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The Female Gaze: Australian Women Historians' Autobiographies

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A striking number of Australian women have ventured into the autobiographical genre. While a slew of immigrant men were producing their personal odysseys of pioneering endeavour and the exploration and appropriation of a new land in the nineteenth century, a regiment of women from diverse backgrounds began to record their remembered experiences and specific local responses to colonial life. The women's stories were very different. Franker, relational, concerned with childhood, people and places, some masquerading as regional or local history, in a strongly masculine society they were often judged as 'unimportant' or 'trivial' and not given publication at the time of writing. But they came to lay the foundation of 'a complementary culture' to male autobiography with its ongoing emphasis on national identity and image, and they have been judged by literary and historical scholars as a rich and unique reading experience.¹

1 Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), Introduction. This source provides a rich study of Australian autobiography.

Turning to women historians in Australia, their contribution to the autobiographical genre across the twentieth century stands well within this tradition. The focus of their work remains strongly linked to reminiscences of childhood; to personal influences, relationships and places; and, by the 1980s, to an emerging awareness of the advent of professional careers. Yet, it is important to note that many decades before professional training for women became available, two earlier women strode the stage in linking their personal lives to national meaning. The first was the electoral reformer, prominent social commentator, journalist and writer in South Australia, Catherine Helen Spence, who in her *An Autobiography* published in 1910, at the age of 85, claimed firmly that her life and career had identified her 'with the evolution of South Australia from a province to an important state in the commonwealth', and ended with the strong words, 'by my writings and my spoken addresses, I showed that one woman had a steady grasp on politics and on sociology'.² The second woman was Dame Mary Gilmore – teacher, writer, influential commentator – who, in her two autobiographical works in 1934–35, *Old Days, Old Ways* and *More Recollections*, saw herself firmly as a 'tribal mother' in the contemporary male world and as 'the wise old woman with a unique understanding of the past'.³

Several decades later, the distinguished public figure Maie Casey, publishing her memoir *An Australian Story 1837–1907* in 1962, offered a different mode in representing her special connection to the country's historical past. Casey made her own childhood her autobiographical baseline, and worked backwards through her family history so as to situate it within the evolution of Australia. She used what she describes as 'a mixture of record and memory' in which, by means of research among historical documents and letters, family myth, and personal memory, she hoped to place and secure her own, her family's and her country's identities, and preserve them from disappearance.⁴

2 Catherine Helen Spence, *An Autobiography* (Adelaide: W. Thomas Printer, 1910), 100.

3 Mary Gilmore, *Old Days, Old Ways: A Book of Recollections* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1934); Gilmore, *More Recollections* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1935). W.H. Wilde, 'Gilmore, Dame Mary Jean (1865–1962)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gilmore-dame-mary-jean-6391/text10923, published first in hardcopy 1983 (accessed 10 August 2015).

4 Maie Casey, *An Australian Story, 1837–1907* (London: Michael Joseph, 1962); see also Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young*, 71–3.

From a singularly different background, yet impelled by a kindred drive to capture and contain the true Australian essence, in this case of 'the humble workers of the outback', the populist historian Patsy Adam-Smith published her autobiographical *Hear the Train Blow* in 1964. Adam-Smith was brought up during the Depression in a railway fettler family as an adopted daughter, a biological fact she did not learn until her teens. The concept of social identity and recognition, united with her need for a personal sense of belonging and of historical remembrance, lay at the heart of her autobiography. Writing in a later edition, she affirmed: 'In some ways it is as though *we* never lived. There is no monument to the toilers of a land and they wouldn't expect it. But a nation will be poorer if it forgets them.'⁵ Her book, rooted in the bush ethos and in the gusto and innovation of the workers, went into a number of editions and enjoyed wide acclaim. It also provided Adam-Smith with the background for her subsequent prolific output of popular Australian historical works (she published 32 books) for which she used manuscripts, oral history and memory in spreading and rehearsing her stories of the railways, ships, workers, Anzacs and prisoners of war.⁶

By the 1980s, trained Australian women historians, moved perhaps by the advances in feminist thinking of the 1970s, were turning to autobiography. Alexandra Hasluck, a graduate of the University of Western Australia, published her *Portrait in a Mirror* (1981). Hasluck had emerged as an independent historian from the late 1950s when the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*) recruited her to the first Western Australian Working Party. Her autobiography was a record as the wife of the politician, later historian, and Governor-General, Paul Hasluck, and of travel and encounters, but she paused to make some passing criticism of a tendency on the part of academic historians ('well-known' ones, she emphasised) to 'requote old errors' and 'retell old stories', without bothering to read new works. Yet this memoir by the first trained female historian proved to be less a reflection of self-endeavour and historical enquiry than a collective relational embrace. Looking into the mirror 'not

5 Patsy Adam-Smith, *Hear the Train Blow: Patsy Adam-Smith's Classic Autobiography of Growing Up in the Bush* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1987), 180 (emphasis added).

