



MONASH University

*The Art and Artifice of Publishing Australian Women's Letter Collections:
1950 to the Present Day*

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Abstract

This thesis examines a series of commercial and editorial imperatives at work in the publishing of Australian women's letter collections from the 1950s to the present day. My key research questions investigate why and how Australian women's letter collections are published, and how the competing interests of personal privacy and public interest align with the pragmatics of publishing to shape the final collections. I locate my research within the chosen timeframe because it covers the mid-twentieth-century establishment of a local publishing industry in Australia, through to the current impacts of global and digital publishing today, when the art of letter writing is in decline. My research is underpinned by my own experience as an epistolary editor and by interviews with publishers, editors, literary agents and authors. It is the publishers' perspective, and how this directs the editing, production and marketing of women's letter collections, that informs my approach.

Thesis Including Published Works: General Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes four original sole-authored papers published in peer-reviewed journals and no unpublished publications. The core theme of the thesis is the art and artifice of publishing Australian women's letter collections from 1950 to the present day. The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the candidate, working within the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies under the supervision of Carolyn James.

The publications are the following:

‘The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon’, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 27, no 3/4, 2012, pp. 74-91

‘Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*’, *Melbourne Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no 1, 2014, pp. 229-255

‘Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood’, *Hecate*, vol. 40, no 2, 2014, pp. 52-66

‘Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent’, *Script & Print*, vol. 39, no 1, 2015, pp. 5-20

I have not renumbered sections of submitted or published papers in order to generate a consistent presentation within the thesis. These published papers are submitted as PDFs as part of this thesis.

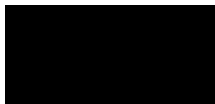
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My archival research was undertaken with a great deal of assistance from staff in the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne; in the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland; in the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales, in particular the late Arthur Easton; in the manuscripts room at the National Library of Australia; and in the reading room at the Public Records Office of Victoria. I am most grateful for their patience and persistence in locating material for me.

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Introduction

This thesis examines what I have termed the ‘art and artifice’ of publishing Australian women’s letter collections from the 1950s to the present day, and analyses the forces at play in the publishing process over this period. The ‘art and artifice’ to which my thesis title refers concerns both the skill involved in creating published letter collections as well as the degree of and the reasons for interventions that turn an original document into another version of a letter for publication. My key research question is to investigate the reasons why Australian publishers contract women’s letter collections, and how the competing interests of personal privacy and public curiosity align with the financial pragmatics of publishing to shape the final product, both at the time of release and in the ongoing life of the letter collection. I locate my research within the chosen period because it covers the mid-twentieth-century development of a local publishing industry in Australia, which included independent and feminist presses, through to the current impacts of global and digital publishing, at a time when the art of letter writing is widely acknowledged to be in decline.

This is a thesis by publication, and I have therefore drawn together four thematically linked journal articles I have written that reference the range of publishers who have produced women’s letter collections, from both scholarly and non-scholarly presses.¹ These articles present case studies of Australian women’s published letter collections illustrative of the key issues I explore in this thesis. Firstly, I analyse the way in which publishers categorise letter collections in order to market them to a perceived readership. Secondly, I consider the shaping of a female narrative in the letter genre. Thirdly, I compare scholarly and non-scholarly editorial methods. Fourth, I acknowledge the constraints of family control in the accessing of letter archives. And finally, I discuss the future forms of letter publishing in a digital age.

My choice of case studies was influenced by my own experience of editing *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000*, which aroused a broader interest in the publishing of Australian women’s letter collections. A collection of Judith

¹ It should be noted that a considerable number of letter collections are self-published in very small print runs, generally for circulation to family members and with no commercial intent. These publications do not form part of the scope of this thesis.

Wright's letters, *With Love and Fury*, was published shortly before *Portrait of a Friendship*, thus allowing for a comparison of editorial methods adopted for letters that appeared in both volumes. I chose to research *The Letters of Rachel Henning* because it remains the bestselling collection of letters, men's or women's, ever published in Australia. Poet Gwen Harwood's *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943* also sold in unusually high numbers after it won the 1990 Age Book of the Year award, an extraordinary achievement for a collection of poet's letters, and subsequently received secondary and tertiary settings. My fourth case study, *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*, is a unique collection of women's letters drawn from a large and complex government archive. I am not aware of another collection of Australian Indigenous women's writing of this kind, and as such this collection is deserving of proper attention in the field of epistolary study.

A comprehensive list of Australian letter collections published since the 1950s, included as Appendix I with this thesis, reveals that the publishing of women's letter collections focused initially on immigrant and travel correspondences, and expanded during the 1990s to include the letters of women writers, many of whose creative works were being brought back into print. A small number of women's letter collections sought to give a voice to the marginalised, such as settlers of modest means and Indigenous women; and these collections required a particular sensitivity in dealing with the correspondences of those likely to have had only a basic level of education. The modest number of women's letter collections listed in Appendix I also indicates that the genre was not, in any significant way, included in the kinds of women's writing that gained more prominence in the wake of second-wave feminism, encouraged by the introduction of women's studies courses in the early 1970s and the establishment of feminist presses, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. It was not until female academics began to research and edit women's letter collections that the genre gained much recognition.

My research is underpinned by interviews with publishers, editors, literary agents and authors in order to ascertain their views on why women's letter collections were and continue to be contracted when one considers the modest print runs undertaken for them. These interviews provided information and insights regarding epistolary publishing that were not available to me in histories of, or personal memoirs based in, the Australian publishing industry. It is the publishers' perspective, in particular, and how this directs the editing, production and marketing

of women's letter collections, that informs my approach, having been both an editor and a publisher for a commercial press for much of my working life.

I have also studied editorial and contractual correspondence held in publishers' archives to further investigate the nature of decisions surrounding the publishing of women's letter collections. My archival research included the reading of original letters by the subjects of my published case studies – Rachel Henning, Gwen Harwood, Barbara Blackman, Judith Wright and eighty-one Indigenous women from Victoria – in order to compare the originals with the versions that have appeared in edited collections. These comparisons provided insights into various editorial processes, revealing a range of approaches from highly interventionist to subtly empathetic, and which have become more accountable and transparent over time. Introductions to published letter collections usually acknowledge the fact of editorial intervention. The reasons for this intervention – some extensive, some minor – generally focus on clarity and consistency and the importance of emphasising a form of narrative structure for the correspondence.

The range and scope of my interviews has enabled me to analyse the nature of the work involved in preparing letter manuscripts for publication, from editorial and production requirements to the expectations of a perceived market for these collections. My own experience of working as a collaborative editor of an Australian women's friendship correspondence, which is included as a case study in this thesis, provided a first-hand account of all aspects of publishing women's letter collections. I was interested to compare my own experience with those of other epistolary editors, and to gain individual publisher's insights into the reasons for their decision-making. These interviews confirm the specialised appeal of letter collections and therefore a publisher's need to shape them for a specific readership, emphasising a novel-like narrative that may be read as a form of autobiography, and in the case of writers' letters to give insights into writers' creative works.

As I demonstrate in Chapter One, commercial prospects influence the decision-making of both scholarly and non-scholarly presses, and sales figures are a more reliable indicator than initial print runs for gauging the success or otherwise of a published work. I have been given access to selected sales figures for a range of letter collections, and from these I argue that with a small

number of exceptions such as *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, included as a case study in this thesis, Australian women's published letter collections remain a specialised genre.

Women's letter collections have been published in England and Europe, as well as the US, for several centuries. Ruth Perry, in *Women, Letters and the Novel*,² links this practice with the development of women's epistolary novels, the popularity of which peaked in the eighteenth century in Europe and England. The personal letter, with its suggestion of unvarnished truth and the private thoughts and feelings of the writer, was regarded, in published form, as a more unguarded view of a person than that presented in a memoir. The publisher's intention is to present both the impression of authenticity and the appeal of voyeurism. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in the evocatively titled *Gossip*,³ considers this practice to be the illusion of mastery gained through taking imaginative possession of another's experience, which occurs when private letters are made public through publication, exciting a sense of intimacy with someone we do not know. Shari Benstock, in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writing*,⁴ discusses the issue of making women's autobiographical writings, in particular diaries, letters and memoirs 'legitimate within the academy', rather than dismissing these works as merely a means of recording experience and emotions that do not provide any critical, historical or literary analysis. Carolyn Heilbrun, in *Writing a Woman's Life*,⁵ argues that the complexities of women's lives, with the intersection of public and private, has resulted in their perceived inability to 'write exemplary lives' that move beyond the domestic and the private and into the public sphere. Estelle C. Jelenik, in *The Traditions of Women's Autobiography*,⁶ also traces the emphasis on personal matters rather than any engagement with the professional, the philosophical or the historical – a theory outlined in early nineteenth-century conduct books analysed by both Carolyn Steedman in *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and*

² Ruth Perry, *Women Letters and the Novel*, AMS Press, New York, 1980.

³ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1985.

⁴ Shari Benstock (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1988.

⁵ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1988.

⁶ Estelle C. Jelenik, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986.

History,⁷ and Linda H. Peterson in *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation*.⁸

Broader and more detailed analysis of the letter form through the study of epistolarity informs the research into both archival and published collections of correspondence being undertaken by UK historians Liz Stanley and Margaretta Jolly. The latter's *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*⁹ investigates the 'social, linguistic and literary codes' of women's correspondence, with reference to their political as well as their artistic rhetoric. Stanley's research into archival collections and her comparisons of edited collections of women's letters alongside the original documents raise key questions about how and why letters are published, and the possibilities presented by curated online archival collections – one of the most impressive being the Olive Schreiner Letters Project with which Stanley is involved.¹⁰ These points will be examined in Chapter Five. Although she acknowledges that the Virtual Research Environment means one must forego the traditional archival romance, Stanley makes the important observation that the online archive can more truthfully present two of the most fascinating elements of letters: their 'bird in flight' and 'moment of writing' characteristics, both of which disappear in typeset form. The online archive is, of course, still subjected to controls exercised by family members and literary executors for collections still in copyright, such as those discussed in Ian Hamilton's *Keepers of the Flame*; the title of which has a double meaning: the gemlike flame of art and the private bonfire of papers.¹¹

The curated online archive offers considerable scope for the publication of voices 'from below' through the letters of the poor, the marginalised and the dispossessed. Lucy Frost's collection of women settlers' letters and diary entries *No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices From the Australian Bush*¹² presents a harsher version of the pioneer narrative than does *The Letters of Rachel Henning*. And Penny van Toorn's *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal*

⁷ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1992.

⁸ Linda H. Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1986.

⁹ Margaretta Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008.

¹⁰ <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/Schreiner'sLetters-ProjectOverview.html>

¹¹ Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame*, Faber & Faber, Boston, 1994 edition.

¹² Lucy Frost (ed.), *No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices From the Australian Bush*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1984.

*Cultures of Writing in Australia*¹³ discusses the ways in which Indigenous Australians engaged with ‘the colonisers’ paper culture’, and she references the collection of Indigenous women’s letters edited by Elizabeth Nelson, Patricia Grimshaw and Sandra Smith, *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*.

As a whole, therefore, this thesis aims to show that Australian women’s letter collections are mediated forms, shaped by archival controls and by editors influenced directly by publishers’ views on the perceived market for such works. Thus the creation of a published letter collection involves a range of influences and interventions in the process of presenting the unguarded voice.

In my first chapter I focus on the commercial imperatives that influence the publishing of Australian women’s letter collections. My four case studies represent, albeit in varying degrees, the range of these imperatives, from the bestseller *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (1951 -), which remains in print both as a hardback and as an ebook; through poet Gwen Harwood’s unexpectedly successful *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943* (1990) and the more modestly received *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995* (2001) and *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000* (2007); to the scholarly edition *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926* (2002), which was released in a very small print run. I place this discussion within the context of Australian publishing as it developed from the 1950s to the present day, and I include interviews with publishers and editors responsible for the structuring of company lists, with specific reference to women’s letter collections: how they are located, edited and marketed.

In my second chapter I further expand this discussion by investigating the place of women’s letter collections in relation to published women’s writing generally. Links between the development of the novel in Europe in the early eighteenth century and the increasing interest in personal letters, diaries and journals were particularly apparent in the epistolary novel form, which women adopted successfully. I go on to discuss how women’s letter collections have been shaped by the female narrative that is contained by friendship, love, marriage and the family, as

¹³ Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006.

opposed to the male hero life-journey that in Australia has been heightened by the pioneer male bush narrative. Although my four case studies are each focused on the personal and the domestic, *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926* also provides a political context as letters of protest to colonial government authorities. This collection of marginalised voices remains unique among Australian women's letter collections, which for the most part are the writings of the white, educated middle class. The acceptance of women's writing into the academy paralleled the establishment of women's studies courses and the gradual increase in the number of female academics. Small feminist presses as well as astute mainstream commercial publishers observed a growing market for books by and for women, which did include a small number of women novelists' and poets' letter collections that began to be released as companion volumes to their creative works.

In my third chapter I compare the different editorial demands of working with letters intended for scholarly and non-scholarly collections. The two case studies that address the publishing of the letters of both Barbara Blackman and Gwen Harwood engage with the further complication of still-living authors keen to rewrite some of their original letters for publication. I discuss the need for epistolary editors to understand the intended readership for letter collections and how this drives key decisions concerned with establishing a narrative and a context, and I also take issue with those who disregard the importance of market-driven publishing decisions when assessing letter collections.

In my fourth chapter I turn to the issue of family involvement in the control of literary estates and the shaping of collections of women's letters for publication. I discuss how editors must sensitively and ethically balance this family involvement and respect for family privacy with commercial imperatives. Each of my four case studies deals with family involvement and control over archives, and the degree to which family members influence the final version of letters in print. Rachel Henning's letters were edited for publication nearly forty years after her death, and were subjected to family censorship. Gwen Harwood, Judith Wright, and Barbara Blackman self-censored some of their correspondence for publication. The correspondence collected in *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria* was subjected to both family censorship and cultural sensitivity guidelines that now overlay much of the material in contact-history government archives, raising questions about access to and the use of such writings.

My fifth chapter questions how changing technologies are affecting the actual writing of letters as well as how digitisation is impacting on the creation of and access to letter archives. The ability to view an archive online has repercussions for archivists, editors and literary executors in that although these curated digital collections are extensive, there will eventually be fewer original documents upon which to draw. Publishers are now marketing letter collections in ways that increasingly focus on the letter as facsimile curio, and on nostalgia for what is perceived to be a vanishing, if not already lost, art. While the future for online, curated archives of letters is positive in the short term, the collections of original documents will eventually dwindle as fewer and fewer people communicate by letter.

Thus the creation of a published letter collection involved a range of influences and interventions. I turn first to the business of publishing, and to the financial pragmatics of producing and marketing women's letter collections to both a scholarly and a non-scholarly readership. Publishers categorise these collections differently, depending on perceptions of why people choose to read the correspondence of others.

Chapter One

The Business of Publishing Australian Women's Letter Collections

In this chapter I focus on the commercial imperatives that influence the publishing of Australian women's letter collections in order to address the question of why publishers think these collections are read and by whom. My perspective in this chapter is that of the publisher rather than the reader, the reasons why people choose to read letter collections being many and varied, and beyond the scope of this thesis. I locate my research in the decades from the 1950s, which saw the tentative beginnings of a local publishing industry in Australia through small independent presses, including feminist presses, as well as university presses, and the opening of branch offices firstly of UK and subsequently of US multinational corporations.¹⁴ This development in local publishing was fed by an interest in promoting Australian writing and writers both at home and overseas.

I focus on the publishing of women's letters within the broader framework of local publishing, the influences of second-wave feminism and the impact the establishment of tertiary women's studies courses around Australia had on the publishing of such collections. From the 1950s onwards, a few women's letter collections begin to feature in the lists of Australian publishing companies, both independent and multinational offshoots, as well as trade and scholarly presses. Located between the latter are institutions such as the National Library of Australia and the State libraries, which occasionally publish letter collections from their own archival holdings, either independently or in partnership with a trade or a scholarly press. A considerable number of

¹⁴ Existing studies of the Australian publishing industry reference the buoyant mood of the 1950s, with its emphasis on consumerism after wartime austerity, which also presented new publishing opportunities. There has been considerable analysis of this postwar phase of national awakening and the resultant growing demand for Australian books, by industry practitioners, by authors and by media and cultural studies theorists. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold's *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market* (2001), Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright's *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* (2006), and David Carter and Anne Galligan's *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing* (2007) together present a broad-ranging study of over a century of publishing in Australia, fleshed out with case studies and profiles of individual companies. John B. Thompson's *Merchants of Culture: the Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (2012) presents a useful comparison with the Australian models in its studies of the contemporary US and British publishing industries. Alongside these key texts are publishing memoirs and company histories such as Geoffrey Dutton's *Snow on the Saltbush* (1984) and *A Rare Bird: Penguin Books Australia 1946-1996* (1996), Craig Munro's *The Writer's Press 1948-1998* (1998) and Hilary McPhee's *Other People's Words* (2001).

Australian letter collections have been self-published, and this category is likely to continue to grow as more authors choose to place their work online via companies such as Amazon and Pressbooks, with associated print-on-demand options for small runs of books.¹⁵ The four case studies that form the backbone of this thesis represent, albeit in varying degrees, the range of publishers and the differing commercial imperatives that impact on the editing, production and marketing of women's letter collections.

My premise that the genre of women's letter collections has remained both specialised and small scale in its market reach and in its financial returns – with a few exceptions – is supported by my research. It is borne out by the evidence from publishing and personal archives; interviews with publishers, editors, authors and literary agents; memoirs and histories of the Australian publishing industry; and my own industry experience as both an editor and a publisher.

Australian Women's Letter Collections Published Since 1950

My survey of women's letter collections published in Australia since 1950¹⁶ reveals that the increased general focus on women's writing that became apparent from the early 1970s, as a result of second-wave feminism and the development of women's studies courses,¹⁷ did not extend in any significant way to the publication of women's letter collections, even by the feminist presses that were being established at this time. The study of women's letters as primary source documents was encouraged, however, and this did eventually lead to an interest in the editing and publishing of collections. Those that were being published tended to be the correspondences of women writers, artists, philanthropists, and members of the educated classes, predominantly published by mainstream presses, and with a focus as much on the personal and the domestic as on creative works and current affairs.

Three times as many men's letter collections as women's letter collections have been published in Australia since the 1950s.¹⁸ These tend to cluster around historical events such as the two

¹⁵ I discuss in detail the future of letter publishing across these categories in Chapter Five of this thesis: *Publishing Women's Letters in a Digital Age*.

¹⁶ See Appendix I: Australian Letter Collections Published Since 1950.

¹⁷ See, for example, Barbara Caine, 'Women's Studies at the University of Sydney', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no 27, pp. 99-106; and Ann Curthoys, *For and Against Feminism: A Personal Journey Into Feminist Theory and History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

¹⁸ See Appendix I: Australian Letter Collections Published Since 1950.

world wars, with letters sent home from the front remaining perennially popular.¹⁹ Men's letters were also collected from explorers and early settlers, from goldminers, from colonial administrators and from politicians. The published correspondences of male public figures – the Men of Letters genre – considerably outnumber those of women. Women's letters, by comparison, are more likely to be grounded in the personal and the domestic, focused on themes such as the family, friendships, and love affairs, with titles such as *Mother Stayed at Home: Letters to a Travelling Daughter* (1985), *A Web of Friendship: Selected Letters of Christina Stead 1928-1973* (1992), and *Maisie: Her Life, Her Loves, Her Letters, 1898-1902* (1994).

Publishers and Women's Letter Collections

The structure of a publishing company's lists, and the reasoning that underpins decisions on acquisitions, is driven by the need to find a market that will generate a sound financial return. These imperatives are at play in all publishing companies to some degree but are particularly dominant in commercial presses. The expectation is that a title's production costs will be covered and that a profit will be made on sales. Decisions about the potential market for a title influence decisions about the print run, format, recommended retail price, and how the published book is to be promoted. The publishing budget for editorial, design and production is allocated based on these decisions. And the sales figures for a particular book influence decisions on whether to publish again in that genre.²⁰ Modest print runs of several hundred copies, or fewer, are usual for self-publishers of letter collections. Those released by scholarly presses generally sell less than a thousand copies. Only a few women's letter collections, released by commercial publishers, have attracted a broad general readership interested in both the content of the letters and the correspondents themselves.

¹⁹ The diaries and letters of young Australian and New Zealand women who served as nurses during World War I, for example, have been overlooked until recently, when these archival sources were used by the writers of the television series *Anzac Girls*.

²⁰ The issue of sales figures is important in any discussion of publishing history and trends. As Richard D. Altick and John F. Fenstermaker observe: 'How many copies were sold? The answer ... will provide some indication of whether the broad public agreed with the critics ... Here publishers' records are the primary source ... Other sources purporting to give the sales figures of books ... must be regarded with great scepticism, for book trade gossip is notoriously unreliable'. *The Art of Literary Research*, W.W. Norton, New York (fourth edition), 1993, pp. 124-125. Book sales figures in Australia can now be tracked across many different categories because of the introduction in 2000 of Nielsen Bookscan Australia, which is part of an international organisation that monitors English-language book sales worldwide. Bookscan claims to collect sales data that represents ninety per cent of all retail book sales across Australia, including audio books. Ebook sales figures are currently being collected though as yet the information is not for general release because of gaps in the tracking systems. Interview by email with Michael Webster, Director of Nielsen Bookscan Australia, 2 December 2015. See also the Nielsen Bookscan Australia website: <http://www.nielsenbookscan.com.au/controller.php?page=108> (accessed 2 December 2015).

Former Penguin Books Australia publishing director Robert Sessions has observed,

I don't think people warm to collections of letters on the whole ... I think they often think 'this is not for me, this will not engage me'. So I think our challenge is to publish them in an interesting way and do a really good job of telling the prospective reader what they will get from the experience. I know the official view is that you can't or shouldn't cut letters but I don't agree. I think an editor should be free to help make the text 'flow' and avoid boring the reader with a collection of letters, just as they would with any other work of non-fiction.²¹

My interviews with scholarly, feminist and commercial publishers confirm that letter collections generally are regarded as specialised literary works, usually published because the correspondents are already well-known.²²

Publishers across all of these categories observed that they rarely commission women's letter collections. At most, there might be an approach made to a potential author/editor firstly to write a biography of a person with a public profile, and subsequently to edit a collection of the subject's letters. Letter collections are both time-consuming to prepare and often costly to produce. They also involve unavoidable practical and complicating factors. Archival material must be located, painstakingly transcribed, and usually substantially cut and edited after being cleared for publication with literary estates or other copyright holders. The censoring of personal material can affect the content and structure of the collection. Permission to publish can often involve substantial payments, either by publisher or editor, to literary estates. If the letter writer is no longer alive, the editor must assume promotional responsibilities upon publication. This can result in a more narrowly focused discussion of the process of editing the letters rather than the life of the original correspondent, which is of less interest to the general reader who is unlikely to even consider the role of the editor in the preparation of a letter collection.²³

²¹ Interview by email with Robert Sessions, 1 December 2008.

²² A fairly recent example is *Dear Sun: The Letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed*, edited by Janine Burke and published by Random House, Sydney, 1995. Fascination with the personal lives of the artists and writers that were part of John and Sunday Reed's Heide circle remains constant. An exception to this is *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, which remains the best-selling collection of letters ever published in Australia.

²³ Barbara Blackman, for example, was available and willing to promote *Portrait of a Friendship*, which assisted the review coverage and subsequently the sales of the book. See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis, and in which this issue is discussed in detail.

According to former Melbourne University Publishing (MUP) publisher Tracy O'Shaughnessy,

We are sent the manuscripts of letter collections quite regularly, and we locate them in the same market sector as diaries. It is hard to see how MUP can continue to publish letter collections purely as letter collections, though. We rarely manage to get sales of over 1400 copies for these titles so they are not covering their costs, even with funding from the [Miegunyah] Grimwade Trust. The editorial eye is important to turn the material into a book, though we still tend to regard them as academic source books rather than trade books, and market them accordingly. The subject is key. Whose letters they are is more important than the actual quality of the letters.²⁴

On occasions, MUP, along with other university presses, publishes in collaboration with the State Library of Victoria (SLV). These publications are drawn from the library's own collections and involve researchers, usually academics whose time and expenses are funded by the institution to which they are attached, who have gone 'archive-diving' in the library collections. Very few of the resulting publications are letter collections, however, despite the SLV's extensive holdings of correspondences. The library has published no letter collections since 1997 as the market is considered to be too small. Their publishing project manager Margot Jones confirmed that 'the SLV is constrained by both costs and by the need for any book publishing with which they are involved to cover its costs'.²⁵

These cost constraints on the publishing of letter collections also affected, and continue to affect, the decisions made by feminist presses, even taking into consideration the market for women's writing that developed from the early 1970s, with the impact of second-wave feminism and the development of women's studies courses around Australia. Louise Poland states that these presses were

politically or culturally led rather than market driven. Some provided the means for feminist and other left-wing publications to be produced without censorship, some sought to reflect the

²⁴ Interview in person with Tracy O'Shaughnessy, 30 October 2008. The Miegunyah Press, an imprint of Melbourne University Publishing, was established in 1967 by Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade, funded from their family trust to assist with the publication of high-quality hardback books focused on Australian culture, history and politics. O'Shaughnessy's observation about whose letters were being considered for publication is echoed by Spinifex Press publisher Susan Hawthorne, interview by email, 27 October 2008.

²⁵ Interview in person with Margot Jones, 7 January 2016.

political concerns of the Australian women's liberation movement, while others aimed to encourage women writers and present experimental and potentially transformative women's fiction to their readership.²⁶

While I agree that political and cultural concerns were key to the establishment of these presses, they were also, to varying degrees, market driven. Even though slightly more women's letter collections began to be published from the early 1980s, and were more often being edited by female academics, these collections tended to be the letters of Australian women writers whose creative work was being studied at secondary and tertiary level, and thus was being brought back into print to supply the demand such courses created.

The Sisters Publishing Collective, established in 1979 by five women – Diana Gribble, Hilary McPhee, Sally Milner, Anne O'Donovan and Joyce Nicholson – published writing by and for women, with a focus mainly on new literary fiction and poetry.²⁷ It also offered a mail-order book club service in response to the difficulties of distribution that afflict all Australian small independent presses without their own sales representatives to cover wide areas of sales territory. Historian Geoffrey Blainey termed this 'the tyranny of distance', in which the distances across a vast continent have shaped Australia's culture and history and affect the means by which businesses operate.²⁸ The members of the collective, all publishers in their own right, were driven by their strong sense that not enough was being published by or for Australian women. Despite the collective's commitment to women's writing, neither Hilary McPhee nor Anne O'Donovan could recall the genre of women's letter collections even coming under discussion at Sisters publishing meetings. They further noted that such works would not have been considered commercially viable for Sisters. The archival records for the Sisters Publishing Collective confirm that women's letter collections were neither sought nor received by them.²⁹

Both Anne O'Donovan and Hilary McPhee expressed a degree of scepticism about a perceived 'flowering' of women's writing from the late 1970s, and commented that they 'were sometimes

²⁶ Louise Poland, 'The Devil and the Angel?: Australia's Feminist Presses and the Multinational Agenda', *Hecate*, vol. 29, no 2, 2003, p. 123. Poland also acknowledges that commercial presses continued to publish into this market.

²⁷ Sisters ceased to operate in 1984.

²⁸ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1966.

²⁹ Interview in person with Hilary McPhee, 19 January 2016; interview in person with Anne O'Donovan, 30 November 2015; Sisters Publishing Ltd, University of Melbourne Archives, accession no 99/16.

caricatured as feminist publishers by the media'.³⁰ There were also suggestions that books by women writers were gaining a disproportionate amount of review coverage, and that women writers generally were being given preferential treatment by publishers in what some male critics referred to as 'the perfumed garden'.³¹

Hilary McPhee and Diana Gribble had founded McPhee Gribble in Melbourne in 1975. They actually began their business with a series of very successful children's books, Practical Puffins, which were commissioned by John Hooker at Penguin Books Australia.³² Despite approaches from 'consciousness-raising' women who insisted that the company should be publishing more works by female writers, McPhee and Gribble always referred to themselves as a publishing company being run by two women rather than as a feminist press; their list included works by male and female authors.³³ McPhee Gribble did publish two works that contained women's letters in 1984, both of which can be categorised as themed collections. Lucy Frost's edited collection *No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices From the Australian Bush* drew on the letters and diaries of women dealing with the hardships of life in the outback and gave a presence to previously unheard voices from the period.³⁴ *Arthur and Emily: Letters in Wartime*, edited by Irene Macdonald and Susan Radvansky, is a fragment of a correspondence between an enlisted soldier and his wife, written during the early years of World War I, a perennially popular subject, though published correspondence from that war in particular, tended to be letters sent home from soldiers.³⁵ Both of these collections were marketed initially for their content – colonial settler experiences; World War I – more than for the fact that they included women's personal letters. Eventually, like *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, Frost's collection was adopted for women's studies courses.

³⁰ Hilary McPhee, *Other People's Words*, Picador Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2001, p. 243.

³¹ See Gerard Windsor, 'Writers and Reviewers', *Island Magazine*, no 27, winter 1986, pp. 15-18; and Don Anderson, 'Windsor Castled?', *Island Magazine*, no 27, winter 1986, pp. 29-31. One should also consider the reasons behind the establishment of the Stella Prize in 2013, named for Stella Maria Sarah 'Miles' Franklin, to address the under-representation of women writers in both literary awards in Australia and in review coverage of books by women writers.

³² The company was sold to Penguin Books Australia in 1989, and while McPhee Gribble remained as a Penguin imprint for some years, it no longer exists.

³³ Interview in person with Hilary McPhee, 19 January 2016. She referred to this as a case of political correctness and a sense of entitlement meeting commercial reality.

³⁴ The letters and diaries reveal lives in stark contrast to those of Rachel Henning and her family.

³⁵ Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (1974) drew heavily on letters and diaries. There are numerous published personal correspondences from this period (see Appendix I: Australian Letter Collections Published Since 1950). Questions surround the authenticity of the letters between Arthur and Emily Dunbar, as discussed in see Chapter Three of this thesis.

McPhee Gribble did not seek out women's letter collections for publication as they could not see a substantial market for such a genre. They did, however, publish a novel by folk musician and activist Glen Tomasetti, titled *Man of Letters: A Romance* (1981), about a philandering academic, which was a dig at the portentous Men of Letters genre.³⁶

Feminist and literary publisher Spinifex Press, established in Melbourne in 1991 by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, also regards women's letter collections as too specialised for their list. Director Susan Hawthorne noted, 'I don't recall ever being sent a collection of letters, and we at Spinifex have not done any nor considered doing so. And it's not something that we'd be likely to do in the foreseeable future (of course, it all depends whose letters they are)'.³⁷

Hawthorne had previously been an editor at Penguin Books Australia, where she had charge of the Penguin Australian Women's Library (PAWL), which ran from 1988 to 1991. Some women's letters were included in the series, most notably *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, however the majority of titles were reissues of out-of-print novels and non-fiction works by women writers. The overall sales figures for the series were poor apart from the Henning letters, yet it does illustrate attempts by mainstream publishers to tap into a perceived market for women's writing. Indeed, from the early 1970s the then Penguin Books Australia publisher John Hooker had been made aware, particularly by female colleagues in the company, of a growing market for books directed at women. Hooker published Anne Summers' bestseller *Damned Whores and God's Police*, which was released in International Women's Year in 1975, followed by Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* in 1976. The success of Summers' book in particular subsequently attracted other female authors to Penguin, however collections of women's letters were rarely offered.³⁸ Former associate publisher at Penguin Books Australia Jackie Yowell observed:

There just weren't that many collections of letters per se that we were offered, or could find, that could be viable books; or editors or academics with the initiative or will or time or resources to pull them together interestingly into a book. Given the issues of access, research

³⁶ The novel's protagonist was allegedly based on the historian Manning Clark.

³⁷ Interview by email with Susan Hawthorne, 27 October 2008.

³⁸ Interview in person with Anne O'Donovan, 30 November 2015; interview in person with Hilary McPhee, 19 January 2016. Both O'Donovan and McPhee were employed as editors at Penguin during the early 1970s, and both commented on the degree of cynicism among their male colleagues that was apparent in discussions about contracting books for a female readership.

time, editing, permissions, etc it is not very surprising there weren't many ... I don't recall the Literature Board [of the Australia Council] being particularly supportive of such projects, either.³⁹

With scant support from literary funding bodies or sufficient commercial imperative, it is not surprising that the editing of letter collections, therefore, has tended to be the preserve of academics with access to both financial and research assistance from their institutions or from Australian Research Council grants or library fellowships.⁴⁰ Even this support does not assist the editor with finding a publisher for the collection. Editors I interviewed during the course of my research, and indeed my own experience,⁴¹ confirmed that the search for a publisher could be a lengthy and dispiriting process. Publishers, be they commercial or scholarly, are generally unwilling to contract large collections of correspondence, which are expensive to produce and to sell, and they do not necessarily want them to be heavily footnoted and annotated. Collections have to be shaped for publication to make them accessible to a perceived readership. The first major editorial task is to cut the original transcription, often by a third or more, to arrive at a manageable manuscript in which themes are made clear and on which a narrative structure can be imposed.

Historian Deborah Jordan's collection of love letters between Vance and Nettie Palmer⁴² is a manuscript of 100,000 words extracted from an original 350,000-word transcription of the Palmers' complete correspondence, for which no publisher could be found. Jordan was of the view that 'the love letters are the gems of their unpublished writing. I approached the letters initially totally from that perspective ... The book is [meant] to generate a new interest in the

³⁹ Interview by email with Jackie Yowell, 24 October 2008. It should be noted, however, that block grants to publishing companies could be used at their discretion to assist with the production costs of selected books. Lucy Frost's anthology *No Place For a Nervous Lady* (1984), for example, was published with the assistance of the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

⁴⁰ The funding is not generous due to such works being regarded as collections of documents rather than original creative works. Published collections of letters are either not recognised by the academy in terms of Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) points or are given low rankings, and therefore do not benefit an academic's publishing profile.

⁴¹ My experience of editing the correspondence of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright is discussed in my article 'Epistolary Editing: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

⁴² The Palmers were husband and wife, and were prominent Australian writers and literary critics in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Palmer and indirectly challenge the crusted representations of them'.⁴³ She was aware of the need to 'balance the letters, and privilege the dialogue between the two [Palmer], and then privilege the courtship'.⁴⁴ In the process of finding a balance in this love affair conducted through letters, Jordan has had to cut and shape a transcription of the surviving correspondence which initially contained three times as many of Vance's love letters as Nettie's.⁴⁵

Attaining an equal balance of correspondence also shaped the selection of letters by writers and friends Dymphna Cusack, Florence James and Miles Franklin, which biographer Marilla North edited into the joint collection *Yarn Spinners: A Story in Letters*. North described the collection as 'part of a hybrid way of showing the complex and interactive creative life-story',⁴⁶ with particular significance to Dymphna Cusack, whose biography North was writing. North, like Jordan, was asked to cut the manuscript substantially for publication: 'after initial submission of the MS to UQP [University of Queensland Press] ... Rosie [Fitzgibbon] set me to cutting out over 100,000 words. I cut by themes, honing in on the women's collaborative writing process ... my friend Jill Roe was up to her neck in Miles Franklin's biography, so I minimised Miles a little from sisterly respect'.⁴⁷

Both Jordan and North grasped the importance of clarifying marketable themes – one, a love affair, and the other women's friendship – for the letter collections they edited. Part of making these appealing is an understanding of the publishers' categorisations of such collections and aiming to fit within those parameters.⁴⁸

How Publishers Categorise Women's Letter Collections

Women's published letter collections fall into three categories: the self-contained narrative; the companion volume to biography or autobiography; and the themed collection that addresses a particular topic. The four case studies that form part of this thesis represent the range of publishers and the differing commercial imperatives that impact on the editing, production and

⁴³ Interview by email with Deborah Jordan, 23 December 2015. The Palmer love letters have been contracted by independent press Brandl and Schlesinger.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Interview by email with Marilla North, 5 January 2016.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Even taking this approach, the print runs for each of these collections were modest: North's *Yarn Spinners* had a print run of 2000 copies; Jordan's is likely to be less than 1000 copies (information provided by the authors).

marketing of such publications.⁴⁹ At one end of the spectrum is the self-contained narrative *The Letters of Rachel Henning* (1951-), heavily edited for serialisation in the *Bulletin* in the early 1950s and subsequently published in nine different editions, mainly by trade publishing companies Angus & Robertson and Penguin Books Australia,⁵⁰ for over sixty years; it has sold nearly 80,000 copies and remains in print both as a hardback and as an ebook.⁵¹ At the other end of the spectrum is *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926* (2003), a themed archival collection edited by academics Patricia Grimshaw, Elizabeth Nelson and Sandra Smith, partly funded by an Australian Research Council grant, and partly by Grimshaw herself, and released in a very small print run through the University of Melbourne's School of Historical Studies.⁵² Located chronologically between these two publications are poet Gwen Harwood's unexpectedly successful *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943* (1990), published by Angus & Robertson and edited by Harwood's friend Alison Hoddinott, which won the Age Book of the Year award; and the more modestly received *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995* (2001), published by the University of Queensland Press and edited by Gregory Kratzmann in place of the Harwood biography he had intended to write.⁵³ The fourth case study is *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000* (2007), published by the Miegunyah Press imprint of Melbourne University Publishing, and which I edited in collaboration with Barbara Blackman and Meredith McKinney, Judith Wright's daughter. *Portrait of a Friendship* is primarily a companion volume to the biographies both Blackman and Wright had published previously, yet also a self-contained narrative of a particular friendship to the exclusion of other close relationships in each woman's life.⁵⁴ Each of these collections, from across the spectrum of commercial publishing (*The Letters*

⁴⁹ Each of these case studies is centred on a specific collection of women's letters; in the case of poets Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright, two volumes each of their letters are discussed.

⁵⁰ The Angus & Robertson imprint remains, however the company was taken over by HarperCollins in 1989. Penguin Books was merged with Random House in 2012 to form the global company Penguin Random House.

⁵¹ The publication history of the bestseller *The Letters of Rachel Henning* is discussed in my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

⁵² The publication history of *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926* is discussed in my article 'Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

⁵³ The family constraints on the publishing of Gwen Harwood's letters is discussed in my article 'Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood', which is included as a case study in this thesis. Although both of the Harwood letter collections are in my view companion volumes, a biography of Harwood is yet to be published.

⁵⁴ A comparative study of scholarly and non-scholarly epistolary editing is presented in my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

of Rachel Henning, *Blessed City*, and *Portrait of a Friendship*) to scholarly publishing (*A Steady Storm of Correspondence*, *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria*) to a form of self-publishing (*Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria*), emphasises the imperative of reaching a perceived readership, and how this in turn shapes the editing and publishing of women's letter collections.

Women's Letter Collections as Self-Contained Narratives

Two of the case studies included in this thesis, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* and Gwen Harwood's *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*, reveal the manner in which commercial presses – Angus & Robertson and Penguin Books Australia – have shaped letter collections for a general readership. From its first serialised release in *The Bulletin* and through every subsequent edition, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* has been promoted as a pioneer narrative, eventually with the qualification of 'woman's' pioneer narrative. Henning herself (1826-1914) was an unknown writer and was not alive to promote her work on publication; it was the posthumous story presented in her letters that was of interest to both male and female readers. The pioneer narrative into which the letters were shaped for publication, illustrated with a series of line drawings by artist Norman Lindsay, took precedence over the letters' value as family papers and archival documents. The published letters were also edited into a self-contained narrative that was not reliant on further information about the author. The continued success of this collection owes much to the manner in which it was marketed variously as historical pioneering autobiography to appeal to an interest in Australiana in the 1950s and 1960s; as a female narrative suited to the women's studies courses being established at universities around Australia in the 1970s; as a nostalgic, if sanitised, version of white colonial settlement to reflect the themes of the bicentennial celebrations of the 1980s; as a successful example of women's writing in the mainstream in the 1990s; and now out of copyright, it is available as an ebook, without the Lindsay drawings, and as a US-published hardback, in which it is promoted as authentic, iconic Australiana.

Interviews with several of the publishers and editors who were involved with various editions of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* confirm the importance of marketing to a readership in

discussions concerning the book.⁵⁵ Former McPhee Gribble director Hilary McPhee was employed as a junior editor at Penguin Books Australia from 1969 to 1971, and much of her work involved putting takeover editions into Penguin paperback format, using existing film stock from hardback editions made available by other publishers, such as Angus & Robertson.⁵⁶ She recalls that there was little interest shown by Penguin senior management in publishing a paperback edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* in 1969, the author being both female and dead, and therefore difficult to promote; this was compounded by the fact that Henning had published no other books.⁵⁷

A paperback edition was licensed from Angus & Robertson, however, and Penguin Books Australia subsequently promoted *The Letters of Rachel Henning* into the education market, resulting in the book being set as reading at both secondary and tertiary level and increasing its sales considerably.⁵⁸ Because the book was kept in print by Penguin from 1969 onwards, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was available to them to include in both the UK-based Lives and Letters series, and the abovementioned Penguin Australian Women's Library (PAWL), which was established in 1988 and ran until 1991.⁵⁹ After copyright on *The Letters of Rachel Henning* had expired, it was released as an ebook by Project Gutenberg Australia and subsequently by Amazon as a Kindle title and a small independent US-based press.

The publication history of poet Gwen Harwood's *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943* shares some similarities with *The Letters of Rachel Henning* in that both collections were published initially in modest print runs, were promoted as self-contained narratives, and

⁵⁵ The full publishing history of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* is discussed in my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

⁵⁶ Book production processes at this time involved the filming of final page proofs for a book, with all text, illustrations and pagination in place. The film was held by the printer but owned by the publisher of the book. This could be used, for a fee, by another publisher to produce another edition, most commonly a paperback, of a previously published hardback book.

⁵⁷ Interview in person with Hilary McPhee, 19 January 2016.

⁵⁸ Penguin Books Australia, although not an education publisher, established an Education Sales Department in the early 1970s, and their sales representatives successfully sold trade list titles into the primary, secondary and tertiary education markets. Tertiary Education Sales Manager Rosanne Turner listed the names of academics and the courses they were teaching at every university in Australia and sent review copies of books she deemed relevant, following up with visits to campuses. Penguin Books Australia fairly quickly established a Women's Studies section in its sales catalogues to assist with the marketing of specific titles. (Interview in person with Rosanne Turner, 7 April 2016.)

