something there" (*Fence* 287). "As with a dog, a child has a burning heart when it comes to those it loves," she declares

(*Fence* 5); yet, in her own childhood it was not until she fell into a river that Park had firm evidence of her mother's love: "My mother's tears were sweet to me. I did so many things she didn't like, or that worried her to death. I gazed on her wet cheeks and thanked God, or someone, for the Mangaokewa's muddy banks" (*Fence* 67). Park reveals, without rancour, that her mother experienced a much closer bonding with Jocelyn, the younger daughter:

Though I do not doubt her love and care, I believe I had always been a puzzle and an irritation to her. The new little girl was dependent and biddable, different in every way. Perhaps my mother knew intuitively that this child would be her greatest friend throughout her long life. (65-66)

The observation may indicate a wry subtext in the title of the autobiography. Certainly the doubt that her ardent love was reciprocated, coupled with the anguish and desolation that the child Ruth experienced when her mother almost died, has coloured Park's attitude to the mother-daughter relationship which, together with the theme of parental abandonment, permeates many of her novels. It is notable that Park opens her life story at the point where she is a terrified and bereft child whose mother has been taken away; also significant is her recollection that when, as a young girl at the height of the Depression, she is sent by her impoverished parents to live with relatives, her reaction is that: "I was to be given away like a parcel, and to people who possibly didn't want me. Like all girls I blamed my mother for this ignominy, as everyone knew that men didn't understand things the way women did" (*Fence* 127).

Park believes that her compulsion to write is inherited from her father ("He was a storyteller, which is all I have ever wanted to be") (*Fence* 10), yet relates that it was her mother who insisted that, as a young girl, Park should be permitted to leave home in order to take up the offer of a job with the *Auckland Star*, overriding for once all her husband's objections. Later Park describes the selflessness with which both parents urged her to leave for Australia, in spite of the fact that World

War II was raging and Australia could be invaded, because there was no future for a female journalist in New Zealand:

'Weren't you worried about me in an occupied Australia?' I asked years later.

'That's when my hair went grey,' replied my mother. 'But you had to go. We knew it.'

Only as an adult . . . did I truly realise what my parents had done for me by their attitude to what many less perceptive people would have considered a harebrained plan. I cannot praise them too much." (*Fence* 290)

Park's first novel, *The Harp in the South*, is dedicated: "To my father who first told me stories and my mother who first encouraged me to write them".

It is in relationship to her parents, therefore, that Park sees herself as a young person and an embryonic storyteller, just as it is in her relationship to D'Arcy Niland that she sees herself as a mature woman and professional writer. The point is underlined by the fact that the first volume of her autobiography ends with her departure from New Zealand and her parents, a departure which coincided with the end of her single life; at the opening of the second volume, she is married. "I suppose I loved that man," she reflects. "There was an inexplicable affinity between us that never wavered during his lifetime and indeed is unchanged even now" (*Fishing* 34). "There had never been anyone with whom I had been so completely myself; he knew even my inner self, a person frequently anxious, insecure and depressed. . . . I felt I had spent my young days talking to myself, and out of nowhere someone answered" (*Fence* 34-35). While, on the personal level, Park and Niland recognized and responded to similar and/or complementary character traits in each other, in their professional lives they rejoiced in the stimulus and excitement of sharing an absolute dedication to writing: "Each of us had been lonely before we married, not only in body and mind but in that mysterious place where literary creativity resides" (*Fishing* 120).

The account of their professional lives is a depiction of literary life in Australia over a twenty-five year period, commencing during the Second World War. To a girl newly arrived from Auckland, bustling war-time Sydney seemed glamorous and sophisticated; new discoveries were everywhere. "The flood of European refugees had brought not only cosmopolitan chic, but the correct method of making coffee. Hitherto I had tasted only that offence against the Lord, coffee essence" (*Fishing* 22). She recalls the thrill of recognizing the poet Douglas Stewart in a cafe when Stewart was accompanied by an elderly lady of striking appearance who produced a teapot from her handbag and proceeded to drink maté: Dame Mary Gilmore (*Fishing* 24). Gilmore and Park later became friends, the older woman giving advice when consulted and encouragement at all times. "You break my heart with your writing because you know the things I know; they are in your blood as they are in mine, and I never was able (too much work & too poor) to write them till I was old," she wrote to Park on 25 May 1947 (Reproduced as illustration, *Fishing* between 138 and 139). Park and Niland knew and/or corresponded with most of the writers in Australia in the decades after the war: Vance Palmer, Christina Stead, George Johnston and Charmian Clift, Kylie Tennant, Jean Devanney, Eve Langley, Jon Cleary, Will Lawson and Henry Lawson's widow, Bertha. They also knew many of the people involved in the theatre, radio and film: Jack Davey, Leslie Rees, Peter Finch, Sean Connery, Roger Moore, Richard Attenborough, Robert Helpman and many more. There is poignancy in reading that the late and "much-loved actor, John Meillon, who was eight or nine years old at the time", attained his first starring role as Stumpy, in the eponymous children's radio serial which Park wrote and which ran for 140 episodes (*Fishing* 154). Similarly touching is Park's revelation, during an interview, that the actor Leonard Teale (now also deceased), "was a wonderful Wombat although he never admits to it now" (Gascoigne 14). Park also recalls the "mysterious enmity" of Miles Franklin towards herself (*Fishing* 150) and rather relishes the irony that, many years later, she should win the Miles Franklin Award in 1977 for *Swords and Crowns and Rings* (*Fishing* 288).

Park comments that she and Niland "were, in a literary sense, obsessively industrious, partly because we had to work like demons in order to make the most basic of incomes, and mostly because writing was life itself" (*Fishing* 39).

Determined to earn a living from freelance writing, they realised that they could not afford to specialise, to concentrate simply on the genres which they found most appealing: in Niland's case the short story, and in Park's children's writing. It was necessary that they write anything and everything: stories, articles, radio-plays, educational material, even scripts for comedians and, in the beginning, the bulk of their work was rejected; nevertheless they persisted, learning by trial and error. The nature of the market for freelance writers has changed considerably in the decades since the War. Until the late 1950s, there was no television work, but the radio was a voracious consumer. In spite of a shortage of paper, there were also many literary magazines (admittedly often short-lived) whereas today this market has shrunk to academic journals and the weekly magazine or review section of the major newspapers. Payment rates for work accepted were very low, and payment itself usually slow and irregular. "It was absolutely essential to have fifteen to twenty pieces of assorted work 'on the go' at all times," Park recalls (Letter to the author. 19 January 1997). Making a virtue of necessity, Park and Niland "made our reliability valuable. If some other writer had let an editor down, that editor knew he could ring or telegraph us and get the vacant space filled without question" (*Fishing* 91). This frequently meant working all night, with Niland walking (to save fares) across Sydney in the early hours of the morning to deliver the script. Park believes that they survived, where many other writers failed, because they combined industry with reliability and flexibility (Letter to the author. 19 January 1997). It is also obvious that they survived because of their close personal bond; they were a team, inspiring, supporting, working with and for each other. "Now we were dual; we set off sparks in each other. Providence had also spared us jealousy, that frequent devil that haunts creative partnerships and which destroys so many writers" (*Fishing*

120). For all this, Park is not unaware of Niland's failings; she describes his self-centredness, his naïveté (almost amounting to foolishness) in dealing with editors, publishers and film-makers, his tacit refusal to allow her and the children the emotional relief of discussing their feelings during his serious illness. Her depiction of him is loving but well-rounded; he and the story of their marriage are given much space in Park's autobiography.

In 1956, Ruth Park and D'Arcy Niland published *The Drums Go Bang!*, a story which Park insists "was not an autobiography, but a lighthearted account of the freelance endeavours of two young people who happened to be married" (Letter to the author. 23 June 1996). At the time of the book's appearance, Park had published five novels, including the highly controversial *The Harp in the South*, and Niland had written a popular novel *The Shiralee* which, published both in Australia and overseas, had also been filmed starring Peter Finch, the charismatic Australian actor. They were, therefore, an extremely well-known Australian literary couple, and a light-hearted story about themselves could be expected to sell well. *The Drums Go Bang!* is an entertaining, marketable literary production; it is neither reflective nor introspective and, read in the light of Park's later, more pensive autobiographies, contains a good deal of fiction mixed in with its fact; a point about which its authors were quite unapologetic. Park also points out that, in spite of her protests, publishers frequently refer to the novel *Pink Flannel* as autobiographical (Letter to the author. 23 June 1996), apparently because the narrator, Jenny Hood, is a little New Zealand girl being raised by four "Radiant Aunts", the prototypes of whom are obviously Park's own maternal aunts. For all Park's protestations, however, she has deliberately muddied the factual/fictional waters by using a first person, female narrator with whom she has several things in common and, as noted in an earlier chapter, by having her discuss the research undertaken for *One-a-Pecker*, *Two-a-Pecker*. This small anomaly, the hint of autobiography, lends the novel a little intrigue, which is never a disadvantage in the book-selling business.

Pink Flannel was published just one year prior to *The Drums Go Bang!* in which the authors state: "At last we had tumbled to the importance of marketing. We had a product, and we lived by selling it . . . Marketing, which is at least fifty per cent of successful living by writing, can be learnt only by experience and intelligent observation" (147). Thus, Jenny Hood both is and is not Ruth Park, in somewhat the same manner as Tiger and Digger Evans, of *The Drums Go Bang!*, are and are not Ruth Park and D'Arcy Niland.