6 Adam-Smith's other autobiographical work is also an amalgam of mixed research involving the use of manuscripts, oral testimony and memory. See *There Was a Ship* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1967); *The Barcoo Salute* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973); *When We Rode the Rails* (Sydney: Landsdown, 1983); *Goodbye Girlie* (Ringwood: Viking, 1994).

only does my own face look back at me,' she wrote, 'but also the faces of ancestors and contemporaries, all wanting to get into the picture: and I cannot keep them out'.⁷

In 1983, the University of Melbourne history graduate Amirah Inglis published *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood*, the personal story of her upbringing by Polish Jewish parents to be a communist and a non-religious Jew. An immigrant child and student in Melbourne balancing a deeply entrenched cultural heritage with a new egalitarian setting, her book reveals a complex search for identity between the inherited old world and a society that offered opportunity but also societal challenge. This book, too, made its focus on childhood, the family and girlhood, although at university in 1944, she records, 'it was impossible to avoid the discomforts of being a Jew', but, 'discovering the anti-Semitism of Karl Marx and of Australian trade unionists was', she wrote with candour, 'a miserable experience'.⁸ Inglis's second autobiography published in 1995, *The Hammer & Sickle and the Washing Up*, frames her first marriage to the historian Ian Turner.⁹ A decade later came the voice of another historian migrant, Helga Griffin, a long-time researcher for the *ADB*, drawn this time from a Turkish and German background and faced with a difficult acclimatisation begun in a prisoner-of-war camp. In her *Sing Me that Lovely Song Again ...*, Griffin offered a detailed, penetrating and rigorously investigative account of her early challenges, her Catholic schooling and her emergence through childhood and university to meet her future husband, historian Jim Griffin. Through its many pages, however, it did not touch on her historian's life.¹⁰

In the early 1980s, a selection of Melbourne and Sydney women academic historians, together with professional colleagues from other disciplines, took on the task of describing their experiences and advancement in a male-structured world in *The Half-Open Door*, co-edited by University of Melbourne historian Patricia Grimshaw, and *Against the Odds*, co-edited

7 Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait in a Mirror: An Autobiography* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1. In 1978, Alexandra Hasluck, who had published eight historical books, became the first Dame in the highest rank of the Order of Australia for her services to literature. See Geoffrey Bolton, *Paul Hasluck: A Life* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2014), 465.

8 Amirah Inglis, *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1983), 155.

9 Amirah Inglis, *The Hammer & Sickle and the Washing Up: Memories of an Australian Woman Communist* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1983).

10 Helga Griffin, *Sing Me that Lovely Song Again ...* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2006).

by University of Sydney historian Heather Radi.¹¹ Almost all the women in this scatter of anthropologists, historians, social scientists, scientists and educators were the first members of their families to attend university, and they show an emergent sense of female agency, a depiction of women who, having gained university degrees and taken steps on the academic or professional ladder, viewed themselves as representing, in Grimshaw's words, 'an alternative role model for Australian girls'.¹² Radi, who had been tutoring and researching her PhD at the University of Sydney during the mid-1960s, and then became a conspicuous feminist in the history field, set the tone:

It took some time for me to grow into the work at the University in the sense of doing anything that others did not do as well or better, but I relished the independence which mother had wanted for me, and feared. ... As my interests shifted firmly to Australian History, my experience as a woman and across class and culture was of recurring relevance for my work. I was emotionally ready for Germaine [Greer] and followed friends into the women's movement and began encouraging students to work in the area of women's history. I contributed a segment on women's history to the first women's history course taught at the University of Sydney and had the pleasure of having my recommendations on the inclusion of the study of migrants, Aborigines and women accepted for the Australian History option for HSC [Higher School Certificate] Modern History.¹³

The sense of agency is modest. The male paradigm of selfhood and its concern for 'understanding' and 'making a coherent system out of life' – as seen in Donald Horne's earlier *The Education of Young Donald*¹⁴ – is absent from the women's more tentative narratives. While Horne presents his personal story firmly as 'sociography', the women place themselves in a scheme where their own sense of agency is still compromised but hopeful, their development again rooted largely in their relational pasts.