⁵⁹ See my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', pp. 88-89, which is included as a case study in this thesis.

subsequently obtained a market in education settings that lifted their sales considerably. *Blessed City* is a wartime friendship/romance in letters written by a young Gwen Harwood over the course of a year to a naval reserve officer, stationed in Brisbane, of whom she was very fond. The collection was contracted by Harwood's poetry publishers Angus & Robertson in mid-1988, with muted enthusiasm and on the understanding that it would not be published for two years, when space would become available on the modest poetry and literature list.⁶⁰ Although such lists were for many years part of the publishing programs of several large companies, notably Angus & Robertson, Penguin Books Australia and Pan Macmillan, they were heavily subsidised by both the Australia Council and publishers' more commercially viable titles.

Blessed City was submitted by the editor Alison Hoddinott as a full manuscript with footnotes and no excisions to the original letters, 'in proper academic style'.⁶¹ Angus & Robertson requested that the manuscript be cut by a third for publication in order to strip the narrative back to the main characters and events. Many of the footnotes were removed. Harwood herself was in favour of the cutting, noting that she and Hoddinott should be publishing something that people would actually want to read.⁶² Because Gwen Harwood was an established poet when *Blessed City* was published, and the fact that winning the Age Book of the Year award was judged on the basis that it was perceived as part-autobiography, the letters narrative was read also as a source of inspiration for her creative work.

The issue of conflating letters with autobiography or biography is pertinent because as Richard D. Altick has wryly observed, 'Whatever theoretical reasons may be advanced for the wholesale printing of letters in the name of biography, allowance must be made for the familiar fact of human indolence',⁶³ meaning that the collation of a subject's letters required less work than the actual writing of a biography. Yet letter collections promoted as a form of autobiography require considerable editorial intervention in order to fashion a narrative, and editors of these collections may have to negotiate with a still-living author, as I did when editing the correspondence between Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright, and a tightly controlled literary estate, as did the editors of Gwen Harwood's correspondence, Alison Hoddinott and Gregory Kratzmann.

⁶⁰ Interview by telephone with Alison Hoddinott, 24 February 2015.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Richard D. Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1966, p. 198.

Hoddinott and Kratzmann both abandoned attempts to write Harwood's biography in the face of restrictions imposed by Harwood's son, her literary executor. The volumes of her letters were promoted as forms of autobiography, yet they are in fact companion volumes to a life story that is yet to be written.

Women's Letter Collections as Companion Volumes

Women's letter collections marketed as self-contained narratives are in many cases actually companion volumes: a form of 'associated' publishing aligned with a biography or an autobiography, or a writer's literary works. And writers, as one would expect, tend to produce elegant and articulate letters.⁶⁴ Mirielle Bossis, however, cautions against the temptation to treat an author's correspondence as 'a gold mine of biographical information', noting that 'We need to abandon the widespread belief that in these writings one finds an authentic expression of the truth, raw, natural, unmarked by any kind of censorship'.⁶⁵ Publishers are prone to use exactly those terms to promote letter collections, of course. The publisher's preference with companion volumes is to release the biography or autobiography first, followed by a collection of letters – the latter being regarded as source material for the former, serving to illuminate character, personality and motive when subject's reputation has been established already.⁶⁶ It is more difficult to generate readers' interest in a letter collection than in a biography or autobiography, especially if the volumes are not published relatively close together.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ There are women writers from the eighteenth century, for example, who have retained a small niche in literary history because of the elegance of their letters. See Leslie B. Mittleman, 'The Twentieth-Century English Letter: A Dying Art?', *World Literature Today*, vol. 64, no 2, 1990, pp. 221-226.

⁶⁵ Mirielle Bossis, 'Methodological Journeys Through Correspondences', *Yale French Studies*, No 71, 1986, pp. 63-75.

⁶⁶ The most successful recent example of this form of 'associated' publishing in Australia has been David Marr's best-selling authorised biography *Patrick White: A Life* (1991), released shortly after White's death, and which was followed by *Patrick White Letters* (1994), which sold several thousand copies. Marr notes that, 'In May 1986 [White] gave me authority to collect his letters. White had been asking – though less and less forcibly as the years passed – that all these be destroyed. Many were, but a great deal of this wonderful correspondence survives ... By this time I was working on White's biography and he was no longer urging the destruction of his letters ... White's change of heart puzzled many of his friends but its cause was simple: privacy was not now the issue; the biography was; and White knew biographies fed on letters. I warned White that once the biography was finished I would be asking to edit the letters. He gave his permission the day we finished working through the typescript together'. *Patrick White Letters*, Random House, Sydney, 1991, pp. 624-625 (sales figures provided by the publishers, commercial in confidence, but confirmation can be provided on request).

⁶⁷ Sales figures clearly show the disparity, with letter collections tending to sell less than a quarter of the numbers obtained for a biography or autobiography (sales figures provided by the publishers, commercial in confidence, but confirmation can be provided on request).

To take an illustrative example, historian Jill Roe notes in her acknowledgements in *Stella Miles Franklin: A Biography* that ‘the origins of this book lie in the feminist ferment of the 1970s and in the then publishing program of Angus & Robertson’.⁶⁸ She was approached in late 1982 by Angus & Robertson publisher Richard Walsh to write a ‘life and times’ of Stella Miles Franklin. No full biography of Franklin had been written,⁶⁹ and Angus & Robertson were reissuing much of Franklin’s backlist to feed the revival of interest in her work following the release of the film of *My Brilliant Career* in 1979. Roe was aware that, ‘If most of these [reissues] were, in publishing terms, opportunistic, they also suggest areas of ongoing relevance in the writings of Miles Franklin. At least they have kept her name before the reading public’.⁷⁰ Opportunism, of course, is essential for successful commercial publishing, and Franklin’s novels – in particular *My Brilliant Career* and *My Career Goes Bung* – were reprinted several times throughout the 1980s, the former with film tie-in covers. Other Franklin titles were reissued to coincide with national events, and a centenary edition of *My Brilliant Career* was released for the centenary of Federation in 2001. Franklin, along with Henry Lawson and A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, was celebrated as a national achiever, with *My Brilliant Career* being nominated as one of the books ‘that tell us who we are and what Australia is’.⁷¹ While acknowledging this wave of interest in Franklin and her fiction writing, Roe’s preference was for an initial focus on the Franklin archives. She insisted that,

the primary sources were so vast I’d better try to get a grip on them first ... Walsh was very keen on Miles and her A&R backlist and he went along with my judgement ... 100,000 words was impossible if justice was to be done to a body of material not previously utilised. I estimated that the total extant correspondence was 100,000 words ... There was initially supposed to be one volume of 100,000 words but I just pressed on until the ground was covered ... There was always a close link between the letters and the biography. The letters were always a kind of supplement to the biography.⁷²

⁶⁸ Jill Roe, *Stella Miles Franklin: A Biography*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2008, p. 665.

⁶⁹ Franklin’s friend Marjorie Barnard had published a commissioned biography in 1967, without having had access to Franklin’s archives, however.

⁷⁰ Roe, *Stella Miles Franklin*, p. 564.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 566.

⁷² Interview by email with Jill Roe, 9 February 2016.

Two volumes of Franklin's letters were published in 1993: *My Congenials: Miles Franklin and Friends in Letters*, Volume One 1879-1938 and Volume Two 1939-1954. Roe was unwilling to rush the work of writing a biography of Franklin,⁷³ and it was not published until 2008, by which time interest in Franklin and her work had contracted to a more academic audience. *The Diaries of Miles Franklin* had been published in 2004 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Franklin's death, and even with the promise of personal observations that were 'revealing, engaging and scintillatingly witty ... friends and enemies so skilfully dissected within the pages', the sales figures of around 3000 copies were considerably less than had been anticipated by the publishers.⁷⁴ Roe's biography of Franklin, although critically acclaimed and the recipient of several literary prizes, sold in similarly modest quantities.⁷⁵

The second volume of poet Gwen Harwood's letters, *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*, and Judith Wright's selected letters, *With Love and Fury*, were both published in lieu of biographies, and although they were both promoted as forms of autobiography they are in fact companion volumes of letters. Kratzmann has spoken of the task of 'condensing that vast body [of Harwood's correspondence] down into such a small space and maintaining a kind of narrative that comes through the letters ... choosing not only which letters to include but which correspondence to include so that there is a sense of what's going on from one letter to the next, so that there was a story ... in that sense editing can be a very creative task'.⁷⁶ Even with biographical essays to introduce each decade of correspondence, however, both *A Steady Storm of Correspondence* and *With Love and Fury* are discontinuous narratives that assume a degree of familiarity with their subjects' life and work.

Themed Women's Letter Collections

Themed collections of women's letters on topics such as family, friendships, and love affairs, tend to be the preserve of commercial publishers, who release them as popular anthologies to coincide with key dates for women readers on the bookselling calendar: Valentine's Day,

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The diaries were edited by Mitchell Library curator Paul Brunton, and were published jointly by the State Library of New South Wales, where Franklin's papers are held, and Allen & Unwin Publishers. Production costs were partly underwritten by the library. Sales figures provided by the publishers, commercial in confidence, but confirmation can be provided upon request.

⁷⁵ Sales figures provided by the publishers, commercial in confidence, but confirmation can be provided upon request.

⁷⁶ 'Profile of an Editor: A Passion for Editing', *The Society of Editors' Newsletter*, August/September 2008, p. 7.

Mother's Day, and Christmas in particular. When discussions with the publishers about *Portrait of a Friendship* were underway, for example, a release date timed to coincide with Mother's Day was one of the first decisions made, and the book's production schedule was drawn up to work backwards from that date.

A more historically-themed collection is *The Oxford Book of Australian Letters*, which 'covers the rise and decline of the letter'.⁷⁷ The selection of two hundred letters draws on correspondence from first European contact to the present day, with a balance of male and female writers and a wide range of professions. Editors Brenda Niall and John Thompson were not above a little pandering to voyeurism, however. Barbara Blackman expressed to me her displeasure in being asked for a copy of the letter she wrote to her then husband Charles Blackman and referred to in her memoir: 'a letter of resignation from marriage to take effect on our twenty-seventh wedding anniversary'.⁷⁸

An important exception to the commercial topics of themed collections of letters are those that focus on the forgotten, or at least neglected, women's voices in history: that is, the poor, the dispossessed, and the enslaved. The UK feminist publishers Virago and The Women's Press released a number of such titles.⁷⁹ As historian Carolyn Steedman has noted,

The absence of women from conventional historical accounts, discussion of this absence (and discussion of the real archival difficulties that lie in the way of presenting their lives in a historical context) are, at the same time, a massive assertion of what lies hidden ... in women's history, loss and absence remain exactly that – loss, absence, insignificance.⁸⁰

The anthology *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840*, for example, edited by historians Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender, focuses on the working lives of white colonial women – from forced labour to shopkeeping, farm work to vice-regal duties. Their

⁷⁷ Brenda Niall and John Thompson (eds), *The Oxford Book of Australian Letters*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. xx.

⁷⁸ Barbara Blackman, *Glass After Glass: Autobiographical Reflections*, Viking Penguin, Melbourne, 1997, p. 326.

⁷⁹ Examples of these are *The Diaries of Hannah Culwick: Victorian Maidservant*, edited and introduced by Liz Stanley, Virago, London, 1984; *Insiders: Women's Experience of Prison*, edited by Una Padel and Prue Stevenson, Virago, London, 1988; *The Diaries and Letters of Two Working Women 1897-1917*, edited by Tierl Thompson, The Women's Press, London, 1987.

⁸⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History*, River Oram Press, London, 1992, p. 164.

absence from the accounts of white settlement has become less marked owing to archival research and an increased focus on women's writing since the 1970s in particular. Clarke and Spender noted in their introduction that 'it is surprising how many of them – convict women included – were literate',⁸¹ though they do not offer explanations for why this might have been and provide no evidence for the claim. The letter and diary extracts included in this anthology are overwhelmingly the writings of educated women, and therefore present the perspectives of the middle class.

A considerably more challenging and unusual collection is *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*, one of the case studies included in this thesis. It is a themed collection of letters of protest and appeal written by Indigenous women and contained within the extensive and complex archives of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, held jointly in the Public Records Office of Victoria and the National Archives of Australia. Documentary sources, such as letters, 'from the other side' of colonial contact history are rare and are frequently subject to cultural sensitivity overlays. The decision to collect women's letters only was a deliberate choice by the academic editors, who were involved with researching and teaching women's studies at the University of Melbourne.⁸² It is costly to establish and clear copyright on such correspondence, and such a letter collection has a specialised, academic readership. These collections, however, have the potential to reach a wider audience in digitised form (currently excluding this particular collection because of the cultural sensitivity overlay in place on such material held in the Public Records Office of Victoria and the National Archives of Australia).⁸³

Each of these three categories of published letter collections is underpinned by a narrative structure, either individual or thematic. The female narrative is evident in collections of one woman's writing, such as *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, Gwen Harwood's *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943* and *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*, and Judith Wright's *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*; in a correspondence between two women such as *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters*

⁸¹ Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender (eds), *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p. xx.

⁸² The issue of access constraints on Indigenous material held in Australian colonial archives is discussed in detail in my article 'Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

⁸³ The digitising of letter collections is discussed in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis.

of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000; and also collections such as *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*, which sought to give prominence to the individual life stories contained within an impersonal colonial government archive.

In order to explore this phenomenon, in the following chapter I focus more broadly on the female narrative in women's writing, referencing published letters, diaries, memoirs and fiction, and how this genre is categorised both in commercial terms and as a focus of feminist analysis with the establishment of women's studies courses in the academy.

Chapter Two

The Female Narrative and Australian Women's Letter Collections

In this chapter I explore the concept of the female narrative in relation to women's letters, with specific reference to Australian collections. I locate my discussion within the broader category of women's personal writing, with reference to diaries and memoirs as well as letters and the associated genre of epistolary novels. I argue that women's published letter collections have remained on the periphery of women's writing, even when it attained more prominence following the establishment of independent feminist presses as well as women's studies courses around Australia in the 1970s. Few published collections of Australian women's letters were available for study at that time, and those that were tended to be focused on the domestic, forming little if any part of the male-dominated historical and literary culture of the time. Australian women's studies courses were also initially more grounded in political and sociological theory rather than individual, domestic experience. Relevant women's archival material, including the correspondences of women writers, which did begin to appear in anthologies from the mid-1980s, was often spread across much larger collections and therefore was not easily located within them.⁸⁴ It was not until there was a focus on the form and context as well as the content of Australian women's letter collections that they began to be assessed as historically and culturally relevant, making them, as Shari Benstock argues, 'legitimate within the academy'.⁸⁵

The History of Publishing of Women's Letters

Letter writing was regarded as a necessary accomplishment for an educated woman, rather than an art form, 'that could be carried on at odd moments ... to fit in with the scope and expectations of a woman's life'.⁸⁶ Similarly, the writing of women's diaries and even memoirs could be seen as

⁸⁴ The State Library of Victoria plans to establish a reader's guide to women's voices across their manuscript collections as a means of making women's writing easier to locate. (Interview in person with Margot Jones, Publishing Projects Manager, SLV, 7 January 2016.) See also Lucy Frost's article 'The Politics of Writing Convict Lives: Academic Research, State Archives and Family History', *Life Writing*, vol. 8, no 1, 2011, pp. 19-33, in which she discusses the 'willed amnesia' that saw convict records being first ignored as historical sources owing to the convict stain, and then closed to the general public in the 1960s for several decades.

⁸⁵ Shari Benstock (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writing*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1988, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, AMS Press, New York, 1980, p. 68.

merely ‘recording culture, neither creating nor analysing it’.⁸⁷ According to Ruth Perry, diary and letter writing in particular also developed at a time ‘when literate women ... were dispossessed of all meaningful activity save marrying and breeding, and when even these activities were to be done only in socially acceptable patterns’.⁸⁸ Into the nineteenth century, conduct book writers like Hannah Moore ‘expended many words ... telling women that the female mind was incapable of making connections between ideas and entities, incapable of drawing out meaning and purpose from the events of life, incapable of hermeneutic activity’.⁸⁹

The publishing of women’s letters, diaries and memoirs, in particular across Europe from the early eighteenth century, proliferated with innovations in papermaking, typography and printing that allowed for more widespread circulation of published materials. Yet, as Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook states, ‘Against the swarm of public print forms that proliferated ... the letter became an emblem of the private; while keeping its actual function as an agent of the public exchange of knowledge, it took on the general connotations it still holds for us today, intimately identified with the body’.⁹⁰ It is the appeal of looking at, and even touching, a personal letter, and assessing the writer’s choice of paper, the quality of handwriting, the smudges caused possibly by sweat or tears that fascinates the archival researcher and offers the suggestion of a personal connection.

Eighteenth-century publishers of letter collections often mimicked what Heckendorn Cook refers to as ‘traces of the body’ by means of ‘pretend inkblots, teardrops, erasures, revisions, a scriptive tremulousness’ in order to maintain the perception of individual personal exchange.⁹¹

The placing of the private sphere within the public domain was heightened by the growing market for reading various forms of published letters. These were by men of political and literary standing, by women writing from the domestic sphere, and for correspondences across a range of genres: ‘letters, speeches, sermons, treatises ... books, broadsheets and essays, all widely

⁸⁷ Jane Marcus, ‘Invincible Mediocrity: The Private Selves of Public Women’, in Benstock (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writing*, p. 120. Katie Holmes’s study of Australian women’s diaries upends this observation by ‘giving priority to the seemingly insignificant ... [and] thereby inverting traditional hierarchies of importance’. *Spaces in Her Day: Australian Women’s Diaries 1920s-1930s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, pp. xii-xiii.

⁸⁸ Perry, p.x.

⁸⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1992, p. 167.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996, p. 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

circulated in print'.⁹² The perceived need for instruction in how to compose such correspondences was met by the publication of letter-writing manuals, which as Ruth Perry has noted, offered directives to its readers 'for a good deal more than style. It would seem that many readers were looking for instruction in how to think and feel'.⁹³ The manuals often drew on complicated life experiences in order to instruct their readers in morally correct responses to life. A prime example can be found in the full title of epistolary novelist Samuel Richardson's letter collection, which was *Letters Written to and For Particular Friends on the Most Important Occasions. Directing not only the Requisite Style and Forms To Be Observed in Writing FAMILIAR LETTERS; But How to Think and Act Justly and Prudently in the Common Concerns of Human Life*.⁹⁴

The letter form was in use for a range of purposes, and as Ruth Perry has noted, it accorded with a demand for what was considered to be authentic and informed reading: 'the new craze for scientific objectivity ... for stories of real people [and] ... for personally verifiable documents'.⁹⁵ This interest extended to travel writing in the form of extended letters home from those exploring new capitalist ventures for the British Empire in particular, in which all the strange and marvellous aspects of 'new lands and foreign people'⁹⁶ could be described. Initially the preserve of male adventurers, the genre of travel writing was taken up by educated middle and upper-class women, thought to be 'more sensitive to nature, and to spiritual matters, than their male counterparts',⁹⁷ though the 'sensitivity' tended to be counterbalanced by the air of British imperial superiority.⁹⁸ As Sanders notes,

From the domestic journal, it was only a short step to the journal kept on a foreign tour, which often formed the basis for modest publication on the diarist's return ... The woman traveller

⁹² Ibid., p.13.

⁹³ Perry, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 86 (capitals and punctuation as in the original title). Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook notes that 'Although the prefatory material of *Pamela* [Richardson's epistolary novel published in 1740] claims that the text is based on real letters, both the plot and the epistolary form of this novel grew out of [the] explicitly didactic model letter manual Richardson was writing (p. 19).

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. xi.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁹⁷ Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Women Writing in the West Indies, 1804-1939: 'A Hot Place, Belonging to Us'*, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 70.

⁹⁸ Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 18.

went abroad as a reporter of strange customs or breathtaking views, which it was her task to relay home with an appropriate sense of the picturesque.⁹⁹

A little-known and highly amusing parody of the patronisingly colourful travel diary and letters genre is *Through Darkest Pondelayo: An Account of the Adventures of Two English Ladies on a Cannibal Island* (1936), dedicated to 'Our Far-Flung Empire Builders' and written by 'Serena Livingstone-Stanley'; this was the pseudonym of Australian writer Joan Lindsay, better known as the author of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967). In *Pondelayo*, Lindsay satirised the imperialist arrogance and triviality of much women's travel writing that had become popular from the mid-nineteenth century: 'From the deck we can see the harbour quite plainly – A white sandy beach much like Eastbourne (except for the grass huts and palm trees)'; 'Francis found a nest of alligators eggs and Placket tossed up an omelette in Mr G's helmet'.¹⁰⁰ She also included a series of montage 'trip' photographs that were actually set up in a back garden in East Melbourne. Lindsay's cousin Martin Boyd claimed that *Pondelayo* contained one of the best collections of malapropisms in the English language:¹⁰¹ 'As Francis has always suffered from verdigris at great heights he went down the track to the valley backwards';¹⁰² 'By good luck a total ellipse of the moon and pitch dark when at last we were given the signal to start'.¹⁰³

The travel narrative, as Blanton observes, 'is a compelling and seductive form of storytelling ... Indeed, the journey pattern is one of the most persistent forms of all narratives ... departure, adventure and return'.¹⁰⁴ Letters from travellers were popular, especially those that allowed for the comforting assumption that 'home' is best, as were other collections: 'letters of spying and political intrigue, love letters, letters satirising social conditions or caricaturing types, letters telling interesting stories, letters from famous people, letters from plain anonymous people. Some

⁹⁹ Valerie Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century England*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1989, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ 'Serena Livingstone-Stanley' (Joan Lindsay), *Through Darkest Pondelayo: An Account of the Adventures of Two English Ladies on a Cannibal Island*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1936, p. 144.

¹⁰¹ *Day of My Delight: Anglo-Australian Memoir*, Martin Boyd, Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1965, p. 47.

¹⁰² Livingstone-Stanley, p. 176.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁰⁴ Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, Simon & Schuster Macmillan, New York, 1997, p. 2.

made serious claims to authenticity while others did not'.¹⁰⁵ In all of these we find the artfulness of the private, and therefore allegedly more honest, account made public.

Epistolary Fiction

The fictional parody and the device of telling a story through letters are not new. The most popular form, which gained great popularity during the first half of the eighteenth century, both in England and in France, was the epistolary novel, a style on which Joan Lindsay drew directly for her parody *Through Darkest Pondelayo*. According to Ruth Perry, 'there were between 100 and 200 epistolary works published and sold in London during the early eighteenth century, many of them very popular, running through many editions'.¹⁰⁶ Some of the best-known of these were written by men – Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1749), and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) – although an Englishwoman, Aphra Benn, wrote the three-volume erotic novel *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687), predating these by over fifty years. The epistolary novel was a genre 'especially suited to a literary age when sensibility was in flower',¹⁰⁷ although the constraints of a style that allowed for a restricted authorial point of view became obvious. The initial appeal of the first-person narrative unfolding through their letters, and thus revealing insights into that character's life and thoughts, came to restrict the omniscient narrator in the development of character, plot and motive.

Epistolary fiction, women's in particular, was popular because of its focus on personal relationships being conducted in writing, and the voyeuristic possibilities of private emotions and secret activities being brought into the public sphere. According to Perry, 'One of the reasons women were encouraged to try their hands at epistolary fiction was because it was a format that required no formal education ... Its success largely depended on a simple, personal, letter-writing style ... an accomplishment rather than an art',¹⁰⁸ and one that was often the preserve of women who took responsibility for maintaining family relationships through correspondence. This was of

¹⁰⁵ Perry, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁰⁷ Richard D. Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1966, p. 195. The epistolary form continues to be used, later examples being Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), and even more recently Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) and Mary Anne Shaffer's *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2008). Shriver's novel is a striking example of the first-person narrative technique known as 'the unreliable narrator'.

¹⁰⁸ Perry, p. 17.

particular importance for women who had travelled halfway across the globe and who wanted to keep family members left at ‘home’ informed of life in a new country. *The Letters of Rachel Henning* is the best-known published collection of this genre of Australian women’s letters ‘home’. From first publication, its links to the epistolary novel form were emphasised.¹⁰⁹

Australian Women’s Immigrant Letters

The writing of letters ‘home’ in the nineteenth century, from those who had immigrated to the colonies, was often undertaken by women. They maintained relationships across vast distances through the circulation of and reading aloud of their letters to a circle of family and friends. These ‘immigrant’ letters were for the most part written by educated middle-class women, such as those published as *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, although as Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender have noted in the introduction to their anthology *Life Lines: Australian Women’s Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840*, women of all classes, including convict women, were literate to varying degrees. These immigrant letters eventually gained credence as archival sources and as female narratives in white Australian contact history.

From the mid-1970s, with the publication of two key Australian works *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (1975) by Anne Summers, and *The Real Matilda* (1976) by Miriam Dixson, both of which in historian Kay Schaffer’s words ‘interrupted the male monopoly on historical interpretation’,¹¹⁰ there were more attempts at challenging the masculine bias of white Australian political and cultural history. As Schaffer has observed, ‘feminist researchers ... challenged the pervasive masculine bias across a range of disciplines. Women writers, artists, historians, geographers, educators and pioneers have been discovered, researched and added to the margins of the discourse’,¹¹¹ and in the process they challenged the male myth of ‘the bush narrative told as a story of national identity’¹¹² and women’s secondary and dependent role within it as wives and mothers. Susan Sheridan has disputed the claim that women writers were part of this group of

¹⁰⁹ See my article ‘The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon’, which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹¹⁰ Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 66.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹² Lucy Frost, ‘Escaping the Bush Paradigm’ in *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World*, Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2004, p. 60.

‘silenced outsiders that later historians and critics rendered them’,¹¹³ drawing on the romantic fiction of writers such as Ada Cambridge and Rosa Praed and the political journalism of Louisa Lawson and Miles Franklin as key examples of works that were part of that cultural fabric. And although it was not until the 1990s that published collections of Australian women writers’ letters began to appear,¹¹⁴ research in their archives had begun considerably earlier, aligned with the re-issuing of out-of-print works by these women by both commercial and scholarly presses.¹¹⁵

Australian Women Writers’ Letters

Literary historians such as Drusilla Modjeska, Susan Sheridan and Carole Ferrier were among the first to research the letter archives of Australian women writers. Modjeska’s *Exiles At Home: Australian Women Writers 1925 to 1945* (1981) focused on the difficulties faced by women writers who had ‘written in spite of poor financial returns, the demands of family responsibilities, a frequently depressed publishing industry, their own low self-esteem and a view of Australian literature that was predominantly masculine’.¹¹⁶ Sheridan’s study of Australian women writers from the slightly later, postwar period, *Nine Lives: Postwar Women Writers Making Their Mark* (2011), questions the concept of a male-dominated literary scene, although she does acknowledge that ‘Most published writers, not to mention reviewers, editors, publishers and university teachers of literature, were men’.¹¹⁷ Certainly the inclusion of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* in Angus & Robertson’s Sirius Books imprint in the early 1960s, ‘a library of memorable Australian Books in all categories of literature’,¹¹⁸ has something of the token gesture about it, with Henning keeping company with the likes of Henry Lawson, A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, and Tom Collins.

Both Hilary McPhee and Anne O’Donovan, who were employed as editors at Penguin Books Australia during the late 1960s and early 1970s, have commented on the lack of interest shown by male senior management in publishing works for a female readership until it came to be seen as a

¹¹³ Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing 1880s-1930s*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. viii.

¹¹⁴ An early exception, though not strictly a collection of letters, was the 1975 publication *Wild Weeds and Windflowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard*, edited by her son Ric Throssell and published by Angus & Robertson.

¹¹⁵ It should be noted that commercial presses such as Penguin Books Australia were able to re-issue some of these works cheaply because they were also out of copyright.

¹¹⁶ Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles At Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1981, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Susan Sheridan, *Nine Lives: Postwar Women Writers Making Their Mark*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2011, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ See my article ‘The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon’, p. 83.

reasonable commercial prospect.¹¹⁹ Once Hilary McPhee and Diana Gribble had established the independent press McPhee Gribble, however, they began to establish links with female academics, and McPhee was aware that as more women entered the academy, they were beginning to research the work of women writers, including their letters.

The public/private divide in published letter collections is a constant fascination, enhanced in the case of writers' letters by the possibility of gaining some insight into the creative abilities of the individual. Rosemarie Bodenheimer cautions that

Letters cannot 'explain novels' or give us access to the writer 'behind' the fictional narrative, nor can excerpts from letters reliably provide 'facts' about a situation or a sensibility on which to ground a literary argument. Letters and novels are both acts of self-representation in writing and, as such, may both be taken, to begin with, as fictions.¹²⁰

Mireille Bossis agrees that a writer's correspondence 'does not necessarily contribute to a better understanding of the author's work' but notes that the work 'was responsible for drawing attention to the correspondence in the first place'.¹²¹ Female academic editors brought to the role a different perspective that focused on the personal as well as the public narrative, and the relationships between women writers.¹²²

Friendship Networks of Australian Women Writers

A common theme apparent in several collections of women writers' letters edited by women,¹²³ and emphasised in the books' titles, is the narrative of friendship: *As Good As a Yarn With You: Letters Between Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark* (1992) edited by Carole Ferrier; *My Congenials: Miles Franklin and Friends in Letters, volume 1, 1879-1938 and volume 2, 1939-1954* (1993) edited by

¹¹⁹ See Chapter One of this thesis: The Business of Publishing Australian Women's Letter Collections.

¹²⁰ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1994, pp. 5-6.

¹²¹ Mireille Bossis, 'Methodological Journeys Through Correspondences', *Yale French Studies (Men/Women of Letters)*, no 71, 1986, p. 65.

¹²² Anne Allingham's study of the editing of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, for example, revealed that the male editor had excised material concerned with female health matters such as pregnancy and miscarriages, as well as discussion of children's general health and wellbeing. 'Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 16, no 3, 1994, pp. 262-279.

¹²³ One of two collections of Christina Stead's letters edited by her male literary executor and associate professor of English at the University of New South Wales, Ronald G. Geering, also adopted this approach: *A Web of Friendship: Selected Letters of Christina Stead 1928-1973* (1992).

Jill Roe; and *Yarn Spinners: A Story in Letters – Dymphna Cusack, Florence James, Miles Franklin* (2001) edited by Marilla North. The title of *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000* (2007), of which I was the editor, was also a deliberate choice, intended to focus on a long and affectionate female friendship as a self-contained narrative. Modjeska suggests, in *Exiles at Home*, that the informal networks of women writers in the 1920s and 1930s were in a position to ‘offer each other a network of intellectual and emotional support’.¹²⁴ Carole Ferrier is less inclined to accept what she describes as Modjeska’s claims of ‘an unproblematic sisterhood’,¹²⁵ citing instead numerous examples where private comments in letters between the six women writers included in *As Good As a Yarn With You* differed from those expressed publicly:

Often an intriguing disparity can be observed between comments in correspondence on other writers and their work, and those offered in published reviews or literary criticism. The public utterances express the mutual support and encouragement that the writers acknowledged was needed for building and strengthening a cultural community.¹²⁶

Ferrier, Roe and North all placed the writers’ letter collections they edited within a cultural and political context, rather than presenting them merely as companion volumes offering insights into the creative works of these women: their novels, poetry and plays. And although women’s published letter collections eventually found a place in women’s studies courses, they have remained on the periphery as archival sources requiring some form of narrative structure, rather than being adopted for theoretical analysis. The separate field of epistolarity now encompasses all aspects of letter writing and collection.

Women’s Writing and Women’s Studies

Coordinators of the early women’s studies courses established at Australian universities in the early 1970s whom I have interviewed focused primarily on the problems they encountered with finding a ‘home’ for these courses in what were often conservative and male-dominated faculties. The reading materials they sourced initially tended towards theoretical analysis by European and

¹²⁴ Modjeska, p. 3.

¹²⁵ Carole Ferrier, ‘Literary Lives in Letters’, *National Library of Australia News*, vol. xi, no 11, p. 15.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

US second-wave feminists, rather than drawing on historical and literary studies by Australian writers. It took some years before the study of women's letters found a place in these courses.

The resistance towards setting up such courses appears to have been widespread in the academy, and was mainly concerned with where women's studies should be housed and what cross-teaching might be permitted.¹²⁷ Despite these setbacks, and the problems caused by understaffing, the courses did become established. Sara Dowse, who had been the inaugural head of the Women's Affairs Section of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, was appointed as a tutor in the Australian National University's (ANU) Women's Studies course in 1978. She recalled that, 'though no doubt there were negative feelings about any cross-discipline program, these were dispelled for the most part because of the student numbers. Women's Studies, by then, was far and away one of the most popular courses [at the ANU], and therefore attracted funding to the History Department'.¹²⁸

The earliest of the Australian courses was established at the University of Queensland in 1973, under the direction of Merle Thornton¹²⁹ and with strong support from the student body. Thornton was head of the Equal Opportunities for Women Association (EOW), and research papers produced by the association

made it very obvious that more research and understanding of what is now called gender was an empty space in universities and urgently needed bringing to life ... courses and books on various aspects of human society, such as politics and sociology, were largely, and often enough exclusively, about men. It was not just possible but standard to publish a book on

¹²⁷ See Curthoys, *For and Against Feminism: A Personal Journey Into Feminist Theory and History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988; and Barbara Caine, 'Women's Studies at the University of Sydney', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no 27, 1998, pp. 99-106. As an undergraduate student in the ANU History School in the mid-1970s, I clearly recall the disquiet about the move to establish a women's studies course within the Faculty of Arts.

¹²⁸ Interview by email with Sara Dowse, 16 October 2008.

¹²⁹ Thornton had already made a name for herself as a feminist activist when in 1965 she chained herself to the bar of the Regatta Hotel in Brisbane, along with colleague Ro Bognor, to protest legislation that prevented women from drinking in public bars. Interview by email with Merle Thornton, 10 February 2016. Dedicated women's studies courses were established around Australia over the following years: for example, at South Australia's Flinders and Adelaide universities (1973), at Murdoch University in Western Australia (1975), at the Australian National University in Canberra (1976) and eventually, at the University of Sydney (1990).

matters of say political behaviour or social inequality containing either no mention of women or a skewed scrap turning around household interests.¹³⁰

Humphrey McQueen even acknowledged this absence in the introduction to the second edition of his controversial New Left history *A New Britannia* (first published in 1970), listing the topic of ‘women’ along with culture, Aborigines and history from the bottom up as ‘sins of omission’.¹³¹ Barbara Caine, who was at the University of Sydney in the 1970s, also noted

The thing that was hardest to deal with in attempting to devise a course on women’s history in the 1970s was the complete absence of serious scholarly material ... those interested in Feminism and Philosophy had the great texts of Mills and Engels, of Woolf and de Beauvoir. But in history, the paucity of material was profound. The women’s movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had produced histories of the suffrage movement and some classical texts on women’s work and on their changing social position. But these books, published mainly in the 1920s, were of limited use and interest in the context of the 1970s with its emphasis on social history and its interest in the lives of ordinary women.¹³²

The reading selected for these new women’s studies courses focused initially on studies of patriarchy and family within a bourgeois capitalist society, and women’s rights to their own bodies. Influential texts such as Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1969), Juliet Mitchell’s *Woman’s Estate* (1971) and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case For Feminist Revolution* (1970) did not have Australian equivalents.¹³³ Ann Curthoys, inaugural coordinator of Women’s Studies at the ANU, introduced a series of special topics that included ‘the history of feminist thought, 1790-1977 ... women in Australian society, past and present; capitalism and the family, and women in developing countries’.¹³⁴ Susan Magarey, who followed Curthoys as coordinator, recalled that she sought reading materials from

Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, even Biology: the historical materials were mostly about the History of the Family; the literary materials were novels written by women; the

¹³⁰ Interview by email with Merle Thornton, 10 February 2016.

¹³¹ Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia*, Penguin Books Australia, Melbourne, 1976 edition, p. 12. An index entry speaks volumes: ‘women, ignored’.

¹³² Caine, ‘Women’s Studies at the University of Sydney’, p. 101.

¹³³ Interview by email with Susan Magarey, 25 October 2008.

¹³⁴ Curthoys, *For and Against Feminism*, p. 43.

Philosophy was Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* and later Elizabeth Grosz on the French philosophers [Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Cixous and Deleuze].¹³⁵

Sara Dowse, who tutored in the ANU course, agreed that, 'the focus was mainly on theories on patriarchy ...after I left women's studies as everything else in the humanities became saturated with theory, by then mainly French'.¹³⁶

Neither Magarey nor Dowse could recall a single book of letters being studied in the subjects they taught at the ANU. As Dowse noted, 'There may have been students at the graduate level looking at archived material, but correspondence between women certainly wasn't a major focus in the early days, with the exception perhaps (a very big perhaps) of Miles Franklin's letters'.¹³⁷

Archival research was being encouraged among women's studies students at the University of Melbourne, however, with an eventual focus on hidden voices in large colonial archives.

Women's Letter Archives

Ann Curthoys, and also Patricia Grimshaw at the University of Melbourne, both recalled setting *The Letters of Rachel Henning* on their courses, initially categorising it as a published archival source: the first-hand account of an unusually adventurous, educated woman who travelled around the colonies, and assisted with the management of the various properties where she lived. The appeal of the Henning letters was their apartness from the traditionally domestic and personal spheres to which women's writing of this genre – letters, diaries and journals – is usually relegated. The Henning letters, as has subsequently been revealed, were a mediated, edited text. It was not until the early 1990s that they were reassessed by historians who took issue with the heavy-handed manner in which they had been treated by a male editor.¹³⁸ In both their original

¹³⁵ Interview by email with Susan Magarey, 25 October 2008.

¹³⁶ Interview by email with Sara Dowse, 27 October 2008. See Carolyn Steedman's chapter 'A Woman Writing a Letter' in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 1999, in which she discusses the theories of the 'new French feminisms' and *l'écriture féminine* in relation to men and women and the act of writing: 'men tending to see signs as stable and whole, as corporeally external things, whilst women have a more bodily, inward relationship to script', p. 122.

¹³⁷ Interview by email with Sara Dowse, 27 October 2008. Franklin's biographer Jill Roe noted in her introduction that Franklin herself had catalogued her papers meticulously before depositing her archive at the State Library of New South Wales, making it a more accessible resource than some.

¹³⁸ See my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

and their published form, however, the Henning letters were the writings of a white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class woman, and not representative of a group without a voice. Anthologies such as Lucy Frost's *No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices From the Australian Bush* (1984) and Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender's *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840* (1992) ranged more broadly in their archival sources, focusing in particular on the unacknowledged work done by women of all classes in colonial Australia.

Patricia Grimshaw was at the forefront of historians who were rethinking the sources and contexts of colonial documents concerned with white contact history, in particular those held in the government archives of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Her work with colleagues Elizabeth Nelson and Sandra Smith produced a collection of Indigenous women's letters, published in 2002, that belies what had previously been assumed to be an almost total silence of Aboriginal women's voices from this period.¹³⁹ The collection therefore gave some prominence to those who were doubly marginalised: Indigenous women.

Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926 is a collection of letters of appeal and petition, political in intent if personal in expression. They differ markedly from the narratives presented in other Australian women's collections not only because of their political content but also because of their presentation. Unsurprisingly, they display none of the flourish of the letters of white, educated, middle-class correspondents. These Indigenous women were taught to write as part of their reserve- and mission-based education. Their letters tend towards an awkward combination of stilted formality and personal anguish as they formally request the authorities for permission to travel, for clothing and food, and most heartbreakingly for permission to see their children. Collections such as these raise questions about how the letters were written, not just the purpose for which they were written. The editing of such archival material requires an understanding of cultural sensitivity that allows for empathy for both the correspondents and for their circumstances.

These Indigenous women's letters are the exception to the practice of presenting Australian women's letter collections as narratives of various kinds – personal, pioneering, friendship. Such

¹³⁹ See my article 'Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*', which is included as a case study in this thesis. The topic 'Aboriginal Women, their problems and priorities' was included in the University of Queensland Women's Studies course established by Merle Thornton in 1972, the subject being taught by Indigenous women Lilla and Pauline Watson.

collections, be they intended for a scholarly or a non-scholarly readership, are generally presented with the claim that they have a narrative form enabling one to read them as one would a novel. Links between the history and the development of the epistolary novel and women's letter writing are frequently emphasised in editorial introductions to women's letter collections, which tends to ground them in the personal and the domestic.

The role of the editor is crucial to the narrative structuring of women's letter collections. In Chapter Three I explore the role of the epistolary editor, and I compare the differences and the similarities in the editorial methods adopted in the compiling of these collections for scholarly and non-scholarly publication.

Chapter Three

Editing Correspondence for Publication: Two Methods

This chapter discusses the two principal methods of editing correspondence for publication: scholarly and non-scholarly. Scholarly editors of letters tend to follow the practice of establishing a copy-text manuscript, which assumes there is a ‘true’ and original copy of a given text in which the author’s final intentions are privileged and should be preserved in published form. By comparison, non-scholarly editors of letters are more concerned with structuring a hybrid ‘life in letters’ narrative from the original correspondence, often involving considerable editorial intervention. The approach taken in the editing of correspondences is influenced by an understanding of for whom and by whom the letters are being published. As this chapter demonstrates, such an understanding differs markedly between expert and non-expert audiences. The letter collections discussed in the case studies included in this thesis provide examples of both scholarly and non-scholarly publications that draw out some of the implications of editing with these disparate intentions. *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*; *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*; and *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright* I have classified as scholarly editions. *The Letters of Rachel Henning*; *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*; and *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000* I have classified as non-scholarly editions. My focus in this chapter will be a comparison of the methods employed by scholarly and non-scholarly editors and the three key points at which the two methods diverge: that is, when dealing with the assumed ‘truth’ of a letter; the structuring of a narrative; and the establishing of a context. I also take issue with those who disregard the importance of market-driven publishing decisions when reviewing letter collections.

The assumed ‘truth’ of a letter underpins its appeal to biographers and to readers of published letter collections. Janet Malcolm refers to letters as ‘the great fixative of experience ... the fossils of feeling ... Only when he reads a subject’s letters does the biographer feel he has come fully into his presence, and only when he quotes from the letters does the biographer share with his

readers the sense of life retrieved'.¹⁴⁰ Yet the concept of what is the 'true' and 'fossilised' version of an original letter is problematic on several scores. As Robert McGill notes,

letters present biographers and epistolary editors with a specific problem in that they are both artifacts of existence and commentaries upon it ... a distinguishing feature of letters is their potential for proximity to the life-events they narrate – thus their conventional claim to be 'true' to those experiences ... [and] the further convention of dating them foregrounds their occasional quality and confers upon them the status of events in their own right.¹⁴¹

One must also consider even the actual writing of a letter. If a writer sends multiple versions of a letter to a range of correspondents, in each case there will be the one original exchange with an individual correspondent. The epistolary editor may have to deal with the discovery that a particular letter from a correspondence has been written from a draft which formed the basis of letters to several people, or that the letter was drafted and then rewritten in a more polished form. Copies of Barbara Blackman's surviving handwritten letters to Judith Wright from the 1950s, for example, are carbons in a notebook-cum-letterbook.¹⁴² They reveal that some of these letters were sent, with varying degrees of alteration, to several different friends; some of these, and later letters, were also used as the basis for Blackman's short prose pieces. For different reasons, both the scholarly and non-scholarly editor must ask which of these versions expresses most accurately Blackman's thoughts and feelings concerning the content of the letters at that time, and therefore which should be included in a published collection of her correspondence.