Jenny Hood, Tiger and Evans are literary constructs, those persons that an author sees in her mind's eye when writing, even when writing about herself. Indeed the subject/object split is an unavoidable phenomenon of self-writing; as Laura Marcus observes, "Autobiography imports alterity into the self by the act of objectification which engenders it" (203). The referential status of the autobiographical "I" has been examined by more than one post-structuralist theorist. Paul Jay considers that, while this has been partly the result of timing, the "serious study of autobiography [having] come of age exactly in the age of structuralism and deconstruction" (43), it is also apparent that there exists "a kind of intrinsic attraction between the nature of autobiographical writing and the concerns and procedures of post-structuralism" ("What's the Use? Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography" 44). This does not necessarily mean that authors prior to the age of post-structuralist literary theory were unaware of the constructed nature of the autobiographical self. Jay himself draws attention to this in an earlier essay, "Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject", where he examines the ways in which St Augustine's *Confessions* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, among other self-writings, have been shaped by just such an awareness. Yet both these writers sought to achieve the unified, seamless, whole consciousness of a pre-lapsarian state; the one in and through perfect reconciliation with God, the other in reuniting with a more perfect self, the self of childhood innocence as Being in Nature.

Autobiography is intrinsically bound up with subjectivity, a matter of constant debate among literary critics throughout the twentieth century. Writing in 1980, James Olney comments that:

This is the crux of the matter, the heart of the explanation for the special appeal of autobiography to students of literature in recent times: it is a fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mysteries and, accompanying that fascination, an anxiety about the self, an anxiety about the dimness and vulnerability of that entity that no one has ever seen or touched or tasted. (23)

This concept of autobiography and the self is in the Romanticist tradition and is, in the opinion of Laura Marcus, "a reaction against the so-called 'bloodless formalisms' of North American New Criticism in the 1940s and 1950s" (181). Writing only two years after Olney, Candace Lang challenges the Romantic concepts of "a unified, unique, ineffable self . . . an authentic self . . . [and] an originary universal human nature, making possible communication . . . through sentiment, which as a truer, more immediate expression of the private individual, is superior to rational discourse" (4). Lang maintains that "the notion of the unified, inalienable self stands up very poorly under the type of close and systematic critical analysis that has been developed chiefly on the basis of structuralist linguistics and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory" (4). Deconstructionist critics would observe, with Paul de Man, that "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?" (920)

Ruth Park's approach to autobiography is something of an amalgam of objectification and subjectivity. That she shares the "fascination with the self" is evidenced in her comment during an interview: "Writing is a great mystery to me. I have come to the conclusion, because my life is really terribly important, significant, to me, that I am not really writing to be understood. I am writing to understand"

(Veitch 116). Yet, in the same interview, she states that she experienced difficulty in deciding how to write her life story until her daughter, a librarian, suggested that she "write the facts but do it with fictional skills" (118). Thus her autobiography is a conscious feat of story-telling. This is not to say that it is fictional but, as Tristram Shandy discovered, no one can relate the entire minutiae of a life; therefore the selection of those incidents and experiences considered relevant is made on the basis of the concept the author has of her self and of the way in which that self has developed. In *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, the initial volume of Park's autobiography, the first thing that she relates in the story of her life is not an account of her birth and antecedents; it is, instead, the tender evocation of a cold, terrified child creeping barefoot along a dark, icy hallway, desperate to discover, by eavesdropping on an adult conference, whether her adored mother is about to die. The narrator aches for the child: "If I could put my hand on her bony little shoulder, I would feel her trembling . . . I try to comfort the little girl, to tell her the story has a happy ending. But there is a wall of glass between us. The child is lost in an inexpressible grief which marks her for ever" (3-4). Thus, as autobiographer, Park conforms with the tendency of women's life-writing to reject the linear, chronological approach in order to concentrate on what seems to be of most immediate importance, the people and events that have had a decisive shaping influence on their lives and characters. Elsewhere Park has mentioned briefly that, as a result of this experience, the child Ruth develops a stammer (*Fence* 4), an affliction which lasts for a number of years (Mitchell, ML MSS 3128); and as has also been noted earlier, the theme of the abandoned child occurs again and again in Park's work. Simultaneously however, as novelist, Park opens her life story dramatically and poignantly; the imagery, strongly physical and tactile, heightens the frustration with the "wall of glass", that invisible yet impenetrable barrier of time which prevents contact with the child self. This is emotive but it is also craftsmanship, observing the time-honoured tenet of good story-telling that a narrative should grasp the reader's interest immediately. It is worth noting, in this

regard, that her second volume, *Fishing in the Styx*, begins with the knock of a murderer on her door.

Having captured the reader's interest, Park takes canny, professional care not to lose it. A notable feature of her autobiography is the skilful manipulation of time. A sudden move into the present tense will give an episode life and immediacy while, through the subtle interplay of story time, prolepsis and the narrative moment, the reader is caught in a complex anachrony, experiencing in advance the poignancy of hindsight. For instance, she writes of her friend, Eve Langley:

I see her this moment, that lost woman . . . A face as neat as a cat's; features cleanly delineated . . . she had the elegance of a small animal, a gloss and compactness, all, alas, to be destroyed by the frightful treatment she received in the Mental Hospital . . . she became bizarrely fat, out of shape, grotesque in appearance . . . When she comes into my office, always unpredictably, and I am in the midst of writing copy for which the printers down below are howling, I put it aside and listen. I'm afraid that so much intellectual glitter may not come my way again. Years later I find out that everyone who knew Eve uses the same metaphors. (*Fence* 254)

The first sentence, "I see her this moment, that lost woman", is an exclamation; she has a vision, not a recollection, but her flashback inevitably encompasses the sorrowful knowledge of Eve's fate, unknown, of course, to either of them at the moment that is being recalled. Then, just as the reader is tantalised by the hint of tragedy to come, the narrative slips back again into the past tense, "she had the elegance of a small animal", before reaching into the future, "all, alas, to be destroyed", so that the reader is given painful foreknowledge of the impending *peripeteia* unsuspected by the two young women. Still the narrator Ruth, friend of Eve, seems lost in her reverie: "When she comes into my office . . . I put [my work] aside and listen". It is as if temporarily she is unable, or unwilling, to return to the present and to realise that Eve will not call in again tomorrow or the next day. Eve Langley's fate, related conventionally in the past tense, would have been regrettable. Imparted in the present tense, it conveys a sense of impending doom which is frustratingly impossible to forestall.

The sophistication of Ruth Park's narrative technique is not limited to delicate manipulations of time. The scene under discussion takes place in the tall building of a newspaper establishment, with offices on the upper floors and the printing works in the basement. Eve Langley, brilliant and charismatic, sits on Park's desk quoting "Keats, Montaigne, Epictetus, [and] the Greek playwrights . . . cast[ing] treasure carelessly around". Douglas Stewart, author of *The Fire on the Snow*, describes her as possessing "a kind of inner radiance, an intensity of *fire*" (*Fence* 255. Italics added.). The "lost woman" with "child's feet in homemade monk's sandals" is perched high above where the "printers down below are howling". When it is recalled both that the lowliest worker in this trade is known as a "printer's devil" and that Eve is destined to fall into the tormented underworld of psychiatric perdition, the subtlety of the imagery becomes apparent. Yet the metaphors are implicit rather than stated, being used, as David Lodge would say, metonymically in the sense of combination and contiguity (*The Modes of Modern Writing* 133). Park achieves her effect at the level of the reader's subconscious, "that twilight region below . . . the conscious", as she describes it (*Fishing* 12).

In "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", Bakhtin maintains that "Art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values* of varying degree and scope" (*Imagination* 243), and discusses several forms of chronotope, the temporal and spatial categories represented in a work. One of these is the chronotope of the road in which, "Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course: "the course of a life," "to set out on a new course," "the course of history" and so on (244). Bakhtin is discussing not autobiography but the novel in which a protagonist often set outs on a physical journey that equates with a spiritual one; we have already considered this in relation to Jackie Hanna's wanderings during the Depression. But Bakhtin's observations are just as pertinent to this

autobiography. "The road is always one that passes through *familiar territory*, . . ." he notes, "it is the *sociohistorical heterogeneity* of one's own that is revealed and depicted" (245). In telling her own story, Park simultaneously tells the story of Australia, of how life in Australia (and not anywhere else) went on at a particular time (and not at any other time). Examining the chronotope further, Bakhtin comments upon Balzac that his "ability to 'see' time in space was extraordinary. We need mention only Balzac's marvelous depiction of houses as materialized history and his description of streets, cities, rural landscapes at the level where they are being worked upon by time and history" (247). This applies equally well to Park; consider her description of the house in Surry Hills in which she and Niland lived for a time:

Mrs Cardy's house has worn itself into the ways of human beings - five or six generations in time, and small changes occurring with each generation.

Its 'front room', not much more than two metres wide, and opening flat-faced on to Devonshire Street, was in the late 1860s converted into a shop. First it served as a grog shop for the soldiers from the Paddington Barracks, then as a chandlery, a harness-maker's, a gunsmithy, and at last a barber shop. During the catastrophic depression of the 1890s it was closed for many years, then rented as a dosshouse for a charitable society. All these permutations left their mark on the walls, the stairs; made this lop-sided, that wry; a door or window swollen, shrunken or intractable so that it never shuts or never opens. (*Fishing* 58)

The sense of "materialized history" and the ability to convey it are among the strengths of Park's writing, apparent not only in her autobiography and journalistic articles, but also in her fictional works such as *One-a-Pecker*, *Two-a-Pecker*, *Swords and Crowns and Rings* and *Playing Beatie Bow*.

We have already noted that Park, in company with many women autobiographers, sees herself in relation to others, and the space given to others, the voice accorded to those otherwise silenced, is a feature of her life writing. In a series of graphic vignettes, in which they are not portrayed simply in relation to the author, people who have featured in her life, their stories and their perspectives take

on autonomous value and interest. Husband and children, parents, relatives, fellow writers, teachers and friends all attain individuality through lively anecdotes and sympathetic, though never sentimental, retrospection. From the doomed Eve Langley to the mysterious grandfather, deserted and never mentioned by his wife and daughters, whom Ruth glimpses only once in her life, each would seem to have a story well worth the telling. Yet all are linked to the main story by the effects they have had on the development of the author as writer and person. The degree of Park's generosity may be unusual, but the concept of self-in-relation, of self-as-product of others, is typical of women's self-writing, whereas male autobiographers have a tendency to regard themselves as self-made, a concept to which, in *A Mother's Disgrace*, Robert Dessaix originally subscribes and later debunks with typically self-deprecatory humour.

