

CLAIMING SPACE FOR AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WRITING



EDITED BY
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& SANJUKTA
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Claiming Space for Australian Women's Writing

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Editors

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*“but wiser than most wives you found a wider canvas
beyond influence, more space, spending long winters away from him”*

Helen Cerne

*This book is dedicated to our spousal partners CHITRARUP and
PUSHKAR for their active support and extraordinary patience.*

Sanjukta and Devaleena

FOREWORD

What space do Australian women writers claim? What space do they occupy in the national story? In one sense they have had to contend with a common struggle for women writers everywhere – producing a vibrant and kaleidoscopic view of Australian life yet failing to receive the recognition of their centrality to Australian culture. Australian women received the benefit of some ground-breaking social legislation. By 1903 Australia was the only country where white women could both vote and stand for national parliament. Writers such as Miles Franklin, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Lesbia Harford, Judith Wright and later Germane Greer grasped the opportunities offered by enfranchisement to intervene into the political development of Australia. Yet women's writing has often existed below the canonical radar because they refused, or were not seen to contribute to the masculinist, patriarchal national myth of Australian identity.

Male writers such as Patrick White and David Malouf dominated the twentieth century, not necessarily because they contributed to the myth (indeed in Malouf's case he exposed and critiqued it) but because their writing could be seen in the context of Nation. In Australia's two century construction of the fiction of identity the Nation has hovered over and haunted every form of literary endeavour, despite the fact that nationalism and national construction simply took over the trajectory of colonialism's civilizing mission. Similarly, those women writers who have dominated Australian literary history, such as Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, Judith Wright and later Kate Grenville and Alexis Wright, could

also be placed in some way in relation to the triumphalist context of the national myth, often because they openly contested it.

But what space, therefore, do they claim? Australian women writers have already claimed a space and it lies around, beneath, between the structures of the national myth. Its existence questions and contests that myth, just as its existence questions the hegemony of nation. The relationship of women writers to the national myth is very much like the relation of colonial states to History. As Ashish Nandy puts it "Historical consciousness now owns the globe . . . Though millions of people continue to stay outside history, millions have, since the days of Marx, dutifully migrated to the empire of history to become its loyal subjects." (1995:46). Australian women writers have, by and large, refused to migrate to the empire of the Nation. Of course this is not universal: Mary Gilmore, Nettie Palmer and others saw the struggle against imperial control as a nationalist one. But Gilmore was ambivalent about Australia as her friend Henry Lawson and her disillusion took her to a utopia called New Australia in Patagonia. A large part of the national story lies in response to war and on this topic women revealed a truth that lay beneath the stories of nationalist heroics.

This space is not that of national myth, which has been co-opted by the state. It is not the space of the Nation but of the transnation. The transnation occupies the space we might refer to as the "nation," distinct from the political structure of the state, which interpellates subjects as citizens. Women writers are example par excellence of the transnation because they already fill the spaces in between the structures of national mythology, the spaces of the real, the mundane, the demotic Australia. This is emphasized by the 18 essays in this volume, which reveal something of the range of women's interventions. The fact that it investigates writers either unknown, undiscovered, unrecognized or undervalued, whether novelists, poets, letter writers or ecologists, adds to their claim upon a different, subversive space in the national story. The fact that the volume is edited by South Asian scholars, inheritors of a very different colonial experience, but a similar hegemony of nation state mythology, demonstrates that women writers, perhaps uniquely, reveal both the national and transnational character of the transnation.

Bill Ashcroft

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
	Sanjukta Dasgupta and Devaleena Das	
	<i>Women in Australian Literary Space</i>	6
	<i>Claiming Space</i>	14
	<i>The Lack and the Claim</i>	28
	<i>Notes</i>	30
	<i>Bibliography</i>	32
 Part I Breaking the Silence: Self and Identity		
2	Writing Silence: Grieving Mothers and the Literature of War	37
	Efion Murphy and Richard Nile	
	<i>Silent Literatures</i>	39
	<i>Gendered Silencing</i>	43
	<i>Rending Silence</i>	44
	<i>God's True Mothers</i>	47
	<i>Communal Spaces of Mourning</i>	51
	<i>Notes</i>	54
	<i>Bibliography</i>	57

3	<i>Among the Reeds: A Lost Novel of Women's Emancipation</i>	61
	Susan Sheridan	
	<i>Notes</i>	70
	<i>Bibliography</i>	72
4	Poetic Rivalry and Silent Love: Lawson's Muse and Mary the Bard	75
	Devaleena Das	
	<i>Introduction</i>	75
	<i>Louisa-Mary-Henry Triad</i>	77
	<i>The Road Diverges</i>	83
	<i>Bard or Muse: Compromise, Sacrifice, and Support</i>	85
	<i>Notes</i>	89
	<i>Bibliography</i>	91
5	Gothic Moods and Colonial Night Guests: Beatrice Grimshaw's Writings on Fiji	93
	Victoria Reeve	
	<i>Strange Individuals and Gothic Moods</i>	94
	<i>Colonial Night Guests in a "Strange" Land</i>	97
	<i>Mood-Alternating Colonial Visitations</i>	99
	<i>Of Gentle Hosts and Boorish Guests</i>	103
	<i>Notes</i>	104
	<i>Bibliography</i>	105

