

School of Media, Communication and Creative Arts

***“A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems”*: A Verse Novel &
An Exploration of Generic Hybridity: An Exegesis**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Maureen Gibbons

Date

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Abstract

This thesis provides two responses to a single question: one in the form of a major work of creative writing and the other in the form of an exegesis. The research question is: How can contemporary generic strategies best be utilised to represent the life and death of a real marginalised figure?

The creative work is titled *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*. It deploys the concept of the silhouette biography, with its reliance on contextual detail to build the sense of a real life, in conjunction with the form of the verse novel, to construct an imagined life narrative for a homeless woman whose body was found in Kings Park in November 2001. The verse novel draws on contextual evidence such as police reports and newspaper accounts, and supplements that evidence with fictionalised interviews and invented characters. *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems* is focalised mainly from the point of view of Patsy, an estranged friend of the dead woman, who arrives in Perth many months after the death and seeks to make sense of what appears to be a murder case. The narrative interrogates, via Patsy's journey, the complex social and cultural meanings of the site of Kings Park, and the paradoxical position of the homeless woman in a contemporary urban setting. It is ultimately a multi-generic work that seeks to open up, rather than close off, discussion around a real, marginalised figure.

The exegesis addresses the research question by outlining and analysing the reading that informed the generic decisions made in relation to the creative project. Chapter One provides an overview of the evolution of the genre of biography, with an emphasis on its postmodern forms. Chapter Two gives an account of research into, the discursive construction of 'the homeless,' into theories of space, place and social displacement, and into the issue of voice and focalisation in relation to those ideas. Chapter Three presents close readings of three texts that offer generic models for the representation of the real figure at the centre of the creative project. Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* is analysed for its use of the devices of silhouette biography, Jordie Albiston's *The Hanging of Jean Lee* provides an example of a verse novel that develops the life story of a real Australian woman, while

Dorothy Porter's *El Dorado* suggests ways in which the strategies of contemporary popular fiction might appeal to potential readers.

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A BAG, A BERET AND A BOOK OF POEMS

Section One

Butter Lady's Final Journey

Painstaking research has enabled police to identify a homeless woman

BRIAN JOHNSON reports

Police turned out yesterday to farewell a woman known on Perth streets as the Butter Lady. There was no one else to say goodbye.

Four detectives bowed their heads as they commemorated the life of a woman they had never met. A single pink rose lay atop her coffin: a personal touch in a tiny, sparsely decorated chapel. A short Bible reading and a simple eulogy in the soothing voice of police chaplain Steven Cross and the service was over.

Lily Harrop was cremated yesterday, nine months after the 68-year-old was discovered dead in Kings Park.

It seemed she had made a concerted effort to become invisible. She had drifted away from her friends and family and travelled the world, before settling in Perth. She had even cancelled her social security payment in order to fend for herself on Perth's sometimes violent streets.

A smiling photograph of the Butter Lady was discovered in an old Centrelink file. Police followed clues, which led them to an 84-year-old sister in South Australia, the sole surviving member of her family. The pair had not seen each other for more than 12 years.

Forensic specialists compared her dental profile to the teeth of the body, which still lay in the morgue and a match was made confirming that the Butter Lady was Lily Harrop.

Further probes revealed that as a younger woman, the Butter Lady had given birth to a baby girl, whom she had given up for adoption.

Olive Harrop, her sister, was not well enough to travel to Perth for a funeral so *Express Couriers* offered to transport the ashes back to Adelaide.

Lily Harrop was sent on her final journey in a simple ceremony without fanfare.

The Amber Rose Guest House
(Bagot Road, Subiaco)

Patsy Hill (2003)

I arrive, from Adelaide,
unsure of what I'll find.

The room's spaciousness,
perfumed with roses,
lifts my spirits enough
to find places
for my camera, laptop,
clothes and toiletries;

enough to imagine Lily
as she was the last time
I saw her—hair dyed
flame-orange—hooped earrings
the size a gypsy would envy;
her demeanour buoyant,

thrilled about my plans
to study photography.

God, that was forty odd years ago.

Across Time

Nepal (1966)

Light bastes Annapurna's peaks
in butter yellow, tints of terracotta.
Beyond our tent, Lily and I piss
amber circles in the snow.

Dendi and Saki stir dahl and
cauliflower over spirit-fed flames.
Bodies are tense with memories
of the night's drum beats,
Saki's premonition of a blizzard.

We break camp—strike out in single-file,
trek through kilometres of silence,
conifers heavy with snow,
colonies of white-whiskered monkeys.

The sky lightens, we relax; joke, step aside,
for an ox with horns that span the path.
Saki relates the legend of Annapurna, the goddess of food,
who refuses to eat until her devotees are fed.

Across Time

Darjeeling (1966)

In the dining room of the Windermere
I order ox-tail soup and crème caramel.
Lily points out the beggars
that squat beneath our window,
and insists she's not hungry.

Kings Park

Planned for pleasure, this bushland
sits between city and river;

I wander through Qualup bells,
kangaroo paws, pink everlastings;

my head a minefield of what ifs and if onlys,
I discover monuments to fallen soldiers:
a cenotaph, a flame of remembrance.

Close to the tennis courts,
skirted by gums, sheoaks and banksias
I find Lily's camp-site;

a space of wild grass, sweet smelling freesias—
a skin of silence—

Ding Dong Bell

Ding dong bell

Lily's down the well.

Who put her in?

Little Lily Flinn.

Who'll pull her out?

Little Lily Stout.

Into the City

There's a nip in the air,
as I stride along Kings Park Road,
adjacent to Lily's camp.

A tall woman trundling a case,
emerges from the bushes.
For a second, she is Lily—wilful, wily.

She brushes past me,
a cluster of grass seeds
stuck to her skirt.

I've been told where to find those
who sleep rough in this city.

In a shop foyer in Hay Street mall
a body huddles in a grey army blanket,
reluctant to stir.

In Murray Street, just past Craft West,
A man lies on his back;
his companion, a bottle,
his shelter, the overhang of a building.

Joshua, who manages the *Amber Rose*,
tells me they clear the homeless out
when dignitaries come to town.

Floral Clock

On the way back,
blistered feet
force me to
pause in the park,

where the aroma
of meat and onions
reminds me I'm ravenous.

A male in an Akubra
tries his luck in the bin.

Lily, did you do that?
You were so fussy about food.
Tricky stomach, you said.

The clock's hands judder to 5.00 pm.
A Rufous Whistler, carved from wood,

bursts from a small cottage window;
its whistle piercing enough to wake the dead.

Departure Point

Today I question
people in the street
about Perth's homeless.

Helen obliges;
brushes her hair back
from her fresh face:

*There's an old guy who
pushes a trolley along
Hackett Drive near uni.*

*His head, always down, as if
divining for something lost.*

*I'm curious as to
how he lives,
how he came
to be in this state.*

*I'm struck by his endurance.
He's a tough perennial.*

*There's another person who
bathes each day in the fountain
on St George's Terrace.*

*Lawyers club together to
buy him a Christmas present.*

Liz who holds a

teaching role in the
court office says:

*Look for the woman
who sits outside
the courts with
doves
in a cage.*

*A colleague offered her food once.
She snapped at him,
'I don't want your food.'*

Christine's voice leeches any
notion of me robbing her of time.

*You need to understand
their path into homelessness
in order to help them find their
way out.*

I approached Toni
near Royal Perth Hospital.

*I don't feel sorry
for them. They fascinate me.
They choose to live off
soup kitchens and refuges.
One used to sleep on a bench
at the back entrance
to the hospital. Staff took
him food. He'd move on*

*when police patrolled, but he'd be
back the next night.*

Jack can't wait
for me to
finish the question.

*Bloody no-hopers.
There's no need for it.
They should get off
their back-sides
and get a job. It's not hard.
They'd rather bum off us.*

Observations

(Alexander Library)

Calf muscles boast a trail
of tattooed leaves,—indigo,
red, green—nicotine-stained fingers
pluck the edge of a T-shirt
whose wearer paces between the shelves
that house books on world religions.

His circuit completed in no time
he taps at computer keys,
his face too close to the screen.

At his mouth's edge, he exposes his tongue.

The Player: Reuben

You read him for what he was
long before I did.

Smart girl Lily,
that's what you were.
Why wasn't I?

Your letters became fewer
then they stopped.
I don't blame you Lily.
It's what I deserved.

Fool that I was, I followed him to Perth;
found a job in the building
where he worked;

haunted his haunts,
discovered his wife, his kids.

My shame was as thick
as an army coat.

Lily, it was Ding dong bell . . .
Who put her in?
Stupid Patsy Flinn.

Section Two

An Artist's Impression

In the identikit portrait
published in the paper
Lily's hair is longer—
her skin unlined; her eyes
 questioning.

There's a sample of tartan similar
to the shirt she once wore—
 feminist colours.

I place the portrait on the desk that looks out
 onto Joshua's roses;
 beside it a candid photo
taken during our teens in the Adelaide mall.
 We're outside the bank
wearing the beige uniform we loathed;

our lunch hour stretching to one and a half
spent laughing, joking about who we'd marry,

what dresses we'd wear, who'd be our bridesmaids,
the diamond rings we'd choose; our trousseaus—
frilly nylons, or de-lusted satins?

Lily, who would have believed
that your life would end this way?

Dior eau sauvage

(Brew-Ha, Subiaco)

Reuben greets me.

Pats, you haven't changed.

My hand is less than steady, as I
fish in my bag for loose change,
thank him for sending the article
from the *West Australian*.

He's aged well. Looks fit.

I make a snap decision to be
business-like; keep to the point.

*I believe you ran into Lily on
your travels, I say. Kathmandu?*

No India— Bharatpur.

Hardly recognised her—skin and bone.

Did you spend time with her?

Very little. She unnerved me.

How was that, Reuben?

Things she said, did.

*Then she'd revert to the Lily
we once knew—witty, fun to be with.*

He pauses, drains his coffee cup.

I finger my silk scarf,

breathe in his *Dior eau sauvage*.

*In the taxi to Calcutta
she took a wad of
dollars from her bag,
wound down the window,
and tossed the lot out.
She had to keep the city safe,
she said.
That was the last I saw of her.*

*A girl in her twenties,
willowy, queues at the counter.
Must say the odd time
when I've seen a tall woman
Lily's crossed my mind.*

Who would have guessed?

Have you heard anything else? I ask.

*Nothing. And there's been
nothing in the papers.*

If she'd had status . . . ?

Maybe. Who knows?

Coming Home

Lily, what magnet
drew you
to Perth?

Was it a voice
from the cast
who lived in your head?

Telephone Conversation with Detective Rob Moore

I picture him as balding, closer to fifty than forty,
a mountain of papers on his desk.

What is your interest in the case? he asks.

I babble about my friendship with Lily,
about our travels—her vitality—
how I lost track of her;

how shocked I was
to hear that maybe it was murder.
He clears his throat, pauses.

I wish you luck, Patsy. I spent months on the case.

*I contacted the South Australian Police
on Melbourne Cup Day.*

You can imagine the response I got.

Ethereal was neck 'n neck with Persian Punch.

Not the time to mention horses, I think.

Surely you haven't shelved the case?

Well if new evidence was to turn up . . .

How likely is that, if you're not actively engaged?

Look it's good that you care but . . .

He clears his throat again. Words catch in mine.

So the case is closed?

Look, you'll need a copy of the coronial inquiry.

Everything we turned up is there.

Aunt Ada & Gustav

(i)

Hot water is endless at the *Amber Rose*,

I shower and day-dream:

Aunt Ada in her kitchen;

her pine table bleached with lemon juice;

her scones, hot, buttery. Her hands dusted in flour.

I wrap myself in a thick, peach-coloured towel,

resolve to ring Adelaide today.

(ii)

Patsy, of course I remember you;

you were Lily's best friend.

Gustav and I loved it when Lily

came to stay and you visited.

It was like a ready-made family:

Sunday nights around the piano singing

Some Enchanted Evening and A, You're Adorable;

Gustav puffing away on his pipe, stoking the fire.

Your visits helped Lily through her pregnancy.

(iii)

Her father turned his back on her

once she refused to keep the baby.

He was my brother but

I could never understand him. He was a bigot;

bigwig in the church. He rang me a

few years ago wanting Lily's address.

The truth is we lost touch with her.

She slipped out of our lives fifteen

years ago without any goodbyes.

We tried to trace her once, but without any luck.

(iv)

Ada's voice lingers long after we finish talking;
staves off feelings of despondency.

Losing Her Grip

(Telephone conversation with Olive Harrop)

Barmera

The last time I spoke

to my sister

it was July, 1990.

In between showers,

we sat on the balcony.

She hated being cooped up.

Mother said it was the gypsy in her.

She was restless, jumped

when a tree-frog

lost its grip in the hibiscus.

I tried to make conversation.

She didn't answer.

She sat there

running her thumbnail

up and down the crevasse

between the canes

on the arm of the chair

So unlike her, she was always so full

of her comings and goings;

the men in her life.

I wondered if she'd heard me

until it all tumbled out

and she confessed

*that night after night
she'd been dreaming
about a multi-breasted woman*

*and of a man who clung to her
like a limpet as if seeking solace
from something he couldn't face.*

*She looked exhausted, so I suggested
she see a doctor; offered to go with her.
But it was not what she wanted to hear.*

*She asked for her bag. My pleas for her to stay,
to eat, had no effect.*

She left without saying goodbye.

Childhood Byte

Barmera—the corner shop
with its dead blow-fly
covered window sills,
its air clogged with dust
from chaff bags
of pollard, bran and wheat;
the counter top,
with its stacks of newspaper
and torn squares of
grease-proof paper, where
Lily & I cut, weighed & wrapped
one pound slabs of butter to exchange
for a coupon from the likes of
Mrs Burton or Mrs Kelly
who returned home, put on
aprons & began to cream
the butter & sugar
for Christmas cakes they
lovingly stitched into calico
*to lift the spirits of our
diggers in the trenches.*

Coroner's Court of Western Australia

OUR REF: 68950B

YOUR REF: MK/DB

Dear Ms Hill,

Thank you for your letter
of 26 November, 2003,
regarding your request
for the Coroner's finding
in relation to the death
of Lily May HARROP.

The finding into the death
was issued without
holding an inquest,
therefore, the issues
were not heard
in an open court.

Out of respect for the deceased
and the deceased's family,
access to the file or
the provision of documents
is restricted to family members only.

All evidence and material gathered
for coronial purposes is for the
Coroner's information only
and for no other.

The Coroner is the custodian
of all information

and as such is responsible
for the privacy
and confidentiality
of all deceased persons
falling
under the Coroner's
jurisdiction.

Joshua's Lead

He looks up from deadheading
the roses that sprawl across
the cream picket fence.

*I've got you a contact, he says.
She walks in the park and her name's Ivana.
She'll ring here late afternoon.*

I like this guy. He reminds me of my son
who's trekking in some remote mountain.
God knows where.

It's time he hung up his boots.

She Said Good Morning Once

I can't work out Ivana's accent. *Croatian*, she says,
Don't hold it against me. Her skin is laser-white,
but stained in places the colour of old maps.

We walk to Fraser's, order coffee and I sit back and listen.
A friend of a friend says I'm mad to walk so early;
he reckons the park's full of druggies and drop-outs.

I didn't notice her until she was pointed out.
People called her the Butter Lady
because she survived on sachets of butter.

She said good morning once. I picked up a nuance of
culture in those two words.
It was as if she was not connected, didn't fit, a loner.

I point to Ivana's empty cup.
Good coffee, but I won't.
She continues, *I remember*
the day before her body was found,
I was taking an early walk when the Butter Lady
crossed my path. She was grey and thin and carried
a rag-bag. I sensed that she wanted to speak.

I didn't have time.

Jewelled Blinkers

(Hannah, a café assistant)

*The Butter Lady used to sit
on the bench close to
the coffee drinkers.*

*I asked myself often
what marked her as odd?
Was it the green, woollen gloves
clipped to her belt,
the lacquered parrot earrings,
the tote bag that sagged
empty at her side?*

*No, it was fear. I've seen it
in the eyes of a dingo
smuggled into the city
to be someone's pet.*

*I watched several times
as she scuttled off
towards the parked cars;
peered into their interiors,
her hand cupped like jewelled blinkers.*

Sounds Like “Nutters”

Anne’s eyes were alert
and she wore a hearing aid.

*Nella and I set out early,
very early.*

*a set of warm ups,
then we headed off across the lawn
behind the war memorial,
along the escarpment
down past the back
of the brewery.*

*And then
a streak of silver
pierced a tree-trunk.*

*It happened
again and again
until*

*a figure stepped out
a knife twirling in his hand.*

*Don’t be scared, I’m not going to hurt you, he said,
in a voice as thin as tissue.*

Nella whispered, Stay still and stare him out.

I did what I was told. Focussed my gaze. Each breath an effort.

He turned away,

placed his knife in a sheath.

Said something that sounded like “nutters”.

And you still walk?

It’s addictive. Each day offers something different

if you open your eyes.

But walk with someone. It’s safer that way.

Offerings

Gosper first glimpsed Lily
(or so he said) close to the tennis courts
sitting on a red, wrought-iron bench;
wearin' a king-sized-gold-hibiscus
tucked behind her ear; as if she were Lady Muck
takin' in the early morning sun.

I picture Lily picking mauve ageratums
at the edge of a road in Darjeeling;

lingering over hot-house blooms
at the railway station in Cologne;

smelling the violets that Gustav
grew for Ada.

She was glued to that bench I reck'n.

He offers me a sandwich from a sweaty plastic bag.
They're not bad. Got 'em at the Salvos this morning.

She didn't eat much. Dunno what kept her . . .

The hiss of a bus's air brakes gives us a moment's grace.
Gosper wipes his nose with the back of his hand,
eats his last sandwich.

Yeah, I'll give you more info if you pay me.

Night Ladling

(Rona: a soup kitchen volunteer)

*Oh yes, the Butter Lady.
She'd line up and wait
until everyone was served
then present a cracked*

*willow-patterned mug
for hot water. One night
I was rostered
with Ben—a psych student—
who moved between*

*the clients and
the urns as if it
was his calling.*

*When he noticed
the Butter Lady
hanging back
talking gibberish
he left me to cope
while he stepped out
of the van to calm her.*

*I have to hand it to Ben,
he coaxed her to accept
a mug of ham & pea soup—
something I'd never managed to do.*

Schizophrenia, he said.

Eyes on the Camera

The first time I notice him it is the day
after the Queen's birthday
and he is sitting in a Holden
behind the restaurant
that overlooks the Swan.

Morning, I say offering my hand.

He lifts his freckled hands from his steering wheel,
steps out and takes my hand. *Cormac's the name, Cormac Carew.*

*Good to meet you Cormac. Look, I'll come straight to the point
I wonder if you could tell me anything about an old friend of mine
known around here as the Butter Lady.*

Cormac's eyes light on my camera as I point to the stretch of lawn
shaded by English trees, by the statue of Queen Victoria.

He moves closer; points to my camera.

What are you, a photographer or something?

Will I be on film?

I wonder what this man/child, might have to say
that anyone could believe.

Depends on how well you knew her.