Park believes, for instance, that it is from her Irish forebears that she has inherited "half a handfull of second sight" (*Fence* 43), and the Irish gifts of humour and delight in words. Of the Scandinavian grandfather whom she never met she says: "Everything profoundly secret within my psyche tells me I was lucky to have him for a grandfather" (*Fence* 261). Park's parents gave her the old-fashioned values of honesty and industry and, at the local convent school, the redoubtable Sister Serenus, "the best teacher I ever met in my life . . . took my writing aspirations by the scruff, wrung them out, and set me straight" (*Fence* 73). Sister Serenus' editorial role was taken up by D'Arcy Niland who, commenting on her work, "suggested the replacement of inexact words with hard-hitting ones, or that I should shorten sentences, sharpen themes" (*Fishing* 120). From Jasper Caldwell, head of the Anglican City Mission in Auckland, she learned that to "indulge . . . her indignation" did not help the poor and feckless and that compassion needs to be combined with realism and a refusal to judge (*Fence* 252-53) lessons that stood her in good stead later in Surry Hills. From her various mentors and from a lifetime of

observation have come two of the leitmotifs of her work: the necessity of self-responsibility and the indomitability of the human spirit.

Commenting on Chris Wallace-Crabbe's observation, made in 1988, that "Very few autobiographies give a voice to those who were not already vocal" (568), Gillian Whitlock maintains that it is accurate when applied to what she describes as the canon of Australian autobiography;¹ she suggests however, that this canon has undergone significant changes in recent years as the narratives of women, Aborigines and non-Anglo Australians have attained recognition (262). While Ruth Park refuses to be marginalised, and certainly could never be considered non-vocal, in her story many otherwise voiceless people have been given utterance and identity; Park is a "voice" for the people of her era. For instance, while much has been written about the Great Depression, the emphasis has usually been on the sufferings of the jobless men forced, in order to receive the bare subsistence of the dole, to keep moving from town to town. Park also writes of these, and movingly, in *Swords and Crowns and Rings* and a two-part article in the *National Times*, but in her autobiography the emphasis is on the experiences of women and children, of how families survived the Depression. In a manner reminiscent of George Orwell's stark depiction of existence *Down and Out in Paris and London*, but in this case from the perspective of a child in beautiful, bountiful New Zealand, she writes of "snagging", queuing interminably outside the Weetbix factory for crumbs and the jam factory for carrot pulp. For people unable to afford proper medical attention, "patent medicines became literally the people's opiate . . . Drugs now considered dangerous were lavishly dispensed . . . 'Asthma cigarettes' were pure cannabis, and said so on the label [and] a certain cough lozenge offered not only cannabis, but morphine, chloroform, and prussic acid" (*Fence* 108-109). From the government's

¹ Whitlock defines the canon as the works discussed by Wallace-Crabbe in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, by John and Dorothy Colmer in *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography* and by John Colmer in *Australian Autobiography: A Personal Quest*.

point of view, "unemployed women were easily dealt with. They were ignored . . . Women were not supposed to be breadwinners, therefore they were not" (*Fence* 108-109). Although they frequently stood for hours, breakfastless, in job queues until they fainted, "No one saw unemployed women gathering in hangdog groups in city doorways or under the verandahs of abandoned shops" as unemployed men so often did (*Fence* 108). Instead they took refuge from both the cold and the public gaze in churches and libraries. Thus the women of the Depression were invisible in more ways than one and Ruth Park, in turning a spotlight on their sufferings, has made a significant contribution to the literature of the Depression.

Later, in *Fishing in the Styx*, Park writes of the war as it was experienced by civilians in Australia:

If you look at photographs of the war years, you will see that almost everyone carries a newspaper tucked under the arm. Every 'extra' edition was eagerly bought. What was happening over there, so far away? Whose familiar name would be on the latest casualty list? Yet, by 1943, the population was largely submerged in drear acceptance of life as it was. We fell over and cursed the piles of sandbags outside every important building. We looked cynically at the many slit trenches dug to save us from air-raid death, and observed that when they were not filled with rainwater, they were choked with junked tyres and old prams. We knew in our hearts that if the Japanese Army invaded, we were probably done for. (80-81)

This, like Park's account of the Depression, is social history. It is both difficult and salutary in the 1990s, when the Gulf War, at the exact time that it was being fought on the other side of the world, has been featured as a nightly television programme, to realise the primitive state of communication in the 1940s. Knowing that even such news as did filter through had been heavily censored, Australians had little alternative other than to wait fatalistically for developments. Park does not dwell on the war, noting simply that "the abnormal had become the norm, so to speak" (*Fishing* 55) but her ironic, understated account captures the spirit of the time in Australia.

In *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith takes issue with Georg Misch's assertion that

Though essentially representations of individual personalities, autobiographies are bound always to be representative of their period, within a range that will vary with the intensity of the authors' participation in contemporary life and with the sphere in which they moved. (12)

Smith finds the term "representative" problematic when taken from the perspective of woman's experience. She asks:

What precisely would it signify for a woman's life and her narrative to be "representative" of a period? Very few women have achieved the status of "eminent person"; and those who have done so have more commonly been labeled "exceptional" rather than "representative" women. Perhaps such women and their autobiographies would more accurately be "unrepresentative" of their period. (8)

Again, Park's autobiography avoids easy classification. She has achieved eminence, and as an author who has earned a living from writing at a time when this was said to be impossible in Australia, she is exceptional both as a writer and as a woman, but, as we have seen, her autobiography could certainly not be described as unrepresentative of her period; it is quite the reverse. Park has not been at the forefront of the great events of her time, and in her life story she does not dwell upon these events; nevertheless, like everyone of her era, she has been affected by them, and it is the effects upon herself and upon all ordinary people that she discusses. Park's autobiography is representative because of the space that she accords to others and because so many of the experiences she records have been common to unremarkable, unexceptional people. As she reveals in an interview with Kate Veitch, this is something that she herself became aware of in the course of the writing:

By the time I had finished the first book, I realised that really what had happened to me had happened to very many other people, that not everybody had peaks and exciting scandals, or huge ascents to fame or riches . . . In other words, I was not just telling my own story, I was telling a story a lot of people would identify with and, my goodness, they have, I am happy to say. They really have. So in a way, you see, I just happened to be a voice for a whole lot of people. (118)

It is typical of Park's style that she should evoke the wartime atmosphere in Australia by reference to old, archival photographs. She conducts painstaking research for any book that she undertakes, as an examination of her papers in the Mitchell Library reveals. There are, for instance, in the folders of working notes for *One-a-Pecker*, *Two-a-Pecker*, photographs of the people and towns of the New Zealand goldfields and photographs of particularly heavy snowfalls such as would have resulted from the blizzard which is a feature of that novel. This is basic, factual research but, interestingly, there are also several photographs of faces, cut out of newspapers and magazines, of people who have no direct relation to her stories, but whose images she has used as mental prototypes for some of the characters in her novels. One notable instance of this has already been mentioned in connection with children's literature: amongst the photographs over which Park lingered, when researching old Sydney and the plague epidemics of The Rocks, was one taken in 1899 of a girl with "hair chopped close to the scalp . . . pale, sharp-faced, with slitted tiger eyes, to whom I returned again and again with my big magnifying glass. Watch it, you, that kid was saying. Don't take me for less than I am, or I'll punch yer yeller and green. She stayed in my head for thirty years . . . but why that child; how did I know her name was Beatie Bow?" (*Fishing* 64-65). It is partly, perhaps, as a result of her early journalistic experience and her own training in photography, that Park is keenly aware of the impact of the visual image and has managed to capture the effect of visibility in the textual medium. A noticeable feature of her autobiography is that she reveals her life and development through a sequence of vignettes rather like a series of snapshots. Click! Her earliest years in the towering New Zealand rainforests are preserved. Click! Her struggles for acceptance in the male enclave of journalism are frozen in time. Click! The loving, laughing, mutually supportive marriage of two compulsive writers is sealed as in amber. This does not mean that her autobiography is disjointed (she is far too experienced an author for that), but her approach gives the work a freshness, an

immediacy, and a wealth of detail through which the points she makes become apparent without the need for discursive elaboration.

To take one example from her childhood, there is the incident through which the budding author learns that to "pour out words" is not "what writing is all about" (*Fence* 74). At the height of the Great Depression, a nameless man commits suicide when his horse drops dead in front of the Parks' house. All the townspeople are shocked and saddened, but Park recalls, "It was the horse I was crying for". When she strokes "its warty white nose", she sees that "its beautiful translucent eye, astonished, it seemed, [is] coated with dirt" (*Fence* 77). Asked by her teacher to write about the incident, the normally prolific, if somewhat callow, young author can only produce: "The horse worked hard all its life. It asked for nothing. But all it had in the end was an eye full of dust" (*Fence* 77). Her teacher is the authoritarian Sister Serenus already introduced; now, perceptively, the nun recalls a line by Thomas Nashe, "Dust hath closed Helen's eye", and, giving Park "a little spank", comments, "'On your way. You're not going to be too bad'" (*Fence* 77). Thus, in her recounting of the incident, the mature Park has juxtaposed innocence and experience, tradition and the individual talent, the dawning of insight and the desolation of the Depression; but none of these things are spelled out.