11 Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan, eds, *The Half-Open Door: Sixteen Australian Women Look at Professional Life and Achievement* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982), 20; Madge Dawson and Heather Radi, eds, *Against the Odds: Fifteen Professional Women Reflect on their Lives & Careers* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984).

12 Patricia Grimshaw, 'Introduction: Professional Women in Twentieth Century Australia', in Grimshaw and Strahan, *The Half-Open Door*, 9.

13 Heather Radi, 'Thanks Mum', in Dawson and Radi, *Against the Odds*, 185. In her chapter ('Thanks Mum', 170–85), Radi paid particular respect to her mother's contribution to her progress. It was a perspective many of the contributors to *The Half-Open Door* and *Against the Odds* shared.

14 Donald Horne, *The Education of Young Donald* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967).

The University of Melbourne historian Kathleen Fitzpatrick contributed to *The Half-Open Door*, but a year later published an autobiography up until her returning from Oxford University to Australia in 1928. It went into several editions and was judged 'a contribution to Australian letters'.¹⁵ Essentially, it was a deep reflection on Fitzpatrick's childhood and girlhood among an extended family at her grandmother's house, 'Hughenden' in Victoria, and her education by Catholic nuns. Beautifully written in her maturity, it gathers remembrance into a social context but leaves her professional life, her ill-fated marriage to Brian Fitzpatrick and her historical writings aside. Fitzpatrick, nonetheless, was one of the very few privileged women to proceed from a degree at the University of Melbourne to Oxford in 1926, where she was affected strongly by the derisive treatment she received from her Oxford dons. Accordingly, she avoided a master's degree and the second-class honours degree she obtained from Oxford profoundly undermined her confidence and sense of self-worth. While she became a greatly admired member of the University of Melbourne's Department of History as a teacher and researcher, her own sense of agency remained conservative and she declined the opportunity of a professorship. 'I have always believed', she ends her chapter 'A Cloistered Life' in *The Half-Open Door*, 'that no one should be appointed to the highest academic rank unless he or she is either a profound and original thinker or a truly erudite person'.¹⁶

In sharp contrast, the Sydney historian Jill Ker Conway marked the arrival of a highly motivated historian and a forceful communicator who, with three books of memoir behind her, would come to dominate the Australian women's autobiographical scene. Her initial venture, *The Road from Coorain*, published in 1989, introduced a newly minted young historian from the University of Sydney in 1958, determinedly steering her path away from the provincialism of Australian life to a richer intellectual experience in the United States. Educated at a private girls' school in Sydney after a childhood in the parched Australian landscape of Hillston, New South Wales, she studied at the University of Sydney in the later 1950s and found the teaching of Australian history 'an exercise

15 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Solid Bluestone Foundations and Other Memories of a Melbourne Girlhood, 1908–1928* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983); *Solid Bluestone Foundations: Memories of an Australian Girlhood* (2nd ed.; Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1986); Fitzpatrick, *Solid Bluestone Foundations: And Other Memories of a Melbourne Girlhood, 1908–1928*, introduced by Susan Davies (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998).

16 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'A Cloistered Life', in Grimshaw and Strahan, *The Half-Open Door*, 133.

in frustration'. She shone in history but her rejection as a university medallist for the cadet corps of the Australian Department of External Affairs deeply marked her, and she dusted her feet of Australia and left the country for a research scholarship at Harvard. *The Road from Coorain* catches her awareness of the need to escape from the cultural attitudes of a patriarchal society that constrained clever women. The book, with its strong intellectual underlay, descriptive power and potent sense of female force, put Ker Conway on the Australian and American map.¹⁷

Her second autobiography, *True North* (1994), traces her scholarly evolution at Harvard, her marriage to the senior Canadian historian, John Conway, and their time at the University of Toronto where she became vice-principal. Already a broad scholar of American women, Ker Conway was sought out at the age of 39 to become the first woman president of Smith College, setting the stage for a dynamic period of growth at this then conservative women's institution. Her book *A Woman's Education* (2001) is in part a personal story but also a record of her successful administration at Smith College. Drawing on her own hard pastoral background, she wrote with spirit: 'I could learn what I needed to know to deal with almost any problem.' Candid, informing and interrogative, a certain solipsism, however, marks the narrative. Ker Conway herself took up American citizenship; however, for an Australian audience, her three memoirs – both in their recording and their genre – offer a key illustration of the pertinence of confident feminine thinking.¹⁸

There appears sometimes a work that, differing in perspective and evocative in character, claims a special place in our historiography. One such is historian Jan Bassett's *The Facing Island*. Drawing upon letters she had written to her since deceased grandmother Edie, a resident of Phillip Island in Port Phillip Bay, enabled Bassett to reconstruct her own life as a grandchild on the island. Interlacing chapters, meanwhile, introduced into the narrative the letters her grandmother had received when a girl from a young New Zealand soldier who, in August 1916, dropped a message in a bottle in Bass Strait on his route to the First World War. Relational and sociological in conveying these profoundly intergenerational recollections, Bassett also infuses her book with her own intellectual curiosity and

17 Jill Ker Conway, *The Road from Coorain: An Australian Memoir* (Adelaide and New York: Heinemann and Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), quotation from 184.