People also write different kinds of letters to different correspondents and in doing so they create multiple 'versions' of themselves. The epistolary editor must make a judgement on whether the letters to one correspondent a more 'true' reflection than those written to others.¹⁴³ Deidre Bair,

¹⁴⁰ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, Picador, London, 1994 edition, p. 110.

¹⁴¹ Robert McGill, 'The Life You Write May Be Your Own: Epistolary Autobiography and the Reluctant Resurrection of Flannery O'Connor', *The Southern Literary Journal*, vol. 36, no 2, spring 2004, p. 35.

¹⁴² See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁴³ The plot device of a letter in novels and plays, where it is often the cause of deliberate confusion, also draws upon what one of the characters in Carol Shields' novel *Mary Swann* describes as the guilty secret of writing two kinds of letters: 'one-drafters and two-drafters. For old friends I bang out exuberant single-spaced typewritten letters, all the grammar jangled loose with dashes and exclamation points and reckless translations ... But in my two-draft letters I mind my manners, sometimes even forsaking my word processor for my pen ... I keep myself humble, am mindful of paragraph coherence, and try for a tincture of charm'. (Carol Shields, *Mary Swann*, Fourth Estate, London, 2000, p. 24)

biographer of the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, was given large collections of Beckett's letters written to three different people, at different times during her research. She discovered that,

In each of the three collections of letters, there were many written to the three recipients on the same day, and the dissimilarity in their content and tone was astonishing. I knew that the third recipient, Thomas McGreevy, was the only person Beckett had entirely trusted and confided in throughout the course of the correspondences because every single person I interviewed insisted this was true and Samuel Beckett verified it in conversation. Therefore I knew that only the McGreevy letters contained the truth about Beckett's feelings and that only they should be trusted.¹⁴⁴

The letters to McGreevy showed a man who 'hated Ireland and could not wait to leave ... spent all of his time drinking himself into oblivion because he could not find work, could not write, and hated his widowed mother with venomous passion'.¹⁴⁵ This was the version of Beckett, presented in his letters to McGreevy and confirmed by Beckett himself, which Bair accepted as true. While Beckett was consulted about the fidelity of the letter versions, retrospectively, Bair does not indicate that he showed any interest in reworking any of his letters for publication, should she have wished to quote from them.

This is a key issue in editing letter collections because the intervention of the still-living author, keen to present themselves in the best light in published form, can present problems for the epistolary editor. Gwen Harwood¹⁴⁶ and Barbara Blackman¹⁴⁷ were keen to refine some of their letters for publication, even to the point of suggesting to their respective editors that they wished to rewrite some letters held in their archives, and combine others into new versions of the originals. Blackman was also mindful that because she is blind she occasionally positioned her hands over the wrong line of first typewriter and then computer keys as she wrote, and consequently her letters were littered with misspellings and malapropisms. Some of these letters

¹⁴⁴ Deidre Bair, 'Samuel Beckett' in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *The Craft of Literary Biography*, Schocken Books, New York, 1985, p. 212.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See my article 'Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

were in parts almost incomprehensible in their original form, and understandably, Blackman did not wish to be represented in this manner in print.¹⁴⁸ Neither woman seems to have regarded their original correspondence as sacrosanct archival material but rather as part of their body of work. Harwood was a poet and librettist and Blackman an essayist and librettist, and both set certain literary standards for their published letters.

The keenness to maintain standards can, of course result, in a kind of fabricated authenticity, whether the ‘polishing up’ or ‘toning down’ is done by the original writer, by a family member or members, or by an editor.¹⁴⁹ George Eliot as portrayed through her letters edited by her husband J. W. Cross is presented as a high-minded woman ‘who would not descend to occasional colloquialism or humour ... [and Cross] refused to allow her, posthumously, to speak of German ballet girls as “looking like butchers in chemises” ’,¹⁵⁰ thus removing a wonderfully evocative image. Meredith McKinney edited her mother Judith Wright’s letters in *Portrait of a Friendship* from the perspective of a daughter, and removed many references to her own personal life concerning teenage boyfriends and student share houses. Barbara Blackman, editing from the perspective of a mother, removed references to a range of troubling issues concerning her children. In both cases, the deleted material was not defamatory but rather potentially upsetting for family members and friends. In the case of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, the most successful collection of letters ever published in Australia, family members and an editor together had a hand in the cutting and shaping of the correspondence into a sweeping pioneer narrative, while toning down Henning’s libelous, snobbish, racist and snide observations, in the process ‘softening’ her character. The Hennings were not inclined to have personal family matters concerned with money, relationships and health issues in particular included in the

¹⁴⁸ Barbara Blackman’s concerns regarding misinterpretation relate to the actual physical process of writing for her, and should not be aligned with G. Thomas Tanselle’s claims that, ‘False starts, excised words, slips of the pen, peculiar abbreviations, and unusual punctuation are among the characteristic features of all kinds of private documents ... and can often be important clues to the writer’s psychology and personality’. G. Thomas Tanselle, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ The practice has a long history. William Mason, editing the letters of his friend Thomas Gray in 1775, for example, took pains to present him as a scholar and poet, ‘not an ordinary human being in everyday clothes’. Richard D. Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America*, Knopf, New York, 1966, p. 172. And in a more recent example, Paul Delany notes that the editors of the two volumes of D. H. Lawrence’s correspondence cut out letters they considered to be ‘trivial, repetitive or concerned with business. The selected editions therefore showed Lawrence as, above all, a prophet and artist: a larger-than-life character who might fit easily into one of his own novels. Paul Delany, ‘Giving Yourself Away: Lawrence’s Letters in Context’, in Charles L. Ross and Dennis Jackson (eds), *Editing D. H. Lawrence: New Versions of a Modern Author*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1995, pp. 174-175.

¹⁵⁰ Altick, *Lives and Letters*, p. 173.

published versions of Rachel Henning's letters, which were edited almost forty years after her death.¹⁵¹ The collection was serialised originally in weekly letter episodes through 1951 and 1952, illustrated with pen line drawings by Norman Lindsay, in the middle-brow *Bulletin* magazine.

The Henning letters, although heavily edited for publication, are at least her originals, as are the letters in my other case studies, unlike the following examples of apparently completely rewritten collections of letters. *Arthur and Emily: Letters in Wartime*, published in 1984, was described in the editorial introduction as 'a most welcome addition to the growing body of Australia's Great War literature ... [lending] a sense of immediacy and intimacy to action and its consequences which larger historical works can only provide in a generalised or selective manner'.¹⁵² Yet even the editors noted that many unanswered questions surrounded the identity of the correspondents and the authenticity of the letters, the originals of which had been lost. The published collection is in fact a surviving copy of a 'typed, aggregated and probably slightly retouched version'¹⁵³ of the letters, which retained the letter form and therefore a sense of immediacy and personal experience. Similarly, *Across the Years: Jane Bardsley's Outback Letterbook 1896-1936*, which was published in 1987, was a collection of rewritten letters. They are described in the cover copy as 'Jane's letters to her friend Althea, written with a naïve charm, [that] reveal the excitement and the harshness of station life in Queensland's Gulf Country and northern coastal regions at the turn of the century'. In the editorial preface, however, Bardsley's grandson John Atherton Young noted that 'It is scarcely conceivable that my grandmother could have found the opportunity or perhaps the courage to have begun writing these letters ... after

¹⁵¹ Rachel Henning's comments about her brother-in-law Thomas Sloman and younger sister Amelia (Amy) were particularly snide ('Mr Sloman is slightly insane', is but one, noted in a letter from Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 17 October 1866, MLMSS 342, SLNSW). Ironically, Thomas Sloman was given an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* several years before Rachel Henning; he is described as 'a fine athlete. All his life was guided by Christian principles, and he was scrupulously honest in his varied business activities.' No other member of the Henning family is listed.

¹⁵² Irene Macdonald and Susan Radvansky (eds), *Arthur and Emily: Letters in Wartime*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1984, p. 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Lucy Frost, editor of *No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices From the Australian Bush*, expressed similar concerns about a typescript of reminiscences by Sarah Davenport, from the northern Victoria pioneering family. By chance, Frost located the original at an exhibition in the La Trobe Library and was able to clarify the extent of the editing that had been done in the process of transcribing, thus '[turning] Mrs Davenport into someone she was not'. *No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices From the Australian Bush*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books Australia, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 14-15.

her marriage ... I believe she must have written them much later in her life'.¹⁵⁴ Young even suggested that Bardsley's correspondent, Althea, was imaginary and that there were 'interesting departures from strict truth' in the narrative of Bardsley's life as she chose to portray it. Therefore Bardsley adopted the epistolary form for its immediacy and intimacy but rewrote her 'letters' long after the originals had been sent.¹⁵⁵

The authenticity of Australian women's published letter collections, the majority of which are the writings of white, educated, middle- and upper-class correspondents writing in their own language, is usually assumed by readers. By comparison, the authenticity of a collection of letters written by Indigenous women from Victoria from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century was initially questioned. The editors of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*, Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw, were frequently asked, even by academic colleagues researching in the field, whether their Indigenous subjects could actually write.¹⁵⁶ This collection is drawn from the archives of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA),¹⁵⁷ composed of articulate letters of appeal and petition written by eighty-one Indigenous women whose own languages had been overlaid with English. Colonisation hastened the degradation of Indigenous languages but it also thereby gave Indigenous people the means to negotiate in a form of political protest, albeit on an unequal footing with white authorities. The editors of this collection aimed to achieve clarity in the letters without imposing an inappropriate (i.e. white) standard of literacy, seeking a balance between preserving original voices while not making the letter writers seem uneducated. Many of the letters are written in a neat, cursive hand and display a fair grasp of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Great care has been taken with the handwriting, with occasional indications that several drafts of a letter were attempted and that

¹⁵⁴ John Atherton Young (ed.), *Across the Years: Jane Bardsley's Outback Letterbook 1896-1936*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1987, p. vi.

¹⁵⁵ There is no evidence that Jane Bardsley had the intention of producing an epistolary novel when she rewrote her original letters. A small number of copies of the recreated version were produced initially for the interest of family members. Bardsley's grandson eventually submitted one of these family copies to Angus & Robertson in the mid-1980s. I was the publisher's editor for *Across the Years*. Ironically, *Across the Years* has been categorised as an example of scholarly editing on the basis that the editor, John Atherton Young, was an academic (see Anne Allingham, 'Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 16, no 3, p. 274).

¹⁵⁶ This important yet little-known collection of letters is discussed in detail in my article 'Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁵⁷ The archives are held jointly in the Public Record Office of Victoria and the Australian Archives (Victorian Regional Office).

more than one person may have been involved with the writing. It is clear, however, that these women could write, rather than having to rely on the assistance of a 'scribe',¹⁵⁸ and that they were able to obtain writing paper on which to send their letters.

As the above examples illustrate, the assumed 'truth' of a letter comes into question when one takes into consideration the veracity of a voice from the past; the existence of multiple versions of a letter; the practice of writing very different letters to different people; the temptation to rework letters for publication; and the issue of balancing authenticity with accessibility for the reader.

Structuring a Narrative

Interventions that affect the assumed 'truth' of a letter are further overlaid by the structuring of a narrative for both scholarly and non-scholarly collections of letters. The shaping of a subject's life narrative guides many an editorial hand in the selection of letters for publication, whether for a scholarly or a non-scholarly audience. Surrounding the selection is the intention to get the letters to tell a story and an understanding that 'When every letter is included, the writer is bound to seem more banal'.¹⁵⁹ But it is not only the letter writer who is telling the story. As editorial theorist and scholarly editor Paul Eggert argues, the editor is also 'telling a kind of story. It is at least partly a fiction because the editor never has all the evidence. The story's value is tested by its ability to encompass and explain without contradiction all the available evidence, to tease out and deal with its implications'.¹⁶⁰ Stating that letters read with the narrative flow of a novel is a common claim in the introductions to scholarly and non-scholarly published letter collections, seemingly in an attempt to suggest accessibility and the ease of reading letters. The claim that a published collection is a hybrid 'life in letters' is made on the baseless assumption that letters contain one's life and provide the most authentic narration of it.¹⁶¹ I will deal with these issues as

¹⁵⁸ Natalie Zemon Davis's *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* is an insightful account of collaborative letter writing that involved notaries and clerks and the formal structuring of letters (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987).

¹⁵⁹ Delany, 'Giving Yourself Away: Lawrence's Letters in Context', pp. 174-175.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Eggert, 'Reading a Critical Edition With the Grain and Against: The Cambridge D. H. Lawrence' in Ross and Jackson (eds), *Editing D. H. Lawrence: New Versions of a Modern Author*, p. 30. Eggert is general editor of the Academy Editions of Australian Literature.

¹⁶¹ See Altick's discussion of this in 'The Writing of Nineteenth-Century Literary Biography', in *Lives and Letters*. He also drily observed that the popularity of the 'life in letters' form, which in his opinion tended to involve considerably less work than a fully researched biography, was due partly to the familiar fact of human indolence on the part of biographers.

they pertain to scholarly collections and move on to then discuss the implications for non-scholarly texts.

Scholarly Narratives

The narrative structure in scholarly editions of letters is generally provided by the framing texts that introduce the collection as a whole and may also be situated throughout the main body of the manuscript, such as with a short essay to introduce the decades during which letters were written. Framing texts play an important role in establishing a narrative both in anthologies of letters, compiled from the letters of a range of correspondents and grouped under topics and themes, as well as collections of an individual's letters. In scholarly editions, priority is given to the veracity of the original letters. Anthologies compiled from the letters of a range of correspondents are often grouped under topics and themes, the content taking precedence over the individual writer.¹⁶² Thus, the editing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926* is an illustrative example of the complexities of compiling sensitive personal correspondence, individual life stories drawn from a much larger archival source, and remaining true to the original material while rendering it accessible to the reader. The inclusion of biographies of the eighty-one women provides short but insightful personal narratives that give the individual women a profile and a glimpse of their life stories that is not present in the physical archives.

Editorial intervention in scholarly editions of letters is clearly indicated, usually by means of square brackets and ellipses inserted in the manuscript, and the inclusion of a methodology in a preface or introduction. Yet this degree of editorial annotation and omission can be counterproductive in that it overlays the original correspondence to such a degree that it creates a fragmented reading experience, rather than a clear narrative, whereby the editorial intervention is privileged over the original.¹⁶³ The scholarly textual critic G. Thomas Tanselle disputes assumptions that 'the reader's convenience' should take precedence over textual accuracy and

¹⁶² One potential publisher of the Blackman Wright correspondence, concerned that the framework of a women's friendship was not sufficiently engaging, suggested that the letters would have more mainstream appeal if they were grouped under headings such as 'family', 'gardens', 'art', 'literature', 'politics', 'love' and so forth, thus removing the chronological structure completely in favour of a larger-scale narrative of events and emotions. Anthologies of love letters, in particular, are perennially popular, with publications from the nineteenth century, such as *Love in Letters Illustrated in the Correspondence of Eminent Persons With Biographical Sketches of the Writers* (1867), and *Love Letters of Famous Men and Women* (1888), through to twentieth-century collections such as *Love Letters: An Anthology From the British Isles 975-1944* (1970) and *The Virago Book of Love Letters* (1994).

¹⁶³ See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

that ‘certain aspects of punctuation and spelling are not significant parts of the original and can therefore be altered without affecting a reader’s understanding of the text’.¹⁶⁴ He goes so far as to say that the concept of ‘the reader’s convenience’ is in fact ‘bound to be an insult to their intelligence and is certain to make them wonder why an editor has gone to such unnecessary trouble ... Readers ... expect raggedness as a characteristic of texts not intended for publication’. This is less problematic when a letter collection may be read as a companion volume to a full biography or autobiography of the subject, as was the case with Janine Burke’s *Dear Sun: The Letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed*. Burke subsequently published biographies of both women.¹⁶⁵

By comparison, when Gregory Kratzmann published *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*, he did so because he had been forced to abandon a biography of the poet and librettist due to family restrictions on Harwood’s archives after her death in 1995. Two biographies of Harwood have been abandoned,¹⁶⁶ and a third underway at the time of writing may well meet the same fate. Harwood left an archive of thousands of letters, but access to many of them is now closed.¹⁶⁷ Only a very small proportion of her letters have been published, in two volumes, the first being the non-scholarly collection, *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*. Riddell was her chief correspondent throughout her life, and his letters also dominate the second volume, the scholarly edition, *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*. In the absence of a full biography, Harwood’s letter collections have been read as narrative forms, in this case of epistolary biography, albeit with skewed and mediated narratives constructed and constrained by Harwood herself in partnership with the editors of each volume.¹⁶⁸

Kratzmann wrote short biographical linking essays to introduce each section of *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*. Both collections focus on Harwood’s male friendships, in particular her

¹⁶⁴ Tanselle, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁵ Janine Burke, ed., *Dear Sun: The Letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed*, Minerva edition, Sydney, 1995 and Random House edition, Sydney, 2001; *Joy Hester*, Random House, Sydney, 2001; and *The Heart Garden*, Random House, Sydney, 2005.

¹⁶⁶ Alison Hoddinott, who was a family friend of the Harwoods and the editor of *Blessed City*, abandoned an earlier attempt at a biography, although she did publish a critical study of Harwood’s work.

¹⁶⁷ The difficulties surrounding access to Harwood’s archives and research into her life are discussed in my article ‘Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood’, which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁶⁸ Gwen Harwood died in 1995, six years before the publication of her second volume of letters. She worked closely with editor Gregory Kratzmann, and at one stage even asked him if he would be willing to become her literary executor.

relationship with Thomas ‘Tony’ Riddell, thus contributing to often prurient speculation about her private life and the inspirations for her writing. Kratzmann was aware that Harwood had written to many more men than women during her life, which thus presented him with a problem of balance in the selection of letters for publication. Yet he also wanted to give a narrative structure to the correspondence, in lieu of the biography he had abandoned, and felt this could best be achieved by focusing on Harwood’s letters to Riddell.

Judith Wright’s daughter Meredith McKinney and her editor Patricia Clarke chose to compile a letter collection rather than flesh out the fragments of a second volume of autobiography Wright had been writing at the time of her death.¹⁶⁹ Like Kratzmann, they were constrained by personal issues that could not at the time be made public. Notes and letters in Wright’s papers indicate she was finding writing the sequel to *Half a Lifetime* difficult, specifically avoiding the matter of her long-standing relationship with the high-profile public figure H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs, which began some years after the death of her husband Jack McKinney. The relationship was known to family and close friends and to a wider circle of literary and political colleagues, but it was never discussed publicly. Correspondence between Wright and Coombs held in the National Library of Australia was embargoed until after the death of Coombs’s wife. Their absence from the narrative framework is noted in McKinney’s introduction: ‘circumstances have dictated that those with her dear friend of later years, Nugget Coombs, remain almost entirely unrepresented in this volume’.¹⁷⁰ Although the editors aimed to present ‘the rich variety of selves that evolved through [Wright’s] long life’,¹⁷¹ the focus is very much on her public life and commitments.

Non-Scholarly Narratives

Unlike scholarly collections, narrative is paramount in non-scholarly letter collections. They need to tell a story to engage the reading public. Robert Halsband, both an authority on eighteenth-century English literature and the editor of the scholarly work *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague*, also acknowledged that non-scholarly epistolary editing reached ‘a reading public interested in genuine literature but intolerant of pedantry and dullness

¹⁶⁹ Wright had published one volume of autobiography: *Half a Lifetime*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1999.

¹⁷⁰ Meredith McKinney, Introduction to Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney (eds), *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2006, p. xiv.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. As this is a selection of Wright’s letters only, we are not privy to the views and responses of her range of correspondents.

... they prepared their handy volumes for a reading public who bought and read'.¹⁷² Present-day editions of letters published for a general readership follow a similar style. Halsband argued that criticism of this style of editing as cavalier, heavy-handed and interventionist should be tempered with an understanding of how these editors actually regard their role. He is of the opinion that present-day scholarly editors are setting up an archive that no one will read for interest and enjoyment, rather than presenting a literary work. In their hands, 'The long shelves of books are no longer meant to be read but only to be referred to'.¹⁷³

The Letters of Rachel Henning, first serialised and then published in book form, as noted above, remains in print today. Henning's letters, which were written to her sister Etta Boyce, in England, were published nearly forty years after Henning's death. The letters' primary appeal was their sweeping pioneering narrative as related by an educated young woman who gradually came to appreciate life in the colonies and found love in the process. Early reviews of the collection noted the 'spiced and candid picture' created by letters 'meant only for family',¹⁷⁴ and the engaging novel-like structure of the narrative. Unremarked upon either in reviews or in any introductions to the various editions of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was that the original correspondence had been heavily edited to achieve this effect, and with great success. The narrative took precedence over the original letters.

Narrative and intimacy are also the hallmarks of the first volume of Gwen Harwood's published letters, *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*. Marketed as the portrait of a youthful wartime romantic friendship between Harwood and Riddell, the letters are contained within a year in the life of a nascent poet. Because Harwood often wrote several times a week to Riddell, the published letters possess a distinct narrative structure that contains a young woman's family, friends and work colleagues within a defined place and time, even though the collection presents only one side of the correspondence. The reader is not privy to Riddell's responses. Had they been included they would have given a contrasting tone to the collection, which was for many years read as a one-sided love affair.

¹⁷² Robert Halsband, 'Editing the Letters of Letter-Writers' in Ronald Gottesman and Scott Bennett (eds), *Art and Error: Modern Textual Editing*, Methuen & Co., London, 1970, p. 125.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁷⁴ *Adelaide Advertiser*, 15 November 1952, p. 7.

Portrait of a Friendship is also a ‘contained’ correspondence, between two women writers; it profiles that specific friendship to the exclusion of others. And while the correspondence ranges across art, literature, music, politics and philosophy, the main emphasis is on the writers’ families and personal lives. Barbara often referred to Judith and her husband Jack McKinney as ‘Jack-n-Judith’, so close did their relationship seem to her. Charles Blackman, in his quite different way, was just as engaged with them both.¹⁷⁵ The McKinneys were admirers of Charles Blackman’s work and often ‘looked after’ paintings of his. Sometimes, Barbara stayed at Mount Tamborine without Charles, and she observed that, ‘On one occasion, he declared that I came back wearing [Judith’s] mind and talking like her’.¹⁷⁶ In fact the two prose styles were different and yet complemented each other. An equal number of letters from each woman had not survived. I removed some letters completely to achieve an equal balance from each writer. Others were cut to remove repetition, and defamatory and obscure comments excised, resulting in an overall more polished exchange that was further enhanced by ‘silent’ editing in which none of these interventions are noted in the published versions of the letters.

The editors of both scholarly and non-scholarly collections of letters acknowledge the appeal of portraying letters as telling the story of a life. The scholarly editor aims to present letters in a form as close as possible to the original, and ensures that the nature and extent of editorial intervention is clear. By comparison, the non-scholarly editor intervenes with a much freer, and often unacknowledged, hand, and gives priority to the created narrative over the original correspondence.

Scholarly and non-scholarly editors frame epistolary narratives with a context that overlays the letters as they were originally written. Barbara Oberg states that ‘Letters exist not in a closed textual universe but in a dynamic, unstable social context’.¹⁷⁷ Reading letters long after they were written can create a sense of re-entering the past, or of recreating it, even though they are being read without their original context; this must be recreated from recollections of the letter writer if still alive, or from the editor’s research into the period. Collections of letters offer both a sense of immediacy and a voice from the past, seemingly fixed in time. Reading letters allows

¹⁷⁵ Barbara Blackman, ‘All in the Family’, *Portrait*, no 8, winter 2003, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, p. 8.

¹⁷⁶ Email correspondence from Barbara Blackman to the author, 20 June 2003.

¹⁷⁷ Barbara Oberg, ‘Whose Intent?’, in George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (eds), *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1993, p. 273.

one to observe the writer at an earlier point in the trajectory of their life; the reader, unlike the writer, being always aware of what was to come.

Charles A. Porter argues that when the letters of only one writer are concerned, ‘once letters have become a correspondence, they have lost ... their independence’; that ‘a letter by itself, written at a given date, for a purpose, to a given addressee, is not the same kind of literary object as a “correspondence” made up of many of those letters’.¹⁷⁸ The very act of collecting letters for publication, in a scholarly or non-scholarly edition, alters their original understood context. What might have been known and taken for granted by the original writer and recipient may well be obscure to the contemporary reader. Editorial intervention and interpretation, which are influenced by a publishing company’s perceived market for a collection of letters, also overlay the original authorial intention in the writing of a letter. Porter notes,

a letter by itself, written at a given date, for a purpose, to a given addressee, is not the same kind of literary object as a ‘correspondence’ made up of many of those letters: for once letters have become a ‘correspondence’, they have lost, as far as their reader is concerned, their independence ... We must recognise that our understanding of these letters is mediated by the ways in which they have come before our eyes. The letter before us, if for no other reason than the passage of time, is *not* identical to the letter that was read by its original addressee.¹⁷⁹

Those interventions and overlays vary between scholarly and non-scholarly collections, and they have both similarities and marked differences. Porter’s observation holds true for the scholarly publication *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*. In published form, grouped under the category headings ‘Children and Family’, ‘Land and Housing’, ‘Asserting Personal Freedom’, ‘Regarding Missionaries and Station Managers’, ‘Religion’, and ‘Sustenance and Material Assistance’, these women’s letters are given the context of a more coordinated form of protest and complaint than would have been the experience of the individual letter writers. In the archives, the letters are filed in general Aboriginal mission and reserve business correspondences to and from various government authorities, forming part of a large and complex collection. The individual women’s voices, which are easily lost in such an archive, were published for the

¹⁷⁸ Charles A. Porter, Introduction, *Yale French Studies (Men/Women of Letters)*, no 71, 1986, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

content and context of their letters. Thus, although scholarly in intention and approach the effect is just as powerful as that introduced in the more drastic excisions visited upon *The Letters of Rachel Henning*.

By comparison, the selections of Gwen Harwood's letters, published as *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*, and Judith Wright's letters, published as *With Love and Fury*, are both drawn from the trajectory of an individual life. The chronology and the style and tone are of equal importance as the content of the letters. Harwood allegedly put a greater value on her letters and letter-writing than did Wright, however both were prolific correspondents who left archives of thousands of letters.¹⁸⁰ The two 'selecteds' present broader but shallower portraits of each writer and gives each letter equal weight within the collection, which may not reflect the nature of each relationship represented. And such collections can be frustratingly fragmented and open-ended, with no sense of how the letters were received and how the recipient may have responded.

Former Cambridge University Press publisher and D. H. Lawrence specialist Michael Black was referring to the publishing process generally, both scholarly and non-scholarly, when he observed that, 'What starts as a pure stream of authorial manuscript is swelled by tributaries of revision, is forced to change direction here and there by external obstacles, and reaches the sea of publication like a river heavily polluted by people living on the banks ... the important sense is of something continuous, and continuously changing'.¹⁸¹

The publication history of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* is a case in point. Although Rachel Henning's letters were addressed mainly to her sister Etta Boyce, in England, and the style and the content are consistent across the original letters, what has not remained consistent with this particular correspondence are the imposed contexts over a publishing history of more than sixty years. *The Letters of Rachel Henning* has been published in nine different editions in hybrid forms such as historical autobiography, a kind of epistolary novel, a children's classic, a feminist text, and above all as 'authentic' letters, despite their having been heavily edited for publication.

¹⁸⁰ Gregory Kratzmann (ed.), *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001, introduction, p. xiii; Clarke and McKinney (eds), *With Love and Fury*, introduction, p. ix.

¹⁸¹ Michael Black, 'Text and Context: The Cambridge Edition of Lawrence Reconsidered', in Ross and Jackson (eds), *Editing D.H. Lawrence: New Versions of a Modern Author*, p. 21.

The content surrounding the edited correspondence has variously included photographs of Henning family memorabilia, Norman Lindsay line drawings of people mentioned in the letters, paintings and drawings from the period, and an introduction by Norman Lindsay that was replaced by one written by Dale Spender for the Penguin Australian Women's Library edition. The abridged edition for the secondary school market also included a glossary of terms. *The Letters of Rachel Henning* remains the best-selling collection of Australian letters because it has been given such a range of contexts.

By contrast, when a correspondence between two writers survives in its original form, the context is effectively already in place, even without a complete set of the original letters. Those written between Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright between 1950 and 2000, for example, retained the context of a correspondence between close friends when published as *Portrait of a Friendship*. Such a correspondence does, however, produce a narrower portrait of each writer, defined as it is by that relationship to the exclusion of others. This can result in the impression that the published correspondence represents a more important friendship in the lives of the writers than might have been the case. Judith Wright maintained long correspondences with wildflower artist and environmentalist Kathleen McArthur and the writer Jack Blight, for example, but neither collection has been published and therefore does not have the public profile of the Blackman/Wright correspondence.

The majority of Gwen Harwood's published correspondence is to Thomas 'Tony' Riddell, but Riddell was also the person to whom Harwood wrote most frequently throughout her adult life and to whom she dedicated all of her volumes of poetry. The context for her first collection of letters, *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*, was established by Harwood herself in the regular correspondence with Riddell, rather than by the editor Alison Hoddinott. As subsequently came to light after Harwood's death, however, author and editor together did refine and shape the context of these letters to emphasise the first year of a lifelong friendship that appeared not to be clouded by any disagreements, which was not actually the case. In fact, Harwood and Riddell

ceased corresponding for five years after Harwood was married, presumably at the request of her husband.¹⁸² The context given to the published letters masks this rift completely.

Robert Halsband makes an important point about the lack of acknowledgement of the intended readership for a published collection of letters, scholarly or non-scholarly: that the practice of scholarly editing results in heavily annotated and contextualised collections meant for reference rather than reading enjoyment.¹⁸³ Such would be the fate to befall *The Letters of Rachel Henning* were it to be republished as a scholarly edition. For over half a century, this collection has been referred to as a classic text of Australian literature. Yet it gained such a profile and label *only* because of the manner in which it was edited and published for a general readership, initially appearing as weekly letters, edited to a similar length and style. *The Letters of Rachel Henning* is the only work of hers ever published; she and her writing would have remained unknown to all but her family and descendants had her letters not been shaped into a lively pioneer narrative by a journalist/editor with an eye for a good story.

The editor David Adams made no mention of the nature or the extent of his or the Henning family's editorial intervention. Yet one would not expect to find this form of acknowledgement in such a publication.¹⁸⁴ And why would anyone read and quote from these letters as if they were primary sources, dressed up as they have been with Norman Lindsay drawings and reissued over more than sixty years in such a range of formats? That is what happened for several decades, however, until in the early 1990s historian Anne Allingham took the trouble to check the published versions against microfilm of the original letters held in State Library of New South Wales. She was shocked to discover that Rachel Henning's letters had been 'deleted, distorted, and defaced by the *Bulletin* editor ... in the best traditions of the fourth estate';¹⁸⁵ all of which is true, if rather emotively expressed. The editing was done on the original letters, ironically

¹⁸² See my article 'Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁸³ Halsband, 'Editing the Letters of Letter-Writers', p. 125.

¹⁸⁴ Less understandable and certainly less acceptable was Robert H. Croll's cutting and editing of Arthur Streeton's letters to fellow painter Tom Roberts, published in 1946 as *Smikey to Bulldog*, accepted as a scholarly edition of the correspondence until the letters were re-edited by art historians Ann Galbally and Anne Gray in 1989. In their preface they noted, 'Croll, who had access to Tom Roberts' papers, edited and heavily annotated Streeton's letters to "The Bulldog", taking upon himself a censorial role in omitting sections or entire letters if they transgressed his own ideas of propriety. He published only selections from the correspondence to Roberts, leaving the impression that that was all there was'. *Letters From Smikey: The Letters of Arthur Streeton 1890-1943*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p. vii.

¹⁸⁵ Allingham, 'Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters', p. 272.

creating both a damaged archive but also a fascinating example of the editor at work—specifically, a male journalist/editor at work in the early 1950s. This so-called classic text of Australian literature is not the collection of original letters but rather the narrative into which they were shaped by David Adams, working to the constraints imposed by the Henning family.

Had David Adams provided a detailed account of his methodology in *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, and assuming the intended readers would have taken the trouble to read such an account, the nature of the work would have been more obvious to those assessing it from a scholarly perspective. This would have avoided what Paul Eggert refers to as ‘the misapprehension that the reader is being given an unmediated access to the author’s text, whereas the access is to an editorially established text—which can only be a collaboration’.¹⁸⁶

Allingham’s further criticism that ‘Never, it seems, in forty years of new editions and reprints, have editors or publishers thought it useful, or indeed necessary, to consult the manuscript, or to compare the now standard text with the original letters’¹⁸⁷ shows a lack of understanding of the commercial imperatives of publishing. Unless concerns about copyright infringement or defamation had been raised, no book editor would have seen the need to check the original manuscript. *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was reissued in several editions without publishers incurring the cost of resetting the type and with the Lindsay line drawings embedded in the text. Even though it was set on secondary and tertiary syllabuses as an example of a pioneering woman’s voice—a rarity in the male-dominated Australian colonial literary canon that focused on the likes of Henry Kendall, A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson and Henry Lawson—*The Letters of Rachel Henning* was never published as a scholarly edition, and therefore should not be judged as a poor example of such works. Neither should it be held up, as some have done, as an egregious example of the poor quality of Australian scholarly editing when the underlying assumption of such a claim is that the work has not been appropriately annotated and contextualised, and that it has been hacked about.

Allingham’s argument that a scholarly tradition in the discipline of publishing edited manuscripts in Australia has never been established rests on her bizarre comparison of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* with the publication of the volumes of US President Thomas Jefferson’s papers by

¹⁸⁶ Eggert, ‘Reading a Critical Edition With the Grain and Against: The Cambridge D. H. Lawrence’, p. 30.

¹⁸⁷ Allingham, ‘Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters’, pp. 264-265.

Princeton University Press. The scholarly first volume of Jefferson's papers was published in 1950, a year before the *Bulletin* popularly serialised Rachel Henning's letters, which is admittedly relatively contemporaneous to that text, although continents and cultures apart. However, to attempt to draw comparisons between the publication of the letters of a former US president and those of an unknown colonial Englishwoman in an Australian popular magazine is a nonsense. These two publishing organisations are at opposite ends of the spectrum.¹⁸⁸ The Jefferson papers are for a specialised, scholarly readership of the mid-twentieth century. By comparison, the editor David Adams aimed *The Letters of Rachel Henning* at a middle-brow readership, promising the voyeuristic *frisson* of reading private letters. In the process, he turned the collection into a bestseller that remains in print to this day.

The fact that *Portrait of a Friendship* was intended for a non-scholarly readership escaped the attention of at least one reviewer, who criticised its 'slightly unprofessional feel' by comparison with the 'meticulously produced, with letters carefully placed' edition *With Love and Fury*.¹⁸⁹ Because thirty-two of Wright's letters to Blackman appear in both *Portrait of a Friendship* and *With Love and Fury*, the disparate editorial methods used by each editor are clear. Different versions of these cross-over letters have been produced in the two volumes, reflected in their length, their content and their style, the last because of differing choices regarding grammar, spelling and punctuation in particular. The cuts to these letters reflect primarily the respective editors' responses to the intended markets for the collections: one scholarly and one non-scholarly.¹⁹⁰

In published form, all letter collections are given a narrative and a context by epistolary editors working to the direction of a publisher's brief. This brief is in turn influenced by an understanding of the perceived readership for a letter collection at a given time.

The editing and publishing of letter collections are further influenced by both the involvement of family members and the physical condition and construction of an archive, even before any

¹⁸⁸ By 1994, the year in which Allingham published her critique of the editing of the Rachel Henning letters, the Australian Scholarly Editions Centre had compiled the *Academy Editions of Australian Literature Manual For Editors*, which was the key editorial reference text for works published under the Academy Editions of Australian Literature imprint.

¹⁸⁹ Georgina Arnott, *Overland*, no 188, spring 2007, p. 85.

¹⁹⁰ My comparison of these two letter collections is discussed in my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

editorial intervention begins. The following chapter, 'Archives, Women's Letters and Families', examines the complex and often highly emotional issues concerned with families, archives and the managing of literary estates, and how each of these impacts on the publishing of letters.

Chapter Four

Archives, Women's Letters and Families

This chapter explores the complex and often emotional issues surrounding access to and the publishing of women's letters held in Australian archives and controlled by family literary executors. The family intervention often precedes any research and collating done by editors, and can continue through the publishing process, in the interests of both protecting family privacy and controlling the public image of the person under scrutiny. Editors must sensitively and ethically balance this family involvement and respect for family privacy with the commercial imperatives of publishing. These personal letters have been read firstly under the guise of archival research and subsequently by virtue of their publication in a book. Patricia Meyer Spacks refers to the continuing fascination with the personal as 'the salability of gossip', claiming that 'In our own time, a boundless audience, scholarly and popular, appears to exist for ever more recovered intimacies'.¹⁹¹ One is being invited to snoop, reading letters not originally intended for one's eyes. As Jacqueline Rose claims, 'voyeurism's ... pleasure rests on exclusion, on a position that remains firmly outside'.¹⁹² Publishers frequently tap into this appeal by marketing women's letter collections using such terms as 'intimate', 'private' and 'revealing'.¹⁹³ Archives also hold the promise of such secrets.

The letter collections discussed in the case studies included in this thesis, with the exception of Barbara Blackman's correspondence, are all drawn from archives controlled to differing degrees by family literary executors. In some cases the executor is an individual, and in others there are several family members involved. Blackman is still alive and therefore controls her own archive. The Rachel Henning archive, controlled by her descendants, is a collection composed almost entirely of her letters, mainly to her sister in England, which were first published in 1951, forty

¹⁹¹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1985, p. 69.

¹⁹² Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, Virago, London, 1991, p.105.

¹⁹³ It has even been suggested that London's eighteenth-century Grub Street hacks wrote letters for publication under the pretence of being women because there was thought to be a larger market for such potentially revealing correspondence. Noted in Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters and the Novel*, AMS Press, New York, 1980, p. 67. More recently, the editors of *Living on Paper: Letters From Iris Murdoch, 1934-1995*, Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, have taken issue with the many reviewers who concentrated on Murdoch's sex life and savagely criticised her for promiscuity: 'Iris Murdoch is "promiscuous" while Ted Hughes is "nomadic". Why the double standards?', review by Avril Horner and Anne Rowe, *Sunday Times*, 27 November 2015.

years after her death as *The Letters of Rachel Henning*.¹⁹⁴ The two volumes of Gwen Harwood's letters, *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*, published in 1990 during her lifetime, and *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*,¹⁹⁵ published in 2001 after her death, are drawn from Harwood's extensive archive, which is now under the control of her son, John Harwood. The published Harwood letters represent only a small part of her archive, which contains thousands of letters as well as drafts of her poetry and libretti. The correspondence between Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright, published in 2007 as *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950-2000*,¹⁹⁶ forms a discrete archive, separate from other collections of each woman's papers. Wright's letters from this specific correspondence also form part of her broader literary estate under the control of her daughter, Meredith McKinney.¹⁹⁷ Editors McKinney and Patricia Clarke drew on this broader collection for the publication in 2006 of *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*. A more complex layering of archival control is in place for the Indigenous women's letters published as *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*,¹⁹⁸ which although drawn from the extensive and complex archives of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, are individually controlled by descendants of the original correspondents. In published form, these letters were subjected to both family censorship and cultural sensitivity guidelines that now overlay much of the Indigenous material in colonial government archives.

My focus in this chapter will be on the establishment of and access to the personal archives outlined above, within the broader framework of archival research and the fluid definitions of the concept of an archive generally and letter archives in particular. This involves some consideration of the ways in which archives have been understood, represented and defined.

¹⁹⁴ See my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁹⁵ See my article 'Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁹⁶ See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

¹⁹⁷ Epistolary editors frequently collate the letters of an individual from a more broad-ranging archive. Barrett Reid and Nancy Underhill, for example, selected letters written by John Reed from the joint John and Sunday Reed archive held in the State Library of Victoria. The collection was published by Penguin in 2001 as *Letters of John Reed: Defining Australian Cultural Life 1920-1981*.

¹⁹⁸ See my article 'Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

The Archival Romance

Archives are seductive, even when portrayed as fusty, bacteria-ridden collections in dingy rooms, as Carolyn Steedman does in *Dust*, her droll take on the meaning of Derrida's 'Archive Fever'. Peculiarly emotive descriptions of the physical experience of researching in archives are common. There is the determined scholar's pursuit, no matter the conditions, as described by Richard Cobb, researching in a collection housed in a provincial French government building: 'the present writer once had to emerge, backwards, from a third-floor window and make a difficult descent to the street, via ... cornice, flag-stone and drain-pipe, from a rural depot on a hot Saturday afternoon'.¹⁹⁹ And there are the many references to acts of 'uncovering', 'unlacing', 'untying', and the kiss bestowed upon 'a sleeping princess' that is the archive, 'a place that is to do with longing and appropriation'.²⁰⁰ The lust for such an archival experience of violation was described in sexual and sexist terms by nineteenth-century historian Leopold von Ranke: 'It is still absolutely a virgin. I long for the moment I shall have access to her and make my declaration of love whether she is pretty or not'.²⁰¹

Contemporary researchers continue to engage with the archival romance and the act of 'uncovering'. Ruth Perry's analysis of the interest in women's personal letters, diaries and journals makes particular note of the salacious expectations of those reading such material in published or unpublished form, noting that 'privacy, like virginity, invites violation'.²⁰² Janet Malcolm insists that 'Simply nothing can take the place of being the first person to look at a new document'.²⁰³ Maryanne Dever, Sally Newman and Ann Vickery write evocatively of 'the particular intimacies and pleasures associated with losing ourselves in paper ... our fetish, the object that promises intimate connection with our subject ... sifting the physical documents to ponder the scratched-out word and the hastily added postscript, together with the fading ink, the

¹⁹⁹ Richard Cobb, *A Second Identity: Essays of France and French History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 55.

²⁰⁰ Carolyn Steedman, 'The Space of Memory: In An Archive', *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 11, no 4, 1998, p. 76.

²⁰¹ Quoted in Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1977, p. 50.

²⁰² Perry, p. 70.

²⁰³ Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives*, Granta Books edition, London, 2004, p. 165.

creases from the original folds'.²⁰⁴ Samuel Beckett's biographer Deirdre Bair refers to this appeal as 'the tyranny of the printed document', in particular, that of handwritten letters.²⁰⁵

In my own experience, there was a poignancy about correspondence held in two of the archives in which I researched because of the effort involved in the physical act of writing of the letters – Barbara Blackman's letters to Judith Wright, and letters written by Indigenous women in the Board For the Protection of Aborigines archives. Several of Barbara Blackman's early letters included in *Portrait of a Friendship* were handwritten. Blackman was certified blind in her early twenties, and the majority of her letters were written on a typewriter and then a computer. Very few of her handwritten letters remain, giving these a particular significance. On the rare occasions when she now handwrites notes, she uses a ruler to guide her pen across the paper she can no longer see.