The episodic narration of an autobiography also echoes the process of memory which is rarely chronological; a half-conscious association will instantaneously bring to mind an incident from the past. Yet memory is unreliable, as Jerome Bruner has pointed out, citing Sir Frederic Bartlett's pertinent observation: "The past is a reconstruction rather than a recovery, each reconstruction also containing the mark of what had been reconstructed before. The secret of history is forever lost" (5). Park is well aware of the reconstructive nature of recollection. Early in *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, she describes an incident which happened "long before [her] time" in which the unmarried daughter of a local

shopkeeper becomes pregnant, an event then much more scandalous than it would be considered today. The girl's father wants to turn her out but is cowed when publicly berated by the formidable parish priest. By way of revenge, the father forces his daughter to work each day in the shop, where she must endure the curious and censorious gaze of the public, and he is maliciously delighted when louts make her the butt of their lewd humour. Witnessing one such scene, Ruth Park's normally shy mother is so indignant that she scatters the witticists with a well-aimed fusillade of potatoes. "I can imagine how she did it, too," Park gloats. "With her elegant European head held high . . . in her well-cut grey costume . . . with [which] she always wore gunmetal court shoes with small silver buckles and waisted Louis heels." Emerging from the reverie, Park comments, "Of course . . . the grey suit and the shoes did not belong to those times at all, but to the present. Still, somehow, that was always how I saw my mother" (*Fence* 24). Because of this anachronism, the recollection takes on added complexity: the incident occurred before Park was born, and her mother was no longer alive when the autobiography was being written, so the "present" of which Park writes must be that time in her childhood when, as the incident was being related to her, she reconstructed the scene vividly in her mind. Brian Finney comments on such a phenomenon:

[The] process of idealizing the past often receives additional impetus from the way in which adults recount stories about a child's earliest forgotten years to him in later life. Such stories have a natural tendency to enhance the self-esteem of both adults and child. They are "family tales", as Leonard Woolf observes, "told so often about one that eventually one has the illusion of remembering them". (120)

The vignettes contained within Park's autobiography give an anecdotal quality to the writing which is not unique to herself. Estelle Jelinek has pointed out that "episodic and anecdotal, non-chronological and disjunctive" qualities are typical of women's narrative, and stem, she believes, from "a multidimensional, fragmented self-image colored [sic] by a sense of inadequacy and alienation, of being outsiders or 'other'; they feel the need for authentication, to prove their self-

worth" (xiii). Ruth Park has commented in this regard: "My feeling is that women *are* many layered and of course this is regarded as a bad thing . . . because it looks like complication, or a complexity that men can't be bothered thinking about. But the layers all develop, I think, from the many different functions that a woman has in an ordinary lifetime" (Veitch 116). On the subject of functions and roles, George Gusdorf has defined a "pre-autobiographical era" as that time when "the individual . . . does not feel himself to exist outside others . . . the important unit is never the isolated being . . . [and] each man thus appears as the possessor of a role" (30). Until very recently, Caroline Heilbrun maintains, "women lived in such a pre-autobiographical era" (15), but she believes that women's self-images and their modes of self-depiction have changed during the last generation. Prior to this time women, even those who had been outstandingly successful in public life, seem to have felt obliged to conceal, in their self-representations, the ambition, ability and assertiveness which are often evident in their private papers and which must have been necessary qualities for high achievement. Instead they give credit for their success to others, to luck, to being in the right place at the right time, and so on. They also, apparently, have deemed other concealments necessary and/or politic: "The pain of the lives is, like the successes, muted," Heilbrun observes. "The expression of anger has always been a terrible hurdle in women's personal progress" (16-17).

Once again, Park's autobiography bears this out. She notes that as a child, "I did all my roaring silently, a great folly regrettably continued throughout my life" (*Fence* 9). Although she can now admit modestly to the achievement of "considerable success" (*Fishing* 184), in her autobiography Park recounts the difficulties she has experienced in her long, determined struggle to become a successful and confident writer. Throughout her childhood, books were longed-for but rare acquisitions; her schooling was interrupted for considerable periods; and even that most basic requirement of the compulsive writer - paper - was a scarce

commodity. She pays sardonic tribute to the condescension of a wealthy socialite who, in explaining that a writing career would be above Park's "place in life . . . unwittingly demonstrated that for one party to convince, the other must assent" (*Fence* 170-74). Park also grimly recalls her struggles for acceptance as a journalist at a time when an editor could kindly advise: "'You must understand we really don't *want* to encourage young women to think they can be journalists. If they must, they should aim at the social pages'" (*Fence* 289). "Remember," she demands of her successors (in a not-so-silent roar), "I was the first in a newsroom. That's my blood you see on the floor" (*Fence* 290).

Yet, although Park's autobiography gives a voice to many other people, and although her life story is told in relation to her family and the people of her era, above all else her autobiography is about that "confluence of two streams, literary and personal" that has shaped and constituted her life. On the one hand, it is an old-fashioned love story; the unlikely union of two highly-opinionated and creative young people that became indeed a "marriage of true minds", unshakable even by death. On the other, it is an account of the development of an ardent and impressionable girl into a mature woman. And more than both of these, perhaps, it is a study of the development of a writer. Ruth Park emphasises that she is a professional writer, not only a novelist, and looks back with justifiable pride on a lifetime spent in practising and honing her craft. She reveals that she has applied to writing some lines from Chaucer, albeit about love, which she has found appropriate to "many aspects of human endeavour":

The life so short, the craft so long to learn;
The assay so sharp, so hard the conquering:
The dreadful joy . . . (*Fishing* 248)

Her two-volume work is an autobiography which exploits the gamut of fictional techniques. Thematically it is a *Bildungsroman*, the study of the evolution of a writer and of a human being learning, as we all must, to cope with life and death. It

is also, however, a life story, one which speaks for a generation with which Park, as author and participant, feels a sense of collective identity. Yet it nevertheless plays quite consciously with time, not only in relation to the remembrance of time past but also in the proportion of narrative time allocated to the span of events, rather in the manner of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*; and it holds the reader's interest with narrative skill, blending humour and sadness, achievement and defeat, excitement and quiet reflection. A lyrically beautiful and starkly graphic narrative, it celebrates both nature and human nature in their infinite variety.

It is also, however, a selective work. Although most autobiographers are aware of the split between the self who writes and the self who is the subject of the writing, it is a broad, but generally accurate statement to say that those who employ the more traditional, Romanticist approach seek reunion and wholeness of being, while those writing from a post-structuralist perspective regard such a feat as impossible. For women who enter the marriage ceremony with one name and leave it with another, the unified yet divided persona is a daily reality. (A simple but common example of this is that a married woman, returning to the town where she grew up, perhaps for a school reunion, will find herself addressed by and answering to her maiden name.) For people with a public image, the gap between inner self and outer façade is often strongly perceived. Park is not the first literary woman to become aware of the difficulty naming imposes on self-representation. Shari Benstock, discussing the fragments of memoir left by Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, notes that it is at the point where Woolf has become aware of the inevitable subject/object split that she inserts into the text: "Adeline Virginia Stephen, the second daughter of Leslie and Julia Prinsip Stephen, born on the 25th January 1882" (24). Benstock comments:

Despite the claim that the "subject of the memoir" must be central to it - must provide not only the "I" but the "eye" of its telling - she finds it impossible to place herself in that position. Indeed, she finds it nearly impossible to name herself; "Adeline Virginia Stephen" was never a name

she was known by, and in the late 1930s, when she began constructing her reminiscences, her name - the one by which she was called and by which she called herself, the name that provided the signature to her texts, including this text - was something different. (26).

As we noted earlier, *The Drums Go Bang!* both is and is not autobiography; the authors have set out to tell a light-hearted story and have both omitted information which did not correspond to that genre and embroidered upon some that did. The narrators are both "we" in the first-person plural and "Tiger" and "Evans" in the third-person singular. Thus Tiger and Evans (and for that matter Young Gus and Uncle Looshus) are literary constructs. Phillipe Lejeune maintains that the name, the signature, of an author on an autobiography binds the writer to the reader in an autobiographical pact, which confers on the reader the authority to judge the authenticity of the work (19); "The deep subject of autobiography is the proper name" (20). Such is obviously not the case with *The Drums Go Bang!*, where the names of Ruth Park and D'Arcy Niland on the front cover merely guarantee the reader an enjoyable piece of light entertainment. But what about *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* and *Fishing in the Styx*?

The concept of names and the process of naming feature prominently in feminist criticism where the right to name is regarded as an empowering device and the condition of being named a disempowering one. This matter is dealt with more fully in the chapter on children's literature where it becomes obvious that the issue is a significant one for Park. Curiously, therefore, names and naming receive scant attention in her autobiography, except when she notes that, in the early years of her marriage, it was difficult for her to have contracts made out in the name of Ruth Park rather than that of Mrs D'Arcy Niland which, she would point out, was not her name but her marital status. As she teasingly explained to one baffled publisher: "If D'Arcy and I divorced and there was a second or even a third Mrs D'Arcy Niland, A & R might be in the soup. Who then would own the copyright? Oh, I could see he

thought I was a troublemaker" (*Fishing* 199). This is an echo of the poignant observation made more than three hundred years earlier by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, who published her autobiography in order "to tell the truth, lest after-ages should mistake, in not knowing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns, near Colchester, in Essex, second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again" (Mason 208). As Mason drily comments, some facts pertinent to the lives of seventeenth century women still have relevance to their twentieth century counterparts (208).