18 Jill Ker Conway, *True North: A Memoir* (London: Hutchinson, 1994); Ker Conway, *A Woman's Education* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 70.

passion for travel and with allusion to her historical researches on the lives and experiences of Australian war nurses across the twentieth century.¹⁹ Throughout, her writing is tempered by the knowledge that she is facing death from cancer at the age of 46 and by her concern to make sense of her life. At one time a teacher of history at La Trobe University and a researcher at the University of Melbourne, she reflects, 'I have measured out my life in books', and concludes: 'I considered that I had served an apprenticeship as a historian and was ready to put my skills to further use. I had published a number of books, was working on another, and had plans for lots more.'²⁰ Jan Bassett died in 1999 without seeing her evocative personal story in print.

In surveying the reach of women historians' autobiographical writings in Australia, I have found great resonance and a distinctive connection between author and the craft of writing history in Inga Clendinnen's *Tiger's Eye*. Renowned historian of the Aztecs and Maya of Mexico, Clendinnen, a Melbourne academic, fell dangerously ill in her early 50s and, after a liver transplant, spent months of hospitalisation in which she endured what she calls 'unscheduled and surprising transformations'. Her description of her illnesses is a masterly section of her book. Trapped in her hospital cot at night, she drew her book's title from the remembrance of a tiger at the zoo, padding up and down with his indifferent sweeping gaze. He was, she found, the one animal who did not acknowledge he was in a cage, and his image and his searchlight eyes became her salvation.²¹ Writing about her childhood, her insights sharp, she realised that 'the marshland between memory and invention is treacherous'.²² But, caught up by chance, she was led to the journal of G.A. Robinson, Chief Protector of the Aborigines for Port Phillip District, conducting a journey on horseback in the early 1840s from Melbourne to Portland, and was restored, after illness, to the writing of history. It was her 'ticket in a bottle', and here lies the core of Clendinnen's compelling book.

19 Jan Bassett, *Guns and Brooches: Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992); Bassett, *The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary of Australian History* (Melbourne/New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Bassett, ed., *As We Wave You Goodbye: Australian Women and War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998).

20 Jan Bassett, *The Facing Island: A Personal History* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 141. It was a characteristically aware and brave reflection.

21 Inga Clendinnen, *Tiger's Eye: A Memoir* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2000), 20–1, 192.

22 *Ibid.*, 73.

Thereafter, as a historian, she put herself to know and interpret Robinson's journal of events and to recreate him sharply and empathetically on the page. It makes splendid reading. Committed and sympathetic in his dealings with the Aborigines, she writes, he 'contrived ways to live with the appalling, immutable fact of Aboriginal death'. Adjusting, he kept himself busy. 'Every night,' she probes, 'this burdened, driven man steals time from sleep to assemble his information, to fix the flux of experience, to assemble his information, to construct his self-exposing account of things.' Robinson is hopelessly divided. 'He picks up a skull and puts it in the van', she writes, and then he continues with his travels and general observations: 'From horror to banality in a breath.' But, as Clendinnen observes, 'the horror is preserved, and now it is there on record, for any of us to read'. 'It is possible', she sums up, 'that someone, some day, will read, and remember.' Complex, duplicitous, Robinson 'speaks to us and moves us still'. For Clendinnen, it was 'the miracle of history'. Blending personal agency and her deep 'immersion in the experiences and mind of a stranger dead long before I was born', it yielded a work that her publisher claimed as a 'triumph for the importance of history', and, for me, marked a major autobiographical thrust.²³

My own role as an autobiographer also turned directly on 'encounters with history' and on historiography. But my first venture, *Breakfast with Beaverbrook: Memoirs of an Independent Woman* (1995), arose in part from a strong feminist conviction that women had appeared in contemporary Australian male memoirs exclusively as mistresses or wives, but, as I had enjoyed a historian's life, there seemed a good reason to present a new perspective. It was my good fortune as a history graduate from the University of Sydney on a scholarship in London to have an early encounter with the charismatic and powerful Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, which became the centrepiece of my book. Beaverbrook, still the dominant press lord of the *Daily Express*, had during the 1950s purchased some of the key political papers of Great Britain including the Lloyd George and Lady Lloyd George Papers and the Curzon Papers, and the Bonar Law Papers earlier acquired by Will. At the age of 75 – to the great annoyance of academic historians – he had planned to keep them in his sole possession and become a historian.