The original correspondence that has been published in *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926* was all handwritten; some in pencil on pages torn out of exercise books and some in ink on decorated notepaper. The letters are for the most part written in a neat, cursive hand, and display a fair grasp of grammar, spelling and punctuation, which reflects the overlaying of Indigenous languages with English through schooling on missions and government-managed reserves. The validity of the letters is beyond doubt, and the actual physical documents heighten the impact of the contents of the letters, which are often formally expressed requests to government officials for food and clothing, for travel passes in order to move around Victoria, and for permission to see children and other family members. These letters are also evidence of a determination to negotiate with white authorities, albeit on an unequal footing, and thus they contain a range of meanings contained not only within the actual content of the letters but within the physical objects themselves. As Jacques Le Goff notes, 'the document is not objective, innocent raw material, but expresses past society's power over memory and the future'.²⁰⁶ Dever, Newman and Vickery expand on this claim to involve the

²⁰⁴ Maryanne Dever, Sally Newman and Ann Vickery, *The Intimate Archive: Journeys Through Private Papers*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2009, p. 29. Janet Malcolm, among others, has also written about the tactile pleasure of handling original correspondence when researching the life of poet Sylvia Plath. See *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*, Picador, London, 1994.

²⁰⁵ Deirdre Bair, 'Samuel Beckett' in Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *The Craft of Literary Biography*, Schocken Books, New York, 1985, p. 212.

²⁰⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992, p. 31.

readers as well as the document, noting that, ‘different meanings are created by different readers who bring diverse reference systems with them ... animated by ... the never innocent reading practices we bring to bear on an archive.’²⁰⁷

Defining an Archive

The accepted meaning of the term ‘archive’ is no longer confined to a collection of artefacts that speak for themselves as primary source material, awaiting the discovery and interpretation by researchers. Rather, as Ann Laura Stoler notes, ‘This move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject [has] gained currency across the richly undisciplined space of critical history and in a range of fields energised by that reformulation’.²⁰⁸ One must ask when, why and for whom the archives in question were established in order to grasp what Stoler refers to as the ‘grain’ of the archive: ‘one needs to understand the institutions that it served’.²⁰⁹

In the case of the personal archive, this ‘institution’ is the family, seeking to protect the privacy and the reputation of the subject.²¹⁰ Much of the general discussion concerning the creation of and context for archives, however, relates to large institutions such as government bodies, record offices and private companies that structure their records following set conventions which prioritise the original order of the records, and even cultural expectations.²¹¹ The colonial-era Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) archives, held jointly in the Public Record Office of Victoria (PROV) and the Australian Archives (Victorian Regional Office) is a case in point. Research currently underway in these archives is indicative of the ways in which historians are rethinking the sources and contexts of colonial documents: scholars are addressing the silences

²⁰⁷ Dever *et al.*, *The Intimate Archive*, p. 20.

²⁰⁸ Anne Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 2009, p. 44.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²¹⁰ Ian Hamilton traces the interest in tighter family control in the UK of ‘literary leavings’ in particular to the Copyright Act of 1842, which ‘granted a 42-year period of ownership from the date of publication or until seven years after an author’s death ... The prompt issue of a family-controlled biography would, it was perceived, safeguard the biographee’s good name and also see to it that the good name was, so to speak, kept warm during the seven-year period of copyright control’. Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography*, Faber & Faber, Boston, 1994, p. 144.

²¹¹ Archival sorting and discarding can be done on a monumental scale when dealing with the records of large organisations. For example, the archiving of historical records ‘from the long defunct New York Central system and the Pennsylvania Railroad, stored by the Conrail Corporation. These consisted of some 360,000 linear feet of materials ... After two years’ work only some 20,000 linear feet were retained. The remainder, judged by the process to be of secondary and even marginal value, was destroyed’. Noted in Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, ‘The Archivist as Activist in the Production of (Historical) Knowledge’ in *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and the Archives*, Oxford Scholarship Online, May 2011, p. 145.

from a period of white invasion, dispossession and control, and in the process ‘reading against the grain’ of the archive’s original purpose of recording government policy regarding Indigenous people in Victoria. Blouin and Rosenberg describe these as ‘sources for new kinds of history [that] had to be teased obliquely from sources that had been collected, catalogued, and preserved as other kinds of testimony’,²¹² subjected in its original form to ‘the seemingly panoptic glare of a vacuous stylised official gaze’.²¹³

The letters of Indigenous women included in *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926* belie the silence of Aboriginal women’s voices in publications that reference white invasion, dispossession and control. Drawn from an official context of Church and government correspondence, and documents related to the administration of missions and reserves in Victoria, the letters have been woven into themed narratives by the editors. They have also been given a personal context with individual biographical notes on each of the eighty-one correspondents. The descendants of the letter writers insisted that during the editing process both family and community privacy, as well as the dignity of the original correspondents, was to be respected. This personal and community privacy and dignity has now been further protected by a cultural sensitivity overlay in place on Indigenous material held in PROV. The letters cannot be copied or digitised, and must be read in the PROV reading room.

These letters present an unusual case study in that it is personal correspondence now under the control of descendants of the original writers but is held in a public archive. The letters have survived because they were filed in order of receipt as mission and reserve correspondence, in the BPA archive. Their discovery was serendipitous; the editors were researching more broadly across the field of mission correspondence in the BPA archives.²¹⁴ As Dever, Newman and Vickery note, successful research in archives can be ‘bound up with luck, accident and coincidence’.²¹⁵ And they further argue that ‘only what is preserved can be accessed ... the very processes of preserving (or destroying), gathering, selecting and ordering archival records ... shapes the archive as we find it’.²¹⁶ Tom Nesmith has observed, ‘Far from a place of dust and stasis – although we can agree there can be plenty of both – archives are thus very active sites of

²¹² Blouin and Rosenberg, ‘Contested Archives, Contested Sources’ in *Processing the Past*, p. 135.

²¹³ Stoler, p. 23.

²¹⁴ Email from Patricia Grimshaw to the author, 7 March 2009.

²¹⁵ Dever *et al.*, *The Intimate Archive*, p. 19.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

constant and multiple possibilities: acquisition and destruction, cultural determinism and challenge'.²¹⁷

Archives are not sites of passive curation. Seen from the inside out they are 'places of constant decision making, where archivists themselves ... are constantly involved in processes that shape the "stuff" from which history is made'.²¹⁸ Before a researcher enters an institutional archive, an archivist will have made many decisions concerned with what to retain and what to discard, thus establishing a structure of sorts and in the process privileging some documents over others.²¹⁹ The very inclusion of an item in an archive invests it with a sense of value. As Louise Craven notes, 'A book bound in red leather says "I'm important", the way documents are folded in a bundle, the ... use of tags, ties and legal pink tape: these are all ways of telling us about the documents before we look at them'.²²⁰ These are decisions being made by professional archivists. Less objective and less informed decisions can be made when family members are in charge of an archive. This has been the case with two of the women's letter archives in which I researched: those of Rachel Henning and Gwen Harwood.

In Family Hands

The sorting, and often the destruction, of items can begin when material is being gathered for an archive, and well before the collection is formally handed over to an institution. Ian Hamilton uses the term 'keepers of the flame' to elicit this duality: 'there is the gemlike flame of art and there is the private bonfire, the "trustful guardian of secret matters"'.²²¹

²¹⁷ Blouin and Rosenberg, 'The Archivist as Activist in the Production of (Historical) Knowledge' in *Processing the Past*, p. 142.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ The protagonist of Martha Cooley's literary thriller *The Archivist* exercises fictional control over the real collection of more than a thousand letters written to Emily Hale by T.S. Eliot and bequeathed by Hale, against Eliot's wishes, to Princeton University. The actual collection is embargoed until 1 January 2020. In Cooley's novel, the archivist ponders the fact that 'An archivist serves the reader's desire. Yet what of the writer's – is it of no consequence? ... Eliot's letters to Emily were not, I know, his bequest. We were never meant to read them: only she was and she relinquished them. Poetry was what he left us. It was all that mattered. *The rest is not our business.*' The novel concludes with the archivist burning the entire collection. Martha Cooley, *The Archivist*, Back Bay Books, New York, 1998, pp. 322-323 (italics as they appear in the novel).

²²⁰ Louise Craven, 'From the Archivist's Cardigan to the Very Dead Sheep' in Louise Craven (ed.), *What Are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2008, p. 22.

²²¹ Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame*, p. viii. A more contemporary version of the bonfire in the back garden is the digital destruction of computer files. In his account of editing Benjamin Disraeli's letters John Matthews refers to the 'wide range of family legends to account for the apparent absence of papers which one might reasonably have expected to have survived. These range from explosion, terrorism (Ireland), enemy action, accident, and assorted

Rachel Henning's descendants played a key role in both the survival of the collection of her letters and their subsequent editing for publication. The original letters were allegedly preserved by 'family contemporaries [with] sufficient appreciation of what she had written to collect the letters from different recipients and to bring them together in Australia where they lay undisturbed for many years in an old leather valise ... forming part of a mass of family correspondence that had been preserved, in some instances, for nearly a century'.²²² Henning's niece sorted out her aunt's letters and claimed to have 'had them transcribed into typescript' for publication, while she retained the original letters. There are some discrepancies in the account given in the acknowledgements, however. Firstly, Rachel Henning, who died in Sydney in 1914, wrote her letters to family members in England. Therefore, the correspondence presumably sat in a family archive of sorts on the other side of the world for some time and then had to be returned to relatives in Australia, possibly at someone's request. Secondly, Henning family members were involved with the selection and editing of Rachel Henning's letters for publication, but there is no surviving evidence that a full transcript was made of the original correspondence before any editing commenced. The original letters, which may be read in the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney, were scored in blue, black and red ink in preparation for publication, rendering some of them unreadable, and there are pencilled queries and instructions to a typist in the margins of some letters. A transcript is more likely to have been prepared from *this* version, as the instructions to the typist would suggest. Such a process would be considered extraordinarily careless and destructive today. The editor David Adams and the Henning family themselves might have treated the original correspondence with more care had it been valued by them as anything other than Rachel's letters 'home'.²²³ It is also possible that after the editing had been

forms of both mayhem and inadvertence. By far the most common, however, was ... either an ignorant housemaid or an inebriated footman (invariably one or the other) is reported to have destroyed archives'. Noted in J. A. Dainard (ed.), *Editing Correspondence*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1979, p. 87. Researchers can also uncover a wealth of material in a family archive because of a lack of family interest in the contents. It can be the case that unfettered access to a subject's papers is due to the likelihood that family literary executors are not fully aware of what is in an archive.

²²² Family acknowledgements in *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, first Bulletin Books edition, Sydney, 1952, p. 7. The Henning family's foresight may have been unusual in light of Dever *et al.*'s observation that 'The paper trail of single women without offspring is often at risk'. *Intimate Archives*, p. 12.

²²³ It is also possible that because these were women's letters they were more open to 'violation' in the interests of constructing a narrative. Rachel Henning's older brother, (Edmund) Biddulph, featured prominently in her letters and was described by Norman Lindsay in his foreword to the book as 'the hero' of the narrative. It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that Angus & Robertson declined the memoir Biddulph wrote of his life and experiences, which the publishers were offered some years after the successful publication of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*. One must assume from this that even with the cutting and shaping to which Rachel Henning's letters were subjected, in

completed, Adams and the Hennings, realising the damage that had been done to the original letters, referred to a 'transcription' of the typescript in the acknowledgements in the first book edition to suggest more care had been taken than was actually the case.

The letters were eventually given to the State Library of New South Wales in 1953, the year after they first appeared in print in book form. Any researcher working in this archive now looks at damaged documents that, ironically, have an associated value: it is a record of the nature and extent of structural editorial work done by a male editor, in consultation with family members, shaping a manuscript for a particular market in the 1950s. There are no access restrictions on the Rachel Henning archive, and neither does it contain any explanations for the manner in which the original documents were treated in the process of turning her letters into a novel-like pioneer narrative.

Unlike Rachel Henning, who had no say in the archiving of her letters or their subsequent publication, Tasmanian poet Gwen Harwood began donating material to various institutions while she was still alive. In 1977, her chief correspondent throughout her life, Thomas Riddell, also donated to the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland all of the letters and postcards Harwood had sent him. A selection of these letters, edited by Harwood family friend Alison Hoddinott, was published in 1990, during Harwood's lifetime, as *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*. According to Gregory Kratzmann, editor of Gwen Harwood's second volume of letters, *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*, Harwood was a letter writer of distinction whose letters 'written to friends and fellow artists over more than fifty years, reach Tolstoyan proportions ... in terms of their range, the degree of self-awareness they reflect and their capacity to delight, the most valuable letters of Australia's literary culture'.²²⁴ Harwood herself, who could be flippant about her correspondences – 'I don't keep anything (except a few letters) in the way of relics'²²⁵ – was a fine letter writer and appears to have been well aware of the value of her own correspondence.

published form they presented a more lively, intimate portrait of the family than did her brother's account of his life and achievements, which the publisher's reviewer damned with faint praise: 'quite pleasant reading and a reasonably interesting document'. Noted in the manuscript review, 8 December 1966, Mrs N. B. Gill File, Angus & Robertson Archives, State Library of New South Wales, Mitchell Library MSS 3269, vol. 226.

²²⁴ Gregory Kratzmann (ed.), *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943-1995*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001, p. ix.

²²⁵ Gwen Harwood to Vincent Buckley, 7 August 1962, quoted in Kratzmann, p. 162.

She kept thousands of letters. According to Kratzmann, ‘At a writers’ festival in Brisbane in 1992, when David Marr spoke about the letters of Patrick White, she turned to me and asked, with unmistakeable seriousness, “Who is going to do *my* letters?”’²²⁶

As it is, two volumes of Harwood’s letters have been published but as yet no biography of her has been completed. Both Hoddinott and Kratzmann abandoned attempts to write one. Harwood herself occasionally placed access restrictions on her archives during her lifetime,²²⁷ writing on one occasion to Alison Hoddinott, ‘I have closed the Fryer material to all but you’.²²⁸ After her death, however, these restrictions were broadened considerably by her literary executor, her son John Harwood, making the prospect of a biography of Harwood unlikely.²²⁹ Kratzmann had already read extensively in the Harwood archives before Gwen’s death, and in the process uncovered evidence of certain personal matters, details of which were subsequently confirmed by Harwood herself, in conversation. These aspects of Gwen Harwood’s life had not been known to John Harwood, who out of respect for both his parents refused permission for Kratzmann to use the material in a biography. Kratzmann did not believe he could do justice to a full account of Gwen Harwood’s life without including this material. Instead, he concluded that a volume of her letters, with an introduction and a series of linking essays, would at least present a partial and mediated epistolary biography.²³⁰ John Harwood also exercised control over the selection of letters included in *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*, resulting in some major omissions from the roll call of Gwen Harwood’s correspondents. An unintended consequence is that the two volumes of her letters are examples of how attempts by a family literary executor to protect family privacy by exercising control over the editing and publishing of the collections have resulted in more prurient speculation. The subsequent conjecture about Harwood’s personal life has skewed analysis of her body of creative work.

A more transparent and cooperative approach to a parent’s private papers has been adopted by Judith Wright’s daughter and her literary executor, Meredith McKinney, even taking into

²²⁶ Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

²²⁷ Email from the Fryer Library, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 30 January 2015.

²²⁸ Gwen Harwood to Alison Hoddinott, 23 June 1985, quoted in Kratzmann, p. 378.

²²⁹ When I enquired about seeking permission in writing to view restricted items held in the Fryer Library I was informed that there was no point in my doing so as this would not be permitted. Email from the Fryer Library, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 6 January 2015.

²³⁰ Interview in person with Gregory Kratzmann, 16 March 2015. Bill Harwood was still alive at the time of Kratzmann’s revelations to John Harwood.

consideration the difficulties of finding space for her own private grief at the loss of her mother when public attention focused on the loss of the ‘famous poet and activist everyone else imagined they knew’.²³¹ In partnership with historian Patricia Clarke, McKinney has edited two volumes of Wright’s letters: *The Equal Heart and Mind: Letters Between Judith Wright and Jack McKinney*²³² and *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*. According to McKinney, her mother ‘set no particular store by her letter writing,[and] she seldom bothered to keep private letters, either by or to herself ... they were transient vehicles of communication and thought, not ends in themselves’.²³³ Wright regarded herself as a reserved person, in one letter to Blackman describing herself as having ‘always been a cat that walked either by myself or on the fringes of other people’s lives and in strict camouflage’.²³⁴ She did donate a substantial archive of letters and papers to the National Library of Australia before her death, however, which suggests awareness both of the material’s historical value and the likelihood that the collection would attract researchers, even with restrictions on access.²³⁵ In Wright’s case, the restrictions concerned correspondence to and from the well-known and highly regarded government advisor and indigenous rights activist H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs, with whom Wright had a long-standing relationship after the death of her husband Jack McKinney. Mindful of their need for discretion, not only because Coombs was married but also because of their public profiles, Wright burnt many of Coombs’ letters to her and pressed him to do the same with hers. She was aware that the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) maintained files on many writers and literary organisations that were considered to be politically active,²³⁶ and she was concerned that the letters might fall into the wrong hands. Those that survived were embargoed by the Coombs

²³¹ Fiona Capp, *My Blood’s Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2010, p. 172.

²³² This small volume of the love letters written between McKinney’s parents was published after Wright’s death. McKinney was ‘impressed that she had so carefully preserved these letters, though she was generally careful to destroy traces of her private life if she felt they weren’t other people’s business’. Meredith McKinney, ‘Memoir of Jack and Judith’ in Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney (eds), *The Equal Heart and Mind: Letters Between Judith Wright and Jack McKinney*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2004, p. 12.

²³³ Meredith McKinney, introduction to *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2006, p. ix.

²³⁴ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 25 June 1981, Correspondence of Barbara Blackman with Judith Wright, National Library of Australia MS 9589, Box 1, National Library of Australia.

²³⁵ Other correspondence of Wright’s is held in the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland, Brisbane.

²³⁶ Wright is listed in the ASIO records of files on Australian writers held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, although her file dates from 1954 to 1961.

family until three years after the death of Coombs' wife Mary.²³⁷ Unlike John Harwood's discovery of aspects of his mother Gwen Harwood's personal life as a result of a biographer's research, Judith Wright's daughter Meredith McKinney was aware of Wright's relationship with Coombs and had frequently spent time with them when they were together. While McKinney respected their privacy and that of the Coombs family at the time, she has subsequently spoken very affectionately about the relationship.

References to Coombs in the letters Judith Wright and Barbara Blackman wrote to each other relate only to the environmental and indigenous issues with which he and Wright were involved. More personal matters were kept for their conversations in person and phone calls between the two women. Judith was also aware that letters to Barbara were never entirely private because they had to be read aloud to her, thus involving a third party and requiring a degree of self-censorship. Their surviving letters, just over 300 written from 1950 to 2000, form a separate archive in the manuscript collections held by the National Library of Australia. Unlike a collection of one person's letters, in which one does not necessarily know how recipients responded, or what the context of a letter may have been, this two-way correspondence gives a greater sense of intimacy and provides a more coherent narrative framework: news, opinions, arguments and advice are tossed back and forth from letter to letter. Such a correspondence inevitably produces a narrower, though more focused portrait of each writer, defined by their relationship and their mutual friends and interests. Yet it excludes all other correspondence by both parties, thereby giving the potentially misleading impression of a particular closeness to the exclusion of other friendships and relationships.

Wright herself was aware of the differences in style and content of her many correspondences. In the 1990s, when she and Blackman were still sorting and returning letters to each other, Wright compared her letters to Blackman with a very different collection written to another longstanding friend, Kathleen McArthur, most of whose letters to Wright have not survived: 'Kathleen's interests and mine are slightly skewed, and what I wrote to her will be of interest in other ways than those I wrote to you ... Funny how different the two batches of letters are – K and I wrote each other a lot, but mainly about wildflowers, conservation and national parkland

²³⁷ Fiona Capp's June 2009 *Monthly* essay 'In the Garden: Judith Wright and Nugget Coombs' details the lifting of this embargo. John Hughes's 2013 documentary *Judith Wright and 'Nugget' Coombs* featured readings of their letters to each other and included commentary from Meredith McKinney.

we were trying to get – whereas I seem to mention these matters seldom if at all to you, and really Jack and Meredith are the only subjects in common between the two lots of letters’.²³⁸

McArthur and Wright were the same age and came from similar pastoralist backgrounds; on her mother’s side of the family, McArthur, who was divorced and raising her three children alone, was related to the Duracks. She was an artist, with a particular interest in Queensland wildflowers, and both she and Wright became passionate environmentalists, dedicated to the establishment of national parks and the preservation of the Great Barrier Reef.²³⁹

Wright was co-founder and, for a time, President of the Wildlife Preservation Society in Queensland. Many of these conservation issues also involved her growing awareness of and sensitivity to Aboriginal dispossession and the need to pursue land rights. Her long friendship with the writer Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), whom Wright met in 1964 when Oodgeroo’s first book of poems, *We Are Going*, was published, was to inform Wright’s later work with the Aboriginal Treaty Committee during the 1970s and 1980s. Wright touches briefly on these issues in letters to Blackman but they do not form the main thrust of that correspondence.

A distinctive thread of family and domestic life runs through their letters, however their first and strongest link was through poetry, and contained within this correspondence one may read early drafts of some of Wright’s poems, which she would attach to letters sent to Blackman. The matter-of-fact tone in which these poems are ‘introduced’, which is similar to the manner in which Gwen Harwood placed her creative works in the domestic sphere when being interviewed about her writing, gives the tantalising impression that composing was simply part of a day’s work: ‘I stick in a not very good little poem I wrote in my head this afternoon while chasing our heifers to the creek for water, near Mrs. Dunn’s old blown-down pear-tree’ [‘Old Woman’s Song’ from *Five Senses (The Forest)*, 1963]’;²⁴⁰ and ‘I’ve been writing a bit, odd times; poem enclosed. (Tell me if you can’t make anything of it.)’ [‘Interplay’ from *Five Senses (The Forest)*,

²³⁸ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 28 January 1994, Correspondence of Barbara Blackman with Judith Wright, National Library of Australia MS 9589 Box 1, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

²³⁹ The Wright-McArthur correspondence also covers fifty years, and it formed a significant part of the collected correspondence of Judith Wright compiled by Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney and published in 2006 as *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*. Katie Holmes has also discussed this friendship in the chapter ‘Judith Wright: The Poet’s Garden’ in *Between the Leaves: Stories of Australian Women, Writing and Gardens*.

²⁴⁰ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 22 September 1956, National Library of Australia MS 9589 Box 1.

1963].²⁴¹ Blackman sometimes responded with poetry of her own, to which Wright responded bluntly: ‘She [Judith] explained to me that I was not a poet; I was a person to whom poems happened’.²⁴²

Copyright in both Wright’s and Blackman’s published poetry is managed separately from their letters because joint control in the works is exercised by the literary executors in conjunction with the companies that have published the works. No drafts of poems that were subsequently published could be reproduced in *With Love and Fury* or in *Portrait of a Friendship* as attachments to the letters without payment of copyright permissions fees.

Joint negotiations of a considerably more complex and emotive nature, involving family, cultural and political elements, affected access to the correspondence published as *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*. Family involvement with this collection of Indigenous women’s letters actually resulted from the editors’ archival research and their respect for family privacy as well as family and community copyrights, acknowledging that these letters were family records not simply archival source material. Descendants of the original letter writers were traced through the Aboriginal Family History Project at Museum Victoria, and the editors were sensitive to the fact that the letters were being read by them for the first time. They did not wish to have family members exposed in any way that might be humiliating, either through references to sensitive topics or through the standard of the writing itself.

Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria is possibly unique among Australian women’s published letter collections, the majority of which are the writings of white, middle- and upper-class correspondents whose letters would never have dealt with such matters as requests for clothing, for food and accommodation, for travel passes or to have children returned. The gulf

²⁴¹ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 1 February 1959, National Library of Australia MS 9589 Box 1.

²⁴² Barbara Blackman, ‘All in the Family’, *Portrait*, no 8, winter 2003, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, p. 8. In a letter to Judith written in 1965 from London, Barbara recounted an example of herself as being ‘a person to whom poems happened’. Barry Humphries had asked to include a series of her poems about lips in his anthology *Bizarre*: ‘I did them during my pre-Barnaby wait [the Blackmans’ third child] in hospital, four line poems in almost four letter words sent home with a tube of loipstick[sic] for Auguste [the Blackmans’ oldest child] to do a bit of reading and draw lips all over the pages ... I had twenty-four hours to rewrite the poems. Charles worked out a splendid technique. He took me to a luscious café and called the cake tray boy who deposited something marvelous and creamy on my plate, and every time I spluttered out enough words I got another cake. I must say it is a very enjoyable way to write poetry’. Barbara Blackman to Judith Wright, 15 June 1965, National Library of Australia MS 9589 Box 1.

between this collection and *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, for example, which is composed of correspondence written between 1853 and 1882 and therefore crosses the same period as some of the published letters of Indigenous women, is considerable.

Henning's letters contain several offensive stereotypes:

They are the queerest looking mortals certainly, with their long lean legs and arms without an atom of flesh on them, more like spiders than anything human. Their costume is usually a shirt and nothing else. Men and women wear the same, and they laugh and show their white teeth whenever you look at them.²⁴³

Norman Lindsay's illustrations for the original edition compound these stereotypes, making Henning's Indigenous domestic servants appear cartoonish, childish and ignorant. Anne Lear has also noted that, 'One source of amusement for Henning's family audience back in England [was her Indigenous servants'] inability to use the English language properly'.²⁴⁴ It is unsurprising that Henning refers to Indigenous people in this manner, considering she was a member of the pioneer class engaged in settlement and dispossession in the Australian colonies and would have had little if any contact with missions or reserves. It is also unsurprising that such letters were published in Australia in the 1950s, with no sense of their content being thought offensive. Less understandable, perhaps, is the fact that *The Letters of Rachel Henning* remains in print, its text unchanged from that first edition.²⁴⁵

The sorting and shaping of a personal archive, in particular by family literary executors, has a considerable bearing on the decisions made by editors and publishers of letter collections, who appeal to voyeurism and the exposure of private lives. In published form these collections provide a focused, directed form of voyeurism by the shaping of a narrative to suit a particular readership. In my next chapter I look at how changing technologies are affecting the composing

²⁴³ David Adams (ed.), *the Letters of Rachel Henning*, second Penguin Books Australia edition, Melbourne, 1969, p. 92.

²⁴⁴ Anne Lear, 'Spot the Lady: Rachel Henning Finds Herself in the Bush', *Women's Writing*, vol. 8, no 3, 2001, p. 398.

²⁴⁵ Contemporary criticism of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* has concerned the editing rather than the original content, yet both can cause difficulties for publishers wishing to keep in print or re-issue a book from a particular era. The novels of Mrs Aeneas (Jeannie) Gunn, such as *The Little Black Princess: A True Tale of Life in the Never-Never Land* for example, were subjected to similar scrutiny when being considered for republication by Penguin Books Australia in the 1980s.

of letters in the abbreviated forms of email and texting, as well as how digitisation is impacting the creation of and access to letter archives. The ability to view an archive online has repercussions for archivists, editors and literary executors, and therefore publishers, who will have to market letter collections in different ways that increasingly focus on nostalgia for a dying art form and letters as curios.

Chapter Five

Publishing Women's Letters in a Digital Age

My final chapter explores how digitisation is impacting on the creation of and access to letter archives, and how this in turn is influencing the publishing of letter collections generally: how we view and value letters in a digital age. Introductions to, and reviews of, letter collections published across the Western world since the early 1990s frequently voice the lament that letter writing is a dying art, replaced by more impersonal and abbreviated digital communication such as email and text messaging. If these predictions are correct, it follows, therefore, that published collections of letters will dwindle in number. In this chapter I will argue that scholarly collections of letters are increasingly likely to appear as online, curated archives, intended for researchers, and that non-scholarly collections of letters are becoming a form of niche publishing aimed mainly at the nostalgia gift market.

Letter collections published for a scholarly readership are less likely than non-scholarly editions to survive in traditional book form in the digital age. With the growth of digital publishing and online access to archives around the world, there is less incentive for a scholarly publisher to produce a book of letters intended primarily for academics when the original documents are available online, often free, accompanied by detailed archival reading and research guides, and with links to a wide range of contextual material that may also include image and sound files. This is the Virtual Research Environment (VRE) that replaces traditional 'paper' archival research.

Non-scholarly editions of letters, by comparison, are intended for a general readership that may or may not be familiar with other works of the letter writer. Editors of such collections aim to draw a narrative from an archive of letters to provide a mediated and accessible reading experience, often described as form of autobiography, heightened by the voyeuristic appeal of reading letters not originally intended for one's eyes. Anthologies of letters intended for a general readership focus on universal themes such as friendship, love, childhood and

parenthood.²⁴⁶ Such collections will continue to be released as traditional books, because general readers retain a connection to the material object, though these publications are likely to be increasingly marketed as facsimile curios with the appeal of nostalgia, object fetish and rarity, playing on a sense of the lost art of letter writing. An associated trend is the revival of letter-writing manuals, which give advice on how to write a wide range of letters and improve one's handwriting, providing 'helpful guidelines to enhance your unique voice ... choosing just the right words, the right stationery, and even the right pen'.²⁴⁷ Also being revived is the traditional role of the scribe writing on behalf of another, through online businesses such as Snail Mail My Email and Bond.²⁴⁸

Thus the widening divergence between the publishing of scholarly letter collections and non-scholarly collections is being driven by new technologies and by the differing requirements and expectations of potential scholarly researchers and non-scholarly readers. The extent to which this divergence is occurring is apparent in the increasing number of archives being curated on line, which is of itself a form of publishing.

Scholarly 'Publishing' via a Digital Archive

Digital archives contain thousands of images and sound files, uploaded with scans and accompanying transcriptions of original documents, including letters. In Australia alone, the National Library of Australia's Trove contains nearly 500 million online resources,²⁴⁹ and National Archives of Australia has digitised over a hundred years of Australian Government records. Worldwide, Google Books has entered into agreements with over forty major libraries

²⁴⁶ Of these categories, 'Love' remains perennially popular, promising a glimpse into other people's private lives with anthologies such as *Other People's Love Letters: 150 Letters You Were Never Meant to See*, edited by former *LIFE* magazine editor Bill Shapiro, and the even more floridly titled *98 Love Letters That Will Bring You to Your Knees: Poems and Love Letters of Great Men and Women*, edited by US self-help guru John Bradshaw.

²⁴⁷ Margaret Shepherd, *The Art of the Personal Letter: A Guide to Connecting Through the Written Word*, Broadway Books, New York, 2008, introduction.

²⁴⁸ These companies are using technology in reverse to turn emails into handwritten correspondence. Snail Mail My Email is focused mainly on the intimacies of love letters, while Bond is focused on the commercial benefits of sending business correspondence with a personal touch. In both cases the process not only provides the nostalgic pleasure of receiving a personal, handwritten letter, it also emphasises the uniqueness of such a missive in a stream of impersonal digital correspondence.

²⁴⁹ <http://trove.nla.gov.au>.

around the world, in the US and the UK and Europe, scanning their holdings for public access.²⁵⁰ And resources such as the *London Lives 1690 to 1800* project, jointly administered by the universities of Sheffield and Hertfordshire, provide access to nearly 250,000 manuscripts and printed pages, collated from eight archives. A clear consequence is that the ease of availability is a major benefit of digitisation; one is able to access many of these collections from a home computer, a tablet or even a smart phone. For the researcher, the digital collection offers quick access, without the need for travel, to a great deal more material and at less expense. Manuscript length and associated printing and production costs are not a consideration in digital format, whereas for both scholarly and non-scholarly book publishers, these two elements are key factors, particularly when print runs are very modest. Balancing this, the digital archive requires skilled technicians to both establish and maintain it. Universities and libraries that have traditionally funded publication of scholarly collections of letters are now also engaging the services of digital specialists.

In the Virtual Research Environment, however, one must forego the traditional archival romance as discussed in my previous chapter. The loss of this experience is lamented by those in thrall to the tactile pleasures of being in the archive itself, and handling original documents, seduced by the possibility of contact with something from ‘the past’. Maryanne Dever, Sally Newman and Ann Vickery insist that ‘it is a rare individual who will avow a preference for microfilmed or digitised documents when paper beckons. We are reluctant to forego the particular intimacies and pleasures associated with losing ourselves in paper’.²⁵¹ UK journalist and Labour politician Tristram Hunt, discussing the British Library/Google Books agreement, also argues that ease of access through search engines diminishes value: ‘when everything is downloadable, the mystery of history can be lost. Why sit in an archive leafing through impenetrable prose when you can slurp frappaccino while scrolling down Edmund Burke documents?’²⁵² James Gleick, US science historian and Isaac Newton’s biographer, who has also studied the cultural impacts of modern

²⁵⁰ Libraries involved in this project include those at Princeton, Cornell, Harvard and Columbia universities in the US, as well as the New York Public Library; Oxford’s Bodleian in the UK; Keio in Japan; and libraries across Austria, Germany, Spain, and France.

²⁵¹ Maryanne Dever, Sally Newman and Ann Vickery, *The Intimate Archive: Journeys Through Private Papers*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2009, p. 29.

²⁵² Tristram Hunt, ‘Online is fine, but history is best hands on’, *The Guardian*, 3 July 2011. Hunt’s observations suggest a degree of intellectual snobbery: that the serious work of an historian cannot be undertaken in archives that are open to the non-academic.

technologies, disagrees, dismissing such views as ‘sentimentalism, and even fetishisation ... that what one loves about books is the grain of paper and the scent of glue’.²⁵³

Louise Craven further elaborates on the perceived distancing effect of researching in the digital archive: ‘The experience online is quite different. The relationship between an individual and the digitised image here seems to be more like that experienced by a person watching a film’.²⁵⁴ One is removed from the documents in every sense of the word, and also from the archivist in our understanding of the traditional role when websites can be created and maintained by a wide range of technicians. Craven continues :

the fundamental distinction to be drawn between paper records and electronic records is this: with paper records, the paper (or parchment or vellum) must be preserved, for this is the authentic record; with electronic records, it is the information which must be preserved, for this is the authentic record ... paper records have a set of signs which we absorb automatically: just as typefaces tell us things about the meaning of the works they convey, the outward form of paper records tell us about the significance and the authority of the content within. ... Signs of conservation are similarly significant: ‘this has been repaired, it must be valuable’. Electronic records have no such signs, no way of saying ‘I’m important’.²⁵⁵

While I agree with all of these observations, I’d qualify them by noting that a digitised scan reproduces an original document in very fine detail and in full colour – a far superior image to that reproduced on microfilm and considerably easier to read. Although the tactile experience of handling original documents cannot be reproduced, the handwriting, the marginalia, the annotations, the choice of writing paper, and evidence of wear and tear are all visible on a scanned document. That which Dever, Newman and Vickery describe as a ‘vital, almost talismanic aspect’ remains intact to a degree in digital form.²⁵⁶ This emphasis on the talismanic

²⁵³ James Gleick, ‘Books and Other Fetish Objects’, *New York Times*, Sunday Review section, 16 July 2011 (accessed via http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/opinion/sunday/17gleick.html?_r=0, 16 January 2016).

²⁵⁴ Louise Craven, ‘From the Archivist’s Cardigan to the Very Dead Sheep’, in Louise Craven (ed.), *What Are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2008, p. 19.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 21–22.

²⁵⁶ Dever *et al.*, *Intimate Archives*, p. 30.

quality of the object does not appeal to Gleick, who describes such objects as being ‘like the coffin at a funeral. It deserves to be honoured, but the soul has moved on’ – his understanding being that the ‘soul’ is the content of the document or object rather than the document or object itself.²⁵⁷

Those with a fondness for the traditional paper archive also lament the perceived loss of serendipity in the digital archive; the document tucked into the pages of a book, or the scribbled note that catches one’s eye and can change the direction of one’s reading. Yet what comes to the fore in the digital archive is the lack of absolute boundaries. There is a fluidity in these records, and they interact with one another, able to be updated and expanded continually, and with other archival sources. Elements such as websites, blogs and wikis exist alongside and linked to a wide range of scanned documents. Thus, as Prescott notes, the individual documents themselves are actually the tip of a very large iceberg²⁵⁸ in a research environment that need no longer be constrained by lack of space or indeed lack of time. The history of the archiving and digitisation of the letters of Olive Schreiner is exemplary of this process.

The Olive Schreiner Letters Project and *The Letters of Rachel Henning*

One of the most detailed and complex online letter archives, which went live in 2012, The Olive Schreiner Letters Project was funded by the UK-based Economic and Social Research Council and based at the universities of Edinburgh, Leeds and Sheffield, under the direction of epistolary scholar Liz Stanley. Around 5000 transcribed letters written by the feminist, social theorist and novelist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), accessed from institutions around the world, appear ‘just as she wrote them – including omissions, spelling mistakes, deletions and insertions’.²⁵⁹ The online archive may be searched by topic, by place, date and address, and by *dramatis personae*. The Project is also exploring Schreiner’s network of friends and acquaintances and the space and time that contextualise her correspondence.

Stanley has assessed that at the time of Schreiner’s death, around 20,000 of her letters were extant, ‘with most of them retrieved and destroyed by her estranged husband Samuel (Cron)

²⁵⁷ James Gleick, ‘Books and Other Fetish Objects’.

²⁵⁸ Andrew Prescott, ‘The Textuality of the Archive’ in Louise Craven (ed.), *What Are Archives?*, p. 130.

²⁵⁹ <https://www.oliveschreiner.org/>, accessed 26 January 2016.

Cronwright-Schreiner'.²⁶⁰ Three volumes of Olive Schreiner's correspondence have been published, overall amounting to around 800-900 letters.²⁶¹ These published letters, in Stanley's view, are 'seriously deficient version[s], many in a drastically shortened or bowdlerised form, containing multiple inaccuracies'.²⁶² Much the same criticisms were leveled at *The Letters of Rachel Henning* when the original correspondence was made available to researchers. The first of the Olive Schreiner letter collections, published in 1924, was regarded by many of her close friends as 'a cashing in on the posthumous market for all things Schreiner'.²⁶³ And according to Stanley, in the case of both the Cronwright-Schreiner and the Richard Rive collections of Schreiner letters, their respective publishers were aware of the probable selling power of the volumes and adopted a hands-off approach to the editors.²⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf's carping 1925 review of *The Letters of Olive Schreiner 1876-1920* makes no mention of the degree of editorial mediation and intervention in which Cronwright-Schreiner engaged in the process of preparing his deceased, estranged wife's letters for publication. Woolf's criticisms were directed at the subject herself:

Olive Schreiner was neither a born letter-writer nor did she choose to make herself become one. She wrote carelessly, egotistically, of her health, of her sufferings, of her beliefs and desires ... this carelessness, while it has its charm, imposes some strain on the reader ... the discrepancy between what she desired and what she achieved can be felt, jarring and confusing, throughout the book.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Liz Stanley, 'Olive Schreiner & Company: Schreiner's Letters and "Drinking in the External World"', Olive Schreiner Letters Project Working Papers on Letters, Letterness & Epistolary Networks, no 3, 2011, p. 7.

²⁶¹ The collections are: S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner (ed.), *The Letters of Olive Schreiner 1876-1920*, Fisher Unwin, London, 1924; Richard Rive (ed.), *Olive Schreiner Letters: Volume 1, 1871-1899*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987; Claire Draznin (ed.), *My Other Self: The Letters of Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis 1884-1920*, Peter Lang, New York, 1992.

²⁶² Stanley, 'Olive Schreiner & Company', p. 8.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁶⁴ Email from Liz Stanley to the author, 2 February 2016.

²⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, review of *The Letters of Olive Schreiner*, *The New Republic*, 18 March 1925 (included in *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, The Women's Press, London, 1979, p.180).

And this bowlderised Cronwright-Schreiner collection of Olive Schreiner's letters was reissued, without any changes or additions and thus at low cost, by US publisher Hyperion in 1976, in their series *Pioneers of the Women's Movement*.²⁶⁶

The Olive Schreiner Letters Project has digitised the surviving letters as complete, accurate and annotated transcriptions of the originals, allowing for a reinterpretation of aspects of Schreiner's life and work that is considerably more layered and open-ended than analyses based on the published collections of her letters; the latter amount to less than one fifth of the letters included in The Olive Schreiner Letters Project. As Stanley notes in the introduction to the online resource, 'Theoretical and methodological ideas developed by the Project are sketched out, including the epistolarium; ... the interface of Schreiner's letters with her other on-the-page and off-the-page activities'.²⁶⁷

This concept of an 'interface', which has also been described as a 'fluidity' of archives in digital form, could apply to the construction of a digital archive of Rachel Henning's papers, now held in the State Library of New South Wales. The papers have been microfilmed by the Library, and they are listed for inclusion in the library's Colonial History website, currently under construction. Such an archive would reveal the full content and context of her original letters and diaries, as well as the publication history of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, thus tracing the making of an Australian classic.²⁶⁸ There is no discussion of the editorial process in the introduction to the published collection of letters, but a digital archive would reveal the editorial markings on the original letters, allowing for detailed research into the changing methods of epistolary editorial practice and how a male editor worked at a particular time with a particular collection, shaping it for a specific market. The Henning archive contains hundreds of letters scored in blue, red and black ink, with pencilled queries in the margins of many of them. The Henning family and the editor, David Adams, worked together on the letters, marking them in a

²⁶⁶ The introduction of an improved form of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) in the early 1970s enabled the scanning of out of copyright books for reissue at minimal cost to publishers. The practice has resulted in the reissue of such oddities as Arthur MacDonal's 1923 volume *Abnormal Woman, a Sociologic and Scientific Study of Young Women: Including Letters of American and European Girls in Answer to Personal Advertisements*. Reproduction quality of the text, however, was often poor.

²⁶⁷ Stanley, 'Olive Schreiner & Company', p. 3.

²⁶⁸ A digital edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* has been available since 2006, when it was posted online, unillustrated, as a Project Gutenberg Australia title.

manner that would be completely unacceptable today. The variations in handwriting are not obvious on the microfilmed letters currently available in the collection – one must sight the originals. The evidence of several hands at work would be clearly visible on scanned documents, however.