Part II A Space of Her Own

6	From Miles Franklin to Germaine Greer: Writing as Activism	109
	Sanjukta Dasgupta	
	<i>I</i>	109
	<i>II</i>	110
	<i>Miles Franklin (1879–1954)</i>	111
	<i>Katherine Susannah Prichard (1883–1969)</i>	115
	<i>Jean Devanny (1894–1962)</i>	117
	<i>Eleanor Dark (1901–1985)</i>	119
	<i>Germaine Greer (1939–)</i>	121

	<i>Notes</i>	124
	<i>Bibliography</i>	125
7	Kate Grenville's Transgressive Narratives	127
	Sue Kossew	
	<i>Notes</i>	138
	<i>Bibliography</i>	139
8	Disparate Visions: The Contested Homefront Worlds of Gwen Harwood, Faith Richmond and Judith Wright (1939–1945)	141
	Raymond Evans	
	<i>Notes</i>	157
	<i>Bibliography</i>	160
9	Made in Suburbia: Intra-suburban Narratives in Contemporary Australian Women's Fiction	163
	Belinda Burns	
	<i>Notes</i>	174
	<i>Bibliography</i>	177
10	"The Inexhaustible Properties of a Lady's Pen": The Literary Craft of Georgiana Molloy	181
	Jessica White	
	<i>Notes</i>	192
	<i>Bibliography</i>	195
 Part III Scripting the Body and Sexuality		
11	From Inner Space to Outer Space: Lesbian Writing in Australia	199
	Susan Hawthorne	
	<i>Inner Space</i>	200
	<i>Time Travel</i>	204
	<i>Travel in Space</i>	206
	<i>Outer Space</i>	209

	<i>Notes</i>	210
	<i>Bibliography</i>	212
12	Possibilities from the Peripheries into the Urban Labyrinth: Helen Garner's <i>Monkey Grip</i>	213
	Nycole Prowse	
	<i>Notes</i>	223
	<i>Bibliography</i>	225
13	"The Sex Thing Is Strange": The Queerness of Barbara Hanrahan's Fiction	227
	Damien Barlow	
	<i>Notes</i>	238
	<i>Bibliography</i>	240
 Part IV From the Margins: Longing and Belonging		
14	Australian Aboriginal Women's Protest Poetry	245
	Anne Brewster	
	<i>Notes</i>	256
	<i>Bibliography</i>	259
15	Locating Indigenous Sovereign Spaces: Race and Womanhood in Romaine Moreton's Poetry	261
	Sibendu Chakraborty	
	<i>Notes</i>	270
	<i>Bibliography</i>	272
16	Writing the Aboriginal Women's Auto/Biographical Experience: Jackie Huggins and Jeanine Leane	275
	Ishmeet Kaur	
	<i>Matriarchal Space and the Storytelling Mode</i>	276
	<i>Symbiosis of Aboriginal Auto/Biography: Beginning and Experiments</i>	277
	<i>Disputing the Form: Auntie Rita a Biography or an Autobiography?</i>	278
	<i>Writing as a Counter-Discourse</i>	279

<i>The Mother-Daughter Collaboration</i>	281
<i>Collusion of Past and Present: Jeanine Leane's Purple Threads</i>	282
<i>Purple Threads: A Critique of Western Theories of Feminism and Marxism</i>	283
<i>Collaborative Writing and the Issue of Authorship</i>	284
<i>Auto/Biography as a Disputed Form</i>	285
<i>Matriarchal Space: The Ever-Present Mother</i>	285
<i>Notes</i>	286
<i>Bibliography</i>	288
 17 On Becoming an Australian: The Journey of Patricia Pengilley	 291
Sanghamitra Dalal	
<i>Introduction</i>	291
<i>Australia's Links with Asia</i>	292
<i>The Anglo-Indians in Australia</i>	293
<i>The Transitions of Pengilley's Becoming an Australian</i>	294
<i>Being and Becoming</i>	297
<i>Cultural Translation</i>	298
<i>The Transcultural Evolution</i>	301
<i>Notes</i>	302
<i>Bibliography</i>	306
 18 Australianness in M. L. Skinner's Exilic Novels	 309
Ipsita Sengupta	
<i>Notes</i>	318
<i>Bibliography</i>	321
 19 Transnation and Feminine Fluidity: New Horizon in the Fiction of Chandani Lokugé	 323
Sharon Rundle	
<i>Notes</i>	333
<i>Bibliography</i>	335
 Bibliography	 337
 Index	 345

Introduction

Sanjukta Dasgupta and Devaleena Das

One of the dictionary definitions of the verb “to claim” is: to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction. “To receive” is to come into possession of; to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true. The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon, and for women it can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Adrienne Rich

Adrienne Rich’s speech “Claiming an Education”, which she delivered at the convocation of Douglass College in 1977 seems to be the most complementary lines to our anthology, *Claiming Space for Australian Women’s Writing*. In her speech, Rich emphasizes the difference between girls “claiming” and “receiving” education and thereby attempts to

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic469725.files/Rich-Claiming%20an%20Education-1.pdf>

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awaken consciousness in young female students about a long history of the exclusion of women writers from a predominantly phallogentric education system. Rich explains that “to claim” means “responsibility to yourself”; in other words, it means

refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work... It means being able to say, with Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*: “I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all the extraneous delights should be withheld or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give.”¹