Park does say that she and Niland jointly wrote pulp fiction under the *non-de-plume* of Ellen Donovan (*Drums* 161) and that, since entries to the *Sydney Morning Herald* competition were required to be submitted under a pseudonym, she signed hers "Hesperus" because, by the time it was finished, she felt a wreck (*Fishing* 141). She remembers with some bitterness that, among the indignities inflicted upon women giving birth in public hospitals, "We did not have names. We were addressed as 'mother' even before we were mothers" (*Fishing* 67). She also recalls an incident from her childhood in which Madame, the wealthy socialite who calls her "Ginger", tells her that to aspire to be an author is to have ambitions above her station in life. Rendered almost inarticulate with rage and "a consuming sense of injustice", all she can croak out is "'and don't you call me Ginger ever, EVER again! You're a rude, ugly woman!'" (*Fishing* 171). Apart from this, however, names and naming receive little attention when Park tells her life story. Obviously, she has retained her patronym, even after marriage, presumably because she already has had quite a volume of work published under this name and wishes to maintain continuity and autonomy in her professional life. Yet it is curious that nowhere, in the course of a two-volume autobiography and an autobiographical novel, does Park mention that her given name is not Ruth but Rosina Lusia. Ruth Park is a professional name, a *nom-de-plume*, a construct.

Where does this leave Lejeune's autobiographical pact, the contract between writer and reader, when the signature on the cover is not a "proper name"? The concept of the autobiographical pact, with its attendant notions of legality, authority and authenticity is a very masculine one, one into which many women may feel under no obligation to enter. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, in the preface to *The Prime of Life*, one of the volumes of her autobiography, states quite flatly: "I must warn them [the readers] that I have no intention of telling them everything . . . There are many things which I firmly intend to leave in obscurity" (8). Ruth Park may or may not be aware of Lejeune's theory, but she is very well aware of side-stepping any authoritarian pact. In her interview with Kate Veitch, Park reveals that the idea of writing an autobiography was not her own, but that the suggestion came from Robert Sessions of Penguin Books (118). Obviously, an autobiography by Rosina Niland would attract little attention in a bookstore; the public want to read about the famous. So Park tells her version of the story of Ruth Park, but only as much of that version as she chooses; this much and no more. Evidence of this is to be found in *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, in Park's enigmatic account of her first day at school:

'Where do you come from? What's your name? Eh? *That* isn't a name!'

I was shoved from one to the other and then pushed over. They had never heard my name before. They themselves were called Kathleen, Phyllis, Mavis, Vera, Jimmy, Jack and Trevor. The Maori children had more splendid names, but they hadn't pushed. Indeed they never did. (18)

How many readers, other than a researcher, would be aware that the name which puzzled the children was not the monosyllabic Ruth, but the rather more exotic Rosina? Since there is no compulsion on Park to include the incident, it serves as a sly declaration of subversion, of independence, of autonomy. Like de Beauvoir, Park declines to enter into the autobiographical pact, but her non-compliance is more subtle.

Kate Veitch has commented on the "little thrill of recognition that comes again and again when I see and recognise characters, places, incidents that I know from the novels" (115), and the prevalence of such recognisable features in the autobiography tends to give it a fictional quality, almost as if they were a series of minor revelations arranged like clues in a puzzle. Have incidents from the life been reworked into the fictions, or have the fictions been reworked into the life? There are some conspicuous absences in Park's life story. Some, like the paucity of detail about her children, are explained: "When I was young, children had their privacy violated almost by tradition . . . So I don't write about our children" (*Fishing* 221). Some, like the omission of any reference to her given name and/or the autobiographically fictional *The Drums Go Bang!*, are not. Park has chosen to concentrate her narrative upon her development as both woman and writer, rather than to provide a fact by fact historical account of the life of a successful author.

Nevertheless, Park's narrator more than once draws attention to her own unreliability and the text concludes with a rather enigmatic anecdote. It is, of course, in the nature of autobiography that any ending must be inconclusive; Robert Dessaix, somewhat in the manner of John Fowles, provides three possible endings to his autobiography, finally concluding with a paraphrase of the epigraph, the demand of Jeanette Winterson's Napoleonic kitchenhand in *The Passion* when relating the impossible: "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" (195). Perhaps, in the course of writing her story, Park has discovered that "Autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction" (Benstock 11), and Ruth Park, writer, has become a story; or perhaps Ruth Niland, private person and also very self-conscious professional writer, is ironically underlining her claim that all she has ever wanted to be is a storyteller:

What had I always wanted to write? What kind of thing?

It seemed I didn't care. All I wanted was to write stories, short or long, fact or fiction, in which the reader could walk about, see a familiar reflection in the looking-glass, say, 'Oh, yes, I know! I've been here all the time but didn't realise it'. (*Fishing* 301)

Again, Voloshinov's "bridge" springs to mind; there is a reciprocal quality in Park's writing. In a lifetime of "writing to understand", Ruth Park has not only sought understanding of herself in her culture, and in the people who have shared the time and space of her lifetime, but has endeavoured to share that self-recognition, to reflect that mutuality with her fellow-travellers.

CHAPTER 7

A GUIDE WITH KNOWLEDGE AND AFFECTION: SYDNEY AS SUBJECT,
SOURCE AND SETTING

Towards the close of *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, Ruth Park writes of standing on the wet deck of a ship at sunrise to catch "my first glimpse of Australia Felix, the ancient, indifferent, nonpareil continent that was to become the love of my life" (270). That first golden vision of the sun on sandstone cliffs, however, was soon obscured, albeit temporarily, by the squalid reality of Surry Hills in wartime. As a newly-wed migrant, homesick, morning-sick and appalled by slum conditions, Park received scant sympathy from her author husband: "'You're a writer,' he said. 'Observe'" (*Fishing* 12). Almost in spite of herself, she admits, she had already begun to do so, lured on by her literary inclination and training and she had, moreover, "discovered the Public Library and was about to begin my long study of what was to be my own city" (*Fishing* 13). The study has proved fruitful; overtly or implicitly, Sydney has been both the source and the setting for much of Park's work, both factual and fictional: her first novel, *The Harp in the South* and its sequel *Poor Man's Orange*; *A Power of Roses*; a large portion of her Miles Franklin Award-winning novel *Swords and Crowns and Rings*; *The Good Looking Women*; *Playing Beatie Bow*; *Merchant Campbell*; *The Big Brass Key*; *The Gigantic Balloon*; the early sections of *My Sister Sif* and, of course, much of her autobiographies and the biography of Les Darcy, as well as numerous short stories, radio plays and journalistic articles. "Write about something you know", is the time-honoured advice given to aspiring writers and in this Park is an exemplary model; with the exception of some of her children's stories and the works set in New Zealand and Norfolk Island (which, of course, she also knows well), Park's writing is centred on Sydney. Although she has travelled extensively both in Australia and overseas, Sydney was her first home when she came to this country in 1942 and she lives there still.

When the publishers, Collins, were looking for someone to write a book on Sydney for their *Companion Guide* series, therefore, Park was a fairly obvious choice. "It is the aim of these Guides to provide a Companion, in the person of the author, who knows intimately the places and people of whom he writes, and is able to communicate this knowledge and affection to his reader," the publishers state on the frontispiece. Park herself notes that the Guides, "more literate, more idiosyncratic" than many conventional compendiums, contain not only much useful information but also "playful and amusing anecdotes, scandalous as well as historical, that tell more about the intimate character of a city than a truckload of statistics" (*Fishing* 279). Her *Companion Guide to Sydney* meets these specifications with assurance, providing copious amounts of practical information about such things as transport, time-tables, food outlets, costs and public access in the course of an animated review of the city's past and present. It begins, in mid-conversation as it were, with a pun: "Here we stand then, civilly on the doorstep. That Circular Quay is Sydney's doorstep no one can deny" (9), and the mixture of fact and discursively informative chatter is maintained throughout, frequently enlivened by humour and opinionated comment. The reader wishing to reach Manly from Circular Quay, for instance, learns that, "You can reach it in 20 minutes by hydrofoil, very comfortable inside, but with little view of the Harbour through all that spray. Or you can ride on the top, which offers sublime views and your nostrils blown inside out" (253). While Sydney Harbour is described as "one of the world's largest and finest ports, beautiful as a dream, laid upon the map like a branch of blue coral" (9), pollution has turned the "gem-like little bay", Collins Beach, into a "place where you wouldn't go in a fit" (260).

Although the information contained in the *Guide* is comprehensive and well-researched, much of it was outdated, even at the time of publication, as both Park and Collins are aware. When approached to undertake the work, Park at first

demurred, pointing out that "Sydney [was] being pulled down" because massive redevelopment was taking place. The publishers, however, were undeterred: "It will be a history of the way Sydney was in the years before the mid-seventies", the senior editor replied (*Fishing* 278-280). Running "ahead of demolition, never knowing what next would be destined for destruction", Park mourned the destruction of the old "European city, full of ups and downs, dogleg lanes and cobbled dens" and its replacement by "something civilised, modern, conformist, the universal utilitarian city you see so often on television, damned by its own dullness" (*Fishing* 282). The old city was the one with which Park had fallen in love and which had been the source of so much of her inspiration. Of the *Guide* she says, "I have always hoped that it is indeed a voice raised in praise of colonial and Victorian Sydney" (*Fishing* 284).

That an avowed storyteller should write something as utilitarian as a guide book may seem, at first, incongruous. Park, however, has always described herself as a professional writer rather than a novelist and, apart from the *Companion Guide to Sydney*, she has written, in conjunction with the illustrator Cedric Emanuel, another book on Sydney, together with books on Tasmania and Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands. Also, for a German publisher, she has written a book about Australia, *Der Goldene Bumerang*, published in 1955. Intended for distribution prior to the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956, this book was translated into several languages and achieved large sales in Europe though it has never appeared in English. In any case, the *Guide* is not such an incongruity as might at first appear since Park has, in fact, written the story of Sydney. Beginning with Captain Phillip and the first fleet, she adumbrates, in the course of a series of simulated excursions to explore the modern metropolis, the biography of the city, illustrated by anecdotes of bays, bridges, buildings and, most of all, people. The story of Sydney is also, in part, the story of Australia, since white settlement of the continent began at Port Jackson and Sydney has remained, in a sense, at the hub of Australia ever since.