Oh, I remember her, he says. Gosper introduced us.

A man doesn't forget a smile like that.

Was there any thing special about her? Anything different?

*Miss, it's as if she were here sitting between us;
her legs tucked under her skirt with that green hat
perched on the side of her head;*

*it's a kind of miracle that it stayed there, like the houses,
my brother used to draw that grew sideways out of hills.*

Cormac fumbles in the pocket of his white shorts;
hands me a page of folded newsprint.
Please read it Miss; that is if you care to.

I read aloud the underlined words:

**Male travel companion wanted
Looks not important. Must have
sense of humour; good personality.
Destination negotiable. Only
Pisces need apply. VMB 240238.**

That's me. I'm off.

Cormac's wide grin sets me wondering how he keeps
his clothes so white. Probably sleeps in them. Poor bugger.

Be gone for long? I ask.

No, you can count on me Miss.

Do you want a photograph now?

Close to Her Chest

***(Conversation with a case-worker
at a women's refuge)***

She was shy.

Shy as a barn owl;

only came in when it was bitter,

or too wet to sleep out.

She used to sit in the rattan chair

by the children's book shelf;

her old, willow-patterned mug

close to her chest.

In art-therapy, when asked:

How do you see yourself?

She made, as I recall,

one and a half

clay spheres—oranges perhaps.

Can't remember what she said

they meant. There're so many women,

we just don't have time

to do anything worthwhile.

That Fine Line

Back at the Amber Rose,
I use scented handwash
to launder my undies
then drape them over
the towel rack.

I imagine Lily in a dimly-lit toilet,
laundering her things
in a timed-burst of water
then placing them in a plastic bag.

I can't imagine anyone
in their right mind
would choose
to live like that.

Voices from the Shower

(Drop-In centre)

*She came in most days;
showered often and for longer than most.*

*I used to bang on the door
in case she'd slipped.*

Once she was talking as if to someone else.

Leave me alone. Please—

When I ticked her off about the length of her showers,

She said she had to clean the recess

with soap and a nail brush

before and after her shower.

That was a pretty sane move, I thought.

Crazy Woman

I follow a lead to speak to the manager
of Zamia Café in Kings Park.

Pete's his name and his rangy body
tricks me into thinking

he's an A type personality.

He strolls out from behind the counter
ready to sit down with a coffee.

I broach the subject of the Butter Lady.

His eyes roll. *Tell me about it*, he says.

*There were more helicopters
than there were police.*

Didn't let up all day.

Didn't find the killer.

You knew of her? I ask.

No, but one of the cyclists did.

(ii)

Stan is stuffed into lime-green lycra.

He commandeers a table,

takes off his helmet and gloves,

I queue for the coffee.

Pete says you want info about that

crazy woman.

I wince.

She was a friend.

He continues, *She used to stand in the middle
of the cycle-path looking over her shoulder
like someone was out to get her.*

She tried to get me to stop.

Probably wanting money. What else?

She may have needed help, I snap.

She was a nut case.

A mobile rings—*Yeah, mate, be there.*

He picks up his helmet and gloves. *Gotta go.*

He clacks off,

the word *LIQUID-GAS*

blazoned across his backside.

Leaves me thinking,

what a waste of space.

It's Time

The Docker's footy fans roar.
I pray for Olive to pick up her phone
before the next goal is kicked.

Hello, a male voice says.
Is Olive Harrop there, please? I ask.

Another goal.

Can you speak up?

May I speak to Olive Harrop, please?
She doesn't live here anymore.
Did she leave a forwarding number?

They don't have one where's she gone.

An address?

Sorry, she's no longer with us.
Are you sure?
I'm living in her flat, lady.

Spinning

Olive Dead. My past eroding
before I've realised its worth.

Lily spinning around
in Olive's sequined dress,
in her Hollywood Maxwell bra
stuffed with cotton-wool;

and the times we lay on Olive's bed
giggling over her *True Romance* magazines;

and later lifting the carved-cedar lid of her glory-box,
for a lucky-last-look at her china salt and pepper shakers
shaped like miniature cabbages;

her stiff, unwashed Irish linen tea-towels,
her hand-embroidered duchess set,
its picot-patterned crocheted edge
perfect.

And we laughed at Olive's dreams.

Check-Out Chick

The girl with the studs in her eyebrows
packs my olives and hommus with an
efficiency that gives me hope.

I pay, then show her
the artist's impression of Lily.

Do you remember this woman? I ask.

The girl, I see her name is Zan, takes the cutting
and holds it in both hands. *Yes, I remember her.*
She used to come here regularly.

It's not a good likeness, but it's her.

She always bought a sachet of butter,
then she'd stash it away in a king-sized bag.

Nice lady. Tall, very thin and didn't say much. Did you know her?

Yes, she was a friend.

The Scent of Magnolia

In Kings Park,
not far from the statue
of the blind man and his dog
there's a magnolia tree.

As I counted the blossoms today,
I wondered if you had stood
in this place,

breathing the scent
laced with Lily Harrop at eighteen,
her skin drenched in Helena Rubinstein's

White Magnolia perfume—
hoping to attract more than the odd bee.

Under the Fig

(Fraser Ave, Kings Park)

Fathers' Day and it's raining.
Cormac waves me to join him
under a Moreton Bay fig.
There's nowhere to hide.

Lot of bunkum

this Fathers' Day racket.

You wouldn't want to know my old man.

Anyhow, he hung 'imself. Good riddance.

Is your mother alive? I ask.

Yeah, but they won't let me visit.

Reckon I upset her.

Gosper says I've got rights and I should use 'em.

*But he doesn't know everything and I don't fancy
every Tom, Dick and Harry knowing my business.*

Anyhow there're things that go on in this park;

odd things I've come across by accident.

One night under the pines

I saw them

jigging around in the nick;

their tits

useless as old football bladders.

I heard moans and saw stars

scratched into the ground;

circles of stones.

Once I found a bunch of bird feathers,

*tied up with string, and a chook-bone
left on a stump.
Not my kettle of fish, but each to his own I say.*

*Gosper's got a kid. It'd be good to be a dad
taking your kid on picnics in the park.
Wouldn't worry about a few spots of rain.*

Beside the Wishing Well

Gosper is here to talk to me again;
He reeks of urine, his breath is foul;
I battle to feel compassion for this
cut-out of a man, humped in front of me.

*There's something I want to tell you,
and I want you to keep it to yourself.*
My throat knots, so I nod.
He continues, *You know why I'm tired?*

It could be the weather; it affects sleep patterns
I say, in an effort to temper the story to come.

*No, it's that silly bitch. I haven't slept
since she forced me to put her straight
about her high-falootin' feminist ideas.
I didn't mean to hurt her, just wanted
to put the breeze up her, but then I lost it.*

No one calls me a loser and takes their next breath.

I pick up my bag.
His fear, coupled with mine,
fouls the air.

Culling Fear

Along the footpath
beside Kings Park Road;
the thrum of traffic
acts like white noise;
blocks out the thump
of my accelerated
heart beat.

a waif-like girl
in school uniform
leans against the bus stop,
blowing smoke rings
like my father used to do.

I breathe in,
place the tip of my tongue
on the fleshy part of the palate
behind the teeth.

Somewhere a police siren howls,
and I think of Lily
and wonder how she handled
her fears.

A Wise Choice

Back at the *Amber Rose*,
I sip a Margaret River white,
and try to block out Gosper's words:

No one calls me a loser and takes their next breath.

I tell myself that the Lily I knew wouldn't use
the word loser. Not in a fit.

And pray that Lily's 'high falootin'
feminist ideas unman

his waking thoughts, his dreams;
rob him of sleep
for the rest of his days.

The Gardener

Andrew looks as if he'd rather be
somewhere else.

So you were the one that found Lily's body? I ask.

*I did. Blood everywhere. Flies,
a gash on her head—bruises.
I still have nightmares.*

*I passed the campsite
but never saw anyone using it.
It was set back from the path,
near the tennis court
close to the maintenance shed.*

*It was like a bush-cubby ;
neatly swept, gum leaves
scattered about the . . .*

*I can't forget the sound of blowflies
and the stench.*

Restless

Why didn't I try to trace you?

Too tied up with work,
the boys—home—

I thought about it
often enough;
never the right time.

I'm stubborn Lily,
fearful of rejection.
Ridiculous, I know.

You miss out on things that really matter.

I pull my room apart
as I hunt for my nail polish
as an antidote to stress.

Notice for the first time it is made
by *Butter of London*.

A Second Meeting

He waits in the *Amber Rose's* guest lounge; edgy, tired.
Sing out if you need anything, Joshua says reassuringly.

The gardener stands to greet me. His hand is sweaty.
He takes a parcel from his cloth bag
and pushes it towards me.

*Her things were in a neat pile:
a green hat, a large tartan bag and
this book of poems.*

He checks the expression on my face, then continues;
I kept it. Stupid thing to do.

I take the notebook, its hand-made-paper cobbled together
with pearl cotton; ink bleeding into the page.

You have it. I don't want it back.

The Fall

The bus-driver's staff room is empty.

My yellow flyer, requesting info on
the Butter Lady, catches my eye.

Joe ambles in. A shy smile,
a body that enjoys food, a few beers
with mates on Fridays.

He wipes perspiration from his forehead
and looks me in the eye.

So you want to talk about the Bag-Lady?

I nod, take out my note-book.

I told it all at the inquest.

I know, but I can't access it.

Did you know her?

Yes, I was her friend.

He looks at his hands.

Sorry, he says.

*She fell heavily. Hit her head
on the concrete where I dropped her off.*

I yelled, Are you all right, lady?

She got up slowly and took off towards the tennis courts.

I had a bus-load so I had to keep going. But I didn't feel easy about it.

When the cops asked for witnesses I told them what I'd seen.

*I reckon that fall might have been enough myself. She wasn't young
and there was nothing of her to speak of.*

It was a nasty fall.

Are you all right, lady?

Counting Losses

I ring home,
and my partner
isn't there.

I ring again,
no luck.

I want to tell him
I miss him,
that I'm coming home.

Wall of Women

(Pioneer Women's Memorial, Kings Park)

On the rise of
the slope sculpted
female bodies enliven
a curved wall,
depict women's contribution
to the state. A closer look reveals
gouged genitalia, navels and
nipples.

The plaque says
Yorkas Nyinning:
Women's Resting Place.
Somewhere a kookaburra
gargles readying itself
to laugh.

Unravelling

(Pioneer Women's Memorial, Kings Park)

This water garden, I discover,
celebrates a century of
West Australian women's
suffrage. I see Lily
take this path, listen to school-kids
chat about motor-bike frogs;
their red faces testament
to
the heat of the day.

I see her kick off her shoes
stretch out on the lawn to watch
the sun anoint the Dobell-like
bronze figure that stands in the lake,
a child on her hip;

Suddenly jets of water craze the air,
glisten the woman's thick-limbed body—
then fall
to the surface like beads unravelling.

Rallentando

(Lily's Campsite, Kings Park)

A late afternoon breeze
shifts the shadows of trees,
filters light
between leaves.

My time here
is coming to an end.

A raven tilts its head,
grips me with its yellow gaze.

Curled, dry leaves skitter along the path
that separates Lily's camp from the club.

End-of-week-players move; their limbs in sync
with the slow thwack of ball against string.

My head, adrift in the click-clicking of cicadas,
nets an image of glass marbles at kinetic play
in some strange barrel of fortune.

Section Three

Book of Poems

(In Trouble)

He tried to hit me. I slid on Mum's lino,
her green polished lino, her green polished pitted lino.
I slid in arcs in wincey pants on Mum's lino,
in thick wincey pants with French seams.
Dad missed, and Mum wiped her hands on
her apron
and Olive was pulling faces at me
through the window
and I wanted to be in the orchard.
Dad slammed the door. Mum yelled, *Get your shoes off,
they're your last dry pair.* And
I didn't care and the lid
on the kettle kept jiggling. *Your last dry pair, I said.
Put them on the hearth and tell Patsy to go home.*

I threw my shoes, the last dry pair— straight into the oven,
and hoped the toes would curl up.

Book of Poems
(Barmera WWII)

(i)

Frogs & spiders hung
out in the air-raid shelter
ready for attack.

(ii)

Bandages, safety
pins and licked barley sugars
filled our first-aid kits.

(iii)

Masking tape criss-crossed
windows during black-outs. We
ate by candle-light.

(iv)

We giggled so much
in church we left damp patches
on the polished pews.

(v)

On Saturdays we
Silvoed Mum's cutlery set,
Brassoed carpet ends.

(vi)

Comics were centre-folds
of our music books, rapped
knuckles were the pay-off.

Book of Poems

(Untitled)

I'm from the freedom of the orchard

the open space

of furrows running with rain;

I'm from the freedom

of swinging in the fig's smooth branches,

pretending I'm a queen.

I'm from the Satsuma—its flesh

dark and firm;

I'm from the sun-glow of orange and mandarin,

the bitter sweet of lemon.

I'm a spitting-pip-loquat-girl,

a rich-sucking-plum-girl—

I'm a buried in my past girl

wanting to break out.

Book of Poems

(Exposed)

A child came from
our first love-making;

that afternoon when rain
stopped the picking of fruit.

You waited until the last
of the pickers had left;

Do you remember
the tang of citrus in the air;

the cold touch of earth
against naked skin;

my father's scythe,
its steel blade whet-stoned
to perfection; ready for slashing?

Book of Poems

(Cyprus: Between Paphos and Limassol)

The driver waits in his cab,
I wade in sea-water close to the rock where, legend
has it, a Goddess was born.

I imagine her scalloped shell, the waves,
the wings of the zephyr,
the flower-embroidered cloak
offered by the seasons;
the orange-groved shore;

the genius in Botticelli's brush-strokes,
his striving to perfect her naked body—
innocent without shame.

Book of Poems
(a room of my own)

a room of my own
a white hospital room
a grey metal box with needles that etch upside-down
smiles on dials marked amperage and current

i walk through the hospital door
the icy grass on the soles of my feet
until a boy stops his van
asks what's wrong

takes me to his friends
in my hospital gown

until the police come
to take me back
to a room of my own
a white hospital room

Book of Poems
(Pioneer Women's Memorial, Kings Park)

You stand patient
cradling your child.

Ducks circle your feet,
muddy the water.

Who held my baby?

Book of Poems

(My Girl)

I'd stitch a red cape
from the strongest
fabric. I'd sequin fairy-wings
and stars for your pocket.
I'd prepare you for the forest.

Book of Poems
(Where the Night Heron Fishes)

In moonlight I walk
the escarpment's edge.

Below the river laps
at the feet of the brewery,
a sacred site that Manfred
spoke about before he died,

before the night-air
punctured his lungs,
rendered him breathless.

Tonight he walks
beside me, barefoot
as his ancestors did;

points out the Wagyl's scales
as they flash across the river
in the shadows of the brewery
where the night-heron fishes.

Book of Poems
(Sounds of Women)

Wind ferries their laughter
 in mazurka rhythms
 across the river.

Book of Poems
(Untitled: Kings Park 2001)

I shallow out
the earth,
lay carpets of
gum leaves;

choose places for
my bag, my beret,
my *Book of Poems*;

then safe from eyes that pry,
I peel back the cover
from my sachet of butter;

feel its viscous warmth
in the pit of my throat.

Note:

The opening poem *Butter Lady's Final Journey* (11) was adapted from news reports in *The West Australian*, 2002. All names have been changed, including that of the journalist.

**AN EXPLORATION OF GENERIC HYBRIDITY:
AN EXEGESIS**

Introduction

Lacking a home, she sought one in the limitless country of writing which knows no borders which welcomes all exiles. (Bray 2)

In November 2001 a woman's body was discovered at a campsite in Kings Park in Perth. At the time it was presumed that she had been murdered. The press reported that the woman had lived on the streets and was known as the Butter Lady, because she regularly purchased sachets of butter at a supermarket in the centre of Perth. An identikit photo and description of her clothes in the newspaper alerted me to the fact that on my morning walks in the park, I had seen her either sitting on a garden seat next to the tennis courts or walking near me on the path that runs adjacent to Kings Park Road.

When the Butter Lady's death was reported, I was nearing the completion of a writing project. Deeply affected by this woman's death, I knew instinctively that she would be a central figure of my work in the future. Forty years prior to the Butter Lady's death, I had run away from a mental institution in my gown and slippers and had been picked up by a young man near where the Butter Lady was found dead; an indelible memory that resurfaced at the time of the reporting of the Butter Lady's death.

I vowed to make visible the contours of her life, to bring her out of silence, to create an identity and context for this unknown subject. The desire to represent this woman then, was at the heart of my project. The ultimate form of the creative component—a verse novel with elements of a silhouette biography which represents her through details of her context, and through the voices of an old friend and multiple other focalisers—developed as the result of a sequence of 'conversations' with theory and inquiries into a range of generic strategies for representing the life of another.

The initial research focussed on exploring the history and evolution of the genre of biography, with an emphasis on its postmodern forms; an essential starting point for any understanding of the implications of, and possible strategies for,

writing the life of a real subject. Chapter One of this exegesis thus provides an overview of critical reading on the generic strategies of biography, as a creative work, *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*.

Research revealed that the genre of biography in its contemporary manifestations offered a range of possibilities for representing the Butter Lady and my creative relationship to her. Silhouette biography, a concept that originated with Leonard Cassuto's attempt to define a form of biography reliant on contextual detail to 'flesh out' a scantily recorded life, emerged from this initial research as offering useful generic strategies for the representation of the little known Butter Lady. This emphasis on the use of contextual detail became central to the creative work. The work of feminist writers and theorists of biography—from Virginia Woolf to Drusilla Modjeska— helped to address some of the problems of representing the life of a scarcely known woman. Feminist works also assisted in the problem of how to represent my own investment in my chosen subject and the ways in which biographer and subject inevitably intersect. This focus is exemplified in the research of Bogusia Temple and Liz Stanley, both of whom articulate the links between their own life experience and that of their subject. Temple describes her research as "autobiographical in nature" and points out that Liz Stanley has used the term "intellectual auto/biography" to describe how researchers can use their life experiences (Temple 23-4). In the text titled *The Auto/biographical I*, Stanley says, "Doing biography changes how you think about yourself, and this in turn changes how you understand the subject; and both impact more widely on how the auto/biographer sees and analyses other social persons, events and processes" (Stanley 159).

As my research progressed it became clear that a key element in this particular life and one that the creative work would have to take into account was the marginal status of the subject as homeless, and more specifically as a 'homeless woman'. Accordingly the research developed to take in a range of theorists who had explored issues such as the discursive construction of 'the homeless' and the gendering of space. The work of Michel Foucault, Martina Löw, bell hooks and Susan Fraiman offered a framework within which to develop an understanding of

this marginalised position from a range of perspectives. Chapter Two, therefore, offers a discussion of their work and its implications for my choice of generic strategies to represent this particular life.

The final stage of the research explores the possibilities offered by hybridity of genre; the combination of a range of generic strategies to facilitate the representation of a figure rendered invisible by the discursive construction of the 'homeless woman' as a non-subject, or as an object. New hybrid generic forms, such as fictionalised biography and the verse novel, offer representational strategies which combine the strengths of narrative—the construction of character, the representation of an 'invested' narrative voice, and the representations of a variety of perspectives on the subject by a number of focalisers—with the strengths of verse such as the metaphorical possibilities of language and the use of rhythm.