Indeed, a strong word “claiming” for centuries remained antipodal to women and this struggle for space is universal for almost all women writers in both the Global North and Global South, even for those who sought the “cloak of maleness” as an obvious seemingly practical refuge.² The revolution of women’s self-awareness and self-expression in the form of writing is a growing clamour all across the globe and Australia is no exception. The opening line (in the Introduction) of David Callahan’s edited volume *Contemporary Issues in Australian Literature: International Perspectives* says: “These days, Australian literary studies is an insecure discipline.”³ Tracing the root of this insecurity, Callahan reflects on the catastrophic decline in funding humanities research, training, innovation and teaching. As the title of his book suggests, he focuses on the contemporary issues in relation to Australian literature like profit oriented institutional pressure, financial crisis, rise of technocratic approach to higher education and many such unnerving perspectives which are now a global concern for all of us in liberal arts and humanities. However, Callahan’s anthology (recently published in 2014) of 184 pages, hardly focuses on the subject of neglecting women writers of Australia and how they are doubly marginalized in this space of insecurity. Interestingly, the book’s cover page shows two elderly women reading books (most probably coffee table journals) with a prominent hoarding in their back that says “Persephone’s Window”. Not only in Callahan’s book but also in many Australian literary critical works, women writers exist like Persephone and we feminists are always struggling to retrieve Persephones or our maternal ancestors by claiming and reclaiming their space that for centuries has been taken for granted as normatively patriarchal. Comparing the US academic context to that of the Australian academic

scenario and writers like Henry Lawson to Nathaniel Hawthorne or Kate Grenville to Alice Walker, Callahan points out that Australian literary figures are not given the required space of recognition that they deserve unlike American authors due to relative thinness of critical tradition.⁴ However, Callahan overlooks the systematic racialized and gendered marginalization of women writers even when Australian women earned their right to vote as early as 1895 (in South Australia), 1899 (Western Australia) and 1902 (New South Wales and Australia commonwealth) in comparison to women's suffrage in the USA in 1920.

At the intersection of gender, race, religion and culture, women writers of Australia have attempted to transform Australian literary space from multicultural to transcultural, that allows an openness to reception, integration and inclusion of other cultures, languages and worldviews. The “new age” movement drew many Australian writers to visit and settle in India, generating a fascinating cultural blending like Judith Wright or Mary Gilmore's travel to Bombay (present Mumbai) and cross cultural visits of contemporary poets like Jackie Huggins or Susan Hawthorne to India. Overcoming the multicultural fatigue, Italy-born Australian writer Arianna Dagnino in her book *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* has captured this transcultural movement and cultural flows based on her interviews conducted with five internationally renowned writers—Inez Baranay, Brian Castro, Alberto Manguel, Tim Parks and Ilija Trojanow. Though many contemporary Australian women writers have embraced this transcultural space beyond ethnic, national, racial or religious loci of identity and identity formation, yet there is not much theoretical and literary awareness in the academia because of lack of inclusion of these women authors in the course curriculum or canonical literature. Sneja Gunew, one of the pioneering feminists who has taught feminism and Women's Studies for decades finds multiculturalism inseparable from feminism. Gunew has rightly pointed out that there is a glaring lack of accounts by Koori (Aboriginal) women or women of colour, whether South Asian, Latino or African-American and if they exist, they are more as extrapolations to fit larger theoretical contexts or as endnotes:

On the themes of exclusions, we have also long been frustrated by the map of international feminism which traces a line between Britain, America and France but rarely includes other groups. As Australian feminists we are excellently placed to be a clearing house for those mainstream feminisms

and have towards them a degree of eclecticism which allows us to adapt what we need and to be more generally critical towards the rest... we are also conscious that the absence of accounts from Aboriginal women signifies glaringly our own lack. The negotiations are continuing and their outcome will redefine the priorities of all Australian feminism.⁵

Even in Indian universities, after a prolonged dominance of hegemonic Anglocentric literature, new courses like Australian Literature made its presence felt. However, as scholars and professors of Australian literature and Women's and Gender Studies, we are still dissatisfied and we feel the need to claim, to own and to initiate an awareness that gender balance should also be regarded as an indispensable criterion in selecting writers and literary critics and theorists for both required and recommended reading lists at all levels. Echoing the words of Arianna Dagnino who writes:

we are living in an age of increasing interconnectedness, where political borders and cultural edges tend to blur and growing numbers of people throughout all layers of society are on the move across the planet, experiencing the effects of dislocation, deterritorialization, and cross cultural acculturation (or transculturation). Hence, we have the growing influence of views and approaches related to transnationalism, flexible citizenship, neonomadism, neocosmopolitanism... or transculturalism.⁶

We intend to explore in this volume how Australian women writers have crossed canonical, cultural and racial boundaries in search of identity and meaning. Common to most of the essays are the central issues of women's subjectivity, conflict and interconnectedness in their patterns of claiming the literary space of identity.

When we came across the book *To Be Australian, a Woman and a Writer* by Giulia Giuffrè, a volume consisting of interviews of contemporary Australian women writers of the 1990s, we were surprised to read a particular line in the Introduction: "Almost laughably ambitious as it may seem to address, even, the topic 'Australian/women/writer', the enterprise seems to me worthwhile."⁷ We were startled not by what Giuffrè calls "laughably ambitious [...] enterprise" but by the fact that what Giuffrè wrote in 1987 seems so relevant even in the twenty-first century. We aim to explore how women writers have been discovering themselves in their writing, "rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous,

perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed".⁸

Writing was often a matter of transgression for creative women, ironically, so is the subsequent search for those writings. Most of the books by the women writers were out of print, unavailable or only existed as unpublished. For example, Giulia Giuffrè in *To Be Australian, a Woman and a Writer* shares an experience of Oriel Gray's 1954 play *The Torrents* that was awarded the first prize in the Playwrights Advisory Board Competition. The play was never published, and Giulia Giuffrè notes that the indifference, indictment and hostility towards women's writing is not a singular story but perhaps the story of every woman.