Park's account is lively and opinionated and although an occasional critic like Cyril Pearl may query some of her "facts" (26), few would dispute that she has captured the essence of a city that, originally planned to be "the last, loneliest and saddest place on earth . . . turned out quite otherwise. Blithe, irresponsible, slightly mad, [with] air full of electric sparks, . . . birds [that] shout in boys' voices . . . and sunshine [which] is here more often and lasts longer" (*Guide* 11).

For the purposes of this thesis, however, the *Guide* is more interesting as a revelation of Park's knowledge of and affection for Sydney and the consequent influence that these have had on her work. Of the Harbour Bridge, for instance, she says: "For me the grace and power of the Bridge's design has [sic] never become diminished since the day I first glided under it in the Matson Line's old *Mariposa*, holding my breath for fear that the mast would poke a hole in the bottom of the deck" (73). This fascination comes as no surprise to one familiar with Park's fiction. The Bridge is synonymous with Sydney as is the Eiffel Tower with Paris, so that the narratorial description of "the great Bridge . . . the arch . . . grey as rock, humping itself from one shore to another like a giant anaconda" is sufficient to establish the setting of *A Power of Roses* (10). Park uses the simile of the "giant anaconda" again in the *Guide* (75), and describes the sensation of walking "amongst the cyclopean pillars that support the Bridge, listening to the airy cries of the maintenance workers above, shouting like currawongs" (38). In the novel, Miriam surveys the Bridge through Uncle Puss's spyglass, marvelling that

there were others treating the giant structure with scorn and carelessness - the painters who swung in their fragile cradles on their eternal job, and higher up, on the catwalk of the arch itself, little figures of maintenance men hardly visible from the deck of the Bridge, not visible at all from the city except as black humps small as flies. (63)

The Bridge, or rather its absence, also features in the time-warp plot of *Playing Beatie Bow*. Abigail, transported to the previous century, surveys what should have been familiar territory and is stunned by a void: "No broad lighted deck strode

across the little peninsula, no great arch with its winking ruby at the highest point - nothing" (44). In the lively imaginations of both girls, the Bridge takes on life: for Abigail, it "bellow[s] with the homegoing traffic" (23); for Miriam, swept by the power of the spyglass lens into close proximity with the "massive Egyptian pillars of the pylons, like the legs of some great beast. It was as though she sat beneath the belly of a crocodile" (10). The Bridge and the young man high upon it become symbols of hope and confidence for Miriam, trapped physically within the squalor of slum living and emotionally within the bewilderment of adolescence.

For Jackie Hanna and Jerry MacNunn, the Bridge, initially, holds out a more pragmatic promise: work (*Swords* 377). Indeed, Park notes in the *Guide* that, during the "terrible years" of the Depression, "the Bridge was known as the Iron Lung, for it kept so many people still breathing" (74). Yet she observes that:

It is characteristic of Sydney's happy-go-lucky methods of doing things that this extraordinary engineering project was embarked upon when the approaching Depression must surely have cast a prophetic gloom over the future. It is to the credit of the government of that time that work on the Bridge went on . . . To a city bogged down in the demoralisation of worklessness, the great steel pincers nearing each other from the opposing shores, must have seemed symbols of a prosperity that must one day come again. (74)

Certainly it had this effect on Jackie and Jerry, newly arrived from the bush:

No photograph Jerry had ever studied had come within a mile of showing the Bridge's soaring massiveness, the grace, the power.

'Gawd,' Jerry kept saying reverently. 'To think that they can get that great bugger to stay up there! Would I think myself lucky to work on that! I'd be like a dog with a tin tail.' (377)

For Jackie, the Bridge is symbolic of Sydney's brash, bustling confidence and he knows, "This is for me" (376).

In *Fishing in the Styx*, Park describes how she and D'Arcy Niland first become acquainted with old Sydney early in their marriage, while conducting

research for a radio talk on the city's outbreaks of bubonic plague (*Fishing* 62-63). (The ABC did not share their enthusiasm for the topic and the talk was not broadcast.) Characteristically, Park was absorbed in old photographs and the celebrated "authenticity" of the old-Sydney setting of *Playing Beatie Bow* is one of the results of her continuing interest and research. On reading the *Guide*, therefore, it should not come as a surprise to learn that, "in Harrington Street", there was indeed a "Ragged School, a free school for the Rocks urchins" (79), the limited curriculum of which is a source of despair for Beatie Bow (*Beatie Bow* 57-58). Later, to introduce her discussion of Hunter's Hill, the narrator of the *Guide* asks a question and answers it herself:

What kind of place is it?

'There are stone wall with doors in them', says a child's poem. 'And what is on the other side isn't today'. (376)

which is precisely what Eliza discovers in *The Big Brass Key*. Similarly, a reader of *James*, may wonder if the small, eponymous hero of that story has had his genesis in the "rather absentminded" aeronautical pioneer, Lawrence Hargrave. "Grannies of present Point Piperians," Park informs us, "were occasionally treated to the delightful spectacle of Mr Hargrave strolling on the water across Double Bay. He wore on his feet 'something like blown-up tennis racquets'" (*Guide* 132). James, it will be recalled, having missed the ferry, walks across the Harbour to school, no one ever having told him that this is impossible.

In *The Gigantic Balloon*, Mr Jones, one of two rival emporium-owners, plans a balloon flight as a publicity stunt. However Pierre Maigre, "the fearless balloonist remained in France, because Mr Hoy [Jones's rival] had sent him a letter saying that smallpox, measles and yellow-spotted fever were very bad in Sydney" (N. pag.). His place is taken by Peter Thin, the downtrodden young hero. At first the balloon fails to ascend, having been secretly tethered by Mr Hoy. "The crowd thought they had been tricked. They were wild with disappointment", but Peter's

dog, Belle, saves the day (N. pag.). We learn a somewhat different version from the *Guide*, however. It seems that in 1856 there occurred "The Great Balloon Catastrophe" in which "Pierre Maigre, heroic French balloonist and shrewd P.R. man . . . whipped public interest to such intensity that when the day of his proposed ascent came, more than ten thousand people, including Governor Denison and his entourage, assembled in the Domain". The balloon, however, failed to ascend and Maigre (obviously lacking a faithful and intelligent dog) was forced to take "refuge in a locked scullery" to escape the wrath of the crowd which "believ[ed] the whole thing a hoax" (*Guide* 175).

The Domain, of course, is where Jackie Hanna has his fateful encounter with Jack Lang, who used this famous public forum on a number of occasions. The crowd which gathered in the Domain to protest Lang's dismissal was "judged in excess of 100,000", we learn from the *Guide* (175). Yet, "God knows what sense of the ironic caused the Establishment to place Lawson's statue where it is," Park exclaims. "This is the part of the Domain called Dossers' Alley, where the homeless unemployed used to sleep, huddled around rocks and trees like a lot of newspaper-wrapped grubs" (*Guide* 170), which is where and how Cushie finds Jackie (*Swords* 434). "As Henry said, there's not much to look forward to when your pants begin to go," Park comments (*Guide* 170). Yet Jackie, "Workless, always half-hungry, the seat of his pants so darned it was like sitting on a cushion, with not a thing in the world to give him hope . . . laugh[s] aloud, knowing that his spiritual centre of gravity had righted itself" in noisy, confident Sydney, his spiritual home (*Swords* 384).

Many and various aspects of Sydney find their way into Park's work, lending the authenticity of true experience. As she remarks in *Fishing in the Styx*, "Nothing replaces field research, even if you're writing fiction; the image that hits the eyeball is immeasurably more powerful than the one you read about in someone else's

book" (282). In *My Sister Sif*, for instance, Riko visits a shell shop in Sydney in order to sell two rare "ruby harp" shells to raise the money for the air fare home to Rongo. There she meets the young American scientist who will fall in love with her sister, Sif. Riko observes, "The shell shop owner loved his wares, you could see that. The shop was clean and the shells glistened. There was a faint smell of ocean which I breathed with pleasure" (7). In the *Guide*, published thirteen years earlier, Park describes the "interesting shops . . . along George Street North" which include "the fabulous shell shop, to which people come from all over the world. I find this shop most agreeable, from its awry doorway to its smell, like a sea cave, clean and salty," she declares (34). In *Home Before Dark*, describing The Spit where Les Darcy trained, Park and Champion maintain that, "In spite of the passing of almost eighty years since he left it, Darcy would recognise The Spit at once, its dreaming waters, the silent bush, the unalterable apartness" (115). They also recount the legend that Darcy, as part of his training, would not only run up the steep Gallipoli Steps but would do it backwards! "But I've tried it and I believe it impossible," the narrator of the *Guide* remarks of what could be considered research above and beyond the call of duty (324).

From a Bakhtinian point of view, one passage of the *Guide* is particularly interesting. Park is describing a bus ride with some pensioners from Balmain. Like Uncle Puss and Mr Fraser of *A Power of Roses*, "Some of the old gentlemen live as permanents in one or another of Balmain's aged hotels," she reveals. These old men, however, "look well . . . some are dapper, all are alert . . . the city, which can grab you and squeeze you if you're poor or weak, seemingly has not reached into Balmain" (*Guide* 382). Then Park makes an observation which might escape someone born in this country and consequently unable to "hear" native speech characteristics:

They speak an older Australian, with a clear debasement of consonants. About a famous New Year's party at one of the pubs - 'it toog thirdy

blueboddles to break it up'. The old men drop their h's - 'E went scone-ot at Arry', but the old ladies seem not to do so. Not only their idiom would be strange to an urban Australian youth; the very structure of their sentences is idiosyncratic. (383)

This is an example of the "internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence" of which Bakhtin speaks, the languages within languages which, he maintains, "serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)," (*Imagination* 263). It is most unlikely that Park could have read Bakhtin in 1973, but that she has an instinctive grasp of the argument is apparent from her papers. For instance, in a letter (undated but presumably written in January 1985) to Beatrice Davis of Angus and Robertson about the proofs of *Missus*, she states: "My use of 'lady', as spoken or thought by a child or young person is correct. The word should not be changed to 'woman'. In those days, this wd [sic] have been rankest rudeness. Surely you recall children saying, 'A lady spoke to me', 'the lady next door' and so on" (Mitchell, ML MSS 3128). In a similar vein, she has said, "I cannot abide a name out of period" (Letter to the author. 19 May 1997). In her discussion of the old men on the bus, there is a suggestion that dropping their h's may be an acquired speech characteristic, unconscious or otherwise, a sort of fraternal identification sign. The old women, it will be recalled, do not have the habit. In *A Power of Roses*, the narrator informs us that, "Uncle Puss was a sort of glossary of twenty other old men. He unconsciously copied their characteristic gestures, as they had copied them from other old gents they had seen in their childhood. His way of stretching his neck like a turkey went back, through his long gone Uncle Majuba McKillop, to the days of Napoleon" (51). As "living" anachronisms Uncle Puss and the other old men perform one function of the chronotope, defined by Michael Holquist as "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring (Glossary, 426-427).