Chapter Three, *Representing an 'Unrepresentable' Life* therefore opens with an exploration of the benefits of generic hybridity for this project and reviews contemporary theorists' explorations of the strategies at work in such texts. It also performs close readings of three key texts chosen because their generic hybridity worked to solve a range of representational difficulties that were extremely pertinent to my own project. Michael Ondaatje's, *Coming Through Slaughter* (Bloomsbury 1976) offers a fragmented, 'syncopated' quasi-fictional representation of the life of the real cornet player Buddy Bolden, and relies heavily on contextual details to construct a silhouette of this legendary figure. *The Hanging of Jean Lee* by Jordie Albiston (Black Pepper 1998), arguably a kind of silhouette biography in the form of a verse novel, offers a range of alternative strategies of representation emphasising the poetic, for example, the use of metaphor and slant rhyme. Finally Dorothy Porter's *El Dorado* (Picador 2007) another verse novel, models complex narrative strategies relating to plot and point of view. All three texts exemplify generic strategies that might facilitate the representation of a little-documented, marginalised life. The texts draw on multi-focalisation, as theorised by Gérard Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, a device that brings authenticity to such a representation. This device, I argue, provides an appropriate solution to the challenge of conveying the complexity of contemporary fragmented subjectivities.

The close readings also demonstrate how the implementation of poetic devices, such as metaphor, imagery, line breaks, metre, rhythmic patterns and stanza formations, have the capacity to draw attention to themselves by their “artificiality” and by “the imagination required to decode” their meaning (O’Sullivan 182).

In addition to my theoretical reading, textual analysis of the above texts and my examination of the sparse documented evidence, I also spoke with people from shelters, the police and regular walkers in Kings Park in order to map out a kaleidoscopic portrait of my marginalised subject. The concluding chapter reflects on the strategies with which I attempted to address the challenges that arose during the process of writing my own verse novel and the understandings and knowledge that I gained from my attempt to represent and make visible a marginalised individual.

Chapter One

REPRESENTING A LIFE: BIOGRAPHY AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONS

Any project which undertakes to write a subject's life needs to frame that attempt in the context of a clear understanding of the implications of the genre of biography, that is to say, the ways in which its generic strategies function. Contemporary discussions of the genre, which usually take as their starting point James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, suggest that biography, as it developed after Boswell, comes, in its hegemonic form, to be a "totalizing" (Lambert 305) mode that is seen in the contemporary context as inadequate to current understandings of subjectivity. Accordingly, the genre of biography has been reworked in ways that take into account postmodern ideas of the subject. My initial research provided me with an overview of the genre, its history and evolution. This enabled me to develop my project of writing the life of the Butter Lady with an awareness of the implications of doing so in a contemporary context. Specifically, the increasing self-reflexivity of those working with the genre accorded well with my own sense of identification with, and investment in, the Butter Lady's experience.

Traditional biographical practices have been informed by the assumptions underpinning Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). In the introduction to his two-volume biography, Boswell declares that after scrupulous observation and painstaking research he has given his readers the opportunity to "live o'er each scene" with him (Boswell 14). The implication of this phrase is that Boswell felt he had captured the essence of his deceased friend in a comprehensive, precise, portrait-like manner. Boswell's assumptions about language, the human subject and the representation of the life of another, derive from his Enlightenment context. His work is based on a belief in the capacity of language to transcribe both the outside world and the internal world of ideas. Boswell was confident of his capacity to record the subject's life accurately:

Wherever narrative is necessary to explain, connect and supply, I furnish it to the best of my abilities; but in the chronological series of Johnson's life which I trace as distinctly as I can, year by year, I produce, wherever it is in my power, his own minutes, letters, or conversation, being convinced that this mode is more lively, and will make my readers better acquainted with him than even most of those who actually knew him but could only know him only partially; whereas there is here an accumulation of intelligence from various points; by which his character is more fully understood and illustrated. (Boswell 14)

In other words, Boswell interweaves the fragments of what Johnson "privately wrote, and said and thought" with the "most important events" of his life in their order (14), exploring, connecting and supplying that which was not self-evident, but which was assumed to be implicit in the material.

While Boswell downplayed the role of a narrative as a kind of occasional adjustment to the accumulation of intelligence about Johnson, Carole Lambert points out that a "biographical metanarrative" is always at work in the use of the "quasi-omniscient voice of the biographer relating the story of another's life" and that the "coherent, unified voice" of the biographer "claiming to present the truth about a life" has much in common with the narrative style of the realistic novel (Lambert 305). Contemporary theorists see the origins of the genre of biography as the product of an historical context in which it was assumed that the life of another could accurately be represented by an accretion of facts. Later biographers continued to accept Boswell's assumptions, even while developing them in response to a new historical context. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell the novelist, in her mid-Victorian biography of Charlotte Bronte, based her work, like Boswell, on the premise that she could accurately convey the essence of her subject by amassing factual information about her life.

Gaskell's biography does, however, reflect a new concern with the ethics of representing the life of another; a concern articulated in 1813 by James Stanfield in his *Essay in the Study and Composition of Biography* in which he argued for "sympathetic emotion", "impartiality" and "moral illustration" and for censoring

particulars that “do not reflect great honour on the deceased” (Stanfield 21,27,14). For this reason, Gaskell safeguarded Bronte’s reputation by omitting all reference to the passionate love letters she wrote to a married man (Lee 59). This suggests that representing the subject’s reputation as exemplary and moral was an important ideological function of the genre in the Victorian period; a version of the realist novel’s concern with representing morality in its construction of exemplary subjects. The thrust of Gaskell’s biography however, remains that of Boswell’s project; to write an objective, albeit censored, account of an individual whose life can be made available to the reader by presenting facts.

Thomas Carlyle, while articulating an emerging cultural anxiety about the difficulty of capturing an authentic self, believed that the biographer could attain a close ‘approximation’ of the subject. His portrayals include *The Life and Letters of Oliver Cromwell* (1845), *The Life of John Stirling* (1851), *Frederick the Great of Prussia* (1858-65) and of his father, in *Reminiscences* (1881). Like Boswell he held that it was possible and desirable to accurately represent a subject, and was committed to searching for the authentic self that he believed existed apart from culture and history. However, it was important to Carlyle in his mid-nineteenth century context, to acknowledge the difficulty implicit in such a project: “Carlyle’s works frequently dramatize[d] the struggle of a narrator attempting to extract the essential self of a protagonist from mere shreds of biographical evidence . . . ” (qtd. in Vanden Bossche 119).

For Hermione Lee, biography in the Boswell tradition is rather like an autopsy, relying as it does on the accurate and objective analysis of empirical detail. The metaphor of autopsy, she asserts, links biography to a “process of posthumous scrutiny” applied to a helpless subject from which life has retreated. The process has the potential to “change our posthumous view” of the subject. Its limitations are that an autopsy cannot comment with any validity on such intangible aspects of the person as “intelligence”, “emotions” or “thoughts” (Lee 2).

As biography moved into the twentieth century it was these ‘intangible’ elements that came to the fore, as understandings of the ‘self’ and ‘subject’ were destabilised by the emergence of psychoanalytic theory with its emphasis on non-

factual aspects of the 'self'. New conceptions of consciousness and subjectivity challenged writers to discover innovative responses to a new definition of the individual as a less stable, more fragmented subject.

Lytton Strachey, representing this conceptual and attitudinal shift toward the subject, derived from the newly translated and influential work of Sigmund Freud with its emphasis on “. . . following clues, building up a pattern of behaviour, interpreting a whole personality through attending to significant details, deciding what was relevant, finding the hidden cause of adult behaviour in childhood” (Lee 84), but insisted that it was never possible to transcribe a life in its entirety because the process of defining key events always implied a particular point of view. Strachey acknowledged that any research into a life always entailed a process of selection and combination of elements and that therefore no life can be represented in its entirety and devoid of point of view. Unlike Boswell's commitment to recording the conversations and sayings of his subject as accurately as possible, Strachey, in *Eminent Victorians*, set out to reject and expose “Victorian heaviness, solemnity, and respect by light, ironic, irreverent methods” (qtd. in Lee 76).

This 'new biography' was increasingly understood to be not just research into facts, but a construction. While Strachey still wrote about the lives of real subjects, Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, foregrounds in her fictional portrayals modernist assumptions with respect to the perspectival nature of representation, defamiliarising in the process the very idea of a single truth about the subject. In *Orlando*, for example, Woolf subverts biographical conventions through fictional parody. Her teasing, private memoir of Vita Sackville-West, a friend and bisexual lover, demonstrates that women's lives required new forms of writing (Lee 84). Woolf's modernist aesthetic, like Picasso's Cubism, emphasises that the relationship between knower and known is always relative: what one sees depends on one's own capacity to see and the particular angle/perspectives of observation. Woolf insists that the process of observation is complex and always partial. At the time, her approach to biographical methodology had less of an impact than Strachey's, but sixty years later feminist biographers cast Woolf in the role of “the twentieth

century foundational Modernist theorist of biography” (Walter 322). Leon Edel, for example, developed her insights in his own work, arguing that one became an artist the moment one differentiated between facts and justified the particular choice of material. “Biography is a noble art and adventurous art, as noble as the making of painted portraits, poems, statues” . . . “a biographer fashions a man or a woman out of documents, words” . . . and if possible constructs a life, as did Virginia Woolf, from six cardboard boxes of “tailor’s bills, love letters and old picture post-cards . . . by using such facts as she possessed and bridging the silences with the poetry of her observing and constructing imagination” (Edel 19).

Like other modernist biographers, Leon Edel wrestled with the difficulty of the existence of the unconscious for the project of writing another’s life, and suggested that the only experience one can even partially know is one’s own. Edel sets down four principles for the biographer. The first is that a biographer must not only learn about her/his subject’s dreams, their thinking and predilections, but must also develop knowledge of himself/herself. His second principle is related to the biographer’s level of identification with her/his subject. The good biographer, he argues, has to be involved with the subject, but be able to have “a strong grip on the biographical self” in order to distance himself/herself or disengage from the subject in order to be what Edel names, “a participant observer” (Edel 29). His third principle for the biographer is the ability to study and analyse his/her materials to find the “true self of the underside of the given tapestry” (30). In other words, the biographer must observe their subject’s “ways of wooing the world or disdaining it” in order to discover the subject’s “private self concept” (30). He suggests that this is at the heart of biography. His fourth principle concerns form and structure. Edel argued that a biographer must search for the ideal form in which to express an individual’s life. He acknowledges that the structure of the biography does not have to follow a specific order, but rather can take a cue from the patterns set in the subject’s childhood that are repeated in adulthood moving backwards and forwards through memory. Edel’s reflections and concerns were the forerunner of an extensive oeuvre on the theory and practice of biography, and, in Walter’s view, heralded the commencement of a very different way of conceptualising biography.

However, while Edel's reinterpretation of the biographer's project critiques the empirical model, it still aims to discover a deep and essential self.

Janet Malcolm's detailed deconstruction of biographies of Sylvia Plath typifies a shift away from such essentialist readings of the subject (Walter 326). As Malcolm read Anne Stevenson's biography of Sylvia Plath, *Bitter Fame*, she discovered that "certain vague, dissatisfied thoughts" that she had experienced "while reading other biographies", took on a "sharper focus" (Malcolm 17). When she discovered the circumstances under which it was written—that is Stevenson's open acknowledgement of her inability to write a definitive life of Plath—Malcolm came to see that the different voices of the dead young woman articulated through the journals, letters, poetry, short stories and her novel, *The Bell Jar*, "mocked the whole idea of biographical narrative" (Malcolm 17). These different voices, evidenced in a range of texts, emphasised for Malcolm that Plath was not a single individual self but rather a complex, constructed subject inextricably linked to the contexts through which she moved—a shift to a more postmodern understanding of the nature of subjectivity.

This shift in the understanding of subjectivity as being complex, constructed fluid and a product of context, called for more reflection and dialogue around the issue of the use of narrative in biography and also brought into question the "theoretical schisms" (Walter 326). Biography in the 1980s and early 1990s became the vehicle for the application of feminist analysis within feminist theoretical frameworks. For example, in *Poppy* (1990) Drusilla Modjeska set out to collect the evidence of her mother's life that included years of shock treatment. Where there were gaps in recorded evidence, Modjeska drew on history and memory, extrapolating and inventing. The process of inquiry itself is made explicit in *Poppy* and demonstrates how self-reflexivity on the part of the biographer provides a fuller understanding of both the subject of the biography and the biographer's investment in that subject.

This new emphasis on self-awareness as a key element in biographical practice precipitated debate between those who embraced theory as a move away from the empiricist approach that had framed the traditional biographical project in

terms of a transcription of a definitive life history and those who still subscribed to the traditional model. In this transitory period, the fragmentation into life writing signalled the end of the “modernist project of biography” (Walter 327). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) discuss life writing as a form of life narration in which “subjects write about their own lives predominantly, even if they write about themselves in second or third person, or as a member of a community. And they write simultaneously from externalized and internal points of view, taking themselves as both subject and object or thematizing that distinction” (Smith Watson 5). Conversely, Smith and Watson argue “in biography, scholars of other people’s lives document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject” (5). Both Smith and Watson use Modjeska’s *Poppy* as an illustration of the “blend of autobiographical and biographical” (8). Contemporary praxis, they contend, “increasingly blends them into a hybrid suggesting that life narrative indeed is a moving target and an ever-changing practice without absolute rules” (8). Put simply, there are those who still hold that a life can be reproduced in a totalising way, that is transcribed in full, and those who are beginning to sense that to write ‘a life’ in the context of the early twenty-first century is to assume that the subject is a complex, cultural construction and that a life, in being represented, becomes a construct involving significant personal investment by the biographer. Such a view questions the possibility of a definitive life history even when there is substantial empirical evidence about a subject.

Feminist thought on postmodern auto/biographical practice signals a departure point in this respect. Bogusia Temple, while researching the lives of Polish women who had been expelled from Poland after the Second World War, articulates the need to include in her writing the “influence of the researcher on the research” (Temple 23). As Temple notes, her investigation became in a sense autobiographical. She chose the concept of ‘Polishness’ and then used this perspective, this point of identification, to select and combine information about the lives of Polish women she was interviewing. She acknowledges the links between her research and her personal life outside of academia and notes that these observations are pertinent to the investments of other researchers in their

subjects in the sense that, whether consciously or unconsciously, every biographer selects and combines elements of their subject's life informed by points of identification with the subject. As Denzin argues, "One becomes the stories one tells. The elusive nature of these stories calls the person back to the understanding that this business of a life story is just that, a story that can never be completed. Stories then, like the lives they tell about, are always open-ended, inconclusive and ambiguous, subject to multiple interpretations" (Denzin 81). This definition of biography suited my invested interest in the Butter Lady, as I knew that I could knit together parts of my personal history with hers and that the resulting narrative would, therefore, avoid closure and be open to many different interpretations.

In *Reflections on Subjectivism in Biographical Interviewing: A Process of Change* (1992), Anne-Kathrine Broch-Due found that when using a life-course approach to guide her research, interviewing people about life-histories or writing a biography became a process of expanding her own knowledge, and that this expansion had the potential to challenge the meanings she had made about herself and her own life. She discovered that "aspects of potential recognition or identification in the information" could be experienced as "threatening" or "provocative" for the interviewer especially in the case where the interviewer was working with females (Broch-Due 100).

Liz Stanley applies the term "intellectual autobiography" to the process whereby researchers analyse their own life experiences to illuminate their own position in relation to the subject. As early as 1990, she describes this process as:

. . . an analytic (not just descriptive) concern with the specifics of how we come to understand what we do, by locating acts of understanding in an explication of the grounded contexts these are located in and arise from.
(qtd. in Temple 24)

Research becomes more nuanced when the biographer acknowledges the ways in which their own autobiography informs the biography. This process of knowledge construction is explained by Stanley using the concept of the 'auto/biographical I'. To designate the link between autobiography and biography the term auto/

biography is coined and the 'I' refers to a process of knowledge construction in which the researcher takes an active role. Writers writing about another person are writing about themselves, in the sense that there will be resonances and echoes connecting the life being constructed and the life of the biographer. When I read about the Butter Lady's place of death there was a moment of recognition. As mentioned in the introduction, forty years prior to the Butter Lady's death, I had ran away from a mental institution in my gown and slippers and was picked up by a young man near where the Butter Lady's body was found. This moment of epiphany triggered my determination to construct a life story for this marginalised 'homeless' woman without an official identity.

I began my project then, like others before me, with an awareness of my identification with my chosen subject. Michael Ondaatje, whose *Coming Through Slaughter* openly acknowledges his identification with Buddy Bolden, Jordie Albiston, when interviewed about the verse novel *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, explained that in choosing her subject "The more I read about her, the more it worked: the tussles she'd had with God, and with her biology as a woman . . . she was a single mother . . . there were lots of places I thought I could write from" (Middleton 1).

Moreover, in a case such as that of the central figure in *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, where there was little empirical evidence, the traditional biography, with its emphasis on constructing a complete, 'essential' life, was not an option. Further, as my research revealed, in the postmodern context, a totalising biographical project is assumed to be impossible anyway, no matter how much evidence is available. In a contemporary context even with the most complete empirical evidence, a full and authoritative account of another's life cannot be produced.

This brief discussion of the ways in which the project of 'writing the life' of another has emerged and been transformed throughout its generic history illustrates that to undertake this project in the early twenty-first century required a clear understanding of its implications: the complexity of subjectivity itself, the role of language as constructing rather than reflecting reality, the inevitable investment

by the biographer in the subject, and the revealing of the details of that investment to the reader.

The term 'silhouette biography' was coined by Leonard Cassuto in an article published in 2006 entitled, "The Silhouette and the Secret Self: Theorizing Biography in Our Time." In this article Cassuto outlines an approach to an individual whose past lies mostly out of reach and is not amenable to traditional biography in which the reader's enjoyment, according to Michael Benton, "lies in the prospect both of gaining documentary information, scrupulously researched and plausibly interpreted coupled with the aesthetic pleasure of reading a well-made work of art with a continuous life story and a satisfying closure" (Benton 77). Cassuto describes the approach of silhouette biography as reconstructing a life from what little contextual information has survived the subject, unlike traditional biography that relies on detail, sometimes too heavily (Cassuto 1250). He relates how, as a reader, he likes to read biographies out of chronological order to locate himself in the subject's life story in the part of the life trajectory that presumably captured the interest of the biographer initially. He questions why biographers don't begin there themselves and suggests that the answer lies in methodological issues that American scholars find problematic: that is the relationship between text and context and the problem of differentiating between the two. Cassuto attributes this problem to the lasting influence of Leon Edel. Edel's dominant biographical model relies on psychoanalytical tools to "locate the figure under the carpet", (Cassuto 1250) or the "secret myth" which lies hidden beneath the particular pattern of lumps and bumps of a individual that are visible to the world. Biographers who adhere to Edel's model, and not all do, are governed by the principle that the 'truth' is to be discovered in a subject's early life. Hence their research has its roots in the events of childhood that shape the adult's life. Certain biographical conventions, Cassuto asserts, have become unquestioned, mandatory parts of the biographical story and readers of traditional biography expect that the biographer will carry out intensive, research into the family of origin of the subject. Cassuto argues that Freud's legacy to the biographer goes further than just the necessity of digging into the childhood of the subject. In addition, biographers inherited from Freud the

need to locate what Freud himself named the 'riddle' of character; put simply the subject's secret self. Cassuto also suggests that finding the key event or character trait that shapes the subject's life is still predominantly the biographical paradigm (1251). This quest for the secret self or 'riddle' of the character may take the form of studying the causes taken up by an activist, or research into the creative works of an artist or close observations of the manoeuvres of a politician. As the revelation of the secret self or internal motivation of the subject by psychoanalysis involves making the unconscious conscious, the biographer's comprehension of the subject's secret self makes visible and more coherent the public persona of the individual. But if there is not sufficient documentation of a subject's life in the form of letters, diaries, notes or living family members to interview to reconstruct the secret self with its implication of a single 'self', what alternative does the biographer have?