Missing from the Henning family's sanitised, published version that bolstered their colonial interests, as presented in *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, are letters concerned with topics such as dubious property dealings, family quarrels over inheritances, and the treatment of Indigenous inhabitants.²⁶⁹ A digital archive would reveal this deleted material and therefore present a different image of Rachel Henning herself and her family, in the process providing parallel narratives to the sweeping pioneer romance presented in the published collection of her letters. As discussed in my case study of the publishing history of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*,²⁷⁰ Henning was 'softened' for publication, in particular, evidence of her sharp tongue and snobbish manner in relation to her extended family as well as her social set was edited out. A digital archive of her papers would include links to many elements of her life. For example, although some context for the Hennings' sense of their superior social standing was included in the first Bulletin Books edition of *The Letters* in the form of notes on land allocations and sales, and some of the grand homes in and around Sydney in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, this material was not included in later editions. One of these properties may well have been Passy, the elegant sandstone mansion in Hunters Hill built in the 1850s for the French consul and subsequently owned by Rachel Henning's widowed brother Biddulph. After the death of her husband Deighton Taylor, Rachel shared her brother's home in Hunters Hill until her own death in 1914. A digital Henning archive would probably contain links to the history of Passy and its owners over the last 160 years, profiled by Hunters Hill resident and novelist Kylie Tennant in

²⁶⁹ Historian Anne Allingham has identified at least one letter of Henning's, removed in its entirety from the published collection, in which Henning takes the part of pastoralists complicit in the massacre of over a hundred Aborigines at a property in central Queensland. (Anne Allingham, 'Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 16, no 3, p. 269).

²⁷⁰ See my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

the 1950s,²⁷¹ listed by the Hunters Hill Historical Trust, and mentioned more recently in a Sydney real estate survey in 2013.²⁷²

Such contextual links would contribute to making an online Henning archive a rich and eclectic resource, and would allow for the co-existence of the published collection of letters, structured for a general readership, and the more layered digital archive. The latter would allow for a broader and deeper analysis of Henning, her family and the era in which she lived as well as a more informed, contextual reading of her letters. Like The Olive Schreiner Letters Project, though on a considerably smaller scale, an online Henning archive would open new fields of research for scholars. Of those case studies presented as part of this thesis, it is only the Rachel Henning archive that currently presents the prospect of becoming a digital archive.

Constraints on Digital Archiving

None of the archives from which the case study women's letter collections discussed in this thesis were drawn has been digitised in full, to date, including those of Rachel Henning.²⁷³ Family restrictions on access to poet and librettist Gwen Harwood's papers, discussed in my article 'Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood',²⁷⁴ currently prevent any digitising of her archives. Over twenty years after Gwen Harwood's death, no biography of her has yet been written because of these restrictions. Were this not the case, a digital archive that contained both the edited letters that form *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943* and the original correspondence from which it was drawn, particularly those letters that were not included, would clarify much of the speculation that has surrounded Harwood's private life and the inspirations for her writing.

²⁷¹ Kylie Tennant, 'The Story of an Old House', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 1954 (accessed via <http://trove.nla.gov.au>, 30 January 2016).

²⁷² Almost a century after Rachel's death, the Hennings' gracious former home, now in need of major repairs, was being offered for quick sale by the disgraced and impecunious former New South Wales Labor powerbroker Eddie Obeid. See Kate McClymont, 'Obeid Falls on Hard Times', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November 2013 (accessed via <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/obeid-falls-on-hard-times-20131106-2x1tc.html>, 26 January 2016).

²⁷³ These are the archives of Rachel Henning, letters written by Indigenous Victorian women and held in the records of the Board For the Protection of Aborigines, and the archives of Gwen Harwood, Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright.

²⁷⁴ See my article 'Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

Family, as well as community privacy, is also a consideration in the use of any records held by the Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV) relating to Indigenous people. Correspondence that was published as *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*²⁷⁵ is subject to a Cultural Sensitivity Statement, put into place in 2010 to provide for Indigenous family control of private documents that are filed in the large and complex government archives of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. This means that the original letters can only be viewed in the PROV reading room. In order to maintain control over access to and use of this material, it has not been digitised, and there are no current plans to do so.

A very small number of items from the Judith Wright archives have been digitised and are available through the National Library of Australia's search engine Trove. Barbara Blackman's archives have not been digitised but they are on open access. This may not remain the case after her death, as has happened with the archives of the late Gwen Harwood, whose family literary executors have heavily restricted access to her papers.

Digitisation of archives is driven by scholarly interests at present. In general, the online archival publishing prospects for scholarly letter collections are promising, in particular through US and UK universities with access to large philanthropic donations. By comparison, the publishing of non-scholarly collections of letters will continue in book form, though fewer of them and edited to appeal to an increasing sense of nostalgia for a vanishing art form: handwritten letters. In an environment of online communication there is also a degree of object fetish concerned with the choice of writing implement and paper and the unique appearance of the handwritten letter. The appeal of nostalgia is also apparent in the readings of private letters to an audience, such as the intimate 'Women of Letters' literary salons, and the larger-scale theatrical performances of the 'Letters Live' series.²⁷⁶

Letters and Nostalgia Publishing

The term 'nostalgia' was regarded as a psychological disorder equated with melancholia or depression until the latter half of the twentieth century, when it acquired the more specific

²⁷⁵ See my article 'Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926*', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

²⁷⁶ These are but two examples of increasingly popular public performance readings of letters around the world.

meaning of ‘a sentimental longing for the past’, generally suffused with positive memories. Contemporary psychological studies in the field often reference objects of nostalgia, such as certain makes of cars, styles of clothing, music, films and books that may have been popular in a person’s youth, and therefore represent a comforting return to the past and one’s roots.²⁷⁷

This longing has been harnessed by the marketing of ‘vintage retro’. Aligned with this longing is what Linda Hutcheon regards as ‘an attempt to defy the end ... If the future is cyberspace, then what better way to sooth techno-peasant anxieties than to yearn for a Mont Blanc fountain pen ... an object of consumer luxury in the age of the computer, when we have all but forgotten how to write’.²⁷⁸

The handwritten letter appeals to a perception of a slower, gentler, kinder past in which a person’s character is revealed through handwriting. As Ruth Perry has observed, ‘The impulse to write autobiographically also comes out of the older Puritan tradition of noting the facts of an individual’s life, gathering up the fragments of his or her character in action’.²⁷⁹ These are elements of letters that researchers bring to the fore when discussing archival work; and they remain in facsimile publications of scanned original documents. In a neat reversal of technologies, editor Shaun Usher compiled two collections of letters from his website ‘Letters of Note’ (<http://www.lettersofnote.com>), established in 2009. The two volumes, which Usher describes as ‘book-shaped museums of letters’, are titled *Letters of Note: Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience* and *More Letters of Note: Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience*. They include scanned images of ‘letters, memos and telegrams of the famous, the infamous and the not-so-famous’²⁸⁰ alongside photographs of the authors and transcripts of the original documents. The images allow the reader to engage with many of the features of the

²⁷⁷ Constantine Sedakides, at the University of Southampton in the UK, has pioneered social-psychological studies in the field of nostalgia, creating the Southampton Nostalgia Scale in order to laboratory test the sources and effects, both positive and negative, of nostalgia on people. See, for example, Xinyue Zhou, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedakides, Kan Shi and Cong Feng, ‘Nostalgia: The Gift That Keeps on Giving’, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 39, no 1, June 2012, pp. 39-50. The object fetish surrounding books has become more pronounced with the emergence of ebook publishing.

²⁷⁸ Linda Hutcheon, ‘Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern’, (accessed via <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>, 4 January 2016), p. 4.

²⁷⁹ Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters and the Novel*, AMS Press, New York, 1980, p. 64.

²⁸⁰ Shaun Usher (ed.), *Letters of Note: Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience*, Unbound, London, 2013, p. xv.

archival romance discussed in my previous chapter: choice of writing paper, choice of writing implement, style of handwriting, and marginalia. Only the smell and the touch of old papers are absent, replaced by uniformly high-quality paper stock.

Usher's collections appeal not only because of the content of the letters but because of their appearance. Non-scholarly publishing companies have tapped into this market with books that focus on how to write and present letters for all occasions, as well as providing examples of worthy correspondence from previous centuries. The authors of these books are often graphic artists and calligraphers, and promise assistance with choosing 'just the right words, the right stationery, and even the right pen ... to write a memorable and meaningful letter that will be cherished by its recipient for years'.²⁸¹ Paper artist Diane Maurer-Mathison even provides instructions on how to make your own decorative paper, thus 'putting real meaning into visually appealing messages'.²⁸² The terms 'art' and 'craft' frequently appear in the book titles, for example: *The Handcrafted Letter*; *For the Love of Letters: A 21st-Century Guide to the Art of Letter Writing*; *Kind Regards: The Lost Art of Letter Writing*; *Snail Mail: Rediscovering the Art and Craft of Handmade Correspondence*.

Letter-writing manuals have been in existence for several centuries, serving a range of purposes from the acquisition of personal communication skills to addressing the business needs of the commercial world. By the mid- to late-nineteenth century, letter writing was also being taught increasingly in schools as part of grammar and composition instruction.²⁸³ The study of epistolary manuals in use in the US and the UK, particularly during colonial imperialist expansion, reveals that these manuals 'functioned as conduct books as well as guides to conversation and correspondence'.²⁸⁴ As Ruth Perry has noted, letter-writing manuals not only outlined polite and clear communication skills, they also 'offered directives ... for a good deal more than style. It would seem that many readers were looking for instruction on how to think

²⁸¹ Margaret Shepherd, *The Art of the Personal Letter: A Guide to Connecting Through the Written Word*, Broadway Books, New York, 2008, introduction.

²⁸² Diane Maurer-Mathison, *The Handcrafted Letter*, Storey's Custom Publishing, Vermont, 2001, cover copy.

²⁸³ See John T. Gage's chapter 'Vestiges of Letter Writing in Composition Textbooks, 1850-1914', in Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (eds), *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction – From Antiquity to the Present*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 2007, pp. 199-299.

²⁸⁴ Eve Tavor Bannet, 'Empire and Occasional Conformity: David Fordyce's *Complete Letter-Writer*', review in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 66, nos 1 and 2, 2003, p. 55.

and feel'.²⁸⁵ She aligns the popularity of letter writing and publishing with the growing interest in scientific objectivity in the early eighteenth century, and a preference for what were considered to be 'personally verifiable documents'.²⁸⁶ There was also the expectation that educated people would 'know how to write graceful letters, how to compose their thoughts on paper', thus displaying a person's social class.²⁸⁷

To be capable of expressing these thoughts in a fine, clear hand was also important. The decline in the quality of handwriting since the middle of the twentieth century, caused first by the ubiquity of the typewriter and then the computer, has prompted research into the perceived different cognitive skills required when writing with a pen or pencil as opposed to typing on a keyboard.²⁸⁸ Neuroscientists are divided on the subject, with those in favour of the teaching of traditional cursive handwriting being of the opinion that it is a key element in teaching a child to read because of the requirement to 'draw' each letter. The contrary view is that keyboard typing allows us to write more quickly and therefore frees up more time for thinking.²⁸⁹ There is no disagreement, however, on the assumption that 'writing has always been seen as expressing our personality ... With handwriting we come closer to the intimacy of the author ... Each person's hand is different: the gesture is charged with emotion, lending it a special charm'.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Perry, p. 9.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁸⁸ This research meshes with the concerns of literary cultural theorist Sven Birkerts, who in the early 1990s expressed a concern with 'a deep transformation in the nature of reading, a shift from focused, sequential, text-centred engagement to a far more lateral kind of encounter ... Attention spans have shrunk and fragmented ... Who has the time or will to read books the way people used to?', *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, Faber & Faber, New York, 2006 edition, p. xiv.

²⁸⁹ Anne Trubek, associate professor of rhetoric and composition at Oberlin College in Ohio, is firmly of the view that keyboard typing is 'a glorious example of cognitive automaticity, the speed of execution keeping pace with the speed of cognition'. See 'Handwriting is History: Writing words by hand is a technology that's just too slow for our times, and our minds', *Pacific Standard Magazine*, 17 December 2009 (accessed via <http://www.psmag.com/books-and-culture/handwriting-is-history-6540>, 17 February 2016).

²⁹⁰ Roland Jouvent, Professor of Psychiatry at the Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, quoted in Anne Chemin, 'Handwriting vs typing: is the pen still mightier than the keyboard?', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2014 (accessed via <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/dec/16/cognitive-benefits-handwriting-decline-typing>, 18 January 2016). In France, the teaching of cursive handwriting was reintroduced into primary schools in 2000, regarded as an important step in cognitive development. French researchers have focused on the gathering of letter recognition data from very young children, and have compared the cognitive skills to those taught to stroke patients who are learning to read again. See Marieke Longcamp, Marie-Thérèse Zerbato-Poudou and Jean-Luc Velay, 'The Influence of Writing Practice on Letter Recognition in Preschool Children: A Comparison Between Handwriting and Typing', *Acta Psychologica*, vol. 119, no 1, May 2005, pp. 67-79; and also Samuel Planton, Mélanie Jucia, Franck-Emmanuel Roux and Jean-François Démonet, 'The Handwriting Brain', *Cortex*, vol. 49, no 10, November-December 2013, pp. 2772-2787.

The Modern-Day Scribe

Apart from the letter-writing manuals now being published, for those without the time, the skill or the inclination to handwrite a letter there are now businesses that will do this for you. The companies Snail Mail My Email and the more recently established Bond both offer a return to the handwritten communication experience, catering to the belief that a letter written on paper in a person's hand stands out in a flood of mainly digital communication. Snail Mail My Email, self-described as a global art project, was established as a one-off event in 2011 by San Francisco advertising art director Ivan Cash, initially working on his own: 'strangers could email him messages that he would transcribe into letters and mail to the intended recipients, free of charge'.²⁹¹ The project now runs worldwide, with over fifteen hundred volunteers artistically interpreting thousands of emails and then sending them out as letters. The participants sending these emails are restricted to a hundred words, and the vast majority of these are love letters. They are decorated with doodles, lipstick kisses and flower petals and even finished with a spray of perfume. A book containing a selection of these letters has been published, however to date, that is the only commercial element of the enterprise.

The communication service offered by the Bond company,²⁹² by comparison, is directed more at customer relations in the business market, offering the personal touch of a handwritten note. Founder Sonny Caberwel describes Bond as '3D printing for communication'.²⁹³ Rather than a group of volunteer 'scribes', Bond has a 'software and robotics system that can imitate customers' handwriting and write up to 1000 handwritten notes at quick speed'.²⁹⁴ The Bond robots will either copy a client's handwriting from a sample provided, for a fee of \$500, or offer a preset font. Clients' signatures are uploaded via smartphone. The Bond robots have 'arms that can hold a pen, a paintbrush or a marker. The paper is moved around using static electricity ... so it stays pristine, with no wrinkles or marks. Bond also seals each envelope with wax, adds

²⁹¹ Ivan Cash, quoted in Maggie Zhang, 'From Robots and E-mails to Handwritten Letters: Using Tech to Reverse Tech', *Forbes*, 7 January 2015 (accessed via <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mzhang/2015/07/01/from-robots-and-emails-to-handwritten-letters>, 16 January 2016).

²⁹² The company name presumably was chosen to draw on nostalgia for the Basildon Bond brand of writing paper as well as the act of forming a bond.

²⁹³ Sonny Caberwel, quoted in Maggie Zhang, 'From Robots and E-mails to handwritten letters'.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

postage and mails it'.²⁹⁵ Bond clients tend to be focused on improving their business's customer relations through the 'personal' contact of a handwritten letter, rather than creating a uniquely crafted work of art that elicits an emotional response.

In both the Snail Mail My Email and Bond correspondences there is the addition of a third person/automaton, the scribe, to the traditional writer/recipient exchange of the personal letter. An awareness of a third party in such exchanges can constrain the letter writer or cause them to request that correspondence be circulated with discretion. Judith Wright, for example, was aware that her letters had to be read aloud to Barbara Blackman because of her blindness, and Wright was therefore mindful of who the likely letter reader might be. Rachel Henning would also have been aware that her letters sent 'home' to her sister in England would be read by their extended family circle, this being the most practical means by which news could be circulated.²⁹⁶ The practice of circulating letters in this manner – the private letter in a more public space – continued well into the twentieth century, before the advent of cheaper international telephone calls and access to the internet. It should be noted, however, that these letters were being read by family members for the content rather than for any voyeuristic pleasure.²⁹⁷

The Private Letter in a Public Space

The current popularity of reading of a private letter in a public space reflects to some degree these family readings, but on a much larger scale, and with acknowledgment of the nostalgic appeal of letter writing as well as the frisson of being privileged to 'overhear' a private letter. Readings such as the 'Women of Letters' literary salons now running across Australia and the United States, and the 'Letters Live' theatre performances in the United Kingdom, appeal to both nostalgia and voyeurism. UK journalist Shaun Usher has drawn on content from his website 'Letters of Note' and *More Letters of Note: Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience*, to

²⁹⁵ Eilene Zimmerman, 'A Handwritten Card, Signed and Sealed by the Latest Technology', *New York Times*, 61 December 2015 (accessed via <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/business/smallbusiness/a-handwritten-card-signed-and-sealed-by-the-latest-technology.html?smtyp=cur&r=0>, 16 January 2016).

²⁹⁶ Rachel Henning was always careful to specify to her sister Etta Boyce, and brother-in-law the Reverend Thomas White Boyce, whether whole letters or sections of them were not for general family consumption.

²⁹⁷ This was not the case when the letters were published for the general public. Early editions of the book were marketed as a 'spiced and candid picture' and 'letters ... meant only for family'. See my article 'The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon', which is included as a case study in this thesis.

establish the London-based 'Letters Live' performances: public readings by well-known actors of letters collected by Usher and which have appeared on his website and in the accompanying books. These public letter readings differ from the 'Women of Letters' salons in that the latter consist of readings by guests who have composed a letter for the event on a given topic.

The 'Women of Letters' salons, the title surely being a gentle dig at the longstanding practice of publishing the writings of Men of Letters, were established in Melbourne in 2010 by local writers Michaela McGuire and Marieke Hardy.²⁹⁸ At these events, invited guests²⁹⁹ read aloud a letter they have written for the occasion on a given topic decided upon by the salon's coordinators: 'To the night I'd rather forget'; 'To my twelve-year-old self'; 'To the photo I wish had never been taken' were topics from the first series of salons, for example. The coordinators 'value and protect the safe and live space of the events'³⁰⁰ in which guests share very intimate material on stage, and therefore no filming, recording or tweeting is permitted during the performances, which are restricted to an audience of 400 to maintain an atmosphere of intimacy.³⁰¹

Guests have the option of submitting their letter for inclusion in the Women of Letters series of books, six of which have now been published by Penguin Random House. The first volume, *Women of Letters*, which was released in 2011, sold over 10,000 copies.³⁰² Subsequent collections have sold half that number or fewer, indicating that though the literary salons continue to be very popular, there is a declining interest in the published collections of letters presented at them. A website might be the future repository for these letters. The first *Women of Letters* collection was marketed as 'Reviving the lost art of correspondence'. Subsequent collections in the series, however, have focused more on the appeal of the private made public,

²⁹⁸ The coordinators have branched out to include some associated events: People of Letters, in which pairs of people write letters to each other, and Men of Letters in which selected prominent Australian men write 'A letter to the woman who changed my life'. The coordinators are of the opinion that there are distinct differences between the genders, not just in what they write but in how the guests interact with each other: 'The men are not as emotionally honest'. The Women of Letters salons remain the flagship events. Email from Lorelei Vashti, a member of the Women of Letters curating team, 14 January 2016.

²⁹⁹ The majority of participants are women, as the title suggests, and the audiences tend to include more women than men. Men do attend the salons, however, and 'some gentlemen correspondents' are occasionally invited to contribute. Email from Lorelei Vashti to the author, 14 January 2016.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Audience members as well as the salon coordinators strictly police this rule.

³⁰² Sales figures provided by the publishers.

with titles such as *Yours Truly: Cathartic Confessions, Passionate Declarations and Vivid Recollections*; *Between Us: Words of Wit and Wisdom*; and *From the Heart*.

Some guests decline the opportunity to be part of the published collections, ‘wanting only to share their letter in this live setting’.³⁰³ Novelist and academic Linda Jaivin, who has performed at one of the Women of Letters salons but declined to have her letter published, noted that ‘In the context of a (now global) culture that measures the value of almost everything in “eyeballs”, “hits” and “likes”, it seemed almost perverse to be doing something interesting and special purely for the benefit of the people in the room’.³⁰⁴ Social media has helped to blur the line between private and public, and indeed to create a different concept of privacy or at least less respect for it.³⁰⁵ This performance in public of a private piece of writing expands on the concept of the letter having been written initially for an audience of one – each performer addresses their letter to a specific person, object or event – allowing the audience some ‘proximity to the act of creating’.³⁰⁶

Proximity to the act of creating is an integral part of both the ‘Women of Letters’ and the ‘Letters Live’ performances, in which delivery is as important as content. The act of creating is also extended to the audience at the ‘Women of Letters’ salons. Audience members are given postcards and writing paper during the interval, and are encouraged to write their own letter either to keep for themselves or to send to someone after the show. The coordinators provide stamped envelopes and offer to post the letters from audience members.

Nostalgia and novelty underpin the continued writing and circulation of the handwritten letter. With the decline of the handwritten letter as a commonplace and practical means of communication, and the associated decline in handwriting ability, the future of letter publishing in a digital age is constrained: divided between curated online archives of existing material for

³⁰³ Email from Lorelei Vashti to the author, 14 January 2016.

³⁰⁴ Linda Jaivin, ‘The End of Secrets: Privacy is Fast Becoming an Old-Fashioned Thing’, *The Monthly*, June 2014 (accessed via <https://www.themonthly.com.au/author/linda-jaivin>, 6 February 2016).

³⁰⁵ Wolfgang Sofsky’s *Privacy: A Manifesto*, discusses the loss of privacy through surveillance technology and the gathering of data from all forms of digital communication, but also through a changing concept of privacy that appears to be driven by a need for attention (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008).

³⁰⁶ Dever *et al.*, *Intimate Archives*, p. 29.

the scholarly researcher, and a niche market of craft and gift book publishing for the non-scholarly reader. The handwritten letter has long been superseded by digital communication, and is now regarded more as a form of artistic personal expression. It remains to be seen whether emails will be printed off and kept in the way letters have been for centuries, thus further constraining the market for published letter collections. The digital age will retain both the art and the artifice of publishing such collections, merging editorial, archival and graphic design skills.

Published Case Studies

This thesis is presented for examination under the Monash University regulations for thesis by publication. The research presented here as a thesis consists of four thematically linked publications published in peer-reviewed journals, all of which are available online. The publications are the following:

‘The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon’, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 27, nos 3-4, 2012, pp. 74-91

‘Archives, Cultural Sensitivity and Copyright: The Publishing of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867-1926*’, *Melbourne Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no 1, 2014, pp. 229-255

‘Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood’, *Hecate*, vol. 40, no 2, 2014, pp. 52-66

‘Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent’, *Script & Print*, vol. 39, no 1, 2015, pp. 5-20



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The Creation of Rachel Henning: Personal Correspondence to Publishing Phenomenon

Bryony Cosgrove

The Letters of Rachel Henning is the best-selling collection of correspondence ever published in Australia.¹ Covering the years 1853 to 1882, the letters were first serialised in the *Bulletin* in 1951–1952 (edited by David Adams and illustrated by Norman Lindsay), nearly forty years after Rachel Henning's death. Since then, they have been published in book form in nine separate editions, and remained in print for nearly fifty years. In October 2006, the book was posted online, unillustrated, as a Project Gutenberg Australia title. I propose to discuss the editing of the original letters, and examine the paratexts and the various publishing strategies that allowed the collection to be marketed successfully, over many years, to a diverse readership whose reasons for finding the collection so appealing varied with the passage of time.

The Letters offers a distinctive, intelligent and articulate voice, apparently providing a first-hand account of the life of a mid- to late-nineteenth-century colonial woman, from the educated English middle class. No anthology of Australian literature seems complete without an extract from, or reference to, *The Letters of Rachel Henning*. From its first appearance in the *Bulletin*, the broad appeal of the collection was emphasised. The *Sydney Morning Herald* advertisement of 4 August 1951 for the forthcoming serial made note of the 'superb pen-drawings by Norman Lindsay, which reproduce the atmosphere of the period with charming fidelity' and referred to 'the freshness and frankness in the writing of the letters which brings the atmosphere of England and Australia of the 1850s right into the present. People and customs are vividly described ... in the letters, which in their entirety make a fascinating story and a necessary addition to our written history' (*The Letters*).

1 Figures obtained from Bulletin Books, Penguin Books Australia, Nelson, and Angus & Robertson indicate combined sales in excess of 80,000 copies.

Through judicious selection and editing, and by commissioning a series of forty line drawings from his *Bulletin* colleague Norman Lindsay, editor David Adams achieved the remarkable feat of turning an unknown woman into an Australian literary icon – and a collection of personal papers into a bestselling book. The cutting and shaping of the original letters produced a work that manages at one and the same time to read like historical autobiography, like an epistolary novel, *and* like a collection of authentic letters, seemingly offering the unmediated experience of a nineteenth-century woman. This hybrid form contributed greatly to the collection's immediate and enduring appeal, allowing it to be published and marketed in several different ways over nearly half a century. The content of the letters has also allowed them to be read in different ways: as immigrant success story; outback romance with the appeal of a novel; Australian children's classic; pioneering woman's voice; iconic Australiana, and even amateur play.²

Above all, the appeal and the significance of *The Letters* derived, for many years, from the sense of them as unadulterated. Commentators frequently note the significance of Rachel Henning's voice, suggesting an authenticity that disregarded the fact that this voice had been carefully shaped by members of the Henning family, and by editors, illustrators, designers, anthologists and publishers. Adams, intentionally or otherwise, played a key role in creating this impression of authenticity while also appealing to the reader as voyeur, a well-established marketing ploy practised since the early eighteenth century with the publication of letter collections and epistolary novels, the latter bearing such titles as *A Lady's Packet of Letters Broke Open* and *The Postboy Rob'd of His Mail* (Perry 131). In his introduction to the first 'book' edition of the letters (1952), Adams noted the letters were 'originally intended for family eyes only' (6). And while an acknowledgement to Rachel Henning's niece for 'sorting out the letters from a mass of family correspondence' (Adams 7) makes particular reference to the special arrangement with the family that enabled publication of the letters, there is no reference to the fact of their having been cut and edited. Early reviews of this edition refer to a 'spiced and candid picture' and 'letters ... meant only for family' ('Pioneering'),

2 *Remembering Rachel Henning* was performed in 1975 by an amateur theatre group in Hunters Hill, the Sydney suburb where the widowed Rachel Henning spent the last years of her life. The play opens and closes with voice-overs from the letters, while Rachel Henning sits at a desk, writing. The final words are those that close the published collection: 'Believe me, dearest Etta, your most affectionate sister, Rachel Taylor' (Papers of Virginia Howie, MS6096, National Library of Australia [NLA], Canberra). As yet, there is no film of *The Letters*, however there are several parallels with the 2008 Baz Luhrmann epic *Australia*, particularly in the account of a genteel, sheltered Englishwoman emerging 'to discover that life could be an exciting adventure ... the thrill of opening up new prospects [inspiring] her with a lyrical love for the beauties of the Australian landscape'. And, of course, the heroine of Luhrmann's film, Lady Sarah Ashley, and Rachel Henning herself both find love in the arms of a bushman.

promising readers a voyeuristic view into early pioneering days in the not so distant past.

The eldest of five children, Rachel Henning was born in Somerset, England in 1826, and by the age of nineteen had taken on the role of head of the family after the early deaths of both parents. The Henning children were raised in a genteel environment that would not have prepared them for the pioneering life in the Australian colonies upon which four of them embarked: Biddulph Henning's delicate health underpinned his decision to emigrate, accompanied by his sister Annie, in 1853 – the year when the published letter collection begins. Rachel and Amy Henning followed soon after. Initially, Rachel was unsettled. She returned to England in 1856, but came to realise that life in the colonies presented her with greater choice and independence. In 1861, she sailed again for Australia, joining Biddulph and Annie in Queensland. These four Henning siblings all settled permanently and married in Australia, Rachel just before her fortieth birthday to her brother's overseer, Deighton Taylor.

Henning's published letters make for an engaging and sweeping story, depicting well the challenges of pioneering life in the Australian bush, and apparently written by a woman who relished her escape from the dreary confines of sheltered spinsterhood in Somerset. Possessed of considerable wit, perception and strength of character, Rachel Henning eventually took to life in the colonies with great gusto: travelling rough, horse riding, camping under the stars, finding love, and coming to delight in the Australian landscape.

It is not clear how David Adams obtained the letters, which had been stored for many years in an old leather valise belonging to the Hennings, but as *Bulletin* editor he may well have been known to members of the family,³ and had been approached by them about the collection. Adams was by training a financial journalist, and had previously been economics editor of the *Bulletin*. As such, he was unlikely to have been on the hunt for a nineteenth-century colonial woman's letters, though when presented with such a cache, his journalist's eye would have identified their immediate appeal to the typical *Bulletin* reader. By the 1950s, the magazine had become middle-brow and conservative; it was still known as 'The Bushman's Bible' and carried the masthead 'Australia for the White Man'.

3 Adams, the youngest of six and the only son of a Scottish-born farmer, and his wife settled in the small town of Bringelly west of Sydney. Rachel Henning's 1894 diary, held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, lists all the social visits she made during that year; they averaged a couple each month and all were to married women – three of the visits were to a Mrs Adams. At the time, Henning and her husband, Deighton Taylor, were living at Fig Tree, on the coast south of Sydney and a fair distance from Bringelly. The diary reference to 'Mrs Adams', however, could suggest a possible family connection and the likelihood that Henning family members came to know, or know of, David Adams. (Rachel Biddulph Henning Diaries 1878, 1894, MLMSS 1193, State Library of New South Wales [SLNSW].)

The published letters were enhanced considerably by Lindsay's spirited drawings. Adams had access to Henning family photographs and memorabilia with which to illustrate the letters, however his decision to commission line drawings was inspired: they reproduced well on the *Bulletin's* cheap paper stock; they were reminiscent of the work of H.K. Browne (Phiz) who illustrated many of Dickens' novels, and that of C.E. Brock, who illustrated late-nineteenth-century editions of Austen, Thackeray and Eliot novels; and they enhanced the continuity of the narrative. Most importantly, however, the work of the popular and well-known Lindsay gave an immediate profile to the then unknown Rachel Henning. He promoted the collection enthusiastically, writing to his sister Mary in September 1951:

I like Rachel who has a touch of Jane Austen in her, and in these days when wharfumpers and hodmen are allowed to run and ruin the country, I like her ruthless class conscious snobbery. She has an easy, flowing style, and an excellent eye for character ... (qtd in Chaplin 85–86)

It is worth noting that Lindsay worked from the final manuscript version of the letters, where the 'easy, flowing style' and all 'the essentials of the novel ... precise character presentation, humour, action, and a clearly visualised background against which the characters grow into the narrative' (Lindsay v) had been produced with the help of the Henning family's cutting and Adams's editing. Adams was also concerned to maintain narrative pace and flow through the weekly instalments that would appear in the *Bulletin*. The letters were ideally suited to weekly serialisation. Most ran to four or five published pages of neatly self-contained episodes, linked by strong story lines and engaging characters. Nevertheless, both editor and illustrator were constrained by the column and word length allocated for the serialisation, which had required considerable selectivity from the substantial body of original material, made up of about 180 letters.

Most of these letters sustained varying degrees of editing at the hands of several people. It was the Hennings themselves, concerned for family privacy, who were the chief censors of personal references. Historian and biographer Brenda Niall has confirmed, from her diary notes and correspondence, that Adams worked in consultation with the Henning family, members of which she interviewed in 1997 when she was considering writing a biography of Rachel Henning. Further, the original letters, held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, show annotations in different handwriting styles and in several different colours. These differences are not clear on the microfilmed copies; one needs to sight the originals. The handwritten annotations are the work of Henning herself, possibly of her brother-in-law in England, often noting that letters had been answered, and of at least two other people.

That this initial editing was done, unacknowledged, on the original letters seems reckless in the extreme today, when photocopying, scanning and archiving practices allow for the careful preservation of original documents, and when editorial methods are now outlined in the introductions to published letter collections.⁴ Indeed, Adams has sustained some criticism in academic circles, accused of deletion, distortion and defacement in the best traditions of the fourth estate, no less. In her 1994 article 'Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters', Anne Allingham accuses Adams of 'having deleted vast tracts of text, rudely marked the manuscript, and scored out, recast and expanded upon the original lines, so that Rachel herself would be astonished at her own words' (277).⁵ Yet such demonization of Adams disregards the fact that the Henning family and descendants retained copyright over the original letters and all subsequent editions of the published versions, apart from the Thomas Nelson abridged schools edition. The family, therefore, had the final say about what was published; they were allegedly bemused and angered by later criticisms of Adams's editing (Niall). Indeed, such criticism seems to disregard the long-standing practice of personal papers being 'tidied up' for publication, either by the original author or by 'well-meaning' family and acquaintances.⁶ The issue, surely, is not that Adams cut and shaped to such an extent but that Rachel Henning's published letters were actually received as an unadulterated primary source for so many years.

Even so, Adams did take various liberties with the papers. He did not attempt, for example, to transcribe those letters rendered almost illegible by being cross-written on thin paper. And he standardised abbreviations, corrected spelling errors, and introduced paragraphs to break up solid blocks of text, with an eye to the *Bulletin* page layouts. Brief references to relatives and passing acquaintances were cut, as were repetitive comments about such matters as late mail deliveries, poor roads, the weather, tiresome servants, dressmaking, and various illnesses and medical conditions. Lengthy opening salutations and fond farewells were shortened or removed from the letters. This enabled the narrative pace to be maintained but it does mean that Rachel Henning appears to write to close family members ignoring many of the customary social niceties with which one frames the main body of a letter; she simply barges straight in. As with other editorial cuts and alterations, Adams made no mention of this stylistic change in his Introduction.

4 More recently, the Academy Editions of Australian Literature have sought to provide rigorously edited and annotated versions of a range of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary works, including fiction and non-fiction as well as journals and letters. A scholarly edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* is yet to be produced, however.

5 Allingham also argues, with more justification, that the removal of many references to female ailments and domestic matters such as sewing, housekeeping and child-rearing trivialised these matters and changed the tone and the nature of the original Henning letters.

6 See, in particular, Ian Hamilton's *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994) for a detailed analysis of this practice.

Some alterations and deletions were made to avoid misinterpretation or offence. For example, when Rachel Henning wrote to her sister Etta Boyce complaining ‘the Aborigines are awful & I never get any sleep at all’,⁷ she was referring to the bedbugs that had invaded her cabin on board ship. Similarly, a later complaint that ‘the inns at which we have to stop are in general so swarming with Aborigines of all descriptions that sleep is out of the question’⁸ refers to the same problem. The first reference was cut from the original letter, and the second was altered to ‘swarming with insects’. Interestingly, Amy Henning refers to new passengers boarding the *Calcutta* in Melbourne, during the sisters’ 1854 voyage to Australia, as ‘aborigines’ – the context suggesting the term was derogatory (119).

Other matters concerning family inheritances and business dealings both in Australia and England were deleted for a range of reasons: defamation, family privacy, and a level of complexity that would both disrupt the narrative flow of the letters and require explanatory footnotes. More significant, however, were cuts to the letters that markedly changed the nature and the tone of many of them. In particular, Rachel Henning was ‘softened’ for publication. The surviving original letters reveal a woman possessed of a sharp tongue, a snobbish manner, and a lively and informed interest in religion and politics. Perhaps Adams was of the opinion that such a forthright female protagonist needed, in Lindsay’s words, to have ‘the rough edges knocked off her’ to make her more appealing to the *Bulletin* readership. Thus, while personal observations of fellow passengers on her several sea voyages remain in the published letters, the most unkind of these were deleted: the description of a Mrs Solomon as ‘vulgar & red-faced & fat ... she has a little boy with a supernaturally large head ... I rather think he is indebted to water on the brains for it’⁹ is but one example. Some smaller deletions change the nature of an observation completely, such as this description of her table companions: ‘... the Friend family. Some [dull – deleted] Sydney people’.¹⁰ Alterations of this nature meant still-living descendants of these people would not be offended by such remarks.¹¹

Rachel Henning was at her most sniping, however, when discussing family members. Adams removed many snide remarks, particularly about younger sister Amy Henning Sloman and her husband and children: ‘Mr Sloman is slightly insane’¹² [and the children] ‘have an awful colonial drawl.

7 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 14 Aug. 1854. Rachel Henning Letters 28 Dec. 1853 – 31 Mar. 1890, MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

8 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 14 May 1856. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

9 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 14 Aug. 1854. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

10 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 15 May 1861. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

11 The Friends of Sydney, descendants of whom I am acquainted with, place some store by the reference to the family in Henning’s letters.

12 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 17 Oct. 1866. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

I cannot think where they got it'.¹³ Cousin 'Tregenna Biddulph and his wife Bella and their children also have a much reduced presence in the published letters, owing to 'Tregenna's drunkenness and frequent requests for funds, and that branch of the family's alleged coarseness: 'B [Biddulph] told him [Tregenna] he did not wish to see him either at his house or office till he altered his habits';¹⁴ and 'I hope you do not think that all your Australian relations have become altered and colonised in the way Bella has ... she was simply vulgar both in dress & manners the last time I saw her'.¹⁵

Family tensions were also sanitised. The strains caused by Rachel's engagement to her brother Biddulph's overseer, for example, a man ten years her junior and considered to be not of her social standing, are hinted at in the published letters – the originals offer considerably more detail about family objections to the relationship. Rachel complained to her sister Etta: 'I do not think B[iddulph] ought to run down a man who is quite as good as himself because he is less fortunate. The difference of age is an unanswerable fact but that is my misfortune & nobody's fault'.¹⁶ Rachel was not beyond childbearing age when she married, although she and Deighton Taylor were to have no children. An unpublished letter to her sister Etta would seem to indicate that this was no great cause for grief. Indeed quite the opposite: 'it always seems to me rather a miserable life when people go on year after year constantly having children ... & never knowing what health is. But I suppose they get used to it like the eels'.¹⁷ The removal of such exchanges meant that the seemingly unlikely relationship between the feisty spinster and the handsome young bushman could be cast in a more romantic light.

Further evidence of the sanitising of strained family relationships is to be found in the removal of several of Rachel Henning's letters to her brother-in-law Mr Boyce, with whom she initially appears to have been on rather frosty terms. While she remained the only unmarried sister, Rachel Henning's sense of her uncertain position in the family, particularly when she was first considering a return to England, is clearly evident in these deleted letters. Writing to Mr Boyce about the matter of where she might live, she confessed: 'the truth is I thought the dislike was on your side & that you considered me latterly an incubus in your household ...'.¹⁸ The relationship eventually developed into a close friendship. In an unpublished letter from Rachel to Mr Boyce, to thank him for escorting her to Liverpool to board the *Great Britain* on her return to Australia, she noted:

13 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 20 July 1861. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

14 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 4 Oct. 1872. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

15 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 31 Oct. 1881. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

16 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 17 Oct. 1865. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

17 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 18 Mar. 1870. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

18 Rachel Henning to Mr Boyce, 16 July 1855. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

Although I am writing to Etta I must write a few lines to answer your very kind letter personally. You do not know what a pleasure it was to me to recieve [sic] it nor how thankful I am that at last I do understand you so much better ... It was very kind of you to miss me so much. The ship seemed very lonely without you when I came on board by myself ... thank you once more for all your kindness and affection. The latter is fully returned tho' the former never can be. I shall value your letter so much.¹⁹

Despite the practice of letters sent home to England being either read aloud or circulated to several family members, Rachel's letters to Mr Boyce frequently contained observations and information that she requested not be shared in this way. She discussed family financial matters, including an inheritance of Amy Sloman's and the need for the money to be transferred to Australia without being subjected to Mr Sloman's financial mismanagement,²⁰ and dismissed cousin Lindon Biddulph as 'the last person who Biddulph [Henning] would trust with the disposal of one shilling of his property'.²¹ Very few of these letters appear in the published collection, with the result that the degree to which Rachel engaged with – or in some cases interfered with – such matters is not apparent. All of this cutting played a part in presenting Rachel Henning as more rounded and less judgemental and class-bound than her original correspondence might suggest. In published form, she is a character shaped by the perceived interests of a particular readership at a particular time.

From the first appearance of her published letters, readers were allowed the satisfaction of knowing that Rachel would eventually come to love her adopted country, a migrant experience referred to as 'The Long Way Round'. A *Sydney Morning Herald* review of the serialised letters noted 'the number of Britons who have travelled ... the hard way; people that is who have arrived on these shores, left disgustedly for England in a few weeks or months, then returned here happily a year or two later' ('The Long Way'). This signals the beginning of a sequence of shaping and censoring of the Henning narrative; in this instance, a narrative of satisfaction, appealing to the national pride of its colonial constituency. This sense of satisfaction has acquired an air of smugness by the time Geoffrey Dutton included an extract from *The Letters of Rachel Henning* in his 1985 anthology *The Australian Collection: Australia's Greatest Books*, one of many illustrated hardcover publications produced in anticipation of the 1988 bicentennial celebrations in recognition of white colonisation of Australia. Dutton initially describes Rachel as 'the original "whingeing Pom"', and Australia was well rid of her when she returned to England in 1856', and then lauds her change of heart 'once she had decided

19 Rachel Henning to Mr Boyce, 26 Feb. 1861. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

20 Rachel Henning to Mr Boyce, 16 Jan. 1862. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

21 Rachel Henning to Mr Boyce, 16 July 1855. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

to make a success of her life in Australia' (*The Australian Collection* 32). Thus, deleted from Rachel Henning's published letters are observations such as 'the only chance of being tolerably contented in this country is to forget if possible that there is such a place as England ... I doubt whether anyone (with my tastes and habits at least) could be happy here'.²² Six years later, having returned to England, she was complaining to her sister Annie, in Queensland, that 'the constant round of visiting though pleasant for a few years is an idle & unsatisfactory way of spending one's life'.²³ The following month, Rachel sailed again for Australia, and this time she stayed.

The satisfaction that Rachel Henning eventually chose Australia over England also suited the post-war climate of the early 1950s, in which Australia was keenly promoting immigration, especially from Britain. The serialised letters were so well received that in 1952 *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was published as a soft-cover quarto book by The Bulletin Newspaper Company (Fig. 1). Within twelve months, sales 'were reported to be in the vicinity of 10,000 copies' – a figure that would be considered very respectable today – and it was reprinted early in 1954. The book included an explanation of the Henning family crest and motto *tutus per undas*, meaning 'safe across the seas', dating back to 1612 (surely an indication of the quality of immigrant family the Hennings represented), and extensive footnotes detailing land allocations and sales, and properties in and around Sydney and the harbour in the mid to late nineteenth century.