For one familiar with Park's work, to read *The Companion Guide to Sydney* is to realise that her writing and the city are inextricably entwined. Time and again, a passage from the *Guide* will evoke the memory of a similar passage elsewhere, those mentioned here are merely a few of many. Some writers set their work in imaginary locations; some disguise the settings, more or less successfully, while others employ an amalgam of several locations, real and/or imaginary. Park leaves her readers in no doubt as to where her stories are taking place, and most often it is in Sydney. This unequivocal locationing seems to be quite intentional. In her autobiography, she reveals that, as aspiring young writers, she and D'Arcy Niland would often gaze at a lighted window inside which, they believed, Xavier Herbert sat writing:

The light may not have belonged to Herbert's house, but we believed it did, and the sight of it strengthened our resolution. We too were writers, little recognised ones; we were part of a movement towards indigenous Australian writing, and we were proud of that. (*Fishing* 89)

Park does not write about the vast outback or the tropical north; even in novels such as *Missus* and *Swords and Crowns and Rings*, the country towns depicted are obviously located in the comparatively populous south-eastern corner of Australia. Like the majority of her readers, Park is an urban Australian and therefore, in reflecting this, her work is nationally representative. She says that she intended *The Companion Guide to Sydney* to be "a record, my own story of the Sydney I knew so well" (*Fishing* 280) and in this she has succeeded. But in the course of displaying her knowledge and love of Sydney, Park has also, advertently or otherwise, left a possibly unique record of authorial inspiration.

CONCLUSION

Ruth Park is a consummate practitioner of the art of writing. In another field of representation, acting, there are basically two types of professionals: those who, while giving competent performances, always play essentially the same role under different names and in different costumes; and those who achieve metamorphoses. In the field of literature Park has accomplished something of an amalgamation: she is a chameleon, writing in almost every genre and for every age group, and achieving popularity, empathy and literary acclaim in each; yet the concerns addressed and the narrative point of view are always her own. She has examined the fear and the effects of abandonment for young and old, male and female; she has taken up literary cudgels on behalf of the poor and the powerless, often pouring scorn on government policies in the process; she has written about the condition and the concerns of women, even before the rise of the feminist movement; she has spun enchantment for children while simultaneously expanding their mental horizons, and she has written, as she herself acknowledges, of love in all its many aspects. She has sought, through her writing, to understand both herself and her culture and to define each in relation to the other.

The century, indeed the millenium, is drawing to a close, yet this ancient continent is, in the Western sense, a young country, settled by its immigrant population for barely two hundred years, a nation for less than a century. For more than half the period of our nationhood, Ruth Park has been one of us and has written for and about us. Her concerns have been our concerns, her observations have sharpened our perception, her recollections have stirred our own. Graeme Turner maintains that, "The Nation's narratives are defined not so much by factors such as the birthplace of the author or whether a text was written in Sydney or London, but rather by the bank of ideologically framed myths, symbols, connotations and contextual associations upon which they draw" (19); "both the way in which

literature organises its meanings, and the way in which that organisation and meaning is received, are overdetermined by the culture" (57). The culture, that is the society and its ideologies, of the present time has evolved and developed from that of the past; there is no boundary and, while there are many differences, there are also many similarities. As Gadamer has observed, "The most basic of all hermeneutic preconditions remains one's own foreunderstanding, which comes from being concerned with the same subject" (294). He adds:

Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history. (296)

Therefore, in Gadamerian terms, readers of today interpret and make meaning because they are able to merge the horizons of their experience and understanding with the horizons of earlier Australians. High sales figures for a particular book may indicate merely that the author has sought to capitalize on the public's "inbuilt weakness for stories", and has, perhaps, captured the mood and interest of the reading public at a particular time. The initial public response to *The Harp in the South* is a case in point; Leslie Rees recalls:

The Harp in the South was serialised in *The Herald*, which printed a whole page in the newspaper at a time. It made a spectacular impact. I remember walking through Wynyard station one morning and noting a long queue outside a bookstall waiting for their *Herald* containing the latest *Harp* instalment, a phenomenon I'd never seen before and have never, as applied to a novelist's work, seen since. (194).

Yet the uninterrupted publication life of *The Harp in the South*, together with that of so many of Park's novels, must indicate something beyond this. It could be argued that, since many of her adult novels deal with everyday female matters, they are popular simply with women, who make up a large proportion of the novel-reading public. Yet this could not be the case with *Missus*, with *Swords and Crowns and Rings* and with the more recently published biography *Home Before Dark*. Nor

is the argument for a gender-biased readership of Park's work suggested by Gavin Souter's research into newspaper publishing. Discussing Maxwell Suich and the monthly magazines published by newspapers such as the *National Times*, Souter records that, "Their generally bouyant effect on circulation was most striking in January 1974, when a colour magazine containing a long article on the Depression, by Ruth Park, lifted sales to more than 100,000" (486). It is also obvious that neither immediacy nor gender can account for the seemingly inexhaustable popularity of the Muddle-headed Wombat.

Although Bakhtin himself did not use the words, "dialogism" and "dialogics" are now widely accepted by students of his work as convenient terms with which to refer to the complexities of his concepts of language and narrative. The writers of the Bakhtinian circle regarded all utterance as essentially social, the making of meaning being an activity shared between addressee and interlocutor; we have already noted Voloshinov's likening of a word to a "bridge thrown between myself and another" (58), and Lynne Pearce's analogy of the telephone (1-2). In *Reading Dialogics*, Pearce observes, "Language exists on that creative borderzone between human consciousnesses, between a self and an other. It is this responsive interaction between speakers, between self and other, that constitutes the capacity of language to produce new meaning," (5). In this sense, Ruth Park has been engaged in dialogue with her readers for more than fifty years and the continuing popularity of her work is evidence that readers willingly participate in making the connection. Her novels retain their appeal because, in their concerns, their ideologies, their myths, their connotations and contextual associations, Australians of different generations still maintain a good deal of that "shared territory" identified by Voloshinov (58).

In spite of the influence of the bush ethos on much of our literary heritage, and therefore on our national self-image, the physical territory shared by most

Australians has not been the Great outback, but the cities that cling to the edge of the continent. That we share the one territory is a tenet of national myth; that we share the other is a fact of quotidian experience. In keeping with the fact rather than the fiction of Australian life, most of Park's characters are city dwellers, sharers in the territory of her "own city", Sydney (*Fishing* 113). In several of her early novels, Park depicts the effects of poverty and overcrowded slum living conditions on citizens of this enormous and fruitful young country; she examines the phenomenon of learned helplessness and condemns commercial exploitation of and governmental indifference towards the powerless. She shows that the qualities in human nature which she values, resilience and self-reliance, are fostered by the giving and receiving of love in any of its various forms. She celebrates family life, therefore, yet simultaneously analyses the internecine conflicts in which family members are so frequently, yet unconsciously, involved. In particular, she probes the often-complicated mother-daughter relationship, especially the situation of a daughter whose love for her mother is unrequited. The majority of her early works are centred on a young girl who has been abandoned, yet, her later novels, it is apparent that she has widened her exploration of the fear of abandonment to include people of both sexes and all ages. The majority of her published books are written for children with whom she obviously has a natural empathy. She has strong views on the responsibilities of those who write for young people, believing that books should not only satisfy the innate craving for stories, but should also excite and expand the mind, fostering, meanwhile, concepts of self-awareness and self-responsibility. Park is fascinated with the indomitability of the human spirit, a quality which finds its most striking exponent in Jacky Hanna the dwarf; born, apparently, to a life of frustration and humiliation, he endures and triumphs, largely because of the love and whole-hearted support he receives and is therefore able to return. Jack's odyssey through the Australia of the Depression years, symbolises the struggles of the infant nation against the giants of international commerce. Park is scathing on the subject of colonialism, pouring scorn on both coloniser and

willingly-colonized, extending her belief in the necessity of self-reliance to include the nation as well as the individual. Yet concern for the disempowered is evident throughout her work which features those often overlooked both in literature and in life: the poor, the old, the disabled and children. Her protagonists are not those at the forefront of great events; their lives are rarely exciting or exceptional; they are ordinary people with ordinary concerns. This is partly because, in most cases, they are women; as is to be expected, the feminist tone of her work has strengthened as the feminist movement has made advances, but she has always written of women's concerns and from a woman's point of view. Her vivid recollection of the plight of women in the Depression has brought to light an aspect of that disastrous era that has, for the most part, been overlooked. One of the great strengths of her writing is her ability to bring an era to life, to make it palpable, something the reader recognizes as if from personal experience. This is nowhere more evident than in her autobiography and in the biography of the Australian icon, Les Darcy; these works are not just personal histories, but social history. Through the medium of her authorial skills, the story of Australia is told by the voices of the ordinary Australians who lived it.