The critical essays in *Claiming Space* refracted through certain theoretical perspectives are not an ultimate assertion of the one and only way of reading the texts of Australian women writers, but can be seen as a possible path of interpretation to foster discussion and encourage wider comparative research on other women writers of the time. Our intention has been to showcase Australian women's writing so that it can step out of the confines of Australian academia. Our endeavour in this volume has been to promote the importance of Australian women's writing globally by sensitizing readers and scholars about the rich resources of Australian women's literature that has remained marginalized even to this day.

The extraordinary range of Australian women's writing has amazed us as we have tried to encompass that great diversity, while the essayists have attempted to unravel many unknown facts surrounding Australian women's writing. Perhaps several volumes would not be enough to critically assess the diversity of Australian women writings, but in some way we see this volume as the first attempt to bring together such comprehensive, analytical and scholarly essays on Australian women writers. We also intend to do away with the myth that there is some lack of archival and critical resources on Australian women writers. Of course there are fewer published resources on the works of Australian women writers than their male counterparts but this volume proves that it is not impossible to expand the scope of research and extend the span of the literary treasure trove of Australian women's writing.

This volume covers significant topics like the growing division between the bush and the city, the impact of war, expatriation, nationality and identity, reflections on writing itself and the emerging image and identity of the modern Australian woman. It also demonstrates that there is no single feminine Australian tradition but the women writers represented here definitely contest the androcentric hegemony.

WOMEN IN AUSTRALIAN LITERARY SPACE

Australian national literature was born out of an exclusively patriarchal context—a pioneering pastoral history, the legendary sagas of the explorers, the struggle of the convicts, “mateship” and the white male hero in the bush, the suffering of Great Depression and Federation nationalistic fervour. The myth of the inadequacy of Australian women writers and the subsequent dismissal of their “immature” and “inchoate” literary output is an unconvincing aspersion especially when critics and writers like Debra Adelaide listed four hundred and fifty women writers in her compendium of Australian women authors, *Australian Women Writers: A Bibliographic Guide*, 1988.⁹ Regretfully, women’s writing still forms a “subculture” in the literary world of Australia.

At a time when a woman’s reputation was ruined if she expressed herself in writing, the rich heritage of Australian women’s surviving letters (which Carole Ferrier called a “mobilization of memory”¹⁰), diaries and journals (like those of Louisa Clifton, Ellen Clacy, Elizabeth Macarthur, Georgiana McCrae, Eliza Brown, Ellen Viveash, Rachel Henning, Annie Henning and Annabella Boswell to name a few) reveal how artfully women writers have handled colonial history, travel experiences in their voyages, domestic life, the economics of farming, gender politics at home and in public space, the political and social consequences of discoveries of goldfields and even their relationships with the Aborigines. Memoirs written by women, like Mary Broome’s *Letters to Guy*, or Ellen Clacy’s account of goldfields, contain detailed accounts of native landscape, sometimes an antipodean sense of alienation and a glimpse of another Australian world very different from their male counterparts. They also entail stark depictions of psychological and physical trauma as their children died or they were beaten and raped. Ellen Moger’s letters show such a vivid anguished outpouring, and suggest how letter writing can be cathartic.

Another great example of a personal existential struggle taking universal shape is in the pioneer Australian diarist Annie Baxter’s thirty-two volumes of dramatic journaling published in the form of a book called *Memories of Past*. Authoritative women like Rachel Henning or Elizabeth Macarthur’s innumerable informative chronicles of colonial life rarely focus on the trials of existence. Additionally, the confessional writings of Ellen Clacy and travelogues by Lady Broome act as an account of the women’s lives in gold mines. Women also underwent penal servitude in Australia and their ability to survive was primarily because they put pen to paper. Convict

women writers like Margaret Catchpole, Elizabeth Macarthur or Mary Talbot present their adventurous reality and heroic outcomes as ways to cope with and survive penal servitude, diseases and starvation.

The first book of Australian women's poetry *Poems and Recollections of the Past* was published in 1840. Fidelia Hill and Mary Therese Vidal are some of the poets from the collection. The first Australian woman poet A. Stanhope Gore followed by Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, Mary Gilmore, Judith Wright, Rosemary Dobson, Gwen Harwood, Caroline Carleton, Dorothea Mackellar, Mary Bailey, Fidelia Hill, Emily Manning and Jill Hellyer represent how they celebrate the joys and sorrows of life. *As We Wave You Goodbye*¹¹ edited by Jan Bassett primarily focuses on Australian women poets who have written on war and Australia. In the introduction, the editor shows that countless Australian women have recorded their views on war and that women's absence in the history of war literature shows no lack of merit but a gender imbalance, reflecting how war has always been gendered or masculinized.