Silhouette biography, Cassuto contends, holds the key, as its intent is to reconfigure a life that has left little in the form of concrete evidence. As a result, silhouette biography draws on different conventions from those of Edel's traditional biography and, more in keeping with contemporary literary theory, is an approach that necessarily privileges situatedness over psychological conflict. In order to privilege situatedness the biographer must examine the situation of their subject, their social class, the historical period and family dynamics. In other words, they must construct a life within a multi-faceted and contextualised framework (1250). To illustrate this Cassuto considers how two recent biographers approached the work of researching and writing about the life of poet and fiction writer Herman Melville who died in 1891 leaving a meagre amount of archival material. The first of these biographers, Herschel Parker, produced a two-volume biography in 1996 that attempts to interrogate Melville's mind state. Parker's methodology for this project consisted of discovering every detail about Melville, his friends, his acquaintances and his family. Parker's over-enthusiastic approach, Cassuto notes, included attributing the happiest day of Melville's life to the novelist's gift of an advance copy of *Moby Dick* to Nathaniel Hawthorne. No record of this event exists so one might infer that Parker fabricated evidence to construct his narrative log of inside information.

The second biographer cited by Cassuto is Andrew Delbanco, whose text *Herman Melville: His World and Work* was published in 2005. Unlike Parker, Delbanco draws upon the literary legacy left by Melville, his poetry and novels. From these texts Delbanco attempts to learn about the man and his mind. He traces the development of Melville's prodigious imagination as found in his works. He does not delve into Melville's moods using psychoanalytic tools but rather weaves text and context to determine what motivated Melville to write as he did. Delbanco attributes Melville's distinctive, excessive style to the time he spent living in the vibrant, ever changing New York. Whereas Parker pieces together snippets of information to discover Melville's secret self, Delbanco is content to sketch the cultural world and let the secret self, if such a self exists, remain a conundrum. The latter writer's praxis, Cassuto argues, is an example of a silhouette biography (1255).

Cassuto also cites the example of Elizabeth Faue's *Writing the Wrongs: Eva Valesh and the Rise of Labor Journalism* (2002) a silhouette biography that relies on contextual information. Valesh was a public figure in the fields of journalism, public speaking and management who left no enduring public record. Like many subjects of the standard silhouette biography, Valesh's contribution did not receive the accolades that it deserved in her time. Only fragments of her correspondence remain and the few interviews that she gave in her later years were full of inconsistencies. Lacking specific data on Valesh's experience in the workplace in the 1890's Faue centred her research and writing on the careers of women generally in the workforce in those particular fields. The reader, rather than becoming familiar with the particulars of Valesh's life, must engage with a 'slice of the times' to gain insight into her life (1257). The silhouette biography, as demonstrated in the works of Faue and Delbanco, is only one of the many practical possibilities emerging from literary and historical scholarship; a model that brings awareness to the way in which text and context both inform and create each other.

Cassuto's concept of silhouette biography, with its intent to reconfigure a life where little archival evidence existed, therefore offered a strategy for the representation of my subject. I began to make connections between Cassuto's

strategy of utilising context to shape a life, and the work of feminist researchers, Temple and Stanley which highlighted the significance of the autobiographical I, with its link to a process of knowledge construction in which the researcher takes an active role. This connection made me think more deeply about my investment in my subject. What parts of myself was I exploring in the process of constructing the life of another? With this realisation came feelings of trepidation about what my writing process might reveal and at the same time, a heightened sense of responsibility closely associated with the representation of a woman whom I did not want to 'other'. Rather than dismiss her struggle to survive in a threatening context as trivial, I wanted my readers, and if I am truthful, myself, to appreciate the complexities of her life situation and how she negotiated those trials in a manner that tried to avoid encroaching on the well-being of others around her. Unlike the subjects of Faue and Delbanco who had some standing in the times in which they lived, the Butter Lady was marginalised, and her personal details and personal artefacts were not accessible. Although a silhouette of her situatedness and temporal context were within reach, additional knowledge and strategies to increase awareness of the ways in which to avoid stereotyping her state of 'homelessness' required further research.

Chapter Two

REPRESENTING AN UNRECORDED LIFE

Traditional biographers most often focus on substantial subjects thought to be exemplary figures of their time whose lives were deemed to be worthy models of a life well lived. In contrast, the central figure of my research is a homeless woman who lived 'rough' on the streets of Perth and, until her death, slept in a campsite in Kings Park that was not visible to those who used the park for recreational purposes.

Homelessness, as a category, renders individuals, especially women, as invisible, voiceless stereotypes, non-entities without dignity or personal history. Homeless women are consistently represented as insane 'bag ladies' or as living rough because they have been poor housekeepers and mothers. These categorisations construct a marginalised individual as abject and alienated from family, friends and society in general. The Butter Lady's marginalised status and categorisation as a homeless bag lady led to my research focus on the ways in which homelessness is represented in contemporary culture. An understanding of the discourse of homelessness has implications for my attempt to bring the Butter Lady out of silence.

In his analysis of the power of discourse to 'other' individuals, Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* points out that "[The] process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like, and of a re-description of what we ourselves are like" (Rorty xvi). This has strong parallels with Liz Stanley's and Bogusia Temple's notions of the auto/biographical I, discussed in Chapter One, that highlight the importance of self-reflexivity regarding the links between the researcher's own life experience and that of their chosen subject. Rorty is emphatic that the responsibility of this mammoth task lies with "genres such as ethnography, the journalist's reports, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially, the novel" (Rorty xvi). The responsibility for those writing about the homeless is to remember

that inherent in their narratives is the potential to “affect perceptions and treatment of those being represented” (Allen 138).

John Allen’s work on the discursive construction of the homeless was helpful in this regard allowing me to understand how such a designation might ‘other’ the Butter Lady culturally. Allen makes the suggestion, based on Mark Pittenger’s research into the historical development of the category ‘underclass’ in America, that the present era resembles, “the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in its interest in and construction of the underclass/the homeless as a distinct and potentially threatening class of people” (138). In the construction of the homeless as ‘other’, earlier perceptions and representations inform present day responses. Allen comments that between 1940 and 1980, the fairly productive period during and after World War II, the discourse of homelessness in America saw the construction of homeless people dominated by the image of the down and out single alcoholic. After 1980, with unemployment resulting in lower wages and a deficit of affordable housing, homelessness became a visible problem. Allen links this to a trend to take people out of institutions and to a reduction in federal assistance (139). The term ‘homeless’ to describe this group who now consisted of the mentally ill, and the unemployable, living visibly on the streets or moved in and out of shelters, became a relatively “stable discursive construct” (Allen 139). This visibility of the condition of homelessness resulted in a range of cultural productions representing this phenomenon. Textual images of unclean, unkempt people living on the streets proliferated, contributing to the stereotyping of the state of homelessness and to the perpetuation of the myth of the difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’.

Allen analyses the discursive process of either romanticising or objectifying the homeless in a discussion of two books that, in his view, exemplify the “historical predilection” to represent these alternative and in the process actively discourage other forms such as “testimony” (Allen 140). The first of these, entitled *Travels with Lizbeth: Three Years on the Road and on the Streets*, was written by Lars Eighner who took to the road with his dog and survived on the streets. This book is situated in the tradition of the “romantic, adventurous hobo” and is related in a fairly

optimistic, carefree tone (140). As Allen argues, this representation “minimizes the plight of homelessness” and also “minimizes any negative thoughts or feelings associated with the socio-economic condition” (141).

In contrast, Allen argues, *My Life on the Streets: Memoirs of a Faceless Man* by Joe Harmless depicts in every chapter sordid aspects of every sordid aspect of living on the streets. The reader is confronted by the central figure’s mistreatment by those who are meant to support him, so that the narrative ultimately lacks verisimilitude as the “constant abuse, humiliation, and discrimination defy logic and credibility” (145). The text’s attempt to construct a testimony of a mentally ill person living on the streets fails to deliver an image that would increase the reader’s sensitivity to the author’s pain and humiliation. Rather it “reinforces the image of the disaffiliated, mentally ill victim . . .” (144). In an effort to avoid representing the Butter Lady as a permanently mentally ill victim, I actively sought a way in which to give a dead woman a voice. Resisting the stereotyping of the mentally ill, I fashioned for Lily a powerful position through her written language. I created Lily’s *Book of Poems* to resist the image of an uneducated, hopeless mother. Allen values texts that resist the traditional discourse of homelessness, and unlike *My Life on the Streets*, offer an alternative to the depiction of abjection.

One such text is, according to Allen, Deborah Pugh and Jeanie Tietjen’s *I have Arrived Before My Words: Autobiographical Writings of Homeless Women*, which has at its centre the stories of five homeless women who worked with the editors to bring their life narratives to the reading public. These stories represent the state of being homeless as not necessarily permanent, and in many cases the subjects of the text only experienced ‘homelessness’ as a temporary episode in their lives. While each essay tells an individual’s story and as such they may not represent the “homeless as a group”, their significance for Allen is that they do not trivialise the struggle of being poor, or of being without stable housing (Allen 146).

As an exemplar of contemporary testimony, Allen analyses the essay written by Angie, one of the five women. Her essay entitled “Creativity Has Got to Find an Expressive Channel Somehow”, shows that stories from this genre “can produce positive cultural work” (147). The writing of her story provides a creative outlet and

enables her to be a part of a social group, and as Abigail Bray might contend as she did in relation to the motivation behind H elen  Cixous' extensive oeuvre, she sought a home "in the limitless country of writing . . ." (Bray 2). Angie's account is told in an honest, realistic and restrained tone informing the reader of her struggles and of her imperfections without subjugating her dynamic persona, her strength, and her resilience (Allen 147). In this way she creates solidarity with her reader by portraying a condition that may not have been experienced by many. Her portrayal of herself as a non-victim resists the discursive construction of the street person or "bag lady as being representative of all homeless people" (147). Unlike the representations of homelessness as a form of destitution, Angie's depiction deconstructs the socially constructed stereotype of the permanent state of victimhood (149).

Allen's work shows the value of the cultural work carried out by such texts. For example, Angie's testament does not diminish her pain and struggle. It positions the reader to feel empathy, compassion and an appreciation of her resourcefulness and resilience. Testimony then, as a literary genre, creates the potential to understand the complexities of being homeless through the voices of the homeless. According to Rorty, analysis of this type of ideological discourse, gained through an awareness of the stereotypes, can reduce the gap between "the homeless (as 'them') and the rest of society ('us'). As he sees it:

Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalize people different from ourselves by thinking, "They do not feel it as we would," or "There must always be suffering, so why not let them suffer?" (Rorty xvi)

The "liminal nature of homelessness", reflects Allen, is evocative because it is a situation that is not "conventional" but is not so "foreign" as to be unfathomable. To read about it provides an insight into the experience of homelessness and may meet a desire by some to "read and write texts" that speak for groups such as the homeless (5). My own reading of Rorty and Allen's work

prompted a rethinking of how best to avoid romanticising or othering the central figure in *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*. Having struggled with mental illness for a short time and then lived with the stigma for many years, I was keen to write about the Butter Lady with awareness and sensitivity.

Allen's work on the state of homelessness raised further questions about the strategies required to represent a homeless figure occupying a liminal space. My situated knowledge of Kings Park, collected over twenty years of walking there on a daily basis, informs the construction of setting and characters in that space, and further research to enable a quasi-authentic representation of an individual who resided in that space was also undertaken. I specifically sought out the work of Michel Foucault, Martina Löw, bell hooks, and current social researchers on space and gender.

In his lecture entitled *Of Other Spaces* Foucault argues that space rather than time provokes anxiety. He suggests that modernity's "desanctification of space" may not yet have completely broken down pre-modern perceptions of space as hierarchical, citing examples of these "inviolable" oppositions that still exist today in Western societies. He instances the oppositions between "private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work" (Foucault 1,2). In addition, he discusses external spaces, "the space[s] in which we live". These he refers to as heterogeneous spaces, which can be described by a differentiating set or "network of relations" linked to particular slices in time (2). He argues that these spaces existed in primitive societies for those who were in crisis or states of transition, for example, menstruating or pregnant women or the elderly. Foucault contends that traces of these heterotopias, in different forms, still exist today for those whose behaviours resist being typed as 'normal', and instead are classified as 'deviant'. He identifies psychiatric hospitals and prisons as such heterotopic spaces, and further suggests that retirement homes should be added as they occupy that liminal space between heterotopic spaces of crisis and deviance "since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation" (3).

Foucault discusses six principles associated with heterotopias, but it is his third principle that informs the perceptions that underpin the representation of Kings Park as a setting for the central figure of my creative work. Kings Park exemplifies elements of Foucault's third principle in that it is a single site that contains many spaces that are in reality, in opposition. For instance, there are war memorials juxtaposed against spaces where visitors picnic, where children play, and there are open-air film-theatres where the scenes represented on film are in contrast to those surrounding the screen. Kings Park is intended to be an ideal civic space. It is created as a safe natural place, ordered, managed, manicured with tracts of bush-land contained within its boundaries. With its displays of wild flowers and flora cultivated and labelled and with its views of the city, it is 'touristic', and able to be consumed as a commodity. However in Foucauldian terms, Kings Park can be read as an heterotopic space with its set of relations supposed to reflect the 'orderliness' of the city that it borders, relations that serve to invent or maintain the image the city as a desirable iconic site. In this manner, Kings Park becomes a vantage point that sanitises and orders 'the city' into a commodity. It is through the exclusion from this official construction of the civic space of characters like the central figure of my verse-novel, the Butter Lady, who occupy, it might be argued, a liminal space within the park, that the construction of Kings Park as an iconic site is maintained.

In my work, drawing on Foucault's notion of heterotopic space, I use the park to represent a liminal space as a place of resistance, in which to situate my marginalised, homeless figure and those, who like her, were also in a state of homelessness. To the Butter Lady, this space offered a sense of security, a pseudo-domestic space, privacy when required, aesthetic beauty and the pretense of living within society without restraint.

Martina Löw's argument about the gendering of spaces usefully supplements Foucault's work on heterotopias, especially in relation to my project of representing a homeless woman. Löw's essay on the social construction of space and gender offers a "microsociological look at the construction of the local, seeking to trace the genderization of spaces" (Löw 119). She suggests that the concept of a

“homogenous whole”, a constant in modern societies, serves to exclude the “alien, the other, the diverse”, and that this thinking is reflected in the way that space has been conceptualised (119). Löw discusses Henri Lefebvre’s concept of homogeneous space as one that “legitimizes” the domination of that space and as one that satiates the “consciousness of western societies” (120). Recent studies, she points out, problematise the limitations of the “ideology of space constructed on these lines” (120). She cites, in this context, Doreen Massey’s understanding of space as fluid, with the opportunity for pluralities and a “respect for future formations” (120). Further to this, Löw suggests in *Raumsoziologie* (2001) that in an attempt to discover “a new definition of the concept of space”, social theorists, with their focus on finding many different ways of “placement” on one site, are able to conceptualise space as “relational arrangements of living beings and social goods” (Löw 120). Put simply, this points out “the simultaneous” action of positioning an arrangement of people with a “need to link together objects” either conceptualised or seen to create spaces. “The synthesising activity” necessary to carry this out, Löw argues, highlights the probability of a very “diverse culture-, gender-or class-specific exclusion, and thus at the same time to the possibility of spatial relevance systems” (120). Löw contends that the “practice of placing, in turn, itself opens our eyes to hierarchic orderings and social structurings” (120).

As a foundation for her research, Löw investigated Jean-Claude Kaufmann’s study of French beach life. Like Kings Park, which was originally wild bushland, the beach conjures notions of freedom, with bodies soaking up the gifts of nature; fresh air and sun; basking in freedoms not bound by homogenising spatial policies. Kaufmann discovered, however, in his project to determine how the display of naked breasts was enacted, that although the beach is conceptualised as being free, every gesture of the body, every gaze, is closely scrutinised. This is affirmed for Kaufman by the process carried out by women in the selection of their space and how they mark out their personal territory both symbolically and physically with their belongings, such as towels, bags, sunshade, and games. They also smooth out the sand or build mounds before taking occupancy in their “privacy zone” (qtd. in Löw 122).

This research made me aware of a significant contextual aspect of the Butter Lady's experience. As she created her space in Kings Park, she was in the act of perceiving and placing. She chose a place, hidden in the bush, away from prying eyes. Her meagre belongings were arranged neatly in her bush camp as if to reconstruct private, domestic, gendered space. It was not until her "boundaries were crossed by gazes and touches or by invasion", as they were by those who found her corpse, that her body, her belongings and her space were further inscribed with a loss of social freedom and were subjected to intense scrutiny (128).

Susan Fraiman, in her study of a variety of texts whose protagonists, like the Butter Lady, were outcasts from "polite society", argues that the act of mirroring the domestic space is an act of self-expression to create a sense of security and preserve sanity. Put simply, an act of survival. Fraiman names the process of describing the steps involved in nesting behaviour exhibited by those who are in various states of dislocation, "shelter writing". In Section Three, Lily's poems "Untitled: Kings Park 2001" (79), poem (v) in "Barmera WWII" (70), are illustrations of "shelter writing". In these poems, Lily expresses a desire for a sense of order and ornamentation. Her 'real' space in the park was situated in a secluded place, but not so secluded that she could not call on help, if needed, from the workers whose maintenance shed was close by. In my creative work, I imagine how her space would be ordered and defined by her few possessions, and how she would clear the space by sweeping it with branches from nearby bushes. This home-like dwelling, situated away from inquisitive eyes, was constructed as a powerful gesture of resistance in opposition to the dominant gaze.

bell hooks, like Löw, writes of the disempowerment inherent in the oppositional gaze. Michel Foucault raised hooks' awareness of the ways power as "domination reproduces itself in different locations" using "mechanisms of control" (115). hooks realises that spaces of agency do exist for oppressed people by "interrogating the gaze of the Other" and that the "gaze" has been, and is, a "site of resistance" for the oppressed (116). She suggests that the dominated can gain agency by "claiming and cultivating" a thorough understanding of the culture of the gaze, and in turn, learning to disrupt that gaze by contesting it, by looking in a

certain way from an informed, politicised position, to ensure that her/his subjectivity would not be negated.