In the course of entertaining Australians for over fifty years, therefore, Park has written a commentary on Australian life and ideology throughout the latter half of this century. A reflective writer, she has sought for understanding of herself through understanding of the culture she has inhabited, always believing that "One is all and all is one" (*Fence* 7). The same belief, however, has made her a gregarious writer; the body of her work constitutes a record of the concerns, the hopes, fears and beliefs of a nation, the story of ordinary Australians told by a talented and perceptive observer/participant. Simultaneously, it has acted as a speculum, so that the culture of our society today is as it is partly through the influence of Park's storytelling, a fact that academics in literary circles have been slower to realise than have those in other fields. In this thesis I have not taken a

reductive approach to her writing, believing that to be inappropriate to what is, essentially, an introductory work. Her writing, while always of a high standard, has acquired increasing scope and complexity as she has matured, its greater sophistication enhanced by assured simplicity, and I have endeavoured to apply appropriate levels of critical analysis. In her introduction to *Writing Lives: Feminist Biography and Autobiography*, Susan Magarey draws attention to the changing attitudes, especially of women, to women's writing: "For some of the contributors to this volume, their feminism renders their choice of subject unquestionable. Jill Roe is able to say, quite simply: 'Miles Franklin matters'" (v). From a feminist point of view, this is true also of Ruth Park; but not only from a feminist point of view. Australian literature, culture, values, myths and ideologies have all too recently attracted academic interest and attained esteem. Australian writing today is prolific, dynamic, and multivocal and, whether primitive or sophisticated, it is, above all else, assured. It reflects the culture from which it springs and that culture evolves continuously from its heritage. Yet, in an age of increasing materialism, one where the pace of technological advance is exhilarating but also bewildering, there is a tendency to lose sight of the personal, to overlook the value of the individual. A society ignorant of its cultural heritage is not only impoverished but endangered. It is in this sense that Ruth Park matters.

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NOTES

In compiling this bibliography I have attempted to include all work by Ruth Park published and performed in Australia since 1942. Given the volume and scope of her writing, however, and the time and financial constraints pertaining to one PhD thesis, this has not been possible. Park has been a freelance writer for over fifty years and, while I believe the list of her books to be comprehensive, the number of her shorter works for magazines and newspapers, many of which have since ceased publication, almost certainly runs into the hundreds. I have listed those that I have been able to uncover. By contrast, most of her writing for radio is held in the document archives of the Australian Broadcasting Commission and I believe my listing of this material to be virtually comprehensive. I have read the texts of this work in the Australian Archives but details of the various radio stations and broadcast dates are, in most cases, lacking and unrecoverable; I have included such details where they are available. Park has also had work published in New Zealand, Canada, Great Britain, the United States of America and South Africa; her works have been translated into many languages, some have been published in braille and some have been sound-recorded. Again, such material is beyond the scope of this bibliography. A comprehensive bibliography of Park's work would be an extremely time-consuming project, one that I hope to pursue in post-doctoral research. Since my thesis is, in the academic sense, something of an introductory study, I have provided this bibliographical listing to indicate the volume and scope of Park's work, and the critical response to it.

Until recent years, Park's work has attracted little academic interest and the critical material listed is, therefore, drawn largely from the review sections of newspapers and magazines, rather than from literary journals although the latter

have been searched. Again, a comprehensive coverage has not been possible and some of the items listed are minor. They have been included because my thesis deals largely with the mutual influence of Park and Australian culture upon each other and to indicate the frequency and variety of comment upon her work. Much of my initial information was obtained from the card index files of the Mitchell and Fryer Libraries and any items I have been unable to locate are marked with an asterisk. Items for which complete publication information is not available are marked p.d.i. (publication details incomplete) and/or N.pag. (no pagination). Listings within each section are chronological.

I was extremely fortunate in being given Ruth Park's permission to examine the papers and manuscripts which she has donated to the Mitchell Library in Sydney. These are as yet uncatalogued and are not available to the public.

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Item unsighted	*
Publication details incomplete	p.d.i.
No pagination	N. pag.
Mitchell Library Reference	ML MSS 3128
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(iv) *Radio Plays*

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 ABC Document Archives SP1216/1 Box 31.

The Centaur (with D'Arcy Niland)
 Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

The Courtship of Henry Lawson (with D'Arcy Niland)
 ABC Document Archives SP1297 S2 Box 4.
 Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

Early in the Morning
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Far from the Land.

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Gulliver's Cousin

ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 21.

I'll Meet You in Botany Bay

ABC Document Archives SP1297 S2 Box 2.
Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

Let No Man Put Asunder (with D'Arcy Niland)

Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

A Little South of Heaven (with D'Arcy Niland)

ABC Document Archives SP1316 S1 Box 3.
Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

The New Year at Billyboona

ABC Document Archives SP1216/1 Box 23.

A Pie for Gus

ABC Document Archives SP1216/1 Box 7.

Stormy Was the Weather: The Story of the Making of James Cook, Master Mariner.

ABC Document Archives SP12971/1 Box 46.
Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

A Tail for Our Times

ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 27.

The Young Girls (with D'Arcy Niland)

ABC Document Archives SP1297 S2 Box 6.
Mitchell Library, Sydney. ML MSS 3128.

(v) *Radio Serials**One Man's Kingdom* (with D'Arcy Niland)

13 episodes.
ABC Document Archives SP1071/2 Box 20.

Night Tales of a Bagman (with D'Arcy Niland)

(1943)
ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 33.

Tales of a Bagman (with D'Arcy Niland)

24 episodes
ABC Document Archives SP1071/2 Box 31

The Bagman on the Wallaby (with D'Arcy Niland)
(1994)
ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 6.

The Bagman Boils His Billy (with D'Arcy Niland)
(1946)
ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 5.

The Bagman Takes It Easy (with D'Arcy Niland)
(1948)
ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 6.

The Bagman Camps Again (with D'Arcy Niland)
(1954)
ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 6.

The Bagman Tells Another (with D'Arcy Niland)
ABC Document Archives SP1297/1 Box 6.

(vi) *Radio Serials for Children*

The Wideawake Bunyip
148 episodes broadcast from early 1946 to 17 Dec. 1948.
ABC Document Archives SP1216 Boxes 9 and 18.

Podger
49 episodes broadcast from 14 Jan. 1949 to 23 Dec. 1949.
ABC Document Archives SP1216/1 Box 7.

The Tale of Tom Devanney
6 episodes broadcast from 3 May 1951 to 7 June 1951.
ABC Document Archives SP1216 Box 30.

The Muddle-headed Wombat
3139 episodes broadcast from 30 Sept. 1952 with repeats to 1984.
ABC Document Archives SP1216 Boxes 34 to 46.

Punch and Judy
448 episodes broadcast from 1954 to 1961 with repeats from 1958 to 1968.
ABC Document Archives SP1216 Boxes 4 and 5.

Tales from the Dreamtime
"Bindi's Boomerang." Broadcast 22 Oct. 1955.
"The Noisy Debil-Debil." Broadcast 29 Oct. 1955.
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The Little Debil-Debil

149 episodes broadcast from 10 Mar. 1958 to 20 Mar. 1961.
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The Treehouse

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APPENDIX A

RUTH PARK - HONOURS AND AWARDS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1946 | <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> Literary Competition - Novel Section
<i>The Harp in the South</i> |
| 1954 | Catholic Book Club Choice - U.S.A.
<i>Serpent's Delight</i> |
| 1961 | Lew Grade Organisation Commonwealth Television Play
Competition
<i>No Decision</i> (with D'Arcy Niland) |
| 1962 | Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards
<i>The Hole in the Hill</i> - Highly commended |
| 1975 | Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards
<i>Callie's Castle</i> - Highly commended |
| 1977 | Miles Franklin Award
<i>Swords and Crowns and Rings</i> |
| 1977 | Highly commended by National Book Council
<i>Swords and Crowns and Rings</i> |
| 1979 | Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards
<i>Come Danger, Come Darkness</i> - Highly commended |
| 1981 | Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards
<i>Playing Beatie Bow</i> |
| 1981 | N.S.W. Premier's Literary Awards, Children's Book Award
<i>When the Wind Changed</i> |
| 1982 | Parents' Choice Foundation Award for Literature
<i>Playing Beatie Bow</i> |
| 1982 | Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction (U.S.A.)
<i>Playing Beatie Bow</i> |
| 1982 | International Board on Books for Young People (Australia) Honour
Diploma
<i>Playing Beatie Bow</i> |
| 1982 | Guardian Prize (U.K.)
<i>Playing Beatie Bow</i> |

- 1986 Young Australians' Best Book Award for a Picture Book
When the Wind Changed (Illustrated by Deborah Niland)
- 1987 Member of the Order of Australia
- 1992 Age Book of the Year Award for Non-fiction
A Fence Around the Cuckoo
- 1992 Colin Roderick Award, presented with the H. T. Priestley Medal
(Townsville Foundation for Australian Literary Studies Award)
A Fence Around the Cuckoo
- 1993 Tilly Aston Award for Braille Book of the Year
A Fence Around the Cuckoo
- 1993 Talking Book of the Year Award (Royal Blind Society)
A Fence Around the Cuckoo
- 1993 Lloyd O'Neil Magpie Award for services to the Australian book
industry
- 1994 Talking Book of the Year Award (Royal Blind Society)
Fishing in the Styx
- 1994 Canberra's Own Outstanding List Award
Playing Beatie Bow
- 1994 Honorary Doctor of Letters, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of New South Wales
- 1995 Fellowship of Australian Writers Christina Stead Award
Home Before Dark (With Rafe Champion)
- 1996 TDK Australian Audio Book Award for Unabridged Non-fiction
Home Before Dark (With Rafe Champion)
(Narrator Peter Hosking)

APPENDIX B

ILLUSTRATIONS ACCOMPANYING SERIALISED VERSION OF
THE HARP IN THE SOUTH IN THE *SYDNEY MORNING HERALD*