Ranging from army nurses' narratives like Mary Tilton's book *The Grey Battalion* (1933), Betty Jeffrey's *White Coolies* (1954) or Jessie Simons' *In Japanese Hands* (1985), to the war poems of Mary Gilmore and Judith Wright, women's active involvement in and views on war and Australia are abundant. May Tilton's work might be described as an "army nurse" narrative of the First World War, those by Betty Jeffrey and Jessie Simons are Second World War prisoner-of-war narratives and Simons' work is more frequently referred to as *While History Passed*. These women were nurses, but their narratives are about the nearly four years they spent as captives of the Japanese. Surely that is relevant information for anyone looking to conduct research on "army nurse" narratives. There was a time when "women's space" referred to the parlor, kitchen or nursery, and male critics dismissed them as trivial and domestic, and writing for and about children was considered banal and womanly. But this does not mean women chose their subjects from what was left over.

On the other hand, novelists like Anna Maria Bunn, Catherine Martin, Katherine Susannah Prichard and Mary Leman Grimstone reveal versatility in novel writing as they transcend the barrier between private and public life in the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Louisa Atkinson, the first native born novelist and author of five Australian novels presents a unique combination of fiction and non-fiction, scientific and

natural descriptions of Australian bush life. She is said to have provided the model for Miles Franklin's *Sybylla*. George Meredith's niece, Louisa Anne Meredith exemplified an ambitious and intellectual woman writer whose incisive philosophy based on the natural history of Australia provided great inspiration to later women writers. Caroline Leakey's first authentic presentation of a woman convict's life (*The Broad Arrow*) never received due credit because of being about the "second sex". Elizabeth Murray's novels daringly criticize second hand English life and the colonial man's violence. Australian romance literature was also dismissed as "feminine" and unworthy to be considered "Australian".

Women romance writers often inverted the quest myth and the Australian landscape became an unlikely liberating space from male hegemony. In the mid-nineteenth century, a group of unrecognized women novelists like Eliza Winstanley, Agnes Grant Hay, Mary Hannay Foot, Laura Luffman and Jessie Lloyd form the missing link between past famous writers and future ones. Many white Australian writers showed genuine interest in human dignity and rights when they reflected upon the Aborigines. Catherine Langloh Parker, Jeannie Gunn, Daisy Bates and Mary Durack are some writers who have shown immense interest in rich Aboriginal life. More than the men writers, Australian women writers like Rosa Praed, Judith Wright, Eleanor Dark (famous for her trilogy on the cultural clash, *The Timeless Land*, *Storm of Time* and *No Barrier*) or Catherine Martin (popular for her heroine Iliapa in the novel *The Incredible Journey*) have shown that a major preoccupation in their writing is an empathetic view of Indigenous life. Nettie Palmer is one such name in the world of Australian literary criticism, usually eclipsed by her popular husband, Vance Palmer. Forging a woman's literary circle ranging from Miles Franklin to Katherine Prichard, Nettie Palmer contributed to the development of outstanding Australian women writers.

Many women writers who remained in oblivion for ages, like Kathleen Caffy (pen-name Iota) or "cosmopolitan writer" Mary Gaunt (known for her adventurous writing), were staunch feminists who prioritized women's ambition over marriage. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Ada Cambridge and Jessie Couvreur—popularly known as Tasma and Rosa Praed—received international recognition as Australian novelists as they took pride in being *women* Australian novelists. Rosa Praed and Judith Wright at one point wrote unabashedly about the suffering of the Aborigines, suffering of their foremothers and national and historical manipulations. Kylie Tennant was a distinctive writer of

social realism, and Mary Durack and Nene Gare focused on controversial issues like assimilation in the black community. Laura Luffman's children books, biographies and novels mark the emanation of the women's movement in writing. Her empowering journalism demonstrates women's emancipation. Being the editor of *Woman's Voice*, Luffman paved the way for women's journalism and periodicals.

On May 15, 1888 *The Dawn*, the first Australian women's journal, saw the light of day. It was a difficult birth at a difficult time, but the determined editor wilfully mothered her offspring, claiming a space and voice for women as Louisa Lawson (1848–1920) wrote in her editorial note:

Every eccentricity of belief, and every variety of bias in mankind allies itself with a printing-machine, and gets its singularities bruited about in type, but where is the printing ink champion of mankind's better half? There has hitherto been no trumpet through which the concentrated voices of womankind could publish their grievances and their opinions... Many a tale might be told by women, and many a useful hint given, even to the omniscient male, which would materially strengthen and guide the hands of law-makers and benefactors aspiring to be just and generous to weak and unrepresented womankind.¹²

Louisa Lawson might be regarded as the truly *grand* grandmother of Australian women's writing. She not only wrote herself but also instilled the love of letters in her talented son, the well-known and widely celebrated Henry Lawson. Instead of concerning itself with supposed "feminine preoccupations"—from homemaking and childcare to fresh recipes and fashion wear—in its very first issue *The Dawn* foregrounded wrongs and battles that women encountered, and promised assistance and advice.

In the year 1933, Miles Franklin returned to Australia after living in America and in England from 1904. Australia had changed quite discernibly in the last 30 years as is obvious from even a cursory reading of the Editorial of *The Dawn* in 1888 and the Editorial of *The Australian Women's Weekly* in 1933. The shift is from women's problems to women's cultural nurturance, from recipes to fashion, in addition to counselling for women and women's work in the public domain. Launched in 1933, the *Australian Women's Weekly* is the most widely read magazine in the history of Australian publishing. Despite such mainstreaming of gender stereotypes there were some feisty Australian women

who were writers and activists and who set up the Sybylla Feminist Press in 1976. There was a strong anti-feminist backlash and the Sybylla Feminist Press appropriately became the namesake of Miles Franklin's rebellious and talented heroine Sybylla in *My Brilliant Career*. However, feeling the pressure of changes in the political system and corresponding targets in publishing, production and even location, Sybylla slowly and steadily yielded to the present Spinx Press, which took over the supply and distribution of Sybylla's backlist.