The *Bulletin* had published over sixty books, previously serialised in the magazine, before *The Letters of Rachel Henning*. All were published as paperbacks with 'three columns of type, taken straight from the serial, running down the quarto page ... [and were] sold at extremely low prices – no more than seven shillings and sixpence for the Henning letters' (Stewart 81). The common theme of these books was a concern with what Angus & Robertson editor and publisher Douglas Stewart later referred to as 'basic Australian tradition' (81). What must have appealed greatly to the *Bulletin*, and also to the Henning family, was that the letters presented 'a graceful and vivid picture of colonial life from the 1850s to the 1880s but also the gratifying and ever-recurring theme of the British migrant who finds,

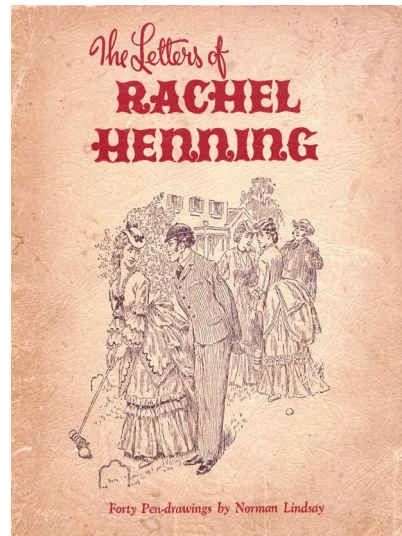


Fig. 1: *Bulletin Books folio edition.*

22 Rachel Henning to Etta Boyce, 21 Dec. 1855. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

23 Rachel Henning to Annie Henning, 17 Jan. 1861. MLMSS 342, SLNSW.

after his initial difficulties, and after he has tried out England again, that much to his surprise he rather likes living in Australia' (Stewart 80).²⁴

David Adams wrote an introduction and an epilogue for the Bulletin Books edition, and compiled a cast of characters. Norman Lindsay's line drawings, acknowledged by now as a key element of the collection, again illustrated the text.²⁵ Lindsay had taken particular care with the details of his drawings, matching facial features, clothing and settings to those described in the letters. Yet the image chosen for the cover of this edition, and the 1954 reprint, is of Rachel Henning's brother, Biddulph, and his bride-to-be Emily Tucker, playing croquet – a charming, coquettish drawing perhaps considered by the publisher to be more appealing than one of stern-faced Rachel, who loiters, here, in the background.

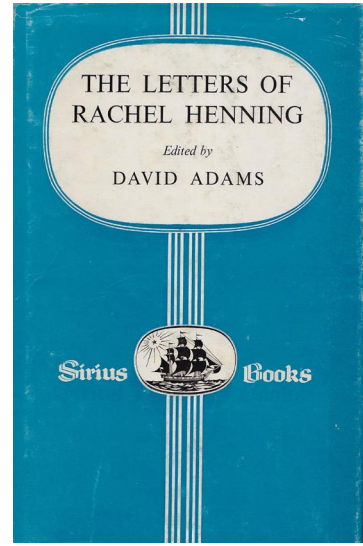


Fig. 2: Angus & Robertson Sirius Books edition.

The success of *The Letters* was immediate, and it has continued. When the first hardback edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was released in 1963, it was promoted as an Australian classic barely a decade after publication. It was included in the first series of Angus & Robertson's Sirius Books imprint, keeping company with *Such Is Life* (Tom Collins), *Capricornia* (Xavier Herbert), *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand* (Francis Ratcliffe) and *Poems* (Kenneth Slessor). These titles were all from the Angus & Robertson backlist and were issued with a generic cover featuring the *Sirius* (Fig. 2), one of the two British flagships that had escorted the First Fleet to Botany Bay. Sirius Books was launched as

a library of memorable Australian Books in all categories of literature: fiction; poetry and *belles lettres*; natural history and travel; history, biography and reminiscence. The aim is to bring back to print and keep in print works which have proved their merits over the years ... All books included will be of high standard and many are Australian classics. (Back flap, Henning, *The Letters*, Sirius Books Edition.)

24 The stage version of *The Letters*, produced in 1975, left the audience in no doubt about Rachel's change of heart: her character description changes from initially 'disillusioned, unhappy but still dignified' to 'restless and bored' on her return to England, and finally 'excited, optimistic, full of anticipations' as she prepares to sail once more for Australia (Ken Armstrong, Virginia Howie, Hilary Bligh and Susan Wrattan, 'Rachel Henning: An Original Play,' *Papers of Virginia Howie*, NLA MS6096, National Library of Australia.).

25 Although he referred to his drawings as 'some trifling illustrations', they were considered a selling point: 'Forty Pen-Drawings by Norman Lindsay' appears on the cover of the Bulletin Books edition, whereas Adams is credited only on the title page.

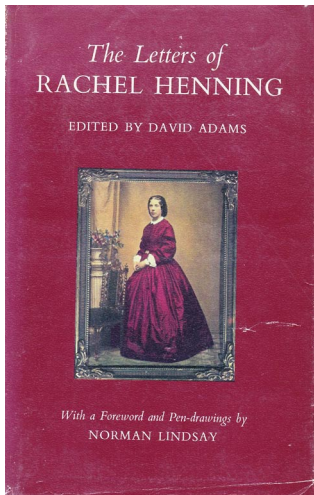


Fig. 3: Angus & Robertson special edition.

Lindsay wrote a foreword to the Sirius edition, this contribution and his forty pen drawings being noted on the book's front cover flap and on the title page, indicating their importance as marketing tools. Lindsay, along with David Adams, would have been available to assist with promotion of the book as the Henning family appear to have been shy of publicity. Lindsay was probably not on cordial terms with Adams at this point, however, having been sacked by him from the *Bulletin* in 1958, with a week's notice, after nearly sixty years of service (Rolfe 233).

Angus & Robertson kept *The Letters of Rachel Henning* in print in hardback throughout the 1960s, tapping into the Christmas market in late 1966 with the release of a 'deluxe' edition, on quality paper stock and with a new dust jacket.²⁶ Rachel Henning finally took centre stage on the cover, fourteen years after first publication of her letters, for an edition pitched at the emerging women's gift book market (Fig. 3). Described as a 'delightful period-piece', the front flap copy emphasises a story 'partly of courtships and romances, partly of the progress of a pioneering family, and partly of Rachel Henning's own progress, through many adventures, towards acceptance of her new way of life'. Unfortunately, the dull cover design reflects neither the wit nor the spirit of the prose, or the liveliness of the illustrations. Although the same manuscript source notes that the publishers' initial intention was to design 'A new jacket, probably lettered, so that no other artwork will clash with the Norman Lindsay illustrations', the Henning family, who retained copyright of the letters, were not to be thwarted.²⁷ They provided the hand-coloured studio portrait of a young Rachel Henning to be used on the front cover. Angus & Robertson editor Beatrice Davis was not impressed, complaining in a memo to publisher George Ferguson, 'Can you imagine using the portrait of her on the jacket of the new edition? Not with the Lindsay illustrations?'²⁸

26 Angus & Robertson Archives, vol. 125, 3, MLMSS 3269, State Library of New South Wales [SLNSW], Sydney. The figures do not detail the specific Sirius and 'quality edition' sales.

27 Perhaps encouraged by this successful negotiation, late in 1966 the Henning family sent Angus & Robertson the memoirs of Rachel Henning's brother Edmund Biddulph Henning for consideration. The anonymous manuscript reviewer noted that 'it is quite pleasant reading, and a reasonably interesting document ... The style is simple and clear, with one worthwhile anecdote following another ... I don't think it has any special force, and most of its material is encompassed in Rachel's letters. Not recommended.' Manuscript review, 8 Dec. 1966, Mrs N.B. Gill File, Angus & Robertson Archives, MLMSS 3269, vol. 226.

28 Memo from Beatrice Davis to George Ferguson, 7 July 1966, Hilda Biddulph Dampney File, Angus & Robertson Archives, MLMSS 3269, vol. 226.

Her appeals were in vain.²⁹ Lindsay is mentioned on the cover, however, as providing a foreword and drawings, and the better quality, heavier paper stock does set off his line drawings well. A favourable review in the *Age* noted that this edition

Does full justice not only to the grace and liveliness of Rachel Henning's prose but also to the spirited pen-drawings by Norman Lindsay with which it is illustrated. This is one of the most delightful period-pieces in Australian literature. (Review)

With the release of a cheaper, paperback edition by Penguin Books Australia in 1969, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* entered both the secondary and tertiary education markets (Fig. 4); this eventually accounted for a fair proportion of the sales of nearly 35,000 in this format. Penguin's local publishing program was expanding at the time, and by 1973, Australian-originated titles accounted for about fifteen per cent of the income.³⁰ As Geoffrey Dutton noted in his history of the company, 'It was a good time to be an Australian publisher. There was a surge of national pride, given enormous impetus by the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972; the arts in general were an essential part of that pride' (*A Rare Bird* 89).

Penguin's newly established educational sales department promoted the book to state government secondary school curriculum planners keen

for more Australian content. And at tertiary level, co-ordinators of the new women's studies courses being introduced in some universities around Australia were keen to set primary source material from women writers. Initially, much of this had to be sourced from overseas, in light of which *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was seized upon as an authentic 'local' voice



Fig. 4: Penguin Books' two paperback editions.

29 Beatrice Davis was an admirer of Norman Lindsay's work, and Davis's biographer Jacqueline Kent was told by members of the Davis family that 'a nymph in one of his etchings is reputed to be Beatrice, wearing nothing but an elaborate headdress': *A Certain Style: Beatrice Davis, A Literary Life* (Melbourne: Viking, 2001) 53.

30 Sales and income figures provided by Penguin Books Australia.

that was read, at the time, as a published archival source rather than as a literary text.³¹

The increasing profile of women's writing as a genre and women's studies as a discipline attracted the interest of mainstream publishers, including Penguin, who marketed *The Letters of Rachel Henning* accordingly. She fitted the bill. Her letters portrayed an educated and forthright woman initially occupied with drawing, reading and sewing, who gradually involved herself with the running of properties beyond the kitchen and the drawing room: she went riding, was conversant with the account books, established flower, fruit and vegetable gardens, and assisted with the sheep and cattle on her brother's and then her own properties. Historian Patricia Grimshaw has observed that these attributes set Henning apart from the types of women portrayed in Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975) and Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* (1976).³² Both of these books were also published as original paperbacks by Penguin Books Australia, the Summers released during the UN-designated International Women's Year.

Responding to the demand for more Australian content across all levels of the school curriculum, *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was abridged in 1979, for inclusion in the Thomas Nelson Australia upper primary school series Classic Australian Stories; this is the only published edition of the Henning letters that does not use David Adams's edited text. The series reflects a conservative focus on the early days of white settlement and pastoral expansion in Australia, including the likes of Henry Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, and Rolf Boldrewood's *Robbery under Arms*. The standard print run for titles in the series was 3,000 copies; the more successful of them, including *The Letters*, sold in excess of 10,000 copies.³³ Editor Ida Veitch reduced nearly three hundred pages of Rachel Henning's prose to the standard seventy-two pages, using only the letters from 1854 to 1865 and concluding with one to her sister Etta Boyce, announcing Rachel's engagement to Deighton Taylor. The letter format was retained, although the reworking removed all of Rachel's political comments, cut many letters completely, and in some cases collapsed several letters into one. The cast of characters – 'Some People in the Letters' – was dispensed with, however a glossary of curiously chosen terms, including 'bonnet', 'bushman' and 'pot' as well as more obscure words such as 'pannikin' and 'muslin', preceded the reworked letters. Nelson promoted the

31 Interview with Patricia Grimshaw, University of Melbourne, 13 Nov. 2008; email correspondence with Susan Magarey, University of Adelaide, 25 Oct. 2008; email correspondence with Anne Curthoys, University of Sydney, 3 Nov. 2008.

32 Interview with Patricia Grimshaw, School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne, 13 Nov. 2008.

33 Estimate of sales figures for this series provided by Thomas Nelson, email 9 Nov. 2009.

book, on the back cover, as providing ‘a fascinating insight into the period ... [while being] short and easy to read [and] retain the excitement, romance and drama of the originals’. The edition’s half dozen illustrations are unacknowledged sketches of places mentioned in the text. None of the Lindsay drawings have been used. On the front cover is English artist Marshall Claxton’s 1859 oil painting of a wistful young woman, gazing at the sea, titled *An Emigrant’s Thoughts of Home*.³⁴ She is as unlike the feisty Rachel Henning of the original letters and of Norman Lindsay’s drawings as one could imagine, the implication being that ‘Home’ is where she would rather be (Fig. 5).

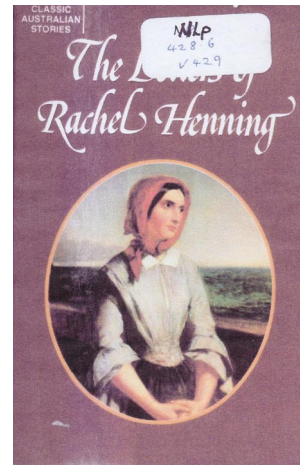


Fig. 5: Thomas Nelson schools' edition.

‘Thoughts of Home’ might have been an appropriate cover line for the 1986 Penguin Books UK edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, the only Australian title published in their Lives & Letters series. Titles were drawn from the backlists of Penguin UK as well as the associated Australian and Canadian companies. For reasons of economy, existing publications, many out of copyright, were preferred for this series. Rachel Henning was in company with such titles as *The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, *Lord Byron: Selected Letters and Journals*, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh* and *The Diary*

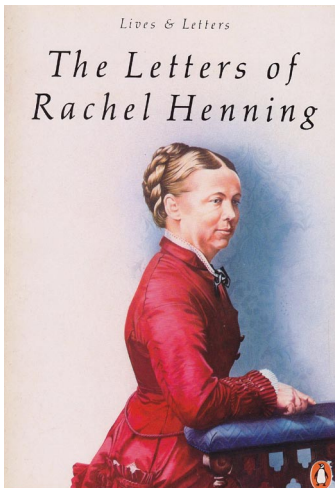


Fig. 6: Penguin Books UK edition.

of *Samuel Pepys*. The existing film of the text with embedded images was used, along with Lindsay’s foreword and Adams’s preface and epilogue. They are not mentioned on the front cover, however, as neither would have been well known in the UK (Lindsay had died in 1969). A portrait of Rachel Henning, drawn from a photograph in the Mitchell Library, is on the back cover (Fig. 6): a dour, corseted woman, ‘pitchforked into the heat, the Spartan conditions and the strange, intense landscape ... which so subverted and enchanted a correct young lady’. One almost expects to find a bodice-loosened ‘after’ image on the back cover, suitably subverted.³⁵ Although published initially for the overseas market, the

34 Claxton travelled and painted in Australia from 1850–1854 but created this work in London.

35 The existing film was not checked with sufficient care for the Lives & Letters edition – the acknowledgments still refer to ‘this Sirius Books edition’, the text lifted straight from the Angus & Robertson 1963 hardback.

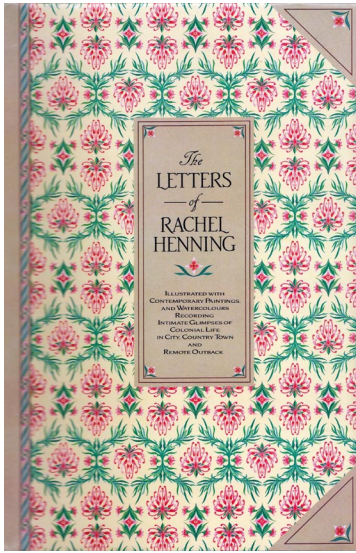


Fig. 7: Angus & Robertson hardback edition.

Lives & Letters paperback also sold around 4,000 copies in Australia, a respectable if modest quantity that reflected Penguin's keenness to keep a paperback edition of the book in print to avoid a reversion of the paperback rights.

In the year of its release, the Lives & Letters paperback had to compete with a new hardback edition of *The Letters* from Angus & Robertson, who had decided to pitch again at the women's gift book market (Fig. 7). In the run up to the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations, many local publishers released illustrated hardback 'Australiana'.³⁶ This edition of *The Letters* was lavishly designed and produced, with gilt-blocked spine and a French-fold dust jacket. The text was completely reset, and new illustrations were sourced from the Henning family and from the work of 'artists and sketchers who would have been Rachel's contemporaries. Wherever possible, the work of women has been included' (front flap), a point aimed directly at the intended market. The Lindsay illustrations and foreword vanished, perhaps judged to be inappropriate for this edition.³⁷ The front flap copy highlights

the grace, liveliness and gossipy intimacy of Rachel's prose ... a vivid family saga ... [that] reads like a novel – partly of courtships and romances, partly of the progress of a pioneering family, and partly of Rachel Henning's own progress towards acceptance of her new way of life.

The emphasis on Rachel Henning herself, and her feelings about the upheavals in her life, rather than just as a writer of letters telling an exciting adventure story of pioneering days, rather unexpectedly links this gift edition of *The Letters* to its next reincarnation: one of the first titles in the Penguin Australian Women's Library (PAWL), (Fig. 8). That a mainstream publishing house would develop such a list was a further reflection of the growth of women's studies courses and the related demand for women's writing, fiction and non-fiction, as well as an increased focus on the study of Australian literature through the 1980s.

³⁶ In 1984, Doubleday Australia released the first of its bestselling editions of *The Australian Women's Diary*, illustrated with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century images of women. The concept was taken up by several other local publishers, who made use of the various State libraries' extensive, and at that time low-cost, pictorial collections.

³⁷ Norman Lindsay had died in 1969. Copyright in the text of the letters and the Lindsay illustrations was controlled by two separate literary estates.

Twelve titles were released in this series, between 1988 and 1991, including fiction, non-fiction, and several anthologies compiled by members of the editorial advisory board.³⁸ The publishers shrewdly appointed well-known feminist and writer Dale Spender to front the series and promote it, a decision similar to that of David Adams' selection of well-known artist and writer Norman Lindsay to illustrate and help promote the original publication. *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was one of the first PAWL titles, chosen because of its existing profile rather than as a lost gem such as Catherine Helen Spence's previously unpublished novel *Handfasted*. *The Letters*, at 6,000 copies, far outsold the other titles. The majority were in fact reprints of out-of-copyright material,

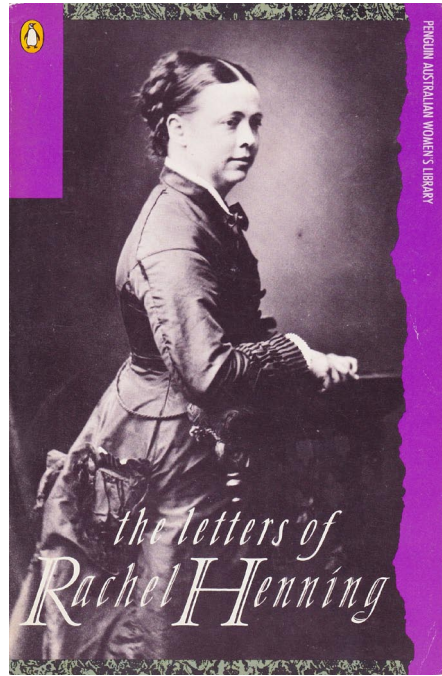


Fig. 8: Penguin Books Australian Women's Library edition.

making the series relatively cheap to produce. The PAWL edition of the Henning letters was printed from the existing film made for the earlier Angus & Robertson editions. Production costs did not allow for a complete resetting of the letters and therefore the Lindsay drawings remained embedded in the text. They sit rather awkwardly with the series' emphasis on the 'work of women writers of our past',³⁹ particularly as by the 1980s, much of Lindsay's work, if not these particular drawings, was regarded as sexist, even verging on soft porn. A photograph of Rachel Henning herself, however, appears on the cover – framed in feminist purple. Neither David Adams nor Norman Lindsay is mentioned on the front or back cover. In the final paragraph of her introduction, series editor Dale Spender does note that the letters have been 'admirably edited by David Adams', without actually explaining his original role as editor of the *Bulletin*, and 'illustrated by Norman Lindsay who gives rein to his own individualistic talent'; it is a curiously backhanded compliment of sorts.

A small selection of Rachel Henning's letters appeared in another PAWL title: Lynne Spender's anthology *Her Selection: Writings by Nineteenth-*

³⁸ Dale Spender was series editor, and the advisory board consisted of Debra Adelaide, Diane Bell, Sneja Gunew, Elizabeth Lawson, Sue Martin, Lynne Spender and Helen Thomson. Janine Burke was appointed 'cover advisor'. In 1991, however, to some extent the victim of an economic downturn and resignations of the two Penguin editors who had championed the series, the PAWL was discontinued.

³⁹ PAWL series editor Dale Spender, included on the half-title page of each book in the series.

Century Australian Women (1988). Spender's selection highlights Henning's independence and travel, and although reference is made to 'the connection between women's letters and the evolution of the novel ... [that] reveal the close links between letter-writing and the novel as a literary form' (108), the extracted letters in this anthology are too fragmented (and remain unannotated) to form any sort of narrative, with Rachel sailing back and forth between England and Australia across several pages and decades in quick succession. They are, however, representative of the women's travel narrative genre, which had also begun to gain prominence as an independent field of literary studies from the mid-1970s.

At the time of the PAWL series, women's letters, diaries, memoirs, and travel writing, along with women's fiction, were being regarded as representations of a feminist narrative. The close links between letter writing and the novel as a literary form – for nineteenth-century women writers in particular – are well documented. In her Introduction to the PAWL edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, series editor Dale Spender emphasised 'women's literary traditions in Australia' and the long and rich tradition of women's letter writing and its links with the novel form, observing that 'the letters read very much like an impressive novel, the only difference being that it is a true story which unfolds'. Such a confluence of factual and fictional narrative forms necessarily leads one to question the long-standing acceptance of the authenticity of these particular letters, or of their presentation as an unmediated voice.

Rachel Henning, as we have come to know her, therefore, is a creation: of Henning family members selecting and censoring her original letters; of an editor with an eye to a popular readership; of an illustrator with a flair for portraying character and humour; and of a parade of publishers seeking new and diverse markets for a versatile text. The continued success of publications of her letters, over fifty years, is indicative of the way in which the hybrid forms in which they were published allowed them to be read as historical autobiography; as a kind of epistolary novel; and as an authentic letter collection. The diverse readerships eventually resulted in a collection of personal correspondence – written by an unknown woman and meant originally only for family eyes – becoming a bestseller, something of an anomaly in the published letter collection genre in Australia.

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**Archives, Cultural Sensitivity
and Copyright: The Publishing of
*Letters from Aboriginal Women of
Victoria 1867–1926***

Correspondence from Aboriginal women in Victoria to the authorities who directed their lives, from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, is filed in the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) archives, held jointly in the Victorian Archives Centre by the Public Record Office of Victoria (PROV) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA). These articulate and broad-ranging letters, written by women educated on missions and reserves, form part of a collection that provides nuance and detail for an era of white invasion, dispossession and control. The correspondence belies what might easily be assumed to be an almost total silence of Aboriginal women's voices from this period, an assumption that persists because the letters have been referenced only

sparingly, and even then mainly in the context of political protest only.¹ The publication in 2002 of a selection of these letters in the collected volume *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867–1926*, edited by Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw, sought to address this neglect and to broaden the scope of their relevance.² However, the editing, annotating and contextualising of the letters proved complex and was affected by issues of cultural sensitivity, copyright and the publication process itself. The book has been out of print for over a decade and copies are now difficult to find.³ It is rarely cited by other historians working in this field.⁴ Yet this accessible and well-structured

¹ Anita Heiss and Peter Minter have noted it was transactions with colonial administrators that formed the basis of early Indigenous literature written in English: ‘a tool of negotiation in which Aboriginal voices could be heard in a form recognisable to British authority’. Anita Heiss and Peter Minter, ‘Introduction’, *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*, eds Heiss and Minter (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2008), 2. See also Jessica Horton’s analysis of Aboriginal women’s letters as a form of politics, ‘Rewriting Political History: Letters from Aboriginal People in Victoria, 1886–1919’, *History Australia* 9(2), 2012, 157–80.

² *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria 1867–1926*, eds Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2002); hereafter *Letters*. The editors used the term ‘Aborigines’ rather than ‘Indigenous’, ‘Kooris’ or ‘Koories’ in response to the preference then expressed by local communities in Victoria.

³ In my own research, I found a copy of the book by accident in Monash University’s Matheson Library when I was searching for something else. None are held in the local history collections of regional libraries in Gippsland, Victoria, one of the home country areas from which the letters flowed.

⁴ There is no mention, for example, of *Letters* in Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005), or in Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005), or in Broome’s fully revised *Aboriginal Australians: A History Since 1788* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2010).

collection offers a way into an extensive and problematic archive, providing further depth and adding private voices to Indigenous Australian histories. *Letters* was a book ahead of its time in scope and in its emphasis on collaboration. It is deserving of republication and proper acknowledgement.

Letters are unique and sensitive historical artefacts, and should be valued for what they are as well as what they contain. In published collections, they acquire a coherent narrative structure that emphasises the writer's voice as much as the content of the letter. Having edited a collection myself, I am mindful of the need to remain true to the original material while also rendering it accessible for the reader.⁵ This collection makes a valuable contribution to a complex and confronting period in Australian history, alongside explorers' and squatters' diaries and letters, missionaries' papers, the writings of ethnographers, and records from colonial and federal government bodies and parliamentary enquiries. These letters, in their eloquence and persistence, are an important Indigenous record in a largely European archive. They reveal resourcefulness, resilience, tenacity and emotional strength in these women's negotiations from an unequal position with white (male) authorities. The women, variously, sent letters to the Chief Secretary, to missionaries and station managers, local guardians, family members, newspaper editors, police, Members of Parliament, and the Governor of Victoria.⁶ The period covered by the letters

⁵ See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent', *Script & Print* (forthcoming, 2015).

⁶ Nelson et al, *Letters*, 19.

crosses key dates, including the establishment in the colony of Victoria of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines and the passing of the *Aboriginal Protection Act* in 1869,⁷ the *Aborigines' Protection Act* in 1886 (which stipulated, with some exceptions, that those between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five deemed to be 'half-castes' had to leave missions and reserves)⁸ and Federation in 1901, as a result of which Aboriginal people were excluded from the Australian Constitution that came into force on 1 January of that year.⁹

Editors Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw produced a carefully mediated collection of personal narratives within a social, historical and political context. *Letters* is by no means merely a collection of selected

⁷ This Act, for 'the protection and management of the Aboriginal natives', restricted their place of residence, possessions, earnings, employment, care, custody and the education of children, as well as interaction with non-Aboriginal people. *Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria, 11 November 1869 (Vic.)*, Parliament of Victoria, No. 349.

⁸ This Act initiated a policy of removing those of mixed descent from the reserve system, with the intention of reducing numbers on the reserves so that they might eventually be closed down. The Act impacted more on men than women as it excluded female 'half-castes' married to Aboriginals and children of an Aboriginal, however it resulted in the separation of communities and family members, causing great distress. *Act to amend an Act intituled An Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria, 16 December 1886 (Vic.)*, Parliament of Victoria, No. 912.

⁹ The 'people' referred to in the Constitution did not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Specifically, Section 127 stated: 'In reckoning the numbers of people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted'.

documents.¹⁰ Further, the decision by the editors to publish these women's letters, rather than writing an interpretive study of the correspondence, displayed a commitment to the Indigenous communities concerned and an acknowledgement of their ownership of the letters as family records, not simply source material. Such a collaborative approach to archival material, at that time, sets *Letters* apart from the publications of revisionist historians, many of whom were engaged in the Australian History Wars – a continuing and frequently acrimonious exchange concerning the history of frontier contact, colonialism and race relations, dominated by non-Indigenous historians,¹¹ which extended well beyond the academy and into the political arena.¹²

Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw ensured that family privacy, as well as family copyrights, were respected – presaging the methodology that is now prescribed under what Maxine Briggs, Koori Liaison Officer at the State Library of Victoria,

¹⁰ Patricia Grimshaw, email message to author, 7 March 2009. *Letters* was dismissed by potential reviewers as being a collection of selected documents rather than a work of 'sustained historical interpretation'.

¹¹ For a discussion of 'a new genre of history writing which features agreements, instances of cooperation and solidarity and intimate interactions between Aboriginal people and colonisers', see Clare Land and Eve Vincent, 'Silenced Voices [Absence of Indigenous Voices from the 'History Wars']', *Arena* 67, October–November 2003, 19–21.

¹² There is a voluminous scholarship on the History Wars: books, journal articles and opinion pieces. Key texts include Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth About Our History* (Melbourne: Viking Penguin, 1999); Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One: Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002); Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003); Attwood, *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History*.

refers to as ‘the invisible net of protocol’.¹³ This ‘net’ has for many years been applied to Indigenous images, oral histories and life stories – in other words, media that ‘hold an immediacy of representation, for instance, representation of place, of ceremony, of knowledge ... material that raises quite intense questions of authorship and ownership’, as well as access and control.¹⁴ The ‘invisible net’ now extends to archival documents, affecting the manner in which they may be accessed and subsequently used, and by whom. In 2010, this was formalised in the PROV Cultural Sensitivity Statement that was applied to all materials held in the BPA archives and in the PROV generally that concern Indigenous communities. This has had a number of consequences that affect access to the letters both by scholarly researchers and those with a more general interest. For example, one effect of the Statement is that these women’s letters have not been digitised. They may be read in their original form only in the reading room at the PROV, and their use is restricted as follows:

It is a condition of use of any records relating to Aboriginal people in the custody of Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) that researchers

¹³ Maxine Briggs, ‘Indigenous Protocols’ (presentation at the La Trobe University symposium Writing and Teaching Aboriginal History, Melbourne, 20 February 2014).

¹⁴ Jane Anderson, ‘Indigenous Knowledge, Intellectual Property, Libraries and Archives: Crises of Access, Control and Future Utility’ in *Australian Indigenous Knowledge and Libraries*, eds Martin Nakata and Marcia Langton, (Canberra: Australian Academic & Research Libraries, 2005), 86–7. See also Terri Janke, ‘Managing Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Cultural Property’ in the same publication, 99–112.

ensure that any disclosure of information contained in these records is consistent with the views and sensitivities of relevant Aboriginal individuals and communities. It is the responsibility of researchers to ensure that these views and sensitivities are sought, understood and applied appropriately.¹⁵

The editors of *Letters* imposed such guidelines on their work a decade before there was a formal requirement for them to do so.

Smith, who was the coordinator of the Aboriginal Family History Project at Museum Victoria at the time the collection was published, took overall responsibility for decisions on the content and presentation of the letters to be included. She was influenced by her understanding that many of these letters involved requests to authorities that few, if any, white women of the time would have been called upon to make: requests for clothing, food and accommodation, requests for travel passes and, perhaps most heartbreaking of all, requests to have children returned. In the process of meeting with Indigenous communities to discuss the project, Smith was also made aware that these letters were often being read for the first time by descendants of the correspondents. This experience in itself was confronting for some descendants who had no wish to have their family members exposed through the letters in any way that might be considered humiliating. References to particularly sensitive topics such as alcoholism,

¹⁵ Public Records Office of Victoria Cultural Sensitivity Statement.

family violence and adultery were removed from the published version of many of the letters.¹⁶ Minor changes were also made to correct some, but not all, of the grammar, spelling and punctuation ‘where this is useful to facilitate the reader’s understanding’.¹⁷

Several practical barriers to publication were encountered, beginning with copyright constraints, which adhere for seventy years from first publication or from the death of the creator, thus restricting the editors to the period before 1927. Further, they were allowed up to a maximum of 200 words per letter writer, and permission was required both from descendants of the letter writers as well as from the PROV. The full names of the selected letter writers were listed in the Commonwealth of Australia *Gazette* for a period of twelve months with the intention of making the proposed publication known to descendants. Smith traced these families through her close contacts with Indigenous communities, and she also researched and wrote brief biographies of the correspondents, including details of place of residence, and of births, deaths, marriages and extended family networks. The approach followed on from the work of anthropologist and historian Diane Barwick, whose research into the Indigenous communities at Coranderrk reserve, published posthumously in 1998, also focused on family networks and the relationships within and beyond these groupings; as well as engaging in archival research, Barwick worked closely with

¹⁶ Patricia Grimshaw and Elizabeth Nelson, interview with the author, 5 March 2014.

¹⁷ Nelson et al, *Letters*, 20.

these communities intent on involving them in her writing of Indigenous history.¹⁸ Descendants of about half of the letters selected for inclusion in *Letters* responded, and the editors were given permission to publish by most families, leading to the eventual inclusion of letters from eighty-one women.

The approach taken by Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw had been influenced by the Virago reissue of *Maternity Letters From Working Women* in 1978, first published in 1915 by the Women's Cooperative Guild in London, and which sought to give such women a voice through their own writings. The method accords with that of other historians and epistolary scholars in search of voices from more private spaces in history, working with the letters of minority groups and approaching such sources from that perspective. Robert Starobin's *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves* is another early example of such letter publication. Starobin presented letters that 'spoke to the slaves' understanding of slavery ... the letters reflect slaves' thought, emotions and feelings while still in bondage. They preserve the words, spelling, grammar and punctuations and alliteration actually used by blacks'.¹⁹ That Starobin located several hundred letters written by slaves is extraordinary in light of the fact that the law prohibited the teaching of slaves to read and write, meaning that the vast majority, as high as ninety per cent, remained illiterate. Yet he cautioned that imposing 'the

¹⁸ Diane Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, eds Laura E. Barwick and Richard E. Barwick (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 1998), monograph 5.

¹⁹ Robert S. Starobin, *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1994 [1974]), xix.

white man's standards of literacy on the enslaved is both irrelevant and arrogant [and] often masks the ability of the barely literate bondsmen to speak their mind'.²⁰ Despite such prudence, however, without literacy such interventions are virtually inaccessible except through oral histories, which do not always survive.

More recently, Katrina M. Powell's study of the creation of a national park in the State of Virginia in the late 1920s, *The Anguish of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park*, details the concerns of families whose ancestors' lives were disrupted by the process and raises similar issues to those that affected Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw's volume. Powell identified a concern about 'a continued misappropriation ... as many see the research and writing about their ancestors as further mistreatment and disrespect'.²¹ Another concern was that the use of phonetic spelling and 'nonstandard language', even set within the accepted formal structure of a letter, meant that the mountain families seeking to engage with the authorities could be dismissed as barely literate.

Likewise, descendants of those correspondents included in *Letters* did not wish to have the letter writers appear as ignorant or uneducated, thereby detracting from the purpose for which the letters had been written. Indeed, one of the most common questions Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw were

²⁰ Ibid., xx.

²¹ Katrina M. Powell, *The Anguish of Displacement: the Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), xi.

initially asked was ‘could these women write?’²² As noted in their introduction, ‘[m]any of the women who write the letters in this collection were the first generation of Aboriginal girls in Victoria to receive primary education from mission wives or assistants and teachers appointed by the Education Department on the government reserves’.²³ Schooling was compulsory after 1872, with the introduction of the Victorian Government’s *Compulsory Education Act*. The Government and church authorities had a vested interest in reporting favourably on the mission and reserve education standards for Indigenous children, yet it was also noted that the outcomes of that education were varied, and assimilation not easily achieved. Comments in some of the official reports on missions and reserves indicate that the curriculum had been modified to suit the environment and also the expected outcomes for Indigenous students, which was in fact manual work and domestic service.²⁴ This was made clear in George Baldwin’s 1925 Report on the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station: ‘Matter which is not likely to benefit the scholar in any way is deleted from the various subjects taught. This tends to shorten the time-table for general subjects and allow more

²² This view was not unusual, as Adam Shoemaker notes in *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929–1988* (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2004), 265: ‘I didn’t know the buggers could write!’ (quoted from a conversation with a Canberra bank manager, 1980).

²³ Nelson et al, *Letters*, 15.

²⁴ Penny Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 14; P.D. Gardner, *Through Foreign Eyes: European Perceptions of the Kurnai Tribe of Gippsland* (Churchill: Centre for Gippsland Studies, 1988), 54.

time for manual training.’²⁵ Writing on the colonial education of Indigenous children, Amanda Barry acknowledged that she was ‘limited to the archival sources compiled and preserved by white men and women, to find those with very little voice at all: the Aboriginal children (and adults) whom they educated’.²⁶ Even so, the ability of many Indigenous children to read and to write a ‘plain and sensible letter’ was noted by the Reverend Mr Spieseke in his Report on Ebenezer Mission, conducted in 1867.²⁷ Letter writing was taught in schools throughout the nineteenth and well into the mid-twentieth century. The validity of these letters is beyond doubt. Indigenous women could and did write.

One must also acknowledge that these letters were written by those whose own voices, whose own languages, had already been overlaid with another. Many of these women, writing in the later years of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, had lost even the link to their own languages, in that they had been separated from it through child removal and schooling. Children often slept in segregated dormitories on missions and reserves, the separation from family being

²⁵ Geo. W. Baldwin, ‘Report on the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Station’, 19 August 1925, PROV, VPRS1694/POOOO/9.

²⁶ Amanda Barry, ‘“A Matter of Primary Importance”: Comparing the Colonial Education of Indigenous Children’ in *Rethinking Colonial Histories: New and Alternative Approaches*, eds Penelope Edmonds and Samuel Furphy (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2006), 171.

²⁷ Reverend Mr Spieseke, ‘Report on Ebenezer – River Wimmera, Sixth Paper’, 30 September 1867, PROV, VPRS1694/POOOO/2.

regarded as essential for ‘civilisation’.²⁸ Even at this relatively early stage of settlement, many Indigenous languages were what linguists describe as non-functioning. Of the 250 or so Indigenous languages thought to have been spoken at first European contact in the late eighteenth century, comparatively few remained a hundred years on.²⁹ Aboriginal people were programmatically discouraged, indeed prevented, from speaking their ancestral languages and made to feel ashamed of using them in public.

Yet while literacy played a role in the loss of much Indigenous culture and language,³⁰ it also equipped Indigenous communities with the means to negotiate with white authorities, albeit on an unequal footing. It gave them a tool of protest, and their letters are evidence of how persistently they were prepared to use it – women as well as men. This was not passive resistance. Coranderrk manager Joseph Shaw, writing to Reverend Hagenauer in November 1901 stated: ‘the natives being now civilised and more or less educated are not so easily managed in large numbers as they

²⁸ Bain Attwood, ‘Space and Time at Ramahyuck, Victoria 1863–85’ in *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, ed. Peter Read (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000), 47.

²⁹ Michael Walsh, ‘Languages and Their Status in Aboriginal Australia’ in *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, eds Michael Walsh and Colin Yallop (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993), 1. Estimates on the loss of Indigenous languages vary. Heiss and Minter in *PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* state that ‘[i]t took only a few generations for almost two-thirds of the pre-contact Aboriginal languages to be made extinct’, 2.

³⁰ The more emotive term ‘obliterate’ is used by local Gippsland historian P.D. Gardner, *Through Foreign Eyes*, 56.

were some 40 years ago'.³¹ These women's letters clearly show how writing had the potential to be a political weapon when levelling a range of complaints: against neighbours, mission and reserve staff, and government policy. And as younger residents on missions and reserves learnt to read and write English, it became more difficult to control the flow of information into and out of those missions and reserves. Literacy, regarded initially as a tool of assimilation, also enabled the Indigenous residents to communicate with the outside world, sometimes with but also without the help or knowledge of missionaries and reserve managers. Protests or requests could now be made in writing, behind a missionary or manager's back, to his superiors.³² On numerous occasions, women wrote to the Premier of Victoria. In October 1921, for example, Maggie Johnson at Lake Tyers sent two letters, in quick succession, to Premier Harry Lawson, requesting the return of her daughter Alison:

Dear Sir,

I am writing you these few lines asking if you would please be so kind as to use your influence with the Aboriginal Board with regard to my little Daughter who was taken away from us three or four years ago. When the members visited our Mission Station, they promised my Husband & I that they would send our little girl home over two months ago,

³¹ Joseph Shaw to Reverend Hagenauer, 23 November 1901, Coranderrk Letterbook, PROV, VPRS926/POOOO/1.

³² Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*, 161.

that was the first week in August we were to have her home, Now we are told that she are sick & wont be able to return until they are better, Sir, I lost two nieces almost under the same circumstances[.] If I cant have her here home with me, there is nothing else for me to do but leave the Station, the Board promises one thing & generally do another, they forget that we are human

Hoping you will do your best for my child

Thanking you in anticipation

I beg to remain Sir,

Yours sincerely

(Mrs) M. Johnson³³

Followed by:

Dear Sir

I am writing you these few lines to you asking if you would please be so kind as to use your influence with the Aboriginal Board with regard to my little Daughter who is at the Convent I don't know whether she is very ill with influenza or not. Mr Parker was down

³³ Mrs Maggie Johnson to Premier Harry Lawson, October 1921, PROV, VPRS 1694/POOOO/9.

here last Sunday & he told me about her she had influenza. I don't know whether she is ill or not[;] at any rate they promised me that they would send her home soon after the meeting was over[;] she might be very ill at the Convent & Im worrying myself to death over her. Dear Sir I wish you could assist me. I would like you to see about her & please to let me know at once

I beg to remain Sir

Yours Sincerely

Maggie Johnson³⁴

The Premier forwarded Maggie's two letters to the Board and her daughter Alison was finally returned to Lake Tyers on 20 December 1921.

Rose Johnson sent her appeal to be returned, with her family, to their homelands at Lake Tyers from Lake Condah directly to the Governor of Victoria:

His Excellency the Governor

Sir Arthur Stanley

³⁴ Ibid.

I am applying to you your Excellency for your
help

Your Excellency

I have received any instructing from the
Members of the Boards of my returning back
home again to the Lake Tyers Mission Station

Your Excellency

I wish to appeal for a free pass for myself and
two children

Trusting your Excellency will see into it

I am your most humble servant

Rose Foster³⁵

The letter was forwarded to the BPA, who refused to grant the request.

These are but two examples of Indigenous women's determination to devote time and effort to writing to the authorities. The BPA exercised almost complete control over Indigenous people, but their response was not passive. The majority of these letters display a neat, cursive hand and a fair grasp of grammar, spelling and punctuation. They are structured formally, often with lengthy salutations, such as that employed by Mrs Jemima Dunolly when writing to the

³⁵ Rose Foster to the Governor of Victoria, 24 November 1916, NAA B337/1, 253.