With reference to black female spectatorship and the effects of individual black women “resisting the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking” which Manthia Diawara describes as, “resisting spectatorship”, hooks argues that this description is not an adequate one “because black females do more than resist. We create alternative texts that are not solely reactions. As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking-relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate and invent on multiple levels” (hooks 128).

My representation of a homeless figure and her presence in the park attempts to disrupt the conceptualisation of space as a pristine, homogenous whole. Rather, it illustrates Massey’s understanding of space as fluid, with the opportunity for pluralities and inclusivity and highlights the prevalence of empowering and disempowering networks that exist in the spaces we inhabit daily. Drawing on Foucault’s heterotopic space, I used the park to represent a liminal space as a place of resistance in which to situate my marginalised, homeless figure and those who, like her, were also in a state of homelessness. In addition my work was informed by Susan Fraiman’s work on “shelter writing”. Fraiman suggests that the very act of writing about ‘nesting’, the act of mirroring the domestic space by those in crisis or various states of dislocation, is a strong expression of the desire for a sense of security, and in the case of my central figure, a gesture of resistance in a liminal space.

The works outlined above, provide practical, partial solutions for the representation of an individual ‘homeless’ subject occupying a space on the perimeter of a contemporary city. These aspects, linked with Cassuto’s research on silhouette biography with its emphasis on context when archival traces of a life are scarce, further informed my research. However, the question of generic strategies needed further exploration, as the Butter Lady’s complex life story could not be told in a ‘totalising’ way through one perspective. Rather, I needed to consider innovative ways to prevent this from occurring.

Having established the implications of place for my representation of a homeless woman, further reading revealed that a closer examination focusing on the strategies of point-of-view and focalisation needed to be undertaken to find ways in which to construct the Butter Lady's complexity, as well as the various facets of her life journey. Simultaneously, the desire was to represent this figure, not as an abject, disempowered figure, but rather as one whose act of residing in a liminal space is a legitimising, self-empowering act of resistance. My aim was both to develop the reader's awareness of this objectification of the displaced homeless woman and to render her as subject of her own life. For this reason I turned to the question of voice and visibility through the lens of focalisers.

The device of multi-focalisation offers a generic strategy not only to avoid a definitive closure, but also to represent the life as seen by a range of perceivers. The life narrative's formation relies on how a number of eyewitnesses perceive the Butter Lady and the events leading up to her death. To develop an understanding of the most effective ways of representing these multiple perceptions, several theories of focalisation were utilised. Gérard Genette uses the term focalisation to name the aspect of 'seeing', that is, the perspective from which characters and events are viewed (Genette 189). This concept derives from Genette's interest in separating two elements of what was once called point of view. For Genette the distinction is between the question "who sees?" and the question "who speaks?" Genette means more by focalisation than the sensory attribute of sight. He refers to the whole gamut of perception: the ability to hear, taste, smell, touch and see (Chatman 192).

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan further developed Genette's work, broadening the term focalisation, with its visual connotation, to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation. Steven Cohan and Linda M Shires define focalisation as a:

. . . triadic relation that is formed by the narrating agent (who narrates), the focalizer (who sees) and the focalized (what is being seen, and, thus, narrated – in the case of mental life: emotion, cognition, or perception). (95)

These links between three elements are dependent upon "contiguity (the degree of proximity of narrator to focalizer to focalized), which in turn, establishes relations of

similarity (closeness or consonance) or opposition (distance or dissonance) between narrator and focalizer, narrator and focalized, focalizer and focalized” in different parts of the telling (95).

Rimmon-Kenan further elucidates these differences and discusses ways in which to detect their presence in a text and in turn to utilise them as a strategy in the construction of a life narrative. External focalisation, she suggests, is assumed to be within close proximity to the narrating agent, and its vehicle is known as narrator-focaliser, a term coined by Mieke Bal in 1977. External focalisation can be found in first person narratives, in two instances. The first occurs when there is little distance, neither “temporal” nor “psychological”, between the narrator and the character. The second is when the “perception” through which the story is conveyed comes through the “narrating self” rather than “the experiencing self” (Rimmon-Kenan 74).

Internal focalisation, on the other hand, is to be found, as the term implies, “inside the represented events” (74). Rimmon-Kenan suggests that this kind of internal focalisation usually “takes the form of a character-focalizer”, or at other times as a “textual stance”, inviting the reader to designate the qualities of a character to an “unpersonified stance” (74). Rimmon-Kenan illustrates this concept with an extract from Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy*, a text that has no personified focaliser. The quote given as an example, describes amongst other things “the opposite slope of the little valley”, and at first seems as if it is an external focalisation. But phrases such as “she would see *this* corner”, “from the far side of the bedroom *the eye* carries over the balustrade” and “the property visible from *here*” suggest “a position from within the story from which things are observed” (75).

Rimmon-Kenan therefore distinguishes between external and internal focalisation in textual analysis. She suggests that if one can transpose a given segment into first person then that focalisation is internal. If not, then the focalisation is external (75).

She also describes how focalisation can be fixed throughout the story, can alternate between two focalisers or more, how it can shift among several, or importantly, for my purposes, how it can construct a life narrative of a person about whom little is known.

These theories of focalisation were very productive when I came to represent the Butter Lady through the eyes of the characters who perceived her.

Chapter Three

REPRESENTING AN 'UNREPRESENTABLE' LIFE

It became clear, as my research proceeded, that to meet the challenge of writing not just an unrecorded life, but also one that was marginalised and objectified, no single genre could fulfil my project. Giving voice to my chosen subject would require a range of generic strategies. Such generic mixing, I discovered, was typical of the context in which I was writing. As Brian McHale (2000) argues, in a context in which the modern “master narrative is viewed with suspicion, new hybrid forms are emerging that make a virtue out of telling stories ‘weakly’” (260). These ‘low’ generic hybrids solve the problem of the absence of a master narrative by “proliferation of what might be called ‘minor’ narrative forms: minor episodes, conversational exchanges, jokes and anecdotes, gossip, dream narratives, ekphrases of paintings with a narrative content, and so on” (McHale 260). It is such deliberate employment of “fragmentation, interruption, dispersal, and juxtapositioning of narrative elements, operations which nevertheless do not prevent our identifying the elements in question as narrative, that keeps at bay the master-narratives” (260). While McHale does not specifically cite traditional biography as such a ‘master narrative’ it was clear from my research that the transformation of the genre of biography has been a product of the changes he outlines.

As well as my understanding of the new permutations of biography, and of the need for a range of strategies for locating and giving voice to a life, my close reading of a number of contemporary texts showed that generic hybridity was increasingly common and that such hybridity had much to offer to my project. Characterised by fragmentation, juxtaposition, multiple voices, the generic mixing of history and fiction, of biography and autobiography, of poetry and narrative prose, by ‘weak’ narratives, open-endedness, and a reliance on contextual details to bring authenticity to the representation of a subject, such hybridity made available a range of representational techniques. My wider reading eventually led me to focus on three key texts as exemplifying the generic ‘mixing’ I felt could serve my own work.

Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* is a fragmented, 'syncopated' quasi-fictional representation of the life of the real Buddy Bolden, a cornet player who descended into madness and was institutionalised at the height of his career. Jordie Albiston's, *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, arguably a kind of silhouette biography in the form of a verse novel, represents the marginalised female subject as a product of her historical context, drawing on the metaphorical possibilities of poetry to do so. Finally, Dorothy Porter's *El Dorado*, a verse novel with a fast-moving plot and the shared process of detection undertaken by its two central characters, provides a model for Patsy, my quasi-detective figure who is reliant on contextual details and a range of witness-focalisers to re-imagine the final stage of her friend's life.

For my analysis of these texts, I drew on Carole J. Lambert's treatment of biography in contemporary France, which in turns draws on the observations of Francis Vanoye, arguing that postmodern theory invites biographers to inscribe a life without resorting to the 'totalising mode' of traditional biography. Lambert highlights new techniques of life-narration through an exploration of an example of this genre, Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties*. She finds in it many of the characteristics Vanoye had identified in his recent non-traditional French examples of biography (Lambert 306). These selected new techniques provide exemplars for the construction of the Butter Lady's life narrative in a non-totalising mode: "[. . . the contradictions of a life, . . . the circumstantial, temporal, logical gaps . . .]" as well as "[fragmentation . . . ; intermixing of the biographical and the autobiographical, . . . ; variations of narrative perspectives and of points of view . . .]" (qtd. in Lambert 305-6). Lambert further suggests that the "content and the style avoid providing a sense of completion or wholeness." Although [the] "biographer and the subject interact", she contends, "gaps remain" and "[t]he mystery of one's own and another's life is paradoxically the central truth of texts manifesting multiple points of view, parodies, and pastiches." What is represented in these splintered biographies" is "[a] postmodern, fragmented view of culture" (Lambert 307). These new techniques of contemporary postmodern biography offered an array of strategies and qualities suitable for the construction of a biographical silhouette

reliant on contextual understandings rather than 'fact'. In particular, the possibilities and challenges inherent in postmodern generic hybridity were worthy of further exploration.

Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, sketches, as I aspired to do, a silhouette of a real figure, extrapolating and expanding the historical contextual evidence where few specific documented personal records existed. The text, set in the 1900s in the Storyville district of New Orleans, relates the story of the cornet player, Buddy Bolden, a legendary figure in the history of jazz. Only very late in the narrative (Ondaatje 133) does the author provide the scant list of known details about the subject which makes it clear to the reader that the preceding pages represent an attempt to flesh out a real person by developing and fictionalising the minimal evidence. *Coming Through Slaughter*, a complexly structured life narrative, is thus constructed from a meagre archive of documentation about Bolden's turbulent life and eventual decline. Ondaatje's fascination with this figure was, as the text makes clear, a product of the writer's sense of affinity with him. As in my connection with the central figure in the creative component of my thesis, the personal link or fascination may be interpreted as the overriding motivation for the painstaking construction of a tentative life trajectory.

Woven into *Coming Through Slaughter* is Ondaatje's questioning of his motivation for his adoption of the role of the 'auto/biographical I', coined by Liz Stanley. He admits that from "the thin sheaf of information" pertaining to his central figure he is transfixed by the power that a particular sentence held. "Buddy Bolden who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade . . ." (135). A similar moment of recognition for Michael Ondaatje is cited by Michael Jarrett in "Writing Mystory: Coming Through Slaughter". Jarrett claims that in Buddy Bolden's image, the legend as well as the actual photograph on the title page of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Michael Ondaatje recognises himself. In *Coming Through Slaughter* Ondaatje writes: "The photograph moves and becomes a mirror. When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that . . . Defiling people we did not wish to be" (Jarrett 3

Ondaatje 134). Jarret sees that this “sting of recognition” guides Ondaatje to a myth composing his identity (Jarret 3).

Ondaatje ponders, “What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front to your mirror and clutch myself” (135)? Ondaatje’s comment forced me to think about my own ‘invested relationship’ to the Butter Lady, the ways in which our lives mirrored each other and the impetus that brought to the writing process. Ondaatje’s utilisation of the historical and the imaginative heightened my interest and gave my quest a direction. For the ‘invested author’ of *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, there was a moment of recognition that the corpse could have been mine when I read that the Butter Lady had been found dead in the vicinity near to where I, dressed in a night gown and slippers, was picked up by a young man who asked where I needed to be driven. This sobering moment was the trigger that set in motion the process of constructing a life narrative with a homeless woman, about whom I knew little, at its centre.

Silhouette biography, according to Cassuto, stresses the utilisation of contextual details to construct a central figure, where there is little archival evidence, through representing a slice of the times in which they live. Ondaatje, with the fragments made available through research into Bolden’s life, deftly interweaves historical places, characters and events with imagined ones, transporting the reader back in time to a believable, detailed reality. This precipitates a reading experience that challenges the reader to inhabit Bolden’s brain and body and as a consequence to think about difference from an informed, empathetic position. In my reading, this representation of Bolden’s detailed reality illustrates the process, outlined by Richard Rorty, as a way to conceptualise unfamiliar people and their circumstances, more in terms of he/they is ‘one of us’ rather than as ‘them’ (qtd. in Allen 137). Ondaatje selects such contextual details to highlight the dissoluteness and poverty of the place in which Bolden lived. The details of Bolden’s physical and social surroundings at the end of the nineteenth century are initially rendered in the present tense.

The text utilises the prose strategy of metonymy, that is contiguity, with the purpose of further exemplifying the poverty of the district where Bolden lived, and highlighting its low social ranking “a mile or so from the streets made marble by jazz” (2) to reinforce a sense of immediacy. Although the following fragment is based on “little recorded history” the reader comes to understand Ondaatje’s subject through the metonymic nature of the contextual details: “Gravier Street, or Phillips Street or First of The Mount Ararat Missionary Baptist Church” that Buddy’s “mother lived next door to . . .” where street names like GRAVIER, set into the pavement were incongruous in relation to “the wooden houses almost falling down, the signs the porches and the steps broken through where no one sits outside now” (Ondaatje 2).

These houses, further described as “bleak, washed out one-storeyed” (4) are similarly metonymic of the slow decline of Bolden’s state of mind from flights of brilliance, where he could be “describing something in 27 ways” through his playing, into a madness that found him in silence, filling his days touching objects: . . . “there are about twenty things he will touch and he goes from one to the next, that’s all (152).

The Cricket, a news-sheet edited by Bolden and published between 1899 and 1905 also operates metonymically, but produces a different kind of contextual evidence. The text provides a key into a whole social world, taking the reader into the heart of Bolden’s turbulent context and simultaneously drawing attention to how this context shaped the behaviours and power relationships of those who lived within in this community:

It took in and published all the information Bolden could find.
It respected stray facts, manic theories and well-told lies. This information came from customers in the chair, and from spiders among the whores and police that Bolden and his friends knew. *The Cricket* studied broken marriages, gossip about jazzmen, and a servant’s memoirs told everyone that a certain politician spent twenty minutes each morning deciding which shirt to wear. Bolden took all the thick facts and dropped them into his pail of sub-history. (18)

This description of *The Cricket* has the potential to arouse the curiosity of the reader, to set in motion a search for further information about the relationships between black and white in New Orleans at this time in history, and to allow the reader to become engaged with the feelings of those who coped with being part of a sub-history. The range of details ('marriages' 'gossip', 'memoirs') with which the *Cricket* deals is metonymic of Bolden's whole world, invoking the reader's imagination to construct everyday events and to construct the contextual details of Bolden's life. In the manner of a silhouette biography, these details flesh out a shadowy outline inviting the reader to gain a fuller picture of the biographical subject at its centre.

Similarly, the diagrams depicting three sonograph pictures of dolphin sounds, set at the beginning of the text, contain subtle metaphorical implications designed to stimulate the curiosity of the reader. The figure conveys diagrammatically and through the supporting text, that dolphin 'squawks' are common emotional expressions that may have frequencies vocalised simultaneously. 'Whistles', conversely, are depicted as personal signatures of 'pure sound' identifying each emitter and their specific location. The uniqueness of each 'whistle' can be read as a metaphor for the unique and powerfully emotional sound emitted from Buddy Bolden's cornet. The sonograph requires the reader to question the purpose of its inclusion, and to read its connotations, its metaphorical implications, not just its literal meaning.

This emphasis on sound functions to produce focalisation; as Genette points out that all the senses are inherent in focalisation. This strategy in *Coming Through Slaughter* also works to construct the sense of Buddy Bolden as a real person through the use of voice. Voice as defined by H. Porter Abbott's is: "The sensibility through which we *hear* the narrative, even when we are reading silently. Voice is very closely associated with *focalization*, the sensibility through which we *see* the characters and events in the story . . ." (197).

The use of voice is also central to my work. For example, the voices of Cormac and Gosper are based on figures I saw every day in the park in the vicinity of where the Butter Lady camped. The lack of recorded information about the

Butter Lady meant that the construction of her persona was reliant on the voices of others, both real and imagined. Also to give the Butter Lady a voice of her own, I used the strategy of the Book of Poems within the narrative to illustrate the complexity of the 'real' person.

Ondaatje's use of this aspect of multi-focalisation was a significant model upon which to draw. As stated earlier, the device of multi-focalisation offers a generic strategy not only to avoid definitive closure, but also to represent Bolden's life as seen by a range of perceivers. By privileging the voices of black musicians who were marginalised in their own historical setting, Ondaatje deploys the narrative strategy of focalisation to construct the complex nature of his subject and the times in which he lived. It is through Frank Lewis, a clarinet player in Buddy Bolden's band, that the reader learns about Buddy's music and its magnetic power. The use of first person, internal homodiegetic narration "narration from a narrator situated within the diegesis—that is, a character in the story" (Porter Abbott 191), creates a sense of authenticity with the potential to draw the reader into the mood of the parades in which Bolden mesmerised his audiences by playing, disappearing and then returning. This playful vignette of interactive excitement in a place, a specific context, with the disappearance and then anticipated return, provides a proleptic mapping of Bolden's life pattern:

God I was at that first parade, I was playing, it was a very famous entrance you know. He walks out of the crowd, struggles through onto the street and begins playing, too loud but real and strong you couldn't deny him, and then he went back into the crowd. Then fifteen minutes later, 300 yards down the street, he jumps through the crowd onto the street again, plays, and then goes off. After two or three times we were waiting for him and he came. (33)

This sense of immediacy is reinforced in the voice of Willy Cornish, a real figure who was a trombonist in Bolden's band. At points in the text he speaks of the time when jazz was becoming history, when "library people" were doing "recordings and interviews" and "they didn't care who it was that talked they just got them talking." In reference to Buddy, the text offers Cornish's perspective:

I never wanted to talk about him. Didn't know what to say. He had all that talent and wisdom he stole and learnt from people and then smashed it, smashed it like ice coming onto the highway off a truck. What did he see with all that? What good is all that if we can't learn or know? (147)

The fictionalised focalising voice, linked to the name of a real figure works to position the reader in relation to the text's central figure. "Willy Cornish" suggests that Bolden was subjected to a "mean silence" by the crippled photographer Bellocq, who photographed prostitutes and was not interested in Bolden's music, and thus the reader is positioned to feel compassion for Bolden's seemingly self-centred repetitive pattern of behaviour (147).

So Buddy went and Bellocq stayed here shocked by his going and Buddy gone for two years then coming back and gentle with us till he had to go . . . crazy in front of children and Nora and everyone. (147)

Cornish, as a focaliser, heightens this sentiment of compassion and indignation for the reader, when his voice offers an anguished account of Buddy's enforced commitment to the insane asylum:

Then *jesus* that, *jesus* that hospital and the company there which he slid through like a pin in the blood. With all his friends outside like they were on a grandstand watching him and when they began to realize he would never come out then all the people he hardly knew, all the fools, beginning to talk about him (147)

These words are placed within inverted commas, which suggest that they have been taken from a transcript of an interview with the real Brock Mumford, a former guitarist in Buddy Bolden's band. The reader thus has a sense of being made privy to recollections of the band's breaking up and of Buddy's mental deterioration. The narrative account of Mumford's passionate, believable reasons for Buddy's fall from grace constructs a sympathetic reading position:

". . . You took anything away from him in those days and he'd either start shouting or would go into a silent temper. He was a child really—though most of the time, and this is important, he was right. A lot of people wanted

to knock him down at that time. The Pickett incident had made him unpopular. Buddy didn't leave at the peak of his glory you know. No one does. Whatever they say no one does . . ." (73)

This narrative strategy of an internal focalisation, which draws on Mumford's reflective memories of Bolden, produces a sense of authenticity as his voice is imbued with the wisdom of one who has experienced or witnessed similar behaviours. First person internal focalisation is used effectively by the text to draw the reader into the increasing intensity of Buddy's personal anguish. In my project, the narrative strategy of internal focalisation is utilised in the construction of the character of Patsy to draw the reader into her inner conflict as well as to develop a sense of accompanying her on her quest to find details or clues about her friend's life.