The Australian literary landscape remarkably changed in the 1980s when the emerging women writers were presented as "feminist", "woman-centred" and "sacred cows". Elizabeth Jolley and Jessica Anderson were some of the leading fiction writers and novelists while Helen Garner, Olga Masters and Jessica Anderson focused on the complexities of family relationships. Jean Bedford, Thea Astley, Barbara Hanrahan and Kate Grenville reflected on gender restrictions, the tension of writing in a phallogocentric world, and the search for alternative ways. A number of women-centred presses with women editors also emerged, like Sybylla, Redress Press and Sisters, alongside Feminist journals like *Hecate*, *Scarlet Woman*, *Refractory Girls* and *Australian Feminist Studies*.

From the twentieth century onwards, the scope of Australian women's writing flourished and encompassed a wide range of literary forms ranging from novels, poetry, non-fiction to drama and chronicles. Catherine Langloh Parker's stories based on Aboriginal myths, legends and oral history, Daisy Bates' journalistic Aboriginal literary accounts, and Jeannie Gunn's romantic novels cannot be discarded so easily. Australian women dramatists like Dorothy Hewett, Oriel Gray, Jennifer Compton, Valerie Kirwan and Anne Brooksbank are some of the prolific playwrights who focused on feminist themes but remained under-represented in the literary canon. Critical neglect has denied space to a great author like Dymphna Cusack whose novels contain criticism about social inequalities and focused on subjects like interracial marriage, post-war German or Vietnam War, the sexual double standard and sexual morality or lesbianism.

Diary writing by women during the inter-war period was not considered to be writing at all, though these diaries may emerge as interesting subject of how Australian women were greatly involved in ushering in an element of modernity. When the spirit of modernism bloomed in Australia during 1920s and 1930s, women played a crucial role in influencing domestic life, lifestyle, language, food habits, hygiene, management and

cultural practices. The culture of diary writing was predominantly practiced among white middle class women where their diary became the space of self-expression, “important precursory literary genre”¹³ and “female enactments of a life in process”. Though the masculinist ideals of the art of autobiography have challenged diary writing as fragmented women’s subjectivity, the diaries became the record of much private and public information that reflects the process of history making. Their diaries reflected the process of nation building and the processes of reinventing and restructuring themselves in the new light of modernism. They also assumed subjectivity in their diaries, which were expression of their desires and freedom, narrative romance, fantasy and wish fulfilment. Frances Reid’s diary shows such negotiation between herself and her dreams.

Carole Ferrier in her edited volume *Twentieth Century Australian Women’s Novel* dealt with how women writers have expressed their views on society, class, nation, race, literature and culture and their identity as Australian woman. Ferrier suggests that a large portion of Australian novels were written by women but the “response of critics to them has been limited and deficient.”¹⁴ In her paper “The Travels, Trials and Travails of the New Woman in Australasia”, Ferrier focused on Australian new women’s writing that emerged between the First and Second World Wars. By 1903, the down under was the only country where white women could both vote and stand for national parliament. Between 1900 and 1950, women’s writing reflected the suffrage movement, World Wars, industrialization, urbanization, sexology and psychology. The obsession with madness and suicide is replaced with the theme of female sexual pleasure. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the “New Woman” in articles like “Is Marriage a Failure?” who rode a bicycle, smoked cigarettes and questioned the double standards of sexual morality. Publicly active and outspoken, the New Woman could participate in national, economic and political struggles as writers, politicians, workers and activists. Women writers gave birth to the image of the “Australian Girl”: Catherine Martin’s novel, *An Australian Girl* (1890) shows how her heroine declares independence from colonial ties. The Australian Girl deconstructs the earlier heroines who were a parody of masculinity, shadowy figures dying in childbirth or the domestic sweetheart contrasting with the romantic isolated man in the bush (as seen in Patrick White’s *Voss*).

The vigorous influence of Australian feminism can predominantly be seen in 1970. It is at this time that Australian women writers started critiquing

negative representations or the absence of women figures in the history of the nation. The 1984 Brisbane Women and Labour Conference focused primarily on Aboriginal and non-English speaking Australian women. Women filmmakers focusing on women-related issues gained new momentum in the 1990s. Multicultural and multiracial issues were incorporated in order to rectify the imbalances in women's movements. In her book *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Anne Summers challenges the stereotypical representation of women characters and calls such representations a "history of misogyny". Kay Schaffeer claimed that women were not absent from Australian history but remained implicitly present, as they were rooted in "feminine" land. In the preface she exclaimed that it is time to "set ourselves free" (*Aus Feminism*, 117). Carole Ferrier's *Gender Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women's Novels* and *Hecate: A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal* and Shirley Walker's *Who Is She: Images of Women in Australian Fiction* are all examples of critically reviewing women's roles and the politics of representation. The trend was set by Rosa Praed's novels like *An Australian Heroine* (1880) and *Policy and Passion* (1881), Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl* (1890) and Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901) that emphasize the image of the Australian girl as either an intellectual rebel or a strong woman struggling against the bush.