Secretary of the BPA to obtain a pass to visit her husband in hospital:

Sir

A very pleasant opportunity prevails itself to me for to pen you these few lines trusting you and yours are enjoying the very best of health as it leaves me enjoying good health at present.³⁶

Great care has been taken with handwriting, possibly suggesting a final draft after a few attempts. Some are written in pencil, on pages torn from exercise books, but others are on decorated note paper, written in ink. There are occasional indications, through different hands, that more than one person has been involved with the writing of letters, perhaps family members or friends rather than a person acting as a scribe. Stationery supplies were available for purchase on missions and reserves, supporting evidence that not only were the people on the missions literate but they were known to be active correspondents. By 1918, for example, a cash store had been established at Lake Tyers for the residents, and the 'Requisition for Sale Store Goods' sent to Melbourne on 3 March by the manager G.E. Ferguson included the following items: '240 one penny Postage Stamps, £2 value Stationery: Writing Tablets (cheap), Envelopes to suit above, Ink (small bottles), Pens.'³⁷

³⁶ Mrs Jemima Dunolly to Mr Ditchburn, Secretary of the BPA, 1 October 1916, PROV, VPRS1694/POOOO/3.

³⁷ G.E. Ferguson, 'Requisition for Sale Store Goods, Not in Annual Contract for Provisions', 3 March 1918, PROV, VPRS 1694/POOOO/2.

The women were able to post their own letters or have them posted on their behalf on the reserves and missions or in local towns, which would indicate an assumption of privacy that may have been misplaced. There is evidence that some letters were intercepted by heads of missions and reserves. On one recorded occasion, Mrs Anne Fraser Bon, a wealthy, widowed white pastoralist who was for many years a member of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, intervened at the request of Mrs Florence Moffatt, a resident of the Lake Tyers station.³⁸ Mrs Moffatt's letter had been opened by the acting manager of Lake Tyers, Charles Greene. Mrs Bon complained to the BPA: 'there is a direct contradiction between the Statement of Mrs Moffatt & that of Mr Greene. The latter states he took the letters out of his mailbag, opened, read & kept it – which is illegal – She states he took the letter from the pocket of the mailbag'.³⁹ The BPA responded promptly to Mrs Bon, noting that 'it was directed that the manager at Lake Tyers be instructed that he had no right to interfere with the correspondence of the residents at the station'.⁴⁰ Greene, however, intercepted the mail of residents on numerous occasions, and with the knowledge and permission of the BPA.

The boundary between private and public is blurred when individuals write personal letters to the authorities; letters

³⁸ Liz Reed, "Mrs Bon's Verandah Full of Aborigines": Race, Class, Gender and Friendship', *History Australia*, 2(2), 2005, 39.1-39.15. Bon was a life-long advocate for Aborigines in Victoria.

³⁹ Anne Bon to Mr Calloway, Vice-Chairman of the BPA, 3 July 1916, PROV, VPRS 1694/POOOO/9.

⁴⁰ W.A. Calloway to Mrs A.F. Bon, 5 July 1916, VPRS 1694/POOOO/9.

that potentially will be read and circulated quite widely. Women such as Lena Austin wrote in the full knowledge that this was the case. In a letter to Mr Macleod, the Chief Secretary of the BPA on 29 March 1917, she not only requested the return of her daughter Winnie from Lake Condah to Purnim, but also complained about the behaviour of Mrs Galbraith, the wife of the Lake Condah reserve manager:

Dear sir in writing you these few lines hoping it will find you enjoying the very best of health as it leaves me not very well at present[.] Dear sir I am thinking about my poor little girl winnie[;] she is longing to come home again to her own native part ... Dear sir I don't know what they is keeping my winnie there for[;] my sister got a letter from Winnie the very same day you was here and Winnie was telling her that Mrs Galbraith is treating her very unkindly ... dear sir if you could only see the letters that my poor little girl writes home it would make your heart ache ... Mr Macleod I plead with you from the very depth of my poor heart just for sake of my little girl as she is breaking her heart to come home once again as Mrs Galbraith is over working her⁴¹

Lena also wrote to Winnie, and attached to *this* letter a note saying: 'Dear Winnie I am sending your letter in aunty flora's

⁴¹ Lena Austin to Mr McLeod, Chief Secretary of the BPA, 29 March 1917, PROV, VPRS 1694/POOOOO/8.

letter because old mother Galley might open it and I dont want [her] to see your letter’.

A memo sent to Lena from the secretary of the BPA on 18 June dismissed her request for her daughter’s return on the grounds that it would not be in Winnie’s best interests. Undeterred, Lena Austin then wrote to Mrs Galbraith (old mother Galley) in December 1917:

Dear Mrs Galbraith I now take the pleasure in writing to you these few lines hoping it will find you and Mr Galbraith in the very best of health as it leaves all the people here quite well in the present time. Dear Mrs Galbraith I received a postcard from my winnie and she was telling me that you and Mr Galbraith would like her to come home for Xmas ... it is nearly two years since I have seen her[.] I have reared that child up from a babyhood ... If you only knew what a mothers love is for her children you would feel it very much[.]

Mrs Galbraith forwarded the letter to the BPA, and Mrs Anne Fraser Bon also intervened on Winnie’s behalf. It was to no avail. Winnie was transferred, twelve months later, to the Salvation Army Home at East Kew from which she was to be placed in service.

These examples demonstrate that the writers understood their letters were likely to be read beyond either the bounds of a private dialogue or a private communication to a public officer. They now form part of a restricted but nevertheless

public archive. Within the BPA archives these women's letters are filed chronologically and by mission or reserve, interleaved with a wide variety of other documents related to their administration: official correspondence, store orders, head counts, reports on agricultural output from missions and reserves, housing and clothing requirements, educational resources, medical reports. For the most part, these are impersonal records generated by those employed by the Church and by government authorities.

It is now widely accepted that the use of such archives, with all their biases and limitations defined by what has survived for inclusion, requires an understanding of the institutions these archives served. There has been a 'turn away from the positivist understanding of archival repositories as being mere storehouses of records, toward considering the status of the archive as a significant element in our investigations'.⁴² As Michael Christie notes, 'there is still a need to challenge historical descriptions, to investigate the language used, and to ask who said what, when and why'.⁴³ Ann Laura Stoler, however, states that 'students of the colonial have turned the tables; to reflect on colonial documents as "rituals of possession", as relics and ruins, as sites of contested cultural knowledge ... unquiet movements in a field of force, as restless realignments and readjustments of people and the beliefs to

⁴² Maryanne Dever, Sally Newman and Ann Vickery, *The Intimate Archive: Journeys Through Private Papers* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2009), 10.

⁴³ Michael Christie, 'The Language of Oppression' in *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, 171.

which they were tethered'.⁴⁴ In the process, one must wade through folders of official documents 'so weighted with fixed formats, empty phrases, and racial clichés that one is easily blinded by their flattened prose and numbing dullness'.⁴⁵ Interleaved as they are with official documents in the archives, these women's letters nevertheless stand out because of their style, their content and their very appearance: the handwriting and the paper on which the letters are written. In the archives, the letters are occasional individual voices addressing a range of matters.

In published form, the effect of the letters selected is heightened because the editors have grouped the correspondence chronologically and by letter writer into six sections: Children and Family, Land and Housing, Asserting Personal Freedom, Regarding Missionaries and Station Managers, Religion, and Sustenance and Material Assistance. Under these headings, the collective content of the letters is given more prominence, and gives the impression of a more coordinated form of protest and complaint than might have been the case as experienced by the letter writer. Grouped in this manner, however, the letters attain a narrative structure that provides a mediated way into the archive while also allowing the reader to gain a stronger sense of the person writing. Nine letters written by Ada Austin from Lake Condah, Purnim and Framlingham between 1917 and 1920,

⁴⁴ Anne Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

for example, provide a kind of family portrait; Ada wrote to the Secretary and the Chief Secretary of the BPA, as well as her local Member of the Legislative Assembly about matters concerning various members of her family. Most of her letters run to several pages, and she was not one to mince words, stating in one letter, 'Dear Sir I hope to hear from you as soon as possible. it seems because we are black people they can do what they like with us they ought to treat us all alike as we got relations fighting at the front.'⁴⁶

Sorting the letters under designated headings affected the cutting and shaping of the correspondence during the editing process. Women wrote letters that often crossed several topics, and an editorial decision had to be made as to where the letter would be best placed.⁴⁷ A letter from Amelia Rose, at Purnim, to Mr Ditchburn, secretary of the BPA, for example, was cut by three quarters for publication in the section Children and Family. In published form it is a short, polite letter concerning one of Amelia Rose's sons, who had been ill with meningitis for ten weeks. In its original form, the bulk of the letter is in fact a lengthy complaint about the allegedly disgraceful behaviour of several of Amelia Rose's neighbours and their children, and the failure of the authorities, both the station manager and the police, to address these complaints.⁴⁸ The neighbours to whom she

⁴⁶ Ada Austin to Mr Bailey, MLA, Port Fairy, 1918, PROV, VPRS1694/POOOO/8.

⁴⁷ See my article 'Editorial Practice and Epistolarity' for a comparison of trade and scholarly editorial practices.

⁴⁸ Amelia Rose to Mr Ditchbourne [sic], 29 January 1917, PROV, VPRS1694/POOOO/9.

referred were members of a family with a presence in *Letters*, indicating that the family concerned were consulted about having such material removed.

Despite their care with copyright and collaboration, however, the editors encountered legal constraints during the publishing process of *Letters* when it was released in 2002 by the University of Melbourne's then Department of History, as part of their Research Papers Series. The Department met the immediate costs of producing a modest print run of 200 copies in paperback on the understanding that Patricia Grimshaw would undertake to sell the entire print run in order to recoup those costs. The advice of the university's legal office was to cover costs but make no profit, in order to avoid any legal action on the part of Indigenous communities.⁴⁹ Copies of the book were presented to families of the letter writers, who appreciated the sensitivity exercised by the editors. Far from being offended, as might have been the case had not such care been taken in ensuring the integrity of the research and the respect shown to the families, these communities described *Letters* as being 'a telling of their own history in their own words'.⁵⁰ The respectful and collaborative approach had given them a strong sense of ownership of the material, and had been achieved within the framework of Indigenous community copyright beliefs: information that is collectively owned.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Patricia Grimshaw, email message to author, 27 June 2013.

⁵⁰ Patricia Grimshaw, email message to author, 7 March 2009.

⁵¹ Terri Janke's chapter 'Managing Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property', in *Australian Indigenous Knowledge*

Despite the support and goodwill that surrounded the initial publication, it proved difficult to generate review coverage, even though (or possibly because, in the case of a conservative press and a conservative federal government unwilling to apologise to Indigenous Australians) the book was released when the Australian History Wars were in full swing. *Letters* was also published only a few years after the release in 1997 of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's official report on the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families: *Bringing Them Home*. The book had a direct connection to the latter publication in its subject matter, evident in the section headings outlined above.

Both publications sought to make Indigenous women's voices more publicly prominent than had previously been the case. And the structure of *Letters*, framed as it is by incisive introductory essays, creates a narrative for the correspondence and emphasises issues of particular concern to Indigenous women, revealing how they viewed their own lives and the 'context within which they and their families were living'.⁵²

Context was a key concern for Nelson, Smith and Grimshaw in relation to the archives, to the Indigenous communities with whom they worked, to major issues that affected these women's lives and, finally, in relation to the editorial processes they followed. Drawing on an extensive and

and Libraries provides an insightful legal analysis of rights to Indigenous knowledge.

⁵² Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*, 175.

problematic archive, now subject to a cultural sensitivity overlay, the editors of *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria* produced an accessible and well-structured narrative that documents individual as well as family stories within the broader framework of a complex and confronting period in Australian history. This correspondence is an important Indigenous record, deserving of more attention. The republishing of the collection would facilitate this.

Fragments of a Life in Letters: The Elusive Gwen Harwood

Bryony Cosgrove

you loved to lie
and swear
you were good at it
and far too intelligent
to suffer fools gladly (Nicolette Stasko)

Almost twenty years after her death, no biography of Australian poet and librettist Gwen Harwood (1920–1995) has been published, despite her having been hailed by one of her peers as “the outstanding Australian poet of the twentieth century.”¹ Harwood published over four hundred works in her lifetime, wrote a series of libretti, and received several prominent literary awards.² Two biographers have abandoned the task in the face of restrictions imposed by Harwood’s literary executor, her son John Harwood; and these restrictions continue to thwart would-be biographers. The two published collections of Harwood’s personal letters focus on her male friendships, thus contributing to often prurient speculation regarding Harwood’s private life and the inspiration for her writing. The lack of a biography has compounded this, while the omissions, elisions and evasions in the published letters—that most malleable of genres—reveal the pitfalls of reading such edited collections as a form of epistolary autobiography.

¹ This acknowledgement from Australian-born Peter Porter (1929–2010) appears on the cover of *The Best 100 Poems of Gwen Harwood*, edited by John Harwood. Writer Thomas Shapcott, a long-standing friend of Gwen Harwood, commented that Vincent Buckley was of the opinion that Harwood was a superior poet to Judith Wright (Interview with Thomas Shapcott and Judith Rodriguez, Melbourne, 2 April 2015). Wright’s political and environmental activism may have irked the conservative Buckley. And Harwood herself may have bridled at the acknowledgement from Porter, disliking as she did the characterisation “Australian poet.”

² Harwood wrote libretti for James Penberthy and John Kay, and for six of Larry Sitsky’s operas: *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Lenz*, *Voices in Limbo*, *Fiery Tales*, *The Golem* and *De Profundis*. She was awarded the Grace Leven Prize (1975), the Robert Frost Award (1977), the Patrick White Award (1978), the Victorian Premier’s Award (1989) and the South Australian Festival Award (1990). The Gwen Harwood Memorial Poetry Prize was established in 1996, the year following her death.

I propose to discuss how the two volumes of Harwood's letters are partial and mediated narratives that were shaped by Harwood herself initially, through what she chose to include in her archive, and subsequently by her editors and her literary executor. I further argue that such a skewed portrayal as these letter collections present is a poor substitute for the more fully rounded and objective biography that is still to be written. Harwood's published correspondence sits awkwardly at the public/private divide, invoking gossip and speculation more than adding to any informed analysis of her complete body of work. With her love of masks and pseudonyms, perhaps Harwood herself would have been amused by this. She might have agreed with the American poet and critic William Logan, who stated, "diaries are dramas of self-deception; letters lie through their teeth; photographs are one long pose; the reminiscences of friends are no better aimed than the perjuries of enemies" (np).

Gwen Harwood's two volumes of correspondence are *Blessed City: Letters to Thomas Riddell 1943*, edited by her friend Alison Hoddinott and published during Harwood's lifetime, in 1990; and *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943–1995*, edited by Melbourne critic Gregory Kratzmann and published in 2001, after Harwood's death. Harwood's chief correspondent, for over fifty years, was Thomas (known as Tony) Riddell, to whom every volume, except the last, of her poetry is dedicated. All of the letters in *Blessed City* and half of those in *A Steady Storm of Correspondence* are addressed to him. During 1943, Harwood often wrote several letters a week to Riddell, a young naval reserve officer to whom she had been introduced by a mutual friend and her first love, the charismatic curate Peter Bennie at All Saints' Church in Brisbane, where Harwood was assistant organist.³ She was living at home and working as a secretary at the War Damage Commission, writing letters on her employer's time and paper, and creating havoc around the office by misdirecting phone calls and pushing the minute hand on the office clock forward, along with other strategies she thought up to keep herself entertained. She and Riddell shared a love of music and literature, and Riddell was a gifted scholar, athlete, singer, actor and stage director. He was one of the first people to take Harwood's writing seriously,⁴ and he kept every letter and postcard Harwood

³ It was Tony Riddell who introduced Gwen Foster to Bill Harwood. He, Riddell and Bennie had been contemporaries at the University of Melbourne before the war. See also John A. Moss's article on Peter Bennie's time at All Saints' Church.

⁴ Interview with Gregory Kratzmann, Melbourne, 16 March 2015.

ever wrote to him, eventually donating them to the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland.⁵

Hoddinott, the editor of *Blessed City*, was researching a critical study of Gwen Harwood's poetry when Harwood directed her to the 1943 letters to Riddell. Both editor and author formed the opinion that the letters were publishable, and could attract a readership beyond the small and quite specialised literary coterie that is the usual market for letter collections, which in Australia rarely sell more than a few hundred copies.⁶ After a fairly dispiriting search, Hoddinott eventually presented the letters as a wartime friendship/romance to publishers Angus and Robertson, Harwood's long-time poetry publishers. Even they displayed muted interest in contracting the manuscript and delayed its publication for two years. To the surprise of author, editor and publisher, however, *Blessed City* met with unexpected success. It won the 1990 *Age* Book of the Year award, against competition that included David Malouf's *The Great World* and Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy* among the 112 entries.⁷ That a collection of letters written by a nascent poet to a young man with no public profile should win such an award is extraordinary, and was due in no small part to the manner in which Hoddinott and Harwood crafted from the letters "the chronicle of a year, of a city, of a family, of a friendship" (Goldsworthy 10). They had wanted the letters to be read and enjoyed, and to actually achieve what epistolary editors are wont to claim, though not always with justification: that the correspondence is accessible and reads with the narrative flow of a

⁵ Other Gwen Harwood papers are held in the National Library of Australia and in the Australian Defence Force Academy, in Canberra.

⁶ Like poetry collections, letter collections are published in modest print runs and tend to go out of print after a year or two. A common observation among publishing industry sales representatives is "Print 1000 and pulp 500." "Reducing stock holdings" is the more polite term for pulping. Such books appeal to a small section of the market, and publication tends to be heavily subsidised by both the Australia Council and cross-subsidised by publishers' more commercially viable titles, such as sport, crafts and self-help books. Publishing literary titles is not profitable unless these books gain an education setting across secondary and tertiary curriculums in several States.

⁷ Allegedly, Angus and Robertson had to be asked by the judging panel to even submit *Blessed City* for the *Age* award. In a letter to Harwood, poet and philosopher Kevin Hart, who was on the judging panel that year, requested, "make sure that Fang us and Obitsen [Angus and Robertson] submit *Blessed City* to *The Age* award; so far it hasn't appeared on my desk" (Kevin Hart to Gwen Harwood, 5 September 1990, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 18, folder 6). Hart also referred to the publishers as "Dangleus and Bottomson" and "Obit and Saddison" in other letters to Harwood.

novel.⁸ These are letters written by a young woman to a man of whom she is clearly very fond (though not the man she would marry). They span a short period during the upheaval of The Second World War, which gives the correspondence a clearly defined structure with an evocative sense of place and time, peopled by entertaining characters whom Harwood satirises, mercilessly. While working on the letters in the Fryer Library, Hoddinott had written to Harwood that they were “better than a novel, I assure you ... they [i.e. the Fryer librarians] certainly LOVE your letters. I get the impression that when life gets dull, they take out a file to cheer themselves up.”⁹

Before publication, however, Harwood had been concerned that some of the letters contained sensitive material which could cause distress to both her husband Bill Harwood and to Tony Riddell, and to a lesser degree to members of her family and some former work colleagues. The final letters she had written in 1943 to Riddell were of particular concern to her. She suggested Hoddinott should consider either “omitting the final letters or in her words, ‘fixing them up’ by possibly rearranging or even rewriting them” (“Editing Poet Gwen Harwood” 32). Harwood was also of the opinion that “much that she had written in 1943 was boring, silly, infantile or repetitive ... [and] that, as she was the author, she was entitled to improve what she had written” (“Editing Poet Gwen Harwood” 32). Such a suggestion is not uncommon, and has a long history, especially when the author of the letters is still alive and is assessing their own correspondence as part of their writerly output. Alexander Pope, Laurence Sterne and Horace Walpole were among a number of literary figures known to have engaged in this practice. And as Richard Altick has observed, they regarded a private letter as “a literary exercise which was entitled to

⁸ See, for example, Marilla North’s *Yarn Spinners: A Story in Letters*, in which North begins her Editorial Note with the claim, “I’ve tried to create an experience that resembles the reading of a novel. The letters are edited and woven together so that the story they tell flows from one to the other ... gaps in the life-stories are filled in with narrative episodes” (North xi). A decade earlier, Carole Ferrier, in *As Good As a Yarn With You*, described her published collection of letters exchanged by Australian women writers Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark as an “epistolary narrative,” and as “a narrative that complements the ‘literary’ production of these six writers. However, the letters can also be read as a genre in themselves, as a continuing dialogue among this group” (Ferrier 21). Ferrier had similarly used connecting italicized narrative passages to provide some further information about significant events.

⁹ Alison Hoddinott to Gwen Harwood, 29 August 1984, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 18, folder 7 (underlining and capitals in the original).

all the improvement, by way of additional wit and polish, that its creator wanted to lavish on it" (Altick 201). When editing the correspondence between Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright for publication,¹⁰ I had to dissuade Blackman from combining some of her own letters and rewriting sections of them to improve the style and the narrative flow. She regarded her own letters *not* as sacrosanct primary sources but rather as part of her body of unpublished work, and she was keen to have the most polished version of this writing in the final collection.¹¹ It is a view not shared, of course, by archivists, historians and biographers. Some epistolary editors, with an eye to narrative structure and accessibility as well as the perceived market for a published collection of letters, are not above cutting and collating, although the focus is as likely to be on material that is perceived to be of little interest as on material in need of censoring.

Hoddinott did not agree to Harwood rewriting her original letters, but she herself edited extensively, and made the crucial decision to remove the final thirty-six from the collection before submitting the manuscript to the publishers ("Editing Poet Gwen Harwood" 33). Neither this omission nor the extent of her editing is mentioned in her introduction to *Blessed City*, a fact that few reviewers mentioned.¹² Harwood herself claimed that only "the domestic trivialities [were] cut out" (Baker 155) and that, "The excisions are not secrets and not matters too personal to print."¹³ Tony Riddell himself was also silent on the extent of the editing when he wrote to Harwood, "It has been richly rewarding for me to follow the warm praise on all sides for B.C. ... It's quite astonishing to find [the letters] gladly received by a new generation after 50 years of privacy."¹⁴ As eventually became clear, however, a degree of privacy *had* been maintained in the process of editing of the letters, and considerably more than "trivialities" had been excised.

After Gwen Harwood's death in 1995, Hoddinott was more forthcoming about the nature of the editorial work on *Blessed City*. She stated that a natural break in the narrative occurred with the arrival in

¹⁰ Published as *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950–2000*.

¹¹ See also Robert McGill, "Biographical Desire and the Archives of Living Authors."

¹² An exception was Stephanie Trigg, who did query the level of editing and the overall selection of letters, crafted in her opinion to show "enfant terrible turned gorgeous artist" (23).

¹³ Gwen Harwood to Father William Paton, 27 November 1990, quoted in Kratzmann (419).

¹⁴ Tony Riddell to Gwen Harwood, 7 October 1990, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 19, folder 5.

Brisbane in September of 1943 of Tony Riddell's friend Frank William (Bill) Harwood, whom Gwen would marry. Hoddinott also acknowledged that her aim had been to highlight the humour and satire in the correspondence, and she had therefore chosen to avoid the sense of loss and unresolvable conflict that permeated the full text, giving it a darker and more complex conclusion ("Editing Poet Gwen Harwood" 33). The relationship between Bill Harwood and Tony Riddell had become strained by the end of 1943. The published letters that are *Blessed City* actually finish in September of that year though the full correspondence does not. Access to the later letters is now restricted, but on the basis of observations Hoddinott made both in interviews given and articles published after Harwood's death, one can assume it was at the request of Bill Harwood that Gwen Harwood did not resume her friendship with Tony Riddell for five years after her marriage. Bill Harwood presumably felt the intimate friendship between his future wife and his friend, even though it was epistolary in nature, was in some way a threat. These later letters, in both Hoddinott's and Gwen Harwood's opinion, revealed a great deal of pain that "would have hurt both Bill Harwood and Tony Riddell, who later resumed their friendship. It would have hurt them very greatly to publish those letters" (*The Book Show*).¹⁵ And the pain would not have sat well with the funny, witty and romantic tone of *Blessed City*.

Neither Hoddinott nor Gwen Harwood revealed the nature of this perceived pain; nor did Gregory Kratzmann, editor of the second volume of Harwood's letters, published in 2001 after her death, although he was aware of the cause, having read all of the original 1943 letters. When interviewed, Hoddinott and Kratzmann declined to be drawn on the nature of Tony Riddell's relationship with Gwen Harwood beyond friendship, noting only that he had lived alone, eventually not far from the Harwoods, in Tasmania, and that he never married.¹⁶ A letter from Gwen Harwood to Alison Hoddinott, however, indicates that before her marriage, Harwood had been made

¹⁵ Transcript of Alison Hoddinott interview with Ramona Koval, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 16 April 2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/radio-national/programs/bookshow/editing-poet-gwen-harwood/326> (accessed 17 September 2014).

¹⁶ Interviews by phone with Alison Hoddinott, 24 February and 4 March 2015; interview with Gregory Kratzmann, Melbourne, 16 March 2015. Poet and critic Judith Rodriguez who, along with her husband Thomas Shapcott, was acquainted with Gwen Harwood, was more open, observing that she herself had had several homosexual friends at university whose company she valued highly because "they were both interesting to talk to and were not after your tail." Interview with Thomas Shapcott and Judith Rodriguez, Melbourne, 2 April 2015.

aware of Tony Riddell's homosexuality, which she had struggled to comprehend despite vague observations such as, "You're barking up the wrong tree"¹⁷ from friends who were allegedly concerned that she would prevail upon Riddell to marry her.

The acclaim with which *Blessed City* was received raised Harwood's profile, and added to existing speculation about her personal life, her friendships and their influences on her work. Harwood had already achieved a degree of notoriety in 1961, when she submitted two sonnets to the *Bulletin*, under the pseudonym "Walter Lehmann," annoyed by what she perceived to be a bias against female poets among male literary editors. The journal issue concerned was withdrawn from sale when it was discovered that the two sonnets were acrostic and read, respectively, "So long Bulletin" and "Fuck all editors," and the *Bulletin* editor was forced to publish an apology amid threats of prosecution for obscenity. Harwood was referred to patronisingly as a "Tas poet-housewife" in the tabloid press, although she was not above placing herself in the domestic sphere—"I married, I had children. There is no need to chronicle domesticity" ("Words and Music" 375). She had to fit her work around the demands of a husband and four children while also working as a medical secretary in a nearby practice in Hobart. Books were read propped over the kitchen sink as she washed dishes (Sheridan, "Mrs Harwood" 145). Poems were composed in her head as she walked her children to school, a practice that would give her the ability to whip up speeches in verse at conferences and presentations,¹⁸ and to recite her own work with ease in public, which in fellow poet Judith Rodriguez's opinion gave Harwood "a magnetic and powerful presence."¹⁹

Five volumes of literary criticism of Harwood's work have been published, four of these in the early 1990s when her fame was at its peak, displaying considerable optimism on the part of the respective publishers that a sufficient market existed for such works. It is possible the publishers had expectations that a biography would be released, that would keep Harwood in the public eye.²⁰ Each of these

¹⁷ Gwen Harwood to Alison Hoddinott, 21 February 1990, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 332, box 3, folder 15. My thanks to Anne-Marie Priest for drawing this letter to my attention.

¹⁸ When Harwood accepted the Age award, her acceptance speech was "a witty reworking of Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppo's,' completed in the Ladies' Rest Room of the hotel in the five minutes before lunch and revised in the middle of the ceremony in order to reply more aptly to the speech of presentation" ("Celebrating Gwen Harwood" 22).

¹⁹ Interview with Thomas Shapcott and Judith Rodriguez, 2 April 2015.

²⁰ Alison Hoddinott's *Gwen Harwood: The Real and Imagined World* (1991); Elizabeth Lawson's *The Poetry of Gwen Harwood* (1991); Jennifer Strauss's

critical studies raised the question of Harwood's sources and influences, making reference to *Blessed City* and specifically to Harwood's relationship with Tony Riddell. Stephanie Trigg, discussing the thin divide between the personal element in Harwood's work and her private life, queried: "Who, after all, has not been tempted to read the repressed narrative of a wartime romance behind the letters in *Blessed City*? To whom were all those later, burning love poems addressed?" (Trigg 2). And she observed, "we know a great deal about [Harwood's] early adulthood from her letters of 1943" (Trigg 11), without further analysing the question of what we "know" being what Harwood and Hoddinott chose to include in that collection. Cassandra Atherton, in her study of Harwood's pseudonymous poetry, opens with the observation: "Gwen Foster's [Harwood's] infatuation with 'Tony' Riddell can be inferred from her letters published in *Blessed City*" (*Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair* 1) and in a later article claims that "[Harwood's] gauche, romantic letters to Riddell can make the reader squirm" ("Gwen Harwood" 30), without ever suggesting that this might have been a misunderstood and therefore misdirected affection. Anne-Marie Priest, in her essay on Harwood for the suggestively subtitled journal issue *Southerly: The Romance Edition*, makes the broader claim that the letters "depict a woman of many loves. Indeed, it is possible to argue, based on these letters, that she was, for her time, quite radical in her understanding of marriage and that she was something of a pioneer in the way she conducted her relationships" (Priest 159).

Hoddinott and Kratzmann both described Gwen Harwood as having a tendency to hero worship and idealise her male friends, particularly writers and poets, a view shared by writer friends of Harwood, Judith Rodriguez and Tom Shapcott: "Gwen enjoyed male company and she was a mischief in both her poetry and her behaviour, with a tendency to a 'Come on, but I'm not telling you anything' manner. She was a very affectionate, tactile person with a great sense of fun and playfulness."²¹ As her archives show, she certainly wrote to many more men than women during her lifetime, and her letters to male friends, with the notable exception of those

Boundary Conditions: The Poetry of Gwen Harwood (1992); and Stephanie Trigg's *Australian Writers: Gwen Harwood* (1994). In 2006, Cassandra Atherton published *Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair: A Reading of Gwen Harwood's Pseudonymous Poetry*, a "psychoanalytic reading" of Harwood's poetry and use of pseudonyms and masks. Alison Hoddinott and subsequently Gregory Kratzmann both began work on biographies of Gwen Harwood, shortly after the publication of *Blessed City*. Hoddinott soon abandoned hers, but Kratzmann signed a contract with Oxford University Press in Melbourne.

²¹ Interview with Judith Rodriguez and Thomas Shapcott, 2 April 2015.

written to Tony Riddell, often provoked salacious responses.²² One can only wonder whether such letters were shared with Bill Harwood, or even if they were left lying opened around the house. Yet these male friends were also fellow poets, as well as academics and the literary editors of journals in which she sought to publish her work. They were Harwood's peers, although as Susan Sheridan has noted, Harwood was well aware of the manner in which women were excluded from informal literary and academic networks, being unable to join these male cohorts for a beer at the pub, for example ("Mrs Harwood" 140). She was more likely to be socialising in the role of faculty wife, at university functions, where her "sense of fun" appears to have been cause for comment on occasions. At a wine and cheese evening for students hosted by the English Department where Bill Harwood lectured, Gwen Harwood's whirl around the floor with fellow poet and lecturer James McAuley was "all heavenly until after about 2 minutes Norma [McAuley] appeared at Jim's right arm, seized him by it, and TOOK HIM AWAY. She glared at me as if I were the Whore of Babylon."²³

Bill Harwood remains a rather shadowy figure in any analysis of Gwen Harwood's life, perhaps as a result of protectiveness on the part of family and friends, particularly after her death. Occasional references to him in interviews with Gwen Harwood often carry a weight of meaning. Candida Baker, for example, referred to his "collection of bonsai trees, attractive in a tortured sort of way" (Baker 133), and noted that "Bill Harwood's study was on the right of the front door. He was working there with his IBM computer, constantly exploring the barriers of language. On the other side of the front door is the kitchen/dining room where there is an elegant desk that Harwood works at" (Baker 133). An elegant desk, and yet it is still in

²² A letter to Harwood from Thomas Shapcott, describing an Australian government-funded writers' tour around Europe, includes some hilarious, sexually explicit anecdotes (28 December 1980, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 16, folder 27). One from her old friend Peter Bennie decries the aridity of his life and the obvious need for a mistress (30 January 1984, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 16, folder 2). These are but two examples. A rather more eccentric letter, addressed to "Little Miss Gwendolinia Foster, c/- the august Doctoria Santa G.G. Harwood (universalia)" was sent by the poet and performer Adrian Rawlins, Gwen Harwood papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, 25 January 1991, series 1, box 16, folder 21.

²³ Gwen Harwood to Roger and Rhyll McDonald, 1 August 1969, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 7, folder 3. (Capitals as they appear in the original letter.) Also quoted in Kratzmann (232).

the kitchen, the domestic space. Harwood claimed to have been disadvantaged by “journalistic emphasis on her domesticity” (Trigg 29), yet much of this sprang from her own published works from the 1960s, in particular those cused on domestic themes.

Hoddinott, who knew both Gwen and Bill Harwood well, considered comments of the “tortured bonsai” kind to be examples of the manner in which “the feminists have been gunning for the husbands for some time ... a reversal of the long-standing criticism often directed at the wives of talented men.”²⁴ She considered Bill Harwood to have contributed a crucial influence on Gwen Harwood’s poetry because of their joint fascination with language and philosophy.²⁵ He introduced her to the works of writers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, and his first gift to her “was Plato’s *Republic* with the important passages underlined in pencil, just in case I missed the point!” (Baker 146). In response to an interviewer’s question about whether her husband worried about her male friendships, Harwood deflected the subject by responding, “We talk and talk. But he doesn’t wish to talk to me about the nature of the iambic pentameter. He is quite happy that I should talk to anyone but him about the future of the sonnet” (Baker 157).

At first glance, Harwood’s was a life she herself described to Alison Hoddinott as being of “surface uneventfulness” (*Gwen Harwood* 85). Harwood noted “all a poet needs is the long journey from innocence to experience” (“Notes and Furphies” 10), displaying a degree of disingenuousness in omitting to mention creative ability and the need to maintain a distance from one’s publications in an attempt to avoid a reading of the work as the private life. Harwood grew up in middle-class Brisbane and showed an early flair for music. In late adolescence, she briefly joined “a small community of Poor Clares [convent] ... after a most unsuitable love affair” (“Words and Music” 374). Afterwards, she worked as a secretary for the War Damage Commission, married a returned serviceman at the end of the war and moved to Tasmania with him, where they brought up four children.²⁶ She did not begin to publish in earnest until the youngest of her children was at school. Harwood returned from time to time to the mainland Australian States but she never went overseas even to accompany her husband to conferences, though she wrote longingly to friends and family who were travelling.

²⁴ Telephone interview with Alison Hoddinott, 4 March 2015.

²⁵ Bill Harwood lectured in linguistics at the University of Tasmania.

²⁶ As Susan Sheridan has noted, in her chapter on Harwood in *Nine Lives: Postwar Women Writers Making Their Mark*, Harwood had little time for writing in the early years of her marriage, in the first seven years of which she bore five children, one daughter being stillborn.

Hoddinott had included some biographical material in her critical study of Harwood's poetry, *Gwen Harwood: The Real and Imagined World*, and after the success of *Blessed City* she had been keen to flesh this out into a full biography. She abandoned the idea, however, and also cautioned Gregory Kratzmann, when he expressed interest in researching a biography of Harwood, after reading *Blessed City*, about "the considerable difficulties [he] could expect to encounter."²⁷ Hoddinott was well placed to make such an observation, being a close friend of both Gwen and Bill Harwood and having been a student of the latter at the University of Tasmania. Gwen Harwood had written several short autobiographical pieces in literary journals,²⁸ although she seems to have been ambivalent about the prospect of a biography, responding to Kratzmann, "I feel more and more that the time is not right for it ... I really think you should wait until I am Taken From this Vale of Tears ... the things I am prepared to say have all been said" (Kratzmann 436). She did eventually introduce Kratzmann to friends and colleagues as her biographer, however, and made a great deal of personal material available to him, frequently handing over letters and diaries without first checking the contents. He was of the opinion that Harwood was aware of the value of her letters, "however thickly her statements on the subject are hedged with self-mockery" (Kratzmann xv). In a letter to writer and editor friend Roger McDonald, Harwood jokingly remarked, "I can't write with Byronic abandon if the beady little eye of posterity is winking over my shoulder. (Hi there, Posterity. Up you! Cop these deathless reflections!)."²⁹ She was a prolific and entertaining correspondent who wrote thousands of letters to friends and fellow artists over more than fifty years, and in Kratzmann's opinion, the letters are "in terms of their range, the degree of self-awareness they reflect and their capacity to delight, the most valuable letters of Australia's literary culture" (Kratzmann ix). This may well be the case, but as access to much of the collection is now heavily restricted, their value to scholars remains limited.

Kratzmann began work on a biography in 1991, but after Harwood's death in December 1995, access to her papers came under the control of her son John Harwood, who had earlier expressed misgivings to his mother during her life about the danger of "letting

²⁷ Gregory Kratzmann to Gwen Harwood, 7 August 1991, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 33, folder 8. Neither Hoddinott nor Kratzmann elaborated on what these difficulties might be.

²⁸ See, for example, "Lamplit Presences" and "Words and Music."

²⁹ Gwen Harwood to Roger McDonald, 2 March 1970, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 45, box 7, folder 1.

some probably incompetent hack loose upon your personal life.”³⁰ By this time, Kratzmann had uncovered information about Gwen Harwood, confirmed by her in conversations with him, which he realised could not have been known to her son. John Harwood refused to allow Kratzmann to use this information. Kratzmann did not believe he could write a full biography under the imposition of such constraints and eventually withdrew from his contract with Oxford University Press.³¹ The option of publishing a selection of Harwood’s letters dating from 1943 to 1995 was put to John Harwood, who agreed but then proceeded to exercise further constraints over the selection. As a result, there are some major omissions from the roll call of Gwen Harwood’s correspondents in *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*.³²

The initial interest in the nature of Gwen Harwood’s male friendships, after the publication of *Blessed City*, increased after publication of *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*, fuelled by the inclusion of letters such as the following,³³ to Tom Shapcott in 1969, in which she says of Riddell, after a visit to Melbourne:

Utter bliss! Hours and hours with the one human being I love above all others, more than the children to whom I have given life, more than anyone I have ever loved, anytime, anywhere. There’s a poem of Rilke’s which ends “I never held you, therefore I hold you fast” ... how can one explain that a bachelor going on for 60 is the most beautiful human being alive? He has supported me through some terrible times without a word of reproach or advice, yet we have seen one another only for a few hours in a lifetime ... A week of spontaneous action: luxury to a mother and wife; no peace to keep, no frowns to fear, nothing to wash or cook; any wonder I went mad. I am still reeling drunk with the glory of it all.
(Kratzmann 229–30)

Also problematic was the outcome of two key editorial decisions concerning *A Steady Storm of Correspondence*. The imbalance between male and female correspondents in the final manuscript troubled the

³⁰ Gregory Kratzmann to Gwen Harwood, 7 August 1991, Gwen Harwood Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, series 1, box 33, folder 8.

³¹ Interview with Gregory Kratzmann, Melbourne, 16 March 2015. Kratzmann declined to elaborate on the nature of John Harwood’s concerns, other than to say he was protective of both of his parents.

³² Ibid.

³³ Curiously, Tony Riddell had suggested omitting this letter, but John Harwood approved its inclusion. Interview with Gregory Kratzmann, Melbourne, 16 March 2015.

University of Queensland Press editor,³⁴ who suggested including some letters to women friends. The published collection is still an unequal eighteen male to three female correspondents—one is tempted to call them token females. And of the four hundred letters included, nearly half are written to Tony Riddell. Kratzmann had wanted an element of narrative in the collection, which to some degree was a substitute for the biography he had earlier abandoned. He was of the opinion that this would be best achieved by focusing on letters to Riddell, Harwood's chief correspondent throughout her adult life.³⁵ As a result, the majority of Gwen Harwood's published correspondence has been structured by males: correspondents, literary executor, and editor.

Kratzmann and John Harwood fell out over the publication of *A Steady Storm of Correspondence* because of the inclusion of several letters for which permission had not been cleared. Ironically, these were letters that portrayed Gwen Harwood as "a mother with a capital M [who] often wrote about her children to friends"³⁶ and were intended to counterbalance the speculation that had long surrounded Harwood's relationships with male friends. Since Gwen Harwood's death, access to her papers has become increasingly restricted. Almost a third of the boxes held in the Fryer Library are either fully restricted or contain folders of restricted material. Over 700 of Gwen Harwood's letters to Thomas (Tony) Riddell, written between 1942 and 1976, are restricted, as are nearly 400 of Riddell's letters to Harwood written between 1956 and 1975. Letters from several of Harwood's male friends are restricted,³⁷ as is a collection of letters to fellow poet Ann Jennings, written between 1954 and 1988. Harwood papers held by the Australian Defence Force Academy and the National Library of Australia, are fully restricted. Some boxes of material now designated as closed to researchers include the originals of letters that have been published already, albeit in edited form.

These restrictions on access to Gwen Harwood's papers represent the divide between respect for privacy and the public's right to know—assuming the public is interested, of course; what Ian Hamilton has described as "The agents of reticence [having] no truck

³⁴ Interview with Gregory Kratzmann, Melbourne, 16 March 2015.

³⁵ Kratzmann interview.

³⁶ Kratzmann interview.

³⁷ These include letters from writer and editor Roger Macdonald (sent between 1969 and 1973); from poet and novelist Thomas Shapcott (sent between 1963 and 1975); from poet and small-press publisher Norman Talbot (sent between 1968 and 1975); and from painter Edwin Tanner (sent between 1961 and 1975). Letters to Harwood from family members (sent between 1968 and 1992) are also restricted.

with the agents of disclosure ... the executor [being] either a secretive parasite or a protector of imperiled decencies" (Hamilton vii). The lack of access to Gwen Harwood's private life has extended to the most recent collection of her poetry. *The Best 100 Poems of Gwen Harwood*, designed as a small gift book, contains no introduction or notes, and refers only in the front flap copy to the fact of literary executor John Harwood's hand in compiling the book. There is the briefest of biographical notes, no list of Harwood's publications and no photograph of Harwood herself, as if the poems simply exist, removed from any personal reference and requiring no introduction or explanation for the selection. As reviewer Simon West noted, "one wonders whether, if we lend an ear, we might once more make out that high-pitched voice calling from the grave, 'Fuck all editors'" (West np).

Without a biography of Gwen Harwood that fully addresses the woman and the wide range of her work, including her musical collaborations, we have available to us only fragments of her life story: as presented in a handful of short autobiographical vignettes; in several volumes of literary criticism that necessarily focus on analysis of her poetry; and in two published collections of her letters. As I have illustrated, both *Blessed City* and *A Steady Storm of Correspondence* present skewed and mediated narratives, constructed and constrained initially by Harwood herself, and subsequently by her editors and publishers, and by her literary executor, who has now restricted access to many of her papers. This attempt to protect family privacy has resulted not only in speculation that is quite possibly well beyond the reality of Harwood's life, but also denies her the full recognition she deserves in Australia's literary culture and canon.