The narrational possibilities of free indirect speech, the "narrative representation of a character's thoughts and expressions without quotation marks or the usual addition of phrases like 'he thought' or 'she said' and without some of the grammatical markers" (Porter Abbott 190-92), are used effectively throughout *Coming Through Slaughter*, to produce a sense of the reality of the subject. In the following example, the fluid adaptability of the narrator's voice operates ventriloquially, allowing Buddy Bolden's voice to inhabit the voice of the third person narrator for brief moments, and immersing the reader in Bolden's desire, his mental and physical vulnerability.

Started shaking, from his stomach up to his mouth, he could not hold his jaws together, he wanted to get the words to Robin or to Jaelin clearly. Whichever one answered the door. But it was her. Her hand wiping the hair off her face. He saw that, he saw her hand taking her hair and moving it. His hands were in his coat pockets. He wanted to burn the coat it stank so much. Can I burn this coat here? That was not what he wanted to say. (40)

Then, without attribution or the usual grammatical indicators, there is a shift to a different voice: "Come in Buddy". It is not clear initially whether this phrase is actually voiced by Robin or whether it is just the response that Bolden wants to

hear. The passage concludes with a filtering of the two voices focalised in past tense through the third person narrator:

She started to move towards him he had to say it before she reached him or touched him or smelled him had to say it. Help me. Come in Buddy. Help me. Help me. Come in Buddy. Help me. He was shaking. (40)

This narrative strategy of free indirect speech is also used to flesh out the darker contextual details that Bolden experienced at the onset of his mental deterioration.

For two days picking up the dirt the grime from the local buses before he was thrown off, dirt off bannisters, the wet slime from toilets, grey rub of phones, the alley shit on his shoe when he crouched where others had crouched, tea leaves, beer stains off tables, piano sweat, trombone spit, someone's smell off a towel, the air of the train station sticking to him, the dream of the wheel over his hand, legs beginning to twitch from the tired walking when he lay down. (35-6)

This focalised fragment, which also functions as an instance of contextualising detail, allows the reader to experience the immediacy of Buddy Bolden's physical and mental suffering through two days spent without money in the "small loin district of Shell Beach," and again to imagine the impact these experiences had on the state of his mind (35). In *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems* this strategy was deployed to create immediacy and engagement with characters, events and places. The poem "Beside the Wishing Well" focalised by Patsy and Gosper is an example of this device.

.....

*No, it's that silly bitch. I haven't slept
since she forced me to put her straight
about her high-faloot'n feminist ideas.
I didn't mean to hurt her, just wanted
to put the breeze up her, but then I lost it.
No one calls me a loser and takes their next breath.*

I pick up my bag. His fear, coupled
with mine,
leave the air stale. (57)

Another narrative strategy underpinning Ondaatje's project of representing a real person in a quasi-fictional narrative, is the use of the figure of Webb. Significantly, Webb is a detective literally searching for Buddy, as Ondaatje and the reader are doing metaphorically in the sense that they seek to understand the figure at the text's centre. Webb's search drives the narrative teleologically. The reader experiences through third person past tense narration the filtered, finely tuned sensibilities of Webb, Bolden's detective/mentor friend.

A month after Bolden had moved Webb went to the city and, unseen, tracked Buddy for several days. Till the Saturday when he watched his nervous friend walk jauntily out of the crowd into the path of a parade and begin to play so hard and beautifully that Webb didn't even have to wait for the reactions of the people, he simply turned and walked till he no longer heard the music or the roar he imagined crowding round to suck that joy. Its power. (31)

This focalisation shows Webb's fearful insight into the impact that talent and its inherent pressures may have on his friend Buddy. The final evocative image of Buddy being lost in the adulation of the roaring crowd invites the reader to imagine the effect on the 'nervous' Buddy, of a crowd prepared to suck that joy and its power. Webb's voice works to frame the narrative, at least in part, as a process of detection in which the reader becomes involved.

In *A Bag, A Beret, and a Book of Poems*, the character Patsy Hill performs this role of the quasi-detective figure. Patsy's quest for fragments of information to help her understand the circumstances surrounding her friend's tragic death, frames the narrative. The persona of Patsy carries the author's emotional and intellectual investment in uncovering any contextual clues that might bring her closer to the figure of the Butter Lady. Because of the inaccessibility of any written evidence, Patsy's quest takes her into the park to question walkers, vagrants and

support personnel with the possibility of introducing the reader to the precarious state of 'homelessness'. Therefore, Patsy's detection process, like that of Webb's in *Coming Through Slaughter*, drives the narrative teleologically.

Coming Through Slaughter combines generic forms such as biography and fiction to construct an identity and context for the subject. Given the dearth of documented evidence about the central figure, *Coming Through Slaughter* constructs a kind of bricolage utilising a diverse range of generic forms. It fleshes out Buddy Bolden's life and times, developing them imaginatively by using the devices of fiction. The text's fictional portrayal of this subject still leaves the reader with a sense that the text has represented a real figure. By concentrating particularly on contextual detail, the text offers 'truths' about Buddy Bolden using the various generic forms: prose, poetry/lyrics of song, drama, fragments, lists, interviews, letters and transcripts from hospital records.

The generic hybridity of *Coming Through Slaughter* gave me the confidence to play with similar strategies in my creative work. Where I used parts of actual newspaper articles in the form of a poem about the Butter Lady, I signalled their use by stating that they were a compilation of different articles. I also adapted the letter that I received from the Coroner's Court and altered its formatting into the form of a poem. Real telephone conversations with a detective and private investigator were supplemented by fictional details. Actual conversations with people who had local knowledge about the Butter Lady or 'the homeless' were transformed into poems in order to convey extra information in a convincing manner. For example, the character of Cormac was based on a person who was always dressed in white and resided in his 'home', a white Holden sedan which was parked behind Fraser's Restaurant. Actual observations made over a period of several years of 'Cormac's' body language and movements in Kings Park were the source of the poems such as "Eyes on the Camera" and "Under the Fig" (44, 55).

The strategy of drawing on multiple, situated local knowledge, both literal and fictionalised, helps construct the central figure in *Coming Through Slaughter*. Because so little of Bolden's life was recorded, Ondaatje's text may be read as a kind of silhouette biography. The text's device of creating (mostly fictional) multiple,

situated local knowledge constructs a convincing portrait of a marginalised individual in crisis. For example, where there is scant evidence, Ondaatje develops it for the purposes of his project of telling a story convincingly. Fictional transcripts of interviews with actual personnel, who worked at the East Louisiana State Mental Hospital where Bolden was long incarcerated and finally died, were created. In one such fictional interview with Lionel Gremillion, a real figure acknowledged at the end of the text as the Superintendent of ELSH, Buddy Bolan is described as “. . . a big frog, he had a following. Had a strong ego, his behaviour was eventually too erratic, extroverted and then a pendulum swing to withdrawal. Suspiciousness. Paranoia. Possibly ‘an endocrine problem’” (139). The reader is positioned to feel great sorrow for Bolden. To think that any person could be buried in an unmarked grave, having spent his days incarcerated in an asylum, is tragic. At the same time the reader is made aware that the pressure to perform placed on those with great talent, such as Bolden, and by inference, Ondaatje, are not always justifiable.

Ondaatje’s use of the transcripts inspired me to think of ways in which I could use my experience of temporary mental illness as a way of shaping a compassionate reader response. I adapted a poem that I had written about that period, “a room of my own”, and included it in Lily’s *Book of Poems*. The function of the inclusion of the poem in the verse novel was to draw attention to the correlation between mental illness and ‘homelessness’. The Butter Lady, was constructed as shy and silent’ and as such did not attract attention to herself or consequently to her illness. This characterisation of Lily Harrop supports the notion that many mentally ill people live rough on the streets or in parks, places of exclusion.

The retelling of these stories through the device of multi-focalisation resonates strongly with Doreen Massey’s understanding of space as a product of interrelatedness, as “an open ongoing production” that “makes room for a genuine multiplicity of trajectories and thus potentially of voices” (Massey 55). Ondaatje’s research into the New Orleans jazz scene of the 1900s, with its cast of pimps, prostitutes and gamblers also brings added authenticity to the construction of place and period. Ondaatje also utilises a more distanced kind of locally situated

knowledge in his imagining of typical voices from the place and period. Where there is “little recorded history” the narrative relies on many stories of the colourful characters that filtered from the “notorious’ black communities of “The Swamp” and “Smoky Row” and the brothel district of Storyville (2). This conceptualisation of space, with its underpinning of a politics that attempts a commitment to anti-essentialism is paramount in *Coming Through Slaughter*.

Drawing on Ondaatje’s model of constructing an authentic representation of place and period, I supplemented my existing knowledge of Kings Park by using the park as a ‘writing space’ at all times of the year and at different times of the day. I read and took notes on every plaque relating to the history of the particular area. I observed, listened, and spoke to regular walkers and guides. I drew information from brochures and read Dorothy Erickson’s history of Kings Park, *A Joy Forever: The Story of Kings Park & Botanic Garden* (2009). The information and sensibilities absorbed by this research, were threaded into my process of shaping an authentic depiction of place and period. I walked the route between the Park and the City of Perth that the Butter Lady took, and visited the places that she frequented, taking note of the flora and fauna and specific sounds and smells associated with that area. I sat for many hours next to the place where she died to write the final poem “Rallentando”. In addition, I took note of where ‘homeless people’ sleep, how they dress and of their physical appearance. I also visited and researched the history of Barmera in South Australia where the Butter Lady’s dental records were discovered and provided her official identification. This process of listening to, as well as retelling these stories through the device of multi-focalisation, provided a useful technique to leave the story open-ended and to provide a point of identification for the reader.

Ondaatje, like myself, felt a strong connection to his central character Buddy Bolden. Using first person to construct an ‘extradiegetic’ external narrator’s voice, that is “the narrative in which the narrator is superior in the sense of being at least one level higher than the *story world*, and hence has a good or virtually complete knowledge of the story he narrates . . .” (Talib 4), Ondaatje invites a similar connection for his reader. By using the pronoun ‘we’ he weaves his memory of a

life experience with that of Bolden's, thus setting in place an intimacy between narrator, subject and reader. The lapse in time between Ondaatje's thought that he is the same age as Buddy when he "went mad" and his "shock of memory" is denoted by an alternative deployment of white space on the page that causes the reader to pause, however briefly, to make the same imaginative journey back in time to stand before "a mirror" (Ondaatje 134).

When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had done that. Stood, and with a razor-blade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be.
(134)

Directly following the use of 'we' which affirms Ondaatje's identification with Bolden's experience and his use of the 'auto/biographical I' the narration changes to the present tense, intensifying the emotional experience of 'self hate/ destruction' for the reader.

He comes into the room, kneels in front of the mirror and sits on his heels. Begins to talk. Holds a blade between his first two fingers and cuts high onto the cheek. . . . This way he brings his enemy to the surface of the skin. The slow trace of the razor almost painless because the brain's hate is so much.
(134-5)

My desire to write a verse novel to bring the Butter Lady out of silence was affirmed by the use of poetic devices in *Coming Through Slaughter*. The poetic strategies of alliteration, anaphora or repetition of phrases, imagery and metaphor enrich the reader's sense of 'following' a man's life. Simultaneously, the insertion of poetic phrases into the text acts as effective signposts to focus the reader's attention on the content. For example, "Nora's Song" leaves little or no escape for the reader from the message that it carries. The eight-line stanza, placed before Nora's disclosure to Webb that Bolden has disappeared, occupies a full page. The poem consists of seemingly simple alliterative, anaphoric phrases with resonances of the nursery rhyme "Little Bo Bop has Lost Her Sheep" and is voiced (one imagines) through Nora, Buddy's wife.

Dragging his bone over town. Dragging his bone over town.
Dragging his bone over town. Dragging his
bone over town. Dragging his bone
over and over dragging his bone over town.
Then and then and then and then
dragging his bone over town

and then

dragging his bone home. (11)

The positioning, repetition and metrical stresses falling on the words “dragging”, “bone” and “town” signify their importance within the text. The two-syllable “dragging” slows down the rhythm of the utterance, at one level, emphasising the effort required by the male doing the dragging; in this instance Bolden with his talent. In the last line the rhythm changes and the sentence ends with a spondee; two stressed syllables together—bone and home. As such, these words flesh out the elusive nature of ‘home’ to one who carries the responsibility of ‘fame’ adding to the complex contours of Buddy Bolden’s silhouette.

In my project I used nursery rhymes and chants as part of Patsy’s focalisations to bring echoes of the fragments of her childhood and young adulthood shared with Lily, into the present. For example, in “Ding Dong Bell” (16) Patsy focalises the rhyme substituting the word “pussy” with “Lily” implying, as they did when they were younger, that Lily had placed herself in this position and only she could “pull” herself “out”. This situation is reversed in the poem “The Player: Reuben” (23). Feeling shame because she had ‘stalked’ Reuben, Patsy addresses her deceased friend Lily: “Lily, it was ding dong bell . . . / Who put her in? / Stupid Patsy Flinn” (23).

The echo of the metaphor of home in different guises is prevalent in the story of Buddy Bolden. Bolden’s struggle to find a place that is at once stable, yet edgy enough for him to experiment with his jazz music, is a constant in the text. When Webb discovers him living with the Brewitts, Bolden says, “He could reach me

this far away could tilt me upside down till he was directing me like wayward traffic back home” (83). Later travelling on a bus “home to nightmare” he reflects what this means in terms of his identification. “All my life I seemed to be a parcel on a bus. I am the famous fucker. I am the famous barber. I am the famous cornet player. Read the labels. The labels are coming home” (104). When he reaches Nora after his long absence he looks up at her to find “[t]he home of his wife’s mouth coming down on him” (122).

Evocative imagery in the form of a rimless, spoked wheel (94), a circling tin-bladed fan and travelling spokes of light are textual motifs that fictively flesh out Bolden’s life from “a desert of fact” (136). The text uses the spokes on the rimless wheel to represent the complexities of Buddy mediated through the stories told to Webb by Nora, Crawley, Cornish and Buddy’s children Bernadine, and Charlie; spokes that end in air because Bolden interacted differently with each one of them. However, these situated stories were invaluable in Webb’s quest to “enter the character of Bolden through every voice he spoke to” (60). Thus Webb represents Ondaatje, performing the author function within the text. The circling tin-bladed fan plays a more sinister role in the narrative, foregrounding the tragic outcomes that were to result from Bolden’s flamboyant talent. It hangs over Bolden as he cuts hair in the Joseph Shaving Parlor “turning like a giant knife all day above his (my) head. So you could never stretch up” (42-3). Set out like a poem spatially on the page the evocative image is repeated.

Bolden’s hand going up into the air
in agony.
His brain driving it up into the
path of the circling fan. (138)

This poem with its central image of the circling fan carries the weight of Buddy’s suffering and an accompanying compulsion to self-destruct. It is in the Asylum where he is committed that “He washed his face in the travelling spokes of light . . . All day” (150).

In my project, the metaphor of butter is woven throughout the verse novel.

Butter, for me, carries memories of family, neighbourhood, childhood pleasures and thriftiness; the 'licking clean' of my grandmother's and mother's cooking bowls that held traces of creamed butter and sugar, the cutting out and the exchange of the small, yellow, square, butter coupons for the one pound blocks of butter which were wrapped in grease-proof and newspaper. In the poem "Childhood Byte", set in World War II in the Barmera corner shop, Lily and Patsy:

.....
cut, weighed and wrapped
one pound slabs of butter to exchange
for a coupon from the likes of
Mrs Burton or Mrs Kelly
who returned home, put on
aprons & began to cream
the butter & sugar
for Christmas cakes they
lovingly stitched into calico
*to lift the spirits of our
diggers in the trenches.* (34)

The metaphor of butter and its rationing has the potential to portray to the reader a sense of the thriftiness and also of the pleasure gained by those who baked Christmas cakes, like my mother, for those who were fighting overseas. The Butter Lady, too, is constructed as one who derives pleasure from the sustenance in a sachet of butter.

Like *Coming Through Slaughter*, the two other key texts I chose for close reading seemed to offer representational possibilities for my attempt to flesh out a real subject. My main concern was to make the life I was writing compelling and engaging for contemporary readers. As Kerry Mallan, Roderick McGillis, Joy Alexander and others point out, in the digital age readers are more attuned to orality, and I felt that my own work therefore needed to be in a generic form that took into account the fact that audiences prefer to process information in "sound bytes". For this reason the other two texts chosen for close textual analysis were

verse novels, as my research had identified this newly popular form as one likely to appeal to contemporary audiences in a digital era.

Mallan and McGillis, in their collaborative exploration of five Australian verse novels, analyse the appeal of this form to young adult readers. Their discussion opens with a comment on the ability of this hybrid genre to engage an audience who may not readily read poetry, and makes the conjecture that the verse novel invites young adult readers to pay less attention to style, offering “an ostensibly easy reading experience” (Mallan McGillis 2). Conversely, they suggest that because of the conciseness of short chapters and the deliberate use of white space on each page, the readers may take the time “to reflect and anticipate . . .” (2). The texts they analyse, although a small selection, draw on a rich tradition of narrative verse, and in particular the Australian bush ballad. The article cites Rayma Turton’s (1999) contention that both the bush ballad and the verse novel rely on a “strong narrative thread to bind together the created images into a cohesive and memorable story” (3). Mallan and McGillis suggest that although “the verse novel offers plot” it is not “plot-driven”. Rather the verse novel’s often “collage-like composition” emphasises the “performative” aspect of language (5). By necessity, such performativity on the page interpellates active readers who are willing to fill the “textual gaps” and to reflect on the multiple meanings that manifest from the textual fragments that resist the familiar linear trajectory (5). Particularly relevant to the construction of my own verse novel are the comments on the importance of “tellability” in verse novels, as in bush ballads, to “attune” the ear and the eye thus inviting engagement in a “sensory experience” of “linguistic play” and “spatial patterning” inherent in form (6).