Aboriginal women's writings still receive cursory attention. Writers like Sally Morgan, Glenys Ward, Ruby Langford Ginib, Kath Walker, Margaret Tucker, Monica Clare, Ella Simon, Alexis Wright, Bobbi Sykes, Shirley Smith and Faith Bandler command attention for contending with not only the primacy of men in Australian literature but also that of whites. They represent Australian history through Aboriginal cultural myths like Dreamtime, Rainbow Serpent, the oral tradition of story-telling, dance, music and rock paintings. Aboriginal women writers excelled more than men in the narrative art of story-telling and biographies. In recollecting the stories of their mothers and grandmothers (like *Auntie Rita* by Jackie Hugging), these women writers preserved the past by presenting Australia as matriarchal. One of the most predominant genres in Aboriginal literature is women's autobiography, ranging from Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Monica Clare's *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* to Ida West's *Pride Against Prejudice*, Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl*, Elsie Roughsey's *An Aboriginal Mother*, Jackie Huggins' *Auntie Rita* and Mernie Kennedy's *Born a Half-Caste*. Elements of spirituality and a sense of belonging are crucial aspects of their writings. Their writing is often a way to reclaim the past.

If Louisa Lawson is considered the pioneering figure of white Australian feminism, then Pat O' Shane is the first Indigenous woman to voice Indigenous women's point of view and criticize white women-centric feminism. She critiques how white feminism valorized colonialism and presented the oppression of black women by black men. Dale Spender claims that many white women were concerned with the plight of the Aborigines and could see them as "sisters in subordination" and portrayed them with "sensitivity and empathy". Spender argues, "It was not confrontational literature, but rather a realm in which the human connection between black and white were evocatively made".¹⁵ Gradually Aboriginal women started objecting to white women's representations of black women's oppression and they criticized Anglocentrism. A more complex view is presented by Sue Kossew in *Writing Woman, Writing Place*¹⁶ as she explains that white women were assigned various roles in the colonizing process: maternal imperialist, pioneer woman, settler-invader woman, white woman, but in the process fails to capture women's position in the web of racial and gendered realities. Colonial settler-women were oppressed but also were oppressors. In the words of Spender, "the time has come to reclaim them, to reinstate them and to recognize the contribution".¹⁷ Cultural diversity and the inclusion of racial differences became an essential subject in contemporary feminism.

In their book *Australian Feminism: A Companion*,¹⁸ Barbara Caine and Moira Gatens traced the history of Australian Feminism in five waves. The first phase (1880–1890) is called the "woman movement" that primarily focused on the protection of women and children and restriction of men's sexual access to women. The second phase called "women citizen" emphasized full citizenship for women and saw the development of the Australian Federation of women voters along with claims for equal pay, individuality and the appointment of women to a number of public and professional positions.

The third phase of Australian Feminism is from 1940s to 1960s that encouraged women to participate in the professional sphere. The Council of Action for Equal Pay and Women for Canberra Movement are some of the essential benchmark marks of this phase. This is also the phase in which factions started splitting off as communist, bourgeois feminist, labour women feminists and modernist feminists with sexual desires and sexual freedom. However, the subject of sexual freedom became the main agenda in the fourth phase of feminist moment. Greer's *The Female Eunuch* made the claim for women to have sexual pleasure and renounce family, which

doesn't necessarily appeal much to the Aboriginal women for whom family held a significant position. The final phase of feminism, also known as postcolonial feminism, made space for women who had been "othered" (as migrant and diasporic) to come into the forefront. The essays in this volume focus on writers who cover the five phases in terms of history, chronology, women's movements and empowerment leading to the increasing visibility of women writers and their political claims for recognition. Increasingly Australian women writers learnt to free their writing from covert textual strategies and were uninhibited in their overt claims for space.

CLAIMING SPACE

The English and Theatre Studies Department of the University of Melbourne is accredited as being among the first twenty universities for having an excellent English studies programme. It lists the following as the core areas of literature studies:

- Medieval and Early Modern literature
- Romantic and Victorian literature
- Modernism and contemporary literature
- Literature and other media
- Genre
- Australian and American literatures
- Theatre, dramaturgy and performance
- Literature and social and cultural theory¹⁹

The list is dominated by canonical categories in literature and is marked by the absence of world literature or more specifically literatures in English translation, which is emerging as an area of interest in Anglophone countries. Also, the point that is most relevant for our book is the lack of any focus on gendered writing, though one can argue that "genre" is expected to include Women and literature as a category. The lack of print visibility in the list of the contribution of women to literary studies is perhaps because till date women's literary roles have remained peripheral, embedded within the *also-ran* lists. This is just a random example, but we fear that a close study of the core areas listed within English literature syllabi of many universities, will not be very different, and if a few

universities have been able to break free from this prevailing stereotype it still cannot be regarded as a normative practice.

In schools, colleges and universities where Australian literature is taught, the token representation of Australian women writers in the syllabi is still a matter of serious concern for feminist scholars and critics. It is this lack that our book *Claiming Space* strives to address, hoping that claiming a space is not about feebly occupying a strip in the margins, or a bush in a remote area. The claim is for a space of equality, which is gender-neutral but does not ignore gender specificities. In the twenty-first century, women's writing in Australia must be recognized as an integral and important component of Australian social and cultural history through establishing women's writing as an indispensable part of the canon and the grand narratives, though these signifiers have been much debated and sometimes negated in favour of a more inclusive curriculum.