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Editorial Practice and Epistolarity: Silent and Not So Silent

BRYONY COSGROVE

Published letter collections are collaborative works that have been given a coherent narrative structure by editors, even when the editorial hand is not always visible or acknowledged. Epistolary editing can be silent, or highly visible, or something in between.¹ These different approaches, whether adopted by trade editors, by scholarly editors or by family members, are the result of similar constraints: the need to reach an audience, to negotiate with a publisher and to submit to the editor's interpretations. Editors are rarely acknowledged or thought about in this context; indeed, editing is often referred to as an invisible profession.² Yet editorial intervention consciously frames and suggests a general way of approaching and reading letters. Introductions, photographs, footnotes, bridging paragraphs and sometimes a cast of characters serve not only to expand and explain references in the letters but also to give prominence to certain episodes, issues and relationships rather than others.³ Even the framing of research questions shapes material drawn from the original archive.

I argue that there is a case for both silent and not so silent epistolary editing, and that a clear understanding of the intended market for a specific letter collection is crucial to the approach taken. I further argue that both trade and scholarly editors are subject to similar constraints by publishers, and that editors seek to position these books in their respective markets in similar ways, frequently claiming a novel-like structure for a narrative told in the author's voice. Case studies presented in this article support these arguments, centred on an analysis of my editing of *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950–2000*,⁴ and a comparison of this collection to *With Love & Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, edited by Wright's daughter Meredith McKinney and historian Patricia Clarke. Surprisingly, considering the small market for

¹ Silent editing is a term used to describe editorial work on original documents without any indication, by means of ellipses or square brackets, for example, of what has been done.

² Editors themselves have used this term for decades to describe their role in the publishing industry, frequently coupling it with the term "invisible mending." For examples, see *Stet: An Editor's Life* by Diana Athill; *The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers* by Betsy Lerner; and *The Editor's Companion* by Janet Mackenzie.

³ The cast of characters may be given various titles by editors. For examples, see Correspondents in *With Love & Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, edited by Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney; Biographical Notes in *The Letters of George and Elizabeth Bass*, edited by Miriam Estensen; and Dramatis Personae in *Dearest Munx: The Letters of Christina Stead and William J. Blake*, edited by Margaret Harris.

⁴ *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950–2000*, edited by Bryony Cosgrove (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2007).

literary letters in general, the two books were released within six months of each other. The former, however, was intended for a general readership and focused on women's friendship. The latter was published as a more intentionally scholarly edition of selected letters by one of Australia's foremost poets and political activists.

Liz Stanley distinguishes between collections produced in scholarly editions and those produced for a general readership:

Editorial work in producing a scholarly edition of somebody's letters is usually extensively indicated and readers of these editions will obtain a good idea of the writing practices of the letter-writer, which will have involved changes of mind and mistakes, corrections and insertions and so on. However, most popular published editions of letters are by no means so transparently edited, with many editors carrying out 'silent corrections' which have the effect of producing a more standardized and uniform version than the original more idiosyncratic letters.⁵

Stanley's term for these is shadow letters, a version of the originals. Yet editors of more intentionally scholarly collections also produce a form of shadow letters, marked by both annotation and omission.

David Marr's introduction to *Patrick White: Letters*, for example, states: "For this book to sustain a narrative of White's life and opinions I have made cuts to most of the 600 or so letters here. So dot dot dot indicates a cut made by me, and dash dash for White's own rare use of dot dot dot. If cuts have been made to the top of a letter there is no salutation, and if to the bottom there is no signature."⁶ Margaret Harris, introducing the letters of Christina Stead and William J. Blake, notes: "In preparing these letters for publication, I have been mindful of the need to make them readable while retaining their spontaneity and informality.... The symbol dash has been used to indicate words that after many scrutinies had to be declared illegible. Some silent emendations have been made to minimise misreading and ambiguities."⁷ This level of editorial engagement with the original letters is expected in a scholarly edition, the methodology being outlined in a preface or introduction. Yet such intervention does impact on the reading experience. A reviewer of *Earth Fire Water Air: Anne Dangar's Letters to Grace Crowley 1930–1951*, edited by Helen Topliss, complained: "Topliss didn't allow me free range to follow Dangar's style. As is the way with letters to friends, often written in haste and unedited, Dangar wrote as I imagine she would have spoken, letting ideas pile on top of each other.... I found Topliss'

⁵ Liz Stanley, "Schreiner's Letters—Project Overview," <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/Schreiner'sLetters-ProjectOverview.html>, section 4, paragraph 13 (accessed 15 March 2013).

⁶ *Patrick White: Letters*, edited by David Marr (Sydney: Random House, 1994), ix.

⁷ *Dearest Munx: The Letters of Christina Stead and William J. Blake*, edited by Margaret Harris (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2005), xiv.

additions of conjunctions frequently intrusive, slowing the pace and diluting the immediacy of the writer's voice."⁸

Remaining true to the original material while also rendering it accessible for the reader is a common dilemma faced by the scholarly editor. Janine Burke's explanation of her editing of the letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed makes this point clearly: "I have used paragraphs and punctuation when otherwise it would prove a strain for the reader. Hester's imaginative spelling is largely intact though where it proved overly confusing (for example, in the case of Heide, which Joy spelled differently in nearly every letter) it has been changed."⁹ Art historian and biographer Burke was well aware that *Dear Sun* would benefit from continuing fascination with the Heide circle and two of its key female members. Through their letters, she constructed the biography of a women's friendship, akin to eavesdropping on a long-running and broad-ranging conversation. Her editorial method, which sits between trade and scholarly, enabled her to reach a market beyond the academic.

When the intended readership for a published letter collection is clear, there should be an understanding and an acceptance of the chosen editorial method. When this is not the case, or when the readership changes, a published letter collection may suffer undeserved criticism. *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, the best-selling collection of correspondence ever published in Australia, sold first into a popular market and later a scholarly one. Over nine separate editions it totalled sales of over 80,000 copies, a figure far exceeding the sales of most published letter collections.¹⁰ *The Letters* was adopted by conveners of some of the first women's studies courses at universities around Australia, in the early 1970s; they were drawn to its educated, outspoken female narrator. Covering the years 1853 to 1882, the letters were first serialised in the *Bulletin* from 1951 to 1952 (edited by journalist David Adams and illustrated by Norman Lindsay), nearly forty years after Rachel Henning's death. Adams also assumed the role of co-author, in the absence of Rachel Henning herself. His name appears on the covers and title pages of most of the editions of *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, and he was involved with the promotion of the book on its initial release and through subsequent editions. Much was made of the manner in which the letters came to light, having lain "undisturbed for many years in an old leather valise" belonging

⁸ Jody Fitzhardinge, "Review: *Earth Fire Water Air: Anne Dangar's Letters to Grace Crowley 1930–1951* by Helen Topliss," *Journal of Australian Studies* 25, issue 68 (2001): 206–7.

⁹ *Dear Sun: The Letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed*, edited by Janine Burke (Sydney: Random House, 2001 edition), ix. Heide was the home of cultural patrons John and Sunday Reed, on the outskirts of Melbourne, where artists and writers gathered.

¹⁰ Sales figures were obtained from the relevant publishing companies' records. Sales figures I have gathered for Australian women's published letter collections rarely exceed 2000 copies, and many sell considerably fewer than that.

to the Henning family.¹¹ The voyeuristic appeal of the collection was noted from the earliest reviews of the published letters, with references to a “spiced and candid picture” and “letters ... meant only for family.”¹² No editorial method was outlined, however, and the editing itself was silent. Readers of the published collection were presented with a smooth, well-paced narrative, likened by some reviewers to an epistolary novel, and suited to a conservative, 1950s, middle-brow audience.

Accepted for many years as authentic, the letters were in fact heavily edited for publication by Adams and by members of the Henning family. When this became known in the 1990s, David Adams was accused of “deletion, distortion and defacement in the best traditions of the fourth estate.”¹³ Such criticism disregards the popular market for which *The Letters of Rachel Henning* was initially intended, while also exposing the pitfalls of reading such published collections as true and complete transcripts of original letters and then judging them by scholarly editorial standards. As yet, no scholarly edition of *The Letters of Rachel Henning* has been published. It seems unlikely one will be because of the widespread use of the popular edition, and the free availability of David Adams’s edited text online through Project Gutenberg.

Although it was Adams who was criticised for the editing of the Henning letters, the family themselves were closely involved with the cutting and shaping, much of which was marked straight onto the original correspondence in blue and red pen.¹⁴ They did, at least, employ the services of an editor, which is not always the case. Letter collections edited (and often self-published) by family members with little if any grasp of their role and responsibilities as editors, coupled with an interest in preserving family privacy, are extreme examples of popular editions. In these cases, a more subjective as well as a more anodyne version of the original is created. The bonfire of private papers in the back garden, after the death of the author, is a well-documented practice.¹⁵ Liz Stanley uncovered an extraordinary example of family intervention in the posthumous publication of the letters of nineteenth-century South African feminist and social commentator Olive Schreiner:

¹¹ *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, edited by David Adams (Sydney: Bulletin Books, 1952), 7.

¹² *Adelaide Advertiser*, 15 November 1952, 7.

¹³ Anne Allingham, “Challenging the Editing of the Rachel Henning Letters,” *Australian Literary Studies* 16, no. 3 (1994): 272.

¹⁴ Taking such a heavy-handed approach with an archive would be inconceivable today. However, the existence of the editing on the original letters provides an insight into the approach taken at the time and by a male editor.

¹⁵ Ian Hamilton’s *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography From Shakespeare to Plath* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1994) is a particularly insightful study of the fate of the literary estates of a range of writers, from John Donne the Younger (1604–1662) through to Philip Larkin (1922–1985) and Sylvia Plath (1932–1963).

[her estranged husband] Cronwright-Schreiner not only destroyed all the letters he had been given by the recipients of them, once he had worked on them in preparing *The Letters ... and the Life of Olive Schreiner*, but he also extensively and intrusively edited what he produced, by joining together parts of different letters, by treating his notes as though written by Schreiner herself, and by imposing a particular view of her character and editing his selections of [parts of] letters to show this.¹⁶

A further complication can arise if the letter writer is still alive and actively involved in editing letters for publication. Robert McGill analyses the potential difficulties of working with the archives of still-living authors, who make their papers available “in a market made buoyant by biographical desire,” and who then maintain varying degrees of control over their archive: “suddenly the author is not the love object but the obstacle, hampering the critic’s desire for intimacy with the author function.”¹⁷ In such situations, McGill argues, “one must accept as untrue Carolyn Steedman’s assertion that the historian who goes to the archive must always be an unintended reader, will always read that which was never intended for his or her eyes.”¹⁸

My own experience of being the intended reader occurred when I was invited to edit the correspondence between Australian women writers Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright, a collection published in 2007 as *Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright 1950–2000*. When Blackman first spoke to me about the letters, she suggested I might be able to make something of the correspondence. Her choice of words revealed not only her familiarity with the editorial process, but also her sense of ownership of the letters and a preparedness to help shape them into a book that was to be for a general, rather than a scholarly, readership. She even suggested combining some of her own letters and rewriting sections of them to improve the narrative flow. Blackman did not regard the proposal as inappropriate because the letters were hers, and she had already used quite a few of them as the basis for other memoir pieces, in some cases almost word for word. The account of her second marriage, in her 1997 memoir *Glass After Glass: Autobiographical Reflections*, for example, is taken almost entirely from a letter she wrote to Wright shortly after the event.¹⁹ Blackman regarded the correspondence as a key element of her life story, and a complement to *Glass After Glass*; she did not regard her own letters

¹⁶ Liz Stanley, “Schreiner’s Letters—Project Overview,” section 4, paragraph 13 (accessed 15 March 2013).

¹⁷ Robert McGill, “Biographical Desire and the Archives of Living Authors,” *Auto/Biography Studies* 24, no 1 (2009): 142, 137. McGill notes the influence of mass media, the rise of literary celebrity and changing attitudes to privacy, as well as the increasing expectation that authors will discuss publicly their lives as well as their work.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁹ Barbara Blackman to Judith Wright, 6 August 1990, Correspondence of Barbara Blackman with Judith Wright 1950–1998, National Library of Australia, MS 9589, Box 1.

as sacrosanct primary sources, and was open to editorial advice regarding their style and content. I dissuaded her from rewriting some of the letters, while at the same time appreciating her keenness to do so. Such editorial intervention by letter writers themselves has a long history. Alexander Pope, Laurence Sterne and Horace Walpole were but three literary figures who engaged in this practice. And as Richard Altick has observed, all three regarded a private letter as “a literary exercise which was entitled to all the improvement, by way of additional wit and polish, that its creator wanted to lavish on it.”²⁰ Letters, after all, are often performance pieces, written initially for an audience of one.

Blackman and I had worked together previously, when I commissioned and published her memoir *Glass After Glass* in 1997. She is a writer, librettist and oral historian and was for thirty years married to painter Charles Blackman. I never met Judith Wright, who was one of Australia’s best-known poets and writers and a dedicated environmentalist and champion of indigenous rights. In 1950, the two women began a correspondence that lasted until Wright’s death in June 2000. In October 2000, Blackman contacted me about the letters she and Wright had written to each other, over fifty years, and of which more than three hundred still existed. Some of these had already served as source material for their respective autobiographies.

Blackman and Wright first met in Brisbane in the late 1940s, where Judith addressed one of the Sunday afternoon meetings of the Barjai group of young writers and read from her first collection of unpublished poems, “The Moving Image.” She had been invited to the meeting with her partner, philosopher Jack McKinney, who gave a paper on “emotional honesty.” Blackman, herself a budding writer and poet, was mesmerised by the speakers, and introduced herself to Wright, beginning a lifelong friendship. In her words, “I breathed their book-lined air and plunged into their bottomless questioning at Quantum, the little bush house on the long red mountain road at Tamborine. I loved their wordiness and their quirky humour.... She of the faraway voice and I of the faraway face did not find our lacks obstructive to the deepening roots of friendship.”²¹ When both women lived in the same city, visits and telephone calls nurtured their friendship, thereby creating gaps in the correspondence. The letters of both women form a bell curve, peaking in the 1960s, when the Blackman family was living in London, and Wright, with her husband Jack McKinney and daughter Meredith, was at Mount Tamborine, then an isolated community in Queensland’s Gold Coast hinterland.

The written word, the letter form, clearly suited both women. Several of Blackman’s letters to Judith from the 1950s are handwritten. However,

²⁰ Richard Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 201.

²¹ Barbara Blackman, *Glass After Glass: Autobiographical Reflections* (Melbourne: Penguin 1997), 110–11.

Blackman's deteriorating eyesight (she was certified blind in her early twenties and given a disability pension) meant that she had to master first a typewriter and then a computer. Her occasionally erratic typing in earlier letters resulted in unintended humour and malapropisms; much of her idiosyncratic spelling subsequently disappeared as efficient word-processing programs "tidied up" after her. These early errors were much enjoyed by Wright and her husband Jack McKinney: "By the way, your typing is very Barbara. I specially like the bit about the planets being pigments of the imagination."²²

Wright's increasing deafness, mirroring Blackman's sensory deprivation, meant that letter writing became her preferred means of communication with friends, even though she could read lips to some degree and wore hearing aids.²³ She wrote to Blackman about the barriers to communication: "I do think visiting is not a proposition for us now—how could we possibly communicate? I wouldn't hear you and you couldn't see me.... So I just wave to you in my mind knowing you can't see me and if you did I couldn't hear you."²⁴ Blackman, whom Wright described as being "blind and sociable,"²⁵ responded, "Dear friend, a kiss is still a kiss, a hug is still a hug. Of course we shall meet and embrace again."²⁶ One of Blackman's final letters to Wright was exchanged in person over coffee in Canberra's Botanical Gardens: Blackman tore a piece of paper into a heart shape and wrote the words "I love you" on it, then tucked it into Wright's hand. Although it created a moving conclusion to *Portrait of a Friendship*, the actual "letter" has not survived, only Blackman's recollection of the exchange. A scholarly editor, by comparison, might have referred to the incident but not treated the exchange as a letter.

From the 1980s, both women had begun to sort and archive their personal papers, each with the intention of writing autobiographies. They also agreed to return each other's letters to gain "the sense of a life retrieved ... [through] the great fixative of experience ... the fossils of feeling."²⁷ Blackman, who approached enthusiastically her writing of *Glass After Glass*, observed: "Now I can look back through this accumulated evidence of my past. I can begin the return journey, the

²² Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 22 September 1956, NLA.

²³ Wright had been diagnosed with otosclerosis in her late twenties.

²⁴ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 19 March 1998, NLA.

²⁵ Comment from Barbara Blackman, July 2001.

²⁶ Barbara Blackman to Judith Wright, 6 April 1998, NLA.

²⁷ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Picador, 1994), 110. Copyright law in Australia allows for the letter writers to retain ownership of the words and the recipient to retain ownership of the paper on which those words are written. Some of Judith's letters were difficult to obtain because several had been addressed jointly to Barbara and her then husband, the artist Charles Blackman; the company now administering Charles Blackman's affairs (the Blackmans were divorced in 1981) initially claimed joint ownership of these letters.

autobiographical archaeological dig.... The way forward is the way back. We turn what has happened into stories, mythologise them as memory.”²⁸

Wright, by comparison, seems to have undertaken autobiographical writing unwillingly, in order to head off would-be biographers: “If anyone ever writes a book about me, I shall come back and haunt them with screams over the telephone, like these outer-space screams that women telephonists are getting with the new Telecom equipment.”²⁹ A few years later she wrote, “I’m trying to anticipate my stealthy self-proposed biographer lady who has warned me she is on my trail, by doing at least some of the job myself to get in ahead of her. As I simply don’t want my biography written in any case, an autobiog. [*sic*] seems the only answer, but what a nuisance.”³⁰

After publishing some autobiographical pieces in literary journals, Wright put aside this form of writing, although she did make her drafts available to HarperCollins publishers, who commissioned an authorised biography of her in the early 1990s. Ironically, because of her dissatisfaction with that book, *South of My Days*, Wright agreed to the publication in 1999 of her part-autobiography *Half a Lifetime*, covering the first forty years of her life. In the epilogue, writing in the third person, she spoke not of the pleasures of such writing but of the problems: “The act of creating autobiography is far more dangerous to the psyche of the autobiographer than she realised when she agreed to start the job. She knew even then that the construction of ‘I’ is endless ... every kind of avoidance, misinterpretation, deliberate forgetfulness, dodge and evasion, aggrandising viewpoint, use of other people and of time and event to cloud the issues, was waiting below the surface of the mind and the text.”³¹ Wright’s observations on the writing of autobiography are ruefully candid but also disingenuous. Publishers regard autobiography as the most saleable form of life writing, especially when written by the well known and the well regarded, as Wright was. Her autobiography and Blackman’s had sold well, in the process creating a market for further books about them. Wright had even begun work on a second volume of autobiography, which was still in rough draft form at the time of her death in June 2000.

Her daughter and literary executor, Meredith McKinney, initially intended to develop the sequel to *Half a Lifetime*, in collaboration with editor and historian Patricia Clarke. They concluded, however, that a letter collection would be, in McKinney’s words, “a better way of filling the gap, since the extant correspondence

²⁸ Blackman, *Glass After Glass*, 6–7.

²⁹ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 25 June 1981, NLA.

³⁰ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 23 September 1984, NLA. This “self-proposed biographer lady” is not identified in the correspondence, but was not Veronica Brady, who wrote the authorised biography *South of My Days*.

³¹ Judith Wright, *Half a Lifetime* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999), 291.

... got going at about the time *Half a Lifetime* finished.”³² In the process of selecting letters, McKinney and Clarke aroused Barbara Blackman’s interest in publishing her own letters to and from Wright as a narrative of women’s friendship. Blackman considered that this two-way correspondence would be quite distinct from McKinney and Clarke’s intention to focus on “the rich variety of selves that evolved through [Wright’s] long life,”³³ and to convey “some of the flavour of her enduring relationships and friendships and the range of her passions and interests.”³⁴ Their decision to proceed with a letter collection rather than attempting to flesh out the fragments of Wright’s unpublished autobiography also presented a solution to the problem of how to deal with Wright’s relationship with H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs, with whom she had a long-standing affair in her later years, after the death of her husband, Jack McKinney, in 1966.³⁵ Apart from a cryptic reference in the introduction to the collection (“circumstances have dictated that those with her dear friend of later years, Nugget Coombs, remain almost entirely unrepresented in this volume”) and the inclusion of several letters concerned with common political interests, there is no reference to their personal relationship, which was a well-known, though well-kept, secret in literary and political circles.³⁶ It is a major omission from *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright* (2006). Now that the embargo on this correspondence has been lifted, these letters could be edited for publication.

McKinney and Clarke removed much family discussion from the letters included in *With Love and Fury*, particularly references to children in Wright’s letters to Blackman, and about Meredith McKinney’s teenage years and—by her own admission—questionable taste in boyfriends. As literary executor as well as daughter, McKinney had a personal interest in removing such references. These editorial decisions give a less personal tone to Wright’s correspondence, while focusing on the nature and range of her literary and political interests and providing

³² Email from Meredith McKinney, 24 January 2012. (Having read this material, I agree that the fragments were unpublishable.)

³³ Meredith McKinney, Introduction to *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, edited by Patricia Clarke and Meredith McKinney (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2006), xiv. Wright regularly wrote up to a dozen letters a day.

³⁴ Ibid., Editor’s Note, xv.

³⁵ H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs (1906–1997) was a highly regarded public figure: an economist, a prime ministerial advisor, a governor of the Reserve Bank, a chancellor of the ANU, and a champion of indigenous rights. The draft fragments of Wright’s autobiography clearly show that she herself struggled with the issue of her relationship with Coombs, although there are disguised references to it in poetry written in her later years.

³⁶ *With Love and Fury*, Introduction, xiv. Judith destroyed many of Coombs’s letters to her, concerned that they would fall into the wrong hands. Those she kept were embargoed in her papers until 2009, three years after the death of Coombs’s wife, Mary. Veronica Brady’s 1998 authorised biography of Wright, *South of My Days*, also skirted the issue, as did Tim Rowse’s 2002 biography, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life*.

“an important memorial to the life of a great Australian.”³⁷ By comparison, Blackman and I were of the opinion that the strengths of the Blackman/Wright correspondence were not only the quality of the writing, but also the manner in which Blackman and Wright mixed the public and the private, giving an intimate and less guarded reading of their lives. Their conversations ranged across the full extent of their lives, touching on drought, conservation, indigenous Australians, land rights, politics in the art and literary worlds, gardening, love, marriage, divorce and death, the problems of juggling parenting and working.

I strove to give each correspondent an equal voice, even though Wright had the higher public profile. This was not always easy. Wright was no longer alive and able to speak for herself when the editorial process was underway; Meredith McKinney acted on her mother’s behalf, balancing roles as literary executor as well as daughter. Blackman, however, had strong opinions on how the letters should be presented, and was aware that she would also become the marketing department’s “talking head” when the book was released.³⁸ Inevitably, my own perspective of this epistolary exchange was biased towards Blackman because of our existing relationship.

As is usually the case with a letter archive, a basic structure had been defined for me in the Blackman/Wright collection by what had survived. A selection process of sorts had already taken place that arose out of a number of factors: the passing of time, tidiness, or lack of care, anger, lack of interest, and concerns for privacy. Blackman confessed to having thrown out some of Wright’s letters soon after receiving them because the contents had annoyed her. Wright tended not to keep personal correspondence, and despised those who sold it: “I DO NOT SELL OTHER PEOPLE’S LETTERS though there are certainly many who do and libraries seem to encourage this vicious practice.”³⁹ Some letters consisted of only a few lines, others ran to several pages, still others were in fragments. But they are what remain. We are all, to varying degrees, in thrall to what Deirdre Bair refers to as “the tyranny of the printed document.”⁴⁰ It is partly the smell, perhaps, and also the tactile pleasure of handling old paper, aerograms, cards, deciphering handwriting and the clotted keystrokes of old typewriters. In these items we are more inclined to “see” the writer, so different from what Sylvia Plath biographer Janet Malcolm describes as “the marmoreally cool and smooth letters young people write to one another today on their Macintoshes and IBMs.”⁴¹

³⁷ Back cover copy, *With Love and Fury*.

³⁸ It is easier for publishers to garner media coverage for new books if there is an author (the talking head) available for interviewing and profiling.

³⁹ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 12 March 1986, NLA.

⁴⁰ Deirdre Bair, “Samuel Beckett” in *The Craft of Literary Biography*, edited by Jeffrey Meyers (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 212.

⁴¹ Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*, 103.

The Blackman/Wright archive contained letters in all of these forms. It also increased in size during the several years I worked on it. Packets of Blackman's letters were found during house moves, some were folded into books, and still others were in the possession of family members. My supreme moment of archival pleasure occurred when I was given a notebook by Blackman, to look through in my own time, while we were still searching for letters to fill chronological gaps in the collection. I carefully opened the fragile notebook on the flight home from Canberra to Melbourne. In it, I discovered not only letters but also several exquisite charcoal sketches by Charles Blackman dating from the 1950s. To have found letters of Blackman's written in the early years of her marriage to Charles Blackman, tucked away with his sketches, imbued my reading of the correspondence with an intensely personal and romantic aura. These were letters and sketches from a happier period in their relationship. Had I come across these letters in a different context, filed chronologically in an archive box without the sketches, the reading experience would not have been so moving.

The size of the final archive meant that I moved fairly quickly from a white-glove approach to assessing what could be cut, despite having initially been constrained by the reverence one accords original documents. I had to convince both Blackman and McKinney that the full manuscript of transcribed Blackman/Wright letters, which ran to over 320,000 words, would have to be cut substantially in order to meet the requirements of commercial publishing. In printed form, such a manuscript would have translated to a book of at least a thousand pages: expensive to produce, cumbersome to hold and to read, and therefore difficult to sell. With the agreement of both, I cut almost eighty thousands words from the manuscript—much of it material that was defamatory, repetitious or concerned with sensitive family matters. At all times, however, I aimed to “preserve both [women's] voices and also the range of the original letters.”⁴² The style or voice of a letter is of particular importance to Blackman. Letters she receives have to be read aloud to her. She believes that more is revealed in a letter if one is familiar with the author's voice and can imagine the author “speaking” the letter. In the process of reading to her myself, I came to realise that the use of italics, bolding and capitals does not truly reproduce irony, anger or surprise. And neither does the use of dashes or ellipses truly indicate discretion, hesitation or silence. The third-party reader of the letter must interpret the language and the punctuation, an interpretation that might not be what the writer intended.

Because *Portrait of a Friendship* was intended, from the start, for a general readership, the editing is silent. I placed greater emphasis on the ease of reading the letters in order to give readers the experience of eavesdropping on a broad-ranging conversation. As I explained in the preface: “Some letters have been

⁴² *Portrait of a Friendship*, xv.

removed entirely, and others have been edited to remove repetition, material of a highly personal nature and minor characters and events in the narrative. These deletions are not indicated in the text.”⁴³ I decided against the use of ellipses to indicate excised material because I considered them an intrusion upon the experience of reading a letter in published form. And an editor’s ellipsis does not show exactly how much or how little of the original text has been removed—a word, a sentence, a paragraph or even a page—and provides no explanation for the editorial decision to cut. The reader is thus made aware of editorial interventions but has no way of knowing the extent of these or the reasoning behind them. I corrected much (but not all) of the grammar, spelling and punctuation—the sorts of errors that creep into everyone’s letters and can distract a reader from the actual content. Blackman felt particularly strongly about this, as she thought her typing errors made her look careless, and even worse, foolish. Occasionally, I had to decode her original typing where she had placed her hands over the wrong line of keys. To have left such sentences in their original form would have made those letters difficult, if not impossible, to read and to appreciate. These were not letters that would have been suited to facsimile publication.

An uneasy relationship between creativity and commerce threads through the publishing process. Unlike authors, who work towards the completion of a final manuscript, publishers work backwards from a release date; they visualise the finished book, including its cover and format, and the readers for whom it is intended. Key costing decisions are made in accordance with these practices: working to an allocated budget for editing, design and printing; creating a production schedule tied to the publication date; and calculating a proposed number of pages from which the recommended retail price for the book is set. Paula R. Backscheider describes these as the “unpleasant questions from the culture and publishing world ... [that] trigger nightmares during the writing.”⁴⁴

In deciding to present the Blackman/Wright letters as portraying women’s friendship I was aware that such a classification would be more marketable than collected or selected letters; it would also suit a Mothers’ Day release date. I had to convince Blackman and McKinney that such an approach would do justice to the correspondence, while accepting that it would emphasise a particular friendship to the exclusion of other relationships in both women’s lives. And the publisher who accepted the Blackman/Wright manuscript had to convince an acquisitions meeting at the Miegunyah Press that there was a market for a book of letters that told the story of a fond and longstanding female friendship between two women with public profiles. The fact that both women had already published

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 edition), 38.

autobiographies worked to our advantage because it meant that a book of their letters to each other could be marketed as a companion volume.

The cover line on *Portrait of a Friendship* states, rather sweepingly, "The engaging, passionate exchange between two of Australia's finest writers." This is a marketing approach also adopted by those editing more intentionally scholarly editions. Carole Ferrier's edited collection of letters *As Good As a Yarn With You*, between women writers Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, is described as "a narrative, capturing ... social and political issues, as well as discussing literary styles and successes and confronting difficult personal questions.... [It] will be welcomed by the general reader."⁴⁵ Marilla North subtitled *Yarn Spinners*, her edited collection of letters between writers Florence James, Dymphna Cusack and Miles Franklin, "a story in letters,"⁴⁶ and Ferrier described North's collection as "much like a novel about the lives of women writers."⁴⁷ Publishers attempt to market these collections as a cohesive narrative while also emphasising the archival content, and the sense of entering into a private life by reading letters not originally intended for one's eyes. This appeal to a voyeuristic fascination for archives and the opportunity to read private papers is also evident in publishers' choices of typeface and layout on the printed page. The letters in *Portrait of a Friendship* were set ragged right, deliberately, to give the letters more of the look of the original correspondence, even though this page design is less economical than fully justified text that fits more words on a page.

By comparison, the text of *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*, marketed as a form of autobiography, was set justified. These design decisions also reflect the respective publishers' larger concern that the two books should not compete in the market. Release dates were separated by six months, with the agreement of the publishing companies concerned, who directed their marketing strategies and cover designs to emphasise each book's unique features rather than their similarities. *With Love and Fury* was given a traditional, photographic cover, using an image of the young Wright. *Portrait of a Friendship* was jacketed with a vibrant painting of a blue armchair on a red background, by Melbourne artist Katherine Hattam. The cover choice itself provided an engaging, and marketable, personal anecdote when the publisher discovered that Blackman was acquainted with the Hattam family and had sat in that very chair.

Inevitably, there was some crossover. Thirty-two of Wright's letters to Blackman were included in *With Love and Fury*. However, Wright's friendship

⁴⁵ *As Good As a Yarn With You*, edited by Carole Ferrier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁴⁶ *Yarn Spinners: A Story in Letters*, edited by Marilla North (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ Carole Ferrier, "Literary Lives in Letters," *National Library of Australia News* xi, no. 11 (August 2001): 16.

with Blackman was but one element of that collection. By contrast, and as the title suggests, this particular relationship was to be the main focus of *Portrait of a Friendship*. Reviewers of the latter work noted the different but complementary writing styles of Blackman and Wright: "The real pleasure of reading these letters derives from the difference between these two women: Judith so self-sufficient, precise and quiet in rapture; Barbara so forthcoming, sensitive and extravagantly emotional. Yet they are both writers of such independent cast their letters show their characters and in this way give the reader equal pleasure in the balance of their friendship."⁴⁸

The narrative flow provided by this two-way correspondence, in which topics were tossed back and forth, also provided a very different reading experience from that of *With Love and Fury*, in which the responses of the recipients of Wright's letters are not included. The importance of context, or lack of it, is obvious when one compares the placement of a particular letter that appears, in full, in both books. In a letter from Wright to Blackman, dated 22 March 1990, it is clear the women have had a disagreement:

Your letter saying "I write with a sense of rebuke" has me floored completely—I don't know what it means. So I'm writing to say I didn't intend any such reading—surely I thanked you in the letter? So let me know what wording is responsible for the misinterpretation and what I said or didn't say that has upset you.⁴⁹

The full text of Wright's letter appears in *With Love and Fury*, set between those written on 29 January 1990 to poet Rosemary Dobson and on 7 April 1990 to environmentalist and painter Kathleen McArthur; both of the letters discuss unrelated matters. The letter from Blackman that triggered the above response from Wright concerned a weekend seminar that Blackman was planning on Wright's work. Wright wished her well but declined to be involved, which upset Blackman: "It hurts me, however, that you write with a sense of rebuke, as though my invitation were itself an intrusion. I know, and you tell me in every letter, how put-upon you are by people wanting you to go here and there and do this and that for them. I feel you count me among these."⁵⁰ From the full exchange one gathers that Blackman feels Wright is not acknowledging the close nature of their friendship or Blackman's interest in and support for Wright's work. When reading Wright's letter on its own, one senses, primarily, her annoyance at the request being made of her.

The manner in which the respective editors have chosen to use (and not to use) ellipses presents the most striking comparison between the published versions of the thirty-two letters written by Wright that appear in both *Portrait of a Friendship*

⁴⁸ Lisa Gorton, "Have I really lived through all this?," *Australian Book Review* (July/August 2007): 10.

⁴⁹ Judith Wright to Barbara Blackman, 22 March 1990, NLA.

⁵⁰ Barbara Blackman to Judith Wright, 17 March 1990, NLA.

and *With Love and Fury*. The editorial methods have produced different shadow letters. To take just a single example—a letter of 18 May 1961 is just under 1500 words in its original form. My edit reduced the letter to 1000 words; McKinney and Clarke's edit reduced the letter to 870 words. In neither edition is it possible to deduce what or how much has been omitted. This letter opens very differently in the two edited versions. McKinney and Clarke removed the first, quite lengthy paragraph, in which Wright refers to a letter from Blackman she has just received, discusses a new typewriter and describes work on a children's book she (Wright) is writing. As my aim, however, was to emphasise the ongoing friendship between the two women, I retained this paragraph and many other references to each other's letters and matters that were discussed over several exchanges. And although Meredith McKinney read and approved the edited manuscript for *Portrait*, I was not privy to decisions made concerning letters to be included in *With Love and Fury*. At no stage did we as editors compare notes. Our intentions were to direct the books to linked but different sections of an admittedly small market for literary letters. The broader appeal of *Portrait of a Friendship* resulted in sales more than double those achieved by *With Love and Fury*.⁵¹

After publication of *With Love and Fury* (2006) and *Portrait of a Friendship* (2007), only one reviewer, Susan Sheridan, made mention of the letters that appeared in both volumes and queried the intentions of the respective editors. *Portrait of a Friendship* informed an aspect of the research being undertaken by Sheridan into Australian women writers born between 1912 and 1928. She presented a paper on the Blackman/Wright correspondence at a symposium titled "To the Letter: Contemporary Perspectives on Epistolarity," held at Flinders University, Adelaide, in April 2008, twelve months after publication of the two editions. She acknowledged the fact that "In taking as my text the published letters ... these reflections address already-mediated materials, letters that have been selected from a larger archive" and silently edited. In her discussion of the editing, she also compared the treatment of letters that appeared in both *Portrait of a Friendship* and *With Love and Fury: Selected Letters of Judith Wright*:

it is intriguing to see the kinds of things each editor leaves out. Cosgrove retains most of the details of personal life, fortunately, but she sometimes omits names. For example, when Wright commented, after reading Lorca, that she wishes she'd been a good surrealist "instead of a rather tedious middle-class writer," she went on "(But I am better than people like Evan Jones and Charles Higham, even at my most abysmal)" (*With Love and Fury* 129). This may have been a comparison that Cosgrove deemed odious and omitted, yet it conveys Judith's sense of her own value with her characteristically astringent tone.⁵²

⁵¹ Information provided by publishers.

⁵² Susan Sheridan, "A Friendship in Letters: The Correspondence of Judith Wright and Barbara Blackman," *Life Writing* 8, no. 2 (2011): 206.

On the contrary, the reason for my omission was not to avoid odious comparison but, more mundanely, to save space. Jones and Higham appeared nowhere else in either Blackman's or Wright's letters and I therefore did not wish to include them in the final manuscript, with the necessary footnote.⁵³ A different editor might not have used that criterion, of course, or might have attended to the need to save space in different ways. Sheridan's comparison raises valid points about differing editorial styles, but does not acknowledge the necessarily commercial nature of publishing decisions, all of which are influenced by market and production costs.

All epistolary editors, whether scholars, trade editors, or family members, add other layers of meaning to published letter collections through decisions concerning content, interpretation, presentation and market. Even as they work with the original author's voice, editors inevitably produce different versions of the correspondence: shadow letters. These should not be read as primary sources but rather as another form of the originals, related but not quite the same, and with an appreciation of the intended market. As the case studies I have analysed illustrate, published letter collections, to varying degrees, are constructed texts. The manner in which this 'construction' is achieved—silently by the trade editor and not so silently by the scholarly editor—is determined primarily by the intended readership and the commercial constraints of publishing, both trade and scholarly.

⁵³ After we had discussed the reason for the omission, Sheridan adjusted her comments slightly, before publication of her paper and subsequent book, *Nine Lives: Postwar Women Writers Making their Mark* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2011).

Conclusion

The publishing of women's letter collections involves both art and artifice, in which original documents become mediated versions, or shadow letters, primarily through the intervention of literary executors, editors and publishers, each of whom must align competing interests in the process of creating the finished book.

Publishers are cultural gatekeepers in an industry that represents an uneasy relationship between creativity and commerce. Their decisions are informed equally by what they see as the demand for a book and the most cost-effective way in which to meet this demand, both of which impact on the processes of editing, production and marketing books. My four main case studies, included as published articles with this thesis, were chosen specifically to enable me to explore in greater detail the publishing practices, the archival constraints imposed by both family and literary executors, and the outcomes for a range of Australian women's letter collections, from commercial bestseller to academic work.

Women's letter collections have been marketed variously as personal journeys contained by friendship, love, marriage and the family; as travel writing with a sensitive touch; and as the often overlooked voices from below that present another version of history. However, it is the imposition of a narrative, frequently described as novel-like, coupled with the voyeurism that colours the reading of any correspondence not initially intended for one's eyes, that are the means by which publishers market women's letter collections. They are described as 'intimate', 'revealing', 'insightful', 'unguarded' and 'original'.

Those Australian women's letter collections that have sold exceptionally well have been presented as self-contained narratives, and have undergone extensive structural editing in order to achieve this effect. Rachel Henning's letters, for example, were edited into a sweeping pioneer narrative concluding with a love story, with Henning herself having the sharp edges smoothed from her character to make her far more appealing in published form. And Gwen Harwood's *Blessed City* presents a witty, charming and fond friendship between a young poet and a man who remained important to her throughout her life. The fact that Harwood's letters read like a one-sided love affair has added to their appeal over the years.

The editors of scholarly letter collections tend not to take such liberties with original material, however they are still subject to the commercial constraints of publishing, often having to cut manuscripts by as much as a third and foregoing the intrusion of extensive footnotes and contextual annotations.

The personal and domestic focus of women's letter collections generally, and the lack of Australian collections specifically has meant that the genre did not engage the attention of those involved with the establishment of feminist presses and women's studies courses in Australia in the early 1970s. Feminist presses were constrained by the same financial decision-making processes of larger commercial presses when considering women's letter collections for publication. It was not until the late 1980s, when the works of neglected female writers began to be brought back into print that female academics began to research the associated letter archives of these writers, the published letter collections that resulted thus tending to be more the preserve of literary studies. *Letters From Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926* remains a rare example of women's personal letters that also possess a distinctive political context.

The fact that published letter collections are mediated works subjected to layers of intervention is clearly the case with books, but this intervention also applies to archival collections. They are shaped by what materials have survived, by what was donated, by what was accessioned, and then by what literary executors will allow access to. Family control in particular can have a major impact on what is released for publication. And while the online archival collection may not be subjected to the same cost constraints as traditional book publication, documents that are placed on open access must be curated. There are archivists' fingerprints all over these collections as there are editors' fingerprints all over published books.

A major attraction of the online letter collection is the scanned original document, displaying choice of writing paper, handwriting, and various embellishments that disappear in typeset form. These are the collections that would reveal Rachel Henning's erratic spelling and impolite comments about members of her own family; Barbara Blackman's malapropisms caused by her placing her hands over the wrong line of typewriter keys; drafts of Judith Wright's poems included in letters as part of a day's work; Gwen Harwood's wickedly funny annotations; and the heartbreaking care taken by Indigenous women in the writing of letters concerning their families

and their living conditions. The online reading experience is intensely visual even if it is not tactile.

Yet at the same time as the digital archiving and digital publishing of letters is thriving, letter writing is a less common practice, along with the skill and individuality of cursive handwriting. Emails and text messages look generic, even if the content is not. Personal letter writing has become a self-conscious art form, with a growth in instruction books on how to write letters for every occasion, nostalgically reminiscent of the letter-writing manuals that were popular in the eighteenth century. Facsimile letter publishing, in which online websites and associated limited-edition books, such as the Letters of Note collections, appeal directly to a perceived sense of loss for a slower, and more considered and personal means of communication.

In published form, letters offer the reader both a sense of immediacy and a voice from the past, seemingly fixed and yet open to interpretation in the hope that they will reveal something of the correspondent, of the recipient, and of the time and place of writing. Women's published letter collections, particular, engage us with the seduction of a narrative, however fleeting, subjective, and potentially unreliable. Epistolary editors and publishers play key roles in this engagement and seduction of readers, a practice made more poignant by the decline in the art of letter writing itself.

Appendix 1

Australian Letter Collections Published Since 1950

This list is divided into five sections, based on the identity of the primary author. The first two are 'Women', denoting collections concentrating on the correspondence of individual females, and 'Men', on the correspondence by individual males. Within each of these I have marked (*) those that are between a primary author and a limited number of individual correspondents of the same gender. The remaining three sections are based around collections between 'Women and Men', 'Family' and general 'Anthologies'.

Women

1951/52 *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, edited by David Adams with 40 pen drawings by Norman Lindsay, *Bulletin*, Sydney, reprinted 1954

1963 *The Letters of Rachel Henning*, edited by David Adams, illustrated by Norman Lindsay, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, reprinted in **1966** and then as an illustrated hardback, not with the Lindsay drawings, in 1986 (reprinted by Penguin Books Australia in **1969** and **1986**; as an abridged version for children by Thomas Nelson in **1979**; by Angus & Robertson in **1986**; by Penguin in **1988** as part of the Penguin Australian Women's Library; released as an ebook by Project Gutenberg Australia in **2006**; remains in print as a US-published hardback)

1963 *Remembered With Affection: a new edition of Lady Broome's 'Letters to Guy'*, with notes and a short life by Alexandra Hasluck, illustrated by Alison Forbes, Oxford University Press, Melbourne

1975 *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers: the life and letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard*, Ric Throssell, Angus & Robertson, Sydney

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