Joy Alexander, too, attributes the increasing contemporary popularity of the verse novel, with its focus on the verbal, to the digital revolution, citing Marshal McLuhan’s description of the consequences of this movement: “Our age translates itself back into the oral and auditory modes because of the electronic pressure of simultaneity” (qtd. in Alexander 270). Alexander also invokes Walter Ong’s argument that a feature of contemporary society is secondary orality as distinct from the primary orality of a culture with no knowledge of writing or print. For

Ong, in this electronic age, a “new oralism served by technology reigns” (Alexander 270). Alexander asserts that in this “new order” . . . “visual and aural imaginations are both active, with the future promising richer methods of eye and ear communication as the likely outcome of more affordable technologies, and with books reflecting these shifts” (Alexander 270). One effect of this orality is the privileging of the voices in the text. As I wrote the poetry, I conceptualised the narrative as a performance and ‘heard’ environmental sounds as well as each character speak their part. This prominence of the voice in narrative, Alexander asserts, creates the potential for a “personalised subjective narration” and constructs the reading experience as if an “intimate conversation or even as eavesdropping” (270). The suitability of the verse novel as an appropriate vehicle for this emphasis occurs because “free verse accentuates the oral dimension” (270). The freedom of controlling the line-breaks and constructing the pace and rhythm through the length of lines and poetic devices such as repetition, near-rhymes and alliteration, constructs the reading experience as one of hearing the “words as sounds”. This necessarily entails a rethinking by the writer of the verse novel about their narrative more as a “spoken text” where the “oral rhythms assume greater significance” (271).

Jeri Kroll’s “Strange Bedfellows or Compatible Partners: the Problem of Genre in the Twenty First Century Verse Novel”, informed by Heinz Insu Fenkl’s concept of the interstitial, affirmed my generic decision. Kroll argues “that the verse novel forces writers and readers to question the collaboration between poetry and narrative. At its most challenging, it is interstitial, liminal, an always becoming form that does not privilege either poetry or narrative, but rather finds power in a perpetual give and take between their techniques” (1). Kroll likens the verse novel to a species that has “incorporated alien genes”, and suggests that such incorporation results not only in a new production, but a “more vigorous” one that performs in unique ways (7). This framing of the verse novel within the liminal, potentially offered the scope my contemporary biographical project required. Paradoxically, this notion of flexibility and freedom that would provide a space in which to voice the auto/biographical I, through the aesthetics of the poetry and

prose narrative, was accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility not only to my marginalised subject, but also to the manner in which the project would be interpreted and categorised by readers.

Just as biography has been refreshed and renewed in the postmodern context, so too has poetry. David McCooey, in *Australian Poetry 1970-2005*, attempts to explain why this is so. He contends that contemporary Australian poetry survives and develops by responding in various material ways to the difficulties of publishing in a limited market. This thirty-year period, he asserts, is marked by marginal and abundant forms of poetic renewal. The postmodern verse novel is one such response with its “attention to the verbal in the mutually reinforcing effect of the semantic and the prosodic, thus as renewed stimulus to both emotions and intellect” (McCooey 200).

For example, In *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, Patsy’s investigation into her deceased friend’s life as a vagrant in 2001, is constructed through the voice of many focalisers and is intended to trigger a complexity of thoughts and emotions and to engage with readers willing to dwell in these subject positions, at least for the time taken for the interchange. During the initial stages of the creative process, I spoke with real people from shelters, members of the police force and regular walkers in Kings Park in order to map out a kaleidoscopic, ‘non-essentialist view’ of my marginalised subject. Gradually I developed an understanding of how to maintain narrative tension in the verse-novel by the juxtapositioning of poems that arose from the ‘real’ or ‘imagined’ conversations and situations. I became aware of the pleasure inherent in knowing how much information was required to engage and sustain the reader’s interest and imagination, in ways that were not entirely akin to my previous writing and reading experiences. My commitment to finding a way in which to bring my key figure out of oblivion, and to reframe her as being an intelligent human being whose life was of value, brought impetus to this doctoral project.

The flexibility of postmodern generic hybridity with its focus on fragmentation, blurring of genres and its accessibility for readers as outlined above, suggested a framework: a silhouette biography in the form of a verse novel. Jordie

Albiston's *The Hanging of Jean Lee* offered a model for such a generic choice, with its especially effective use of the resources of poetry privileging voice, orality, performativity, metaphor, near-rhyme and rhythm. Like *Coming Through Slaughter*, Jordie Albiston's *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (1998) is based on fact. The fifty-five poems construct a narrative that traces significant events spanning the thirty-two years of Jean Lee's life. The text represents people, places and events that shaped Lee's life trajectory from birth to execution by hanging at Pentridge for the part she allegedly played in the murder, in Carlton in 1949, of William (Pop) Kent. Albiston uses contextual evidence to flesh out the known details of a controversial life and thus creates a kind of 'silhouette'. The text has been described "as an example of how accomplished poetics and sensational story line can come together to create something memorable" (Johnson 7). The verse novel constructs a range of focalisers—Jean, her mother, and several minor characters, including Jean's hangman—and also creates fictionalised versions of real documentary sources. As Shane Rowlands observes, "Albiston does not mistake or overstate the so-called 'hard evidence': press coverings, photographs (mug shots and studio portraits), police, court and prison files—as factual". Instead he suggests she utilises this type of evidence in her poems by presenting them as "partial truths open to multiple interpretations" (23). The local place settings, and the multiple perspectives of the characters that inhabit them, provide *The Hanging of Jean Lee* with the kind of contextualised framework that gives a silhouette biography its authenticity. Because the verse novel utilises both poetic and narrative devices within a structured contextualised framework, Albiston's text, like Ondaatje's, serves as a valuable model to inform the writing of a silhouette of the subject of *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems* about whom little was known.

Working with "words and space" and a belief in "unity, balance and symmetry", Albiston insists that although a poem does not have to possess a visual symmetry on the page, "there has to be a particular sense of organic order and cohesion; a beginning, and an end, and a relationship between every part" (Middleton 2). Her verse novel's structure is testament to this view of organic order and cohesion. The poems are divided into sections under newspaper headings:

Personal Pages, Entertainment Section, Crime Supplement and Death Notices. This makes possible an unfolding of the subject's life trajectory. The use of headings from a public document, such as a daily newspaper circulated to thousands of people, brings the work's central figure into the public sphere, while the devices of poetry function to give that figure depth and immediacy.

Appealing to the ear through the poetic strategies of near-rhyme and alliteration, the first poem in *Personal Pages* entitled "Birth Column", begins:

Dark delivery in dinky-di
Dubbo a red-haired cherub
with waxen wings born

between wars in 1919 to
Charles Wright and wife
their latest delight is . . . (3)

The opening lines enlist "the listening mind" to "brighten the language" (Oliver 29), focusing the contemporary reader's attention on the sound and meaning of each separate word as fragmentary 'sound bytes'. Questions arise for the reader: what does the narrator mean by 'dark delivery'? Is it a particularly painful delivery? Is it a foreshadowing of the infant's life narrative? Literally/denotatively 'dark' means absence of light, but connotatively 'dark' also implies unhappy, unfortunate, obscure, and this connotation produces a sense of foreboding. 'Delivery' alliteratively linked with 'dark', means a birth that has negative connotations. The line then shifts, while maintaining the alliteration, to the colloquial Australian phrase "dinky-di Dubbo". This coupling of "dark delivery" with "dinky-di Dubbo" set up a dichotomy/contradiction that runs through the whole text; sinister deeds in ordinary contexts. The phrase "a red-haired cherub with waxen wings" resists the more usual association of the golden-haired cherub with purity. The phrase "waxen wings" sets in play a metaphorical association with Icarus, the mythical character who brought about his own demise by ignoring his father's warning about flying too close to the sun.

The text's use of assonance and internal rhyme in the last word of stanza one ("born") and in the first line of stanza two ("wars") emphasises the historical situatedness of Jean's birth in 1919, immediately after World War I. The reader is also informed that Jean is the fifth child, the "latest delight" of Charles Wright and wife. The baby and the mother are not named, but instead are designated the roles of mother, wife or daughter. This is a powerful device that allows the reader to understand Jean Lee as part of an ordinary family rather than merely as a criminal. In my own work, I represent the Butter Lady as a single woman who has given up her child for adoption, but has not forgotten her, in order to construct her as mother, rather than as 'homeless woman.'

The second poem in *Personal Pages*, "Mum's Little Helper", furthers elucidates specific subject positions and demonstrates how these positions construct the relationships within the family. It is through Jean's voice as a bright, compliant four-year old that the reader is invited into this family dynamic. Through her babbling and repetition of phrases the reader learns how Jean's actions mirror those of her mother's domestic routine:

. . . I wash up mop lino do
what's to be done I run around

tidying up in a trice so when
she gets up she'll say *How very*

nice you really are my little
helper! (4)

But Jean's ultimate reward comes from Daddy when he comes near and offers a kiss for Mum's special helper. This focus on the dynamics of the family highlights for the reader the situatedness of the subject in process. While in a traditional biography Jean Lee's childhood would be represented by events and behaviours, here the child's perspective is distilled in short lines

Juxtaposed on the opposite page to "Mum's Little Helper" is "Interrogation" (5), which utilises the narrative device of prolepsis " . . . a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned. The narration, as it were,

takes an excursion into the future of the story” (Rimmon Kenan 46). The poem of six stanzas, “Interrogation”, focalised by Jean, erupts unexpectedly into the narrative. The poem is an outpouring of the adult Jean’s anger and disbelief in reaction against her Catholic faith, but also against the collapse of the narrative of gangster as glamorous hero:

Hail Holy Mother There is no Mary
Our Father Which art There is no God
Christ Almighty there’s no more Bonnie

or Clyde . . . (5)

This use of prolepsis adds narrative tension to the reading experience, but as Rimmon-Kenan explains, rather than the type of suspense that generates the question what will happen next? (48), prolepsis more commonly produces a different kind of suspense revolving around the question, “How is it going to happen?” (48). The text’s use of narrative prolepsis is repeated to advantage in “A Bun in the Oven”. Using the language appropriate to the times in which the narrative takes place, the poem plays with the words ‘bun’ and ‘oven’ referring crudely to a foetus in the womb. In order to make this meaning clear to readers who may not be familiar with the colloquialism, the words are juxtaposed against an image of “a yellow rat’s / belly opened last week her / babies lined up in a row plucked / out with tweezers were laid out on / plates a bun in the oven! she says.” Jean’s young voice as focaliser relates excitedly that:

. . . A
sister of Maisie’s brought her new
baby to show us the other day It
was such a cutie-pie curled in its
bassinette blinking its black-currant
eyes I wanted to have one! a doll
out of dough! but when I said
that it got me a slap so we won’t

mention dough-dolls again . . . (15)

The potential to enter the world Jean experienced as a child is offered to the reader in echoes of the tale of *The Ginger-Bread Boy* fashioned from dough with currant eyes, who jumped out of the oven and ran away from his parents crying “Run, run, run, you can’t catch me.” This citational echo also foreshadows the future of Jean Lee in which ambition drove her away from the constraints imposed by family life and the subject position of motherhood offered in her cultural context.

In an understated way, once again through the juxtaposing of the poems “Bedroom Burial” and “Dear Diary (1934)” on opposite pages, the text immerses the reader in a rite of passage, one in which they are positioned to feel the tumultuous emotions of a fifteen year old girl. Set out in three dense six-line stanzas “Bedroom Burial” creates through evocative imagery and sound, a grim scene of Jean’s disenchantment with “dead” “porcelain” “pathetic” dolls and what they once represented to her. The repetition of words and phrases, the utilisation of alliteration, onomatopoeia and simile, depict visually and aurally the grim scene of Jean’s disenchantment. Diction and rhythm position the reader to ‘travel beside’ Jean as she makes that transition.

. . . she gazes

into green balls of glass fingers the false
lifeless hair and thinks whatever it was she
saw there never was ever there never
was ever there She fondles the fashions the
fabulous fabrics submits them to scissors
and carefully cuts lilliput camisoles

blouses and hats into whirling mosaics of
meaningless scraps plucks limbs like
petals *he loves me not* and grasping a
head in each adult hand Snaps it back

*they are dead they were already dead
just like me and like me let them rot (18)*

Again there is that sense of foreshadowing, a forward projection of Jean Lee's tendency toward unmanageable emotions, leading to violence, as expressed through her dismembering of the dolls. The second poem "Dear Diary (1934)" gives voice to violent rage with powerful anaphoric phrases (a repetition of phrases) uttered toward God:

.....
... I will kill Him

but first I will force
Him to crawl through
the valleys and shadows

scrawled over my soul
I will teach Him the
scriptures from inside

of me I will preach till
He prays for verses of
mercy . . . (19)

Here the text not only uses the narrative strategy of prolepsis, but introduces its opposite, analepsis, that is "a narration of a story-event at a point after later events have been told. The narration returns, as it were, to a past point in the story" (Rimmon-Kenan 46). "Dear Diary (1941)," focalised by Jean Lee at twenty years of age, takes the reader on such an excursion. It follows the poem "Leaving Ray Brees" which is set in 1939 in September, the second year of World War II, a poem leaving no doubt that her marriage to Ray Brees has finished. The diary entry's tone is poignant and in direct contrast to that of the previous poem and the one that follows "You Stalker". In this diary entry Jean has lost direction

and the utilisation of the prose strategy of analepsis supports the subject's yearning to return to her family:

I just had a flashback right back
to when I was six arms out from
everywhere bearing me up it

seemed enough I knew who I
was I crayoned a crude family
tree How I miss that sea of filial

fins I catch myself thinking the
banter the rumpus the elbowed
Say Please the thing that soothed

the bruised knee I know the years
can drive a hard wedge can hide
a life or fifteen but I look for it

everywhere sad-eyed and stupid

listen for the sound of a leaf coming

down climb the abandoned tree (32)

The narrative strategy of analepsis as illustrated in *The Hanging of Jean Lee* proved a useful device to flesh out fragments of Lily and Patsy's lives prior to their separation. The poems "Childhood Byte" (34), "An Artist's Impression" (25) "Across Time" (13) "Barmera WWII" (70), serve to construct their friendship in particular contexts. For example, in the poem "Across Time" (13), I drew on real travel experiences of my own for both key characters in order to give the reader a glimpse into the dynamics of their relationship and to create reader involvement in Patsy's investigation.

An extract from the court proceedings entitled *Reportage (The Sun)* follows “A Bun in the Oven”. Using excerpts of dialogue from the court proceedings the poem offers the reader a glimpse into the attitudes toward capital punishment at the time of Jean’s sentencing. The poet draws on local historical knowledge adding authenticity to her text and in addition, through the use of prolepsis creates a further tension that requires the reader to ‘read on’, to query the validity in the opening line: “I didn’t do it! a woman screamed / . . .” (17). Early in the experimental stage of finding a way to structure the verse novel, I positioned one of the few ‘recorded pieces’, a compilation of newspaper articles on the Butter Lady’s funeral, on the first page, in an attempt to ground her history in contemporary social reality by offering the reader specific contextual evidence.

As this close reading indicates, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* constructs from the rather slight available evidence, including contextual evidence, a kind of silhouette biography of its historically real subject. The genre of the verse novel makes it possible to represent the vernacular of the Australian colloquial voices redolent with memories, time and place, while the text’s identification with the plight of the subject as a single parent and her struggle with her own faith, attests to its author’s partial adoption of the auto/biographical I.

Albiston’s representation of Jean Lee’s life provided a model for *A Bag, a Beret and a Book of Poems*. The accessible life narrative, shaped by the partial adoption of the Auto/biographical I constructs an empathetic position for the reader from which to identify with the plight of a clever woman who found it difficult to live within the boundaries of the subject positions of mother, wife and daughter as offered by her cultural context. My own project too, aimed at representing the Butter Lady in a way that would allow readers to understand her not as ‘other’—as merely a homeless woman—but a person like themselves and to feel empathy for her. In order to keep readers connected to the life trajectory I was fleshing out, it was essential to find a form that would be comfortably readable for a contemporary audience.

Lars Sauerberg argues that most readers’ reactions will be influenced by what they are used to as “readers of contemporary fiction, perhaps even more

generally by narrative as such informing both novel and film and by reference to the lyrics of popular music” (440). Sauerberg sees the emergence of the verse novel as a “regrouping in response to new synaesthetic formations” (461), that appeals to a wider range of readers conversant with current media forms. For this reason, I was drawn to Dorothy Porter’s fourth verse novel *El Dorado* (2007). Unlike *Coming Through Slaughter* and *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, which are based on real figures, *El Dorado* is a fiction. It is a complex fast-paced detective thriller detailing the hunt to capture a serial killer of children. Dorothy Porter’s *El Dorado* was selected for its emphasis on strategies including a strong narrative drive and contemporary characterisation developed through pacy, vernacular dialogue. A concern that accompanied me throughout the writing of *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, was to keep the reader reading, and therefore *El Dorado*, which draws on a contemporary, popular fictional form of detective fiction, specifically the crime thriller, with its forward moving trajectory, offered useful strategies. Porter’s representation of a postmodern complex understanding of how ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’ are intertwined related to the complexity of the relationship between Patsy, the detective-like figure, and her friend, the Butter Lady, Lily Harrop. Set in contemporary Melbourne, Porter’s verse novel was a valuable model for the construction of Patsy, a kind of detective figure in her quest to understand her friend’s life trajectory into homelessness and to discover the details of her death.

El Dorado illuminates its central characters in a novelistic way, utilising the strengths of narrative to appeal to readers familiar with the structures and devices of popular generic forms. The verse novel uses colloquial dialogue and quintessentially Australian self-deprecating humour to appeal to contemporary readers. *El Dorado* derives its very powerful narrative impetus from the strategies of detective fiction, a genre that clearly appeals to a wide range of readers conversant with current media forms. The mystery elements familiar from the crime thriller—proliferating corpses, false leads, captures and rescues—render *El Dorado* an accessible, tightly structured reading experience, while its use of the Australian vernacular gives it the feeling of popular TV drama. Porter’s text immerses the reader in a process of detection, undertaken by two friends, that

ultimately results not just in their discovery of the identity of a serial killer, but also in a fully contextualised understanding that produces a kind of empathy with him.

The key figures in the investigation are Detective Inspector Bill Buchanan “. . . from the Homicide Department / of hard Fucking Unfair Knocks / (Porter 9), and Cath, “his old best mate” with the “hypnotic imagination” “who’s making a fucking fortune in Hollywood” (29) as an Imaginary Worlds Specialist Director. An additional hook is the fleshing out of their back-stories and their ongoing personal lives—Bill’s in relation to his daughter Caitlin, and Cath’s in relation to her new lover, Lily. *El Dorado* offers the reader a tight, forward-moving structure with satisfying clarity around its social and moral outcomes. The killer is identified. Justice is done.

But through the verse form, *El Dorado* also facilitates contemplation on the situatedness of another and of the need for empathy. The awareness that self and other may not be so different is also central to my creative work, and to my attempt to represent Lily Harrop in a way that does not ‘other’ her. In Porter’s “Hangover” (250), Bill questions Cath: “Why do you think / El Dorado let you go? / And why in a Melbourne Cemetery?” Cath realises at one level that it “was old E.D.’s little joke— / or a warning”. She then asks Bill, “Do you remember— / there was a bunch of us— and we shut that annoying little— / shit— I can’t remember his name— / in the vault?” This connects Cath and Bill’s thoughtless childhood behaviour towards their victim and the behaviour now exhibited by El Dorado.