Till the canon and grand narratives represent a gender balance in representative literary writing, the debates about recognizing the merits of non-canonical writing seem ironic. It is through the dual roles of being a part of the literary canon and yet underscoring the exclusivity of women's gendered writing, that can establish the merging within the mainstream/malestream literary culture, the vibrancy of diverse streams of literary excellence—male, female and queer—representing the white, aboriginals and later immigrants, all of which in their distinctive ways have transformed the social environment of Australia into such a dynamic composite mosaic. Yet one must hasten to add that despite the lacunae in representing women's writing, there is the ever increasing presence of women's writing, women's literary criticism, women's journals and memoirs, all of which prove that the madwomen will carry on writing and publishing despite the indifference of damning them with faint praise.

This volume commences with the Introduction and Foreword followed by Part One which consists of essays that reflect on the subject of silence and its multiple meanings: how silence is not merely passivity, submissiveness and avoidance but a much more complex cognitive practice. Silence and the gendering of silence when seen in the Australian context of war, colonialism, race, commitments and love invoke meanings that are pregnant with action and empowerment. From silence as a means of resistance, love and unbending support to silence as a politics of marginalization, distortion and forcible national amnesia, in their innovative ways the first four essays delineate how the subject of silence—often seen as an integral

part of women's existence—has a broader nationalist, racial, cultural and gender significance.

The five essays in Part Two track the growing presence of women writers ranging from Miles Franklin, Georgiana Molloy, Kate Grenville, to Germaine Greer. These writers insightfully represent the politics of place and spatio-temporal dynamics. The essays underscore the sameness and difference in women's writing, and the difference stands out in the varying styles and voices of women writers, their priorities, the problematization of their subject position, their standpoint and their ideological standpoint. The subjects of space, gender and sexuality are produced and altered through social relations and practices and these essays examine how these Australian women writers have challenged and disrupted the sexist categorization of academic and scholarly space, thereby re-writing the narrative. The three essays in Part Three foreground the body as desiring subject, docile bodies and the commodification of the body and alternative sexualities. The essayists examine how the subject of the bodily self of a woman is directly related to the evolution of her mind and is an important representation of the connection between time, space and identity.

The fourth part of the volume includes six essays that redefine Australian literary tradition and Australian women's writing. Shifting away from mainstream white Australian women's writing that has been showcased in many anthologies, we are excited to focus on the voices from the margins, ranging from Aboriginal women's writing to South Asian immigrant women's writing. The essays on Aboriginal women's writing navigate claiming rights to place, self-identity and sexuality and outline a journey of re-discovering themselves in their ancestral place of origin. Immigrant women's writing is often about roots, uprooting and re-rooting, a journey from the place of origin to the place of re-location in Australia. Part Four of this volume therefore heralds the redefinition of twenty-first century Australia, which is increasingly creating a positive impression of being an inclusive multi-racial, multicultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic mosaic. In response to the spirit of globalization, Australia is also moving towards recognizing gender equality and racial equality, and distancing itself from bias and discrimination.

The eighteen essays in this book claim recognition not only in terms of the innovative subjects and their scholarly re-viewing of the writers of the past and showcasing the emerging voices of contemporary times but also there is an inter-active link between the essays, a link that binds Australian

women's literary tradition and evolution from the late nineteenth century to the present, celebrating more than a century of Australian women's writing.

Readers will notice that in fitness to the structure of the arrangement in the contents, the first essay by Ffion Murphy and Richard Nile explores the silence imposed by the repressive state apparatus on its own citizens, as the recruitment of young Australian men for active participation in the front lines of the war in Europe between 1914–1918, led to a collective sense of shock, dismay and helplessness among family members, especially mothers. The silencing of mothers was imposed as the demand was for patriotism, heroism, sacrifice, a sort of male chauvinism that was trumpeted and the voices of women, often those of protesting mothers, were criticized and stifled. The surviving verses used in this well-researched essay also identifies voices of dissent such as those of Katharine Susannah Prichard and Eleanor Dark, the two writers whose activist writing has been discussed in the seventh chapter of the volume. The first essay critiques with no uncertain irony the patronizing counselling of the state to the women in a country where the young men had been sent to the war front, while it was assumed that women's supreme duty was to participate in peace and conflict management while maintaining the home front.

The verses cited in the essay by Murphy and Nile reveal the excruciating agony of the grieving mothers. Military records inform us that in Gallipoli more than 8,000 soldiers died in the offensive. Also it must be noted that more than 61,000 Australian soldiers died in the First World War.²⁰ Understandably, the ANZAC Parade had to elide the loss of lives and harped on the bravery and glory of the heroic soldiers. The War Memorials, common monuments in many countries that were active participants in the two World Wars and other wars such as the Vietnam War, Gulf war, Iraq war among many others, are structures that epitomize the will of the masculinist state interpreted as the will of the people, eliding or de-recognizing or even brutally punishing voices of dissent and protest. The essay powerfully critiques the binaries, the masculinist war front in opposition to the maternal lament in the home front.

Susan Sheridan's essay on the forgotten novel titled *Among the Reeds* by Alice Muskett first published in 1933, resurrects a narrative that addresses feminist claims such as independent income, freedom of choice and the creative artist's freedom of expression. Sheridan places the novel between the influences of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf. The politics of the institution of marriage and the husband-wife relationship are a part of