The text has its characters draw on contextual clues to construct a kind of silhouette biography or profile of the killer, mirroring contemporary practices of detection. In profiling the killer, Cath and Bill come to understand that their own profiles are implicated in the case. In “Going back” (187) Bill identifies his fascination with Sydney as perhaps one that he shares with the killer; a hunch that he follows.

. . .

Bill can’t shake the feeling
that El Dorado
is not Melbourne born,

a certain
brazen front
suggests Sydney.

.....

And Cath draws analogies between herself and El Dorado in “El Dorado is me”:

El Dorado now means
a murderous puritan
coming for your kids.
Give us back our delusions!

.....

Give me a good night’s sleep.

Or a sweet suffocating pillow
over my endless Lily insomnia. (215-16)

While *El Dorado*’s fast moving trajectory is driven by Bill and Cath’s hunt for the child serial killer, the verse novel develops both characters fully by exploring their longstanding friendship and its nuances. Like *El Dorado*, *A Bag*, *A Beret* and *a Book of Poems* is both a quest, in the form of Patsy’s quest to find the ‘real’ Lily, and the representation of an enduring friendship which that quest evidences. In *A Bag*, *A Beret*, and *a Book of Poems*, I give Patsy some of the functions of the detective to provide the text with a forward-moving structure intended to keep the reader involved. The possibility that the Butter Lady has been murdered renders Patsy’s interviews and investigations analogous to those of the detective. The reader is given red herrings with the intention of creating tension, complexity and ambiguity in the narrative’s trajectory. This strategy informs the off-handed comment of Detective Moore in the poem entitled “Telephone Conversation with Detective Rob Moore” (29), and in Gosper’s reference to hitting the “*silly bitch*” (57). Rather than solving the mystery of Lily’s death, this verse novel resists closure, attempting to position the reader to reflect on difference with empathy and compassion. The text attempts to reveal, through Patsy’s process of detection, the complexity, the pain

and the richness of an enduring friendship in a contemporary world. *El Dorado* too, through an epigraph on the page before the title page, makes it clear that the desire for authentic friendship underpins the narrative:

Gilgamesh said, *'May the dream come true.
May the true friend appear, the true companion,
who through every danger will stand at my side.'*

From the outset, *El Dorado* is an exemplar of what Joy Alexander describes as a “new order” in which “visual and aural imaginations are both active” (270). Alexander suggests that in “the new order”, with its reliance on technology, there is an increasing emphasis on voice and the sound of words, so that reading positions in verse novels will be constructed as “intimate conversations” or an “eavesdropping” where there is an “increased awareness” of the “narrative voice” (270). She suggests “writers who select the genre of the verse novel rather than plain prose conceive their narrative more explicitly as spoken text and oral rhythms assume greater significance” (271). This oral quality in *El Dorado* has the potential to engage with an audience who would not normally read poetry. The text’s use of language often draws on the blunt Australian mode of address, its vernacular humour masking horrifying events and vicious attitudes. For example, Bill recalls words spoken by the insensitive Detective Sergeant Rodney Mason to “Constable Jasmine Cook at an El Dorado crime scene just before she vomited” . . . “Keep your nerve love / I know that kiddie’s chest / looks like it’s moving. / Trust me, he’s not alive. / It’s just the maggots. / They’re having a big party / right under his ribs” (270).

A Bag, A Beret, and a Book of Poems draws on this blunt vernacular to give voice to the homeless characters of ‘Cormac’ and ‘Gosper’, based on real characters I observed residing in Kings Park. In the poem “Under the Fig” (55), Cormac confides to Patsy that:

. . . *things go on in this park*
.....
I saw them

*jigging around in the nick;
their tits
useless as old football bladders. (55)*

The hatred of women these harsh lines articulate is made even more explicit in “Beside the Wishing Well” (57) when Gosper connects his insomnia to a past event.

*. . . it's that silly bitch. I haven't slept
since she forced me to put her straight
about her high-falootin' feminist ideas.
I didn't mean to hurt her, just wanted
to put the breeze up her, but I lost it. (55)*

Here too, there is a strong hint that the macho ‘ocker’ voice is sinister. In Lily Harrop’s “Book of Poems” (69-79), the use of refined poetic language illustrates that homeless people are as diverse as the circumstances that lead to their state of being homeless. My representation of Lily through her poems is an attempt to show that she is capable of using language that resists the stereotyping discursive construction of a homeless woman as inarticulate and uneducated. “My Girl” (76) is intended to engender empathy for the ‘other’. Lily speaks to the child she gave up for adoption, but has never forgotten. Many readers would identify with the grief of the loss of a loved one expressed through these words, and would understand the falseness of the distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’, other and self:

*I'd stitch a red cape
from the strongest
fabric. I'd sequin fairy wings
and stars for your pocket.
I'd prepare you for the forest. (76)*

Like *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *Coming Through Slaughter, El Dorado* utilises the narrative strategy of varied focalisations to sketch a portrait of the central characters. This technique interpellates readers into a position of active listening and imagining. Through Cath’s focalisation, for example, the reader is given clues to Bill’s physicality: his “narrow tired face” (Porter 42), his “comfortable

warm oil smell" (47), his "knobbly old elbows" (58), his unflossed teeth (313), the "scurf around his [Bill's] bald spot on his bent unwashed head" (311) and that he "looks old enough to be Lily's—grandfather" (198). Through a third person narration the reader sees "his bony freckled fingers" (191) and observes Bill rubbing his "sandpaper grey stubble" (268). *El Dorado* constructs for readers a strong sense of Buchanan's character through his actions, and the way he interacts with his immediate world through his focalisations. His thoughts, his humour and the deep compassion and care that he feels for not only Cath and his adolescent daughter Caitlin, but for the victims of El Dorado, the children and their parents works to mirror the compassion and deep concern that El Dorado feels for his child victims. In El Dorado's distorted view, he protects them from a harsh world. The reader is able to put together a kind of identikit picture of Bill from the above fragments; just as the reader of *Coming Through Slaughter* pieces together Buddy Bolden, and the reader of *The Hanging of Jean Lee* comes to have a sense of Jean Lee as a real human being.

This use of varied focalisations to build the reader's knowledge of the central figure is evident in *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*. The reader is offered snapshots of the character's outward appearances. Patsy describes Lily: "Lily's hair is longer / her skin unlined; her eyes / questioning" (25). In a subsequent stanza in the same poem Patsy sketches Lily in her youth as "wearing the beige uniform we loathed", and in a poem titled "The Amber Rose Guest House" (12) as she was the last time she saw her, "hair dyed / flame-orange / hooped earrings / the size a gypsy would envy . . ." Cormac recalls Lily: "Miss it's as if she were here sitting between us: / her legs tucked under her skirt with that green hat / perched on the side of her head; . . ." (45).

If the prose narrative strategies of detective fiction underpin *El Dorado's* pace and focus, it is often the text's poetic devices that make possible its meditation of how one knows others. *El Dorado* draws on the poetic strategies of simile and alliteration to create a sense of narrative tension to drive the story forward. The following incident for example, takes place after a meeting, instigated by Lily, between Cath, Bill and Lily where, according to Cath's observations:

Neither her grey-haired flat-vowelled best friend
nor her baby-faced silent lover
would qualify
at the best of conversational times
for a soiree with the Bloomsbury Group. (199)

In “What does she see?” Bill thinks:

.....
what does Cath see
in this girl?
what in fuck’s name
do they talk about?

And there’s something about her
that makes Bill’s nose
twitch.

It’s as obvious as dog’s balls
she’s not easy
in a copper’s company.

What’s this hard-work rude bitch
hiding? (200)

The diction comprised of Oz ‘ordinariness’ and prosaic speech has the potential to appeal to readers for whom the vernacular is familiar and accessible, and who might not normally be drawn to poetry. The Australian vernacular in Porter’s poem represents Bill as the typical hard-boiled, tough-talking detective of contemporary popular detective fiction. Yet other poems in the verse novel work against this stereotype by constructing him as gentle and tender. For example, he is sensitive to the beauty of the flight of Eastern Rosellas, and the music of their “bell notes” comes to him through the utterance of “grandfather’s chattering / ghost / pointing them out:

Look, Billy! Eastern rosellas!
Should be a good day, son.
They're very lucky birds.

.....

Lucky?
Oh Pop.
Even dead
You're a lovely old optimist. (24)

It is the unexpected use of the word “lovely” by the tough-talking detective that reveals his tenderness and ability to care deeply about another. In the same poem, when in the company of the insensitive Detective Sergeant Rodney Mason and a line-up of “cunning perverts”, Bill draws on the words of his grandfather to buoy his inner resources:

Maybe I should be thinking
lucky. eastern rosellas.
and pretend I'm in
your happy company, Pop,
and hope (25)

Through the use of direct speech, for example Bill's routine conversation each morning with his recalcitrant teen-aged daughter Caitlin, the verse novel sketches Bill's character as a likeable/humane person, not unlike Patsy's trait of 'groundedness'. Bill's wry comments construct and encourage an empathetic coupling with the reader inviting them to 'eavesdrop' not only on the conversation between the father and daughter, but on Bill's inner thoughts.

.....

'School really sucks,'
she says through a visible
and revolting cud
of masticated toast.

I keep skimming my paper. (274-5)

I used the vernacular in a similar way in the poem "Departure Point" (19-21) to illustrate, through the voice of Jack, an attitude to the homeless of Perth.

Bloody no-hopers.
There's no need for it.
They should get off
their back-sides
and get a job. It's not hard.
They'd rather bum off us. (21)

Not only can the vernacular give insights into how one knows others, the poet's choice of sensory images can illustrate the deep respect inherent in friendship. For example, in *Among Friends* (47), Porter describes fading photos and tangible objects that hold valuable insights into Bill's character and Cath's appreciation of his kindness. When the intuitive Cath first arrives to help Bill discover the serial killer, El Dorado, the reader is positioned to feel the comfort and closeness offered by their friendship.

. . . the comfort
of sleeping in the arms
of Bill's things.
.....
fading photos
of long-dead dogs
all tongue-lolling
ill-assorted mongrels
.....
and his daughter's discarded
doona
covered with romping
hippos
enclosed Cath

like a sacred chrysalis. (47-8)

Similarly in *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, Patsy's friendship with the absent/deceased Lily Harrop is represented through objects that stimulate the senses. After a recollection of their closeness, Patsy speaks to Lily in second person:

As I counted the blossoms today,
I wondered if you had stood
 in this place,
breathing the scent
laced with Lily Harrop at eighteen,
her skin drenched in Helena Rubinstein's
White Magnolia perfume—
hoping to attract more than the odd bee. (54)

Similarly, Porter incorporates the temporal device of analepsis to construct an authentic historical context to ground the characters in the present:

but then some sour thing in him
unpicks the song
damming his flooding memories
until the song is nothing
but stale noise

because Christ almighty
is he sick and bloody
tired
of remembering
how happy Cath made him
when they were—what—
twelve? (145-6)

My close readings of the three key texts, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *El Dorado*, have informed the representation of my chosen

subject: a marginalised female about whom little was recorded. The particular generic strategies of the 'auto/biographical I' and multi-focalisation, and the use of multiple situated local knowledge at work in these hybrid texts, were utilised in my attempt to 'flesh out' the life of a woman without a voice; a woman the media portrayed as The Butter Lady, a shy, homeless individual who kept to herself and survived on the sometimes violent streets of Perth.

Chapter Four

REFLECTING FROM A DISTANCE

The principal objective of this research-based project was to provide an understanding of how to effectively represent the life-narrative of a marginalised homeless woman about whom little was known. The thesis consists of two sections: the first, a verse-novel titled *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, and the second an exegesis recording the research undertaken in the development of that creative project. The ‘conversations’ that occurred on an ongoing basis between my creative work and my exploration of the strategies used by others to address the challenges of representing and making visible a marginalised individual, are outlined in this concluding chapter.

The initial research focussed on exploring the history and evolution of the genre of biography. This highlighted the inappropriateness of the traditional form, with its emphasis on the concept of a stable subjectivity able to be captured in a totalising way, and made it clear that this was not a generic option for my project. This necessitated an exploration of postmodern forms as an essential starting point for any understanding of the implications of, and possible strategies for, writing the real life of an ephemeral subject, the Butter Lady. Therefore my exegesis begins with an overview of critical readings of the generic strategies of biography as an explanatory context for the choices that came to inform the final version of the creative project, *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*.

‘Silhouette Biography’—a concept that originated with Leonard Cassuto, as a form of biography reliant on contextual detail to ‘flesh out’ a scantily recorded life, emerged as an appropriate variant of the genre for the representation of the little known Butter Lady. This emphasis on the use of contextual detail became central to the creative work. I was intrigued to discover that my childhood experience of growing up in an orchard was mirrored by Lily Harrop’s time spent in Barmera, a citrus-growing area of South Australia. I re-imagined a packing-shed and used this place as the site of the conception of the child she gave up for adoption.

The work of feminist writers and theorists of biography—such as modernist Virginia Woolf and postmodernist Drusilla Modjeska—also addressed some of the problems of representing the life of a scarcely-known female. The imagining of details where facts were unavailable allowed the construction of a life narrative of the little known subject and validated my decision to invent actions, behaviours and values for my chosen subject and a cast of imaginary characters and situations. These works also solved the problem of how to represent my investment in my chosen subject and the ways in which biographer and subject intersect.

The revelation that Lily's place of death in Kings Park was adjacent to my place of rescue from the mental institution established the initial point of identification for me. Growing up female during World War II in the 1940s, Lily and I had experienced the same societal constraints, including the expectation that marriage would satisfy our every need. This was symbolised by the rituals related to preparing for marriage; the glory boxes, engagement rings and trousseaus. Also I drew on the distant relationship that I had with my older sister, to construct Lily's relationship with her older sister, Olive. My investment in this concept of the 'auto/biographical I', was supported by the research of Bogusia Temple and Liz Stanley. Both theorists articulate the links between their own life experience and that of their research subjects. Temple describes her research as autobiographical in nature and points out that Liz Stanley has used the term 'intellectual auto/biography' to describe how researchers can use their life experiences (qtd. in Temple 23-4). "Doing biography," says Stanley "changes how you understand the subject; and both impact more widely on how the auto/biographer sees and analyses other social persons, events and processes" (Stanley 159).

As my research progressed it became clear that a key element in this particular life and one that the creative work would have to take into account was my concern about the marginal status of the subject as homeless, and more specifically as a 'homeless woman'. My desire was to resist the clichéd construction of the homeless as abject, powerless and voiceless. I have experienced the stigmatising pain of mental illness; and I have felt the frustration of being a woman in a patriarchal society. As a result, my research developed to take in a range of

theorists whose work explored issues such as the discursive construction of the homeless and the gendering of space. The research of Martina Löw, bell hooks, Michel Foucault, and Susan Fraiman offered frameworks from which to develop an understanding of this marginalised position and enabled the construction of characters with the potential to resist this disempowering categorisation.

Chapter Two discusses their work and that of Allen and Rorty, who suggest strategies to avoid romanticising or objectifying the homeless. Their analyses reveal ways in which to encapsulate the complexities of the lives of the homeless and the circumstances in which these people find themselves. By presenting a detailed context, factual or imaginary, which, far from romanticising their situation, presents it as a 'reality', they are empowered. This approach is dependent on a vibrant depiction of the historical cultural context in which these characters are situated which I have attempted in my project through descriptions of rationing in Australia during World War II, the post-war period of euphoria, and by contrast, contemporary attitudes towards homelessness.

Finally, my inquiry discovered the virtues of postmodern generic hybridity, which freed me to experiment and explore the diverse ways I could bring my subject out of oblivion in my attempt to make her life meaningful. Chapter Three discusses the qualities I discovered of fragmentation, the inter-mixing of the biographical and the autobiographical, the variation of narrative perspective and of points of views, in order to avoid the sense of completion or wholeness that is characteristic of traditional biography. Most significantly, I discovered in my research on French postmodern biographies, alongside the work of other theoreticians, that I could marry the factual with the fictional, the poetic with the prosaic, I could inscribe a life without a phalanx of facts. This study culminated in the study of the genre of the verse novel.

The genre of the verse novel enables a 'silhouette biography' of a figure rendered invisible by the discursive construction of the 'homeless woman' as a non-subject, an object. The representational strategies of this generic form offer both the strength of narrative, the construction of character; the representation of an 'invested' narrative voice; and the representations of a variety of perspectives on

the subject by a number of focalisers—with the strength of verse; the metaphorical possibilities of language and of its rhythm.

Chapter three thus offers close readings of a silhouette biography and two verse novels, each chosen because they offer possibilities for representing a character such as the Butter Lady. These experimental forms of biography suggest that the verse novel can be a model that offers solutions to some of the problems of inscribing a life. Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* by Jordie Albiston and Dorothy Porter's *El Dorado* offered generic strategies relevant to the representation of a sparsely documented, marginalised life. The textual analysis focussed on how the utilisation of multi-focalisation, as theorised by Gérard Genette and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, is a device that brings authenticity to such a representation. This device, when applied to my verse novel, provided an appropriate solution to the challenge of conveying the complexity of a contemporary, fragmented subjectivity, because it was a way of gathering information in order to flesh out an absent figure who had left little trace.

Close readings of these texts demonstrated how the implementation of poetic devices such as metaphor, imagery, line breaks, metre, rhythmic patterns, chiasmic phrases and stanza formations have the capacity to draw attention to themselves by their “artificiality” and by “the imagination required to decode” their meaning (O’Sullivan 182). For instance, metaphor demands of the reader the capacity and imagination to fill the textual gaps, to defer closure, and remain open to alternative possibilities. In order to interpellate such a non-judgemental reader, I isolated the specific strategies within those three texts that served my purpose, and drew on them to inform the creative component of my thesis, *A Bag, A Beret, and a Book of Poems*.

A key motivation in my quest to give the Butter Lady a life and voice was to convey to my readers that Lily Harrop’s life situation could be one that any one of us could experience, at any time. I was also keen to discover ways in which to resist the stereotyping of a bag lady living rough. Imperative to this project was the concept of the ‘auto/biographical I’: the process of knowledge-construction in which the researcher takes an active role. Consequently this inquiry gave birth to

conflicting emotions and thoughts varying from paralysing frustration to compassionate understanding. The frustration stemmed from my failed attempts to access information about the Butter Lady from sources that I thought would be open to me; the long periods between requesting information through the correct channels and receiving answers that did not satisfy my sense of justice. I sought information from databases, but because I did not know the name of the person who discovered the Butter Lady's body, I was not successful. I felt that details were being hidden. This absence of evidence fired my resolve to find a way around these challenges.

As a contemporary writer and researcher, I was confronted with knowledge that made me reflect on my attitudes toward homeless people. I needed to re-examine my reasons for wanting to write about a homeless woman that I had not met. I value what I have learned from Richard Rorty's analysis of the power of discourse to 'other', in particular his contention that "[The] process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of a re-description of what we ourselves are like" (Rorty xvi).

I hope that the verse novel *A Bag, A Beret and a Book of Poems*, authenticates the life of a person who otherwise would have remained invisible and silent. I hope that this verse novel will offer a range of readers the opportunity to experience, albeit vicariously, the volatility of those living in situations such as that in which the Butter Lady found herself, and the space in which to engage with notions of vulnerability and resilience in the face of adversity.

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