23 The quotations concerning Robinson are in *ibid.*, 191–218.

My appointment as his personal research assistant, with its life of glamour, excitement and tireless work, led to the publication in 1956 of the book *Men and Power*, which placed Lord Beaverbrook as a historian on the international stage.²⁴ He himself was a participant in history. A Canadian by birth and a Member of the House of Commons, he had been at the centre of manoeuvres in the British Parliament in 1916 to bring down Herbert Asquith and install Lloyd George in the Prime Minister's seat. His interest now lay in writing of the two critical last years of the First World War and the battle for power between the generals and the politicians. It was history of a gripping political kind and it became 'Our War'. My book provides a detailed account of the collaborative methodology, aided by the clever archivist Sheila Lambert (Mrs Elton, from her marriage to Tudor historian Geoffrey Elton), by which we worked.²⁵ But the critical point about this 'encounter with history' was the uniqueness of the man. Examined against the documents of the period, Lord Beaverbrook's firsthand knowledge of the players in those two vital years of war gave him a mastery over the documentary material that no other historian, working systematically through the records later, could hope to achieve. It was this combination that placed him in special command of this piece of British political history and, significantly, won him the acclaim of the historians of the ivory tower. Lord Beaverbrook died in 1964 and, despite the amazing range of his career, he wanted to be remembered for his books. *Breakfast with Beaverbrook* gave me the opportunity to illuminate the processes and outcomes of his historical work.

My second 'encounter with history' occurred when I returned to Australia in 1959 to help another distinguished but very different historian, Sir Keith Hancock, establish the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. In his second autobiography, *Professing History* (1976), Hancock made oblique reference to an 'exhausting' quarrel in respect of the *Dictionary* as well as to another unrelated imbroglio, adding, 'Those stories had better not be told'.²⁶ But I was there, and had preserved the correspondence between Hancock and myself across the critical years of 1960–61 when the *ADB's* relationship with the independent historian Malcolm Ellis was at its most

24 Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power, 1917–1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1956, and numerous subsequent editions).

25 Ann Moyal, *Breakfast with Beaverbrook: Memoirs of an Independent Woman* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995), 59–60.

26 W.K. Hancock, *Professing History* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), 39; D.A. Low, ed., *Keith Hancock: The Legacies of an Historian* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 249–68.

complex. It seemed important that the story should emerge. My chapter on the foundations of the *Dictionary* in my memoir remained the main historical source on this great pioneering enterprise until the publication based on the full archives was told in *The ADB's Story*, edited by Melanie Nolan and Christine Fernon in 2013.²⁷ For me, my years at the *Dictionary* returned me to Australian history and led, through Hancock's mentorship, to my study of the history of Australian science.

Against this backdrop, the female autobiographical gaze was further enriched during the late 1990s by a trio of participant women writers, set in a specific historical period, with their gender specific titles: Susan Ryan, *Catching the Waves* (1999); Wendy McCarthy, *Don't Fence Me In* (2000); and historian Anne Summers, *Ducks on the Pond* (1999). All three, writing in mid-career, published vivid accounts of their contributions to Australia's political, feminist and organisational life.²⁸ Summers, a history graduate of the University of Sydney, with her PhD study and book, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, behind her, overviewed her creative role as an activist in the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s and her key participation as an advisor on Women's Affairs to two Australian prime ministers, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.²⁹ Her title, 'Ducks on the Pond', relayed the words shearers cried out when a women was seen approaching their male domain. A new gendered autobiographical form was on the shelves, and more was to come with Cassandra Pybus's light-hearted and partly fictionalised memoir, *Till Apples Grow on an Orange Tree*.³⁰

This genre continued to evolve, and the letters of daughters to mothers as sources for autobiography figure in the works of two historians composing their memoirs in the twenty-first century. Alice Garner, daughter of the writer Helen Garner, cut her teeth in history at the University of Melbourne in the late 1980s where she became attracted to French history through her lecturer, Peter McPhee. Garner spent time in France working on both her MA thesis and her PhD thesis, the latter being a study of changing

27 Melanie Nolan and Christine Fernon, eds, *The ADB's Story* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013).

28 Susan Ryan, *Catching the Waves: Life In and Out of Politics* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1999); Wendy McCarthy, *Don't Fence Me In* (Sydney: Random House, 2000); Ann Summers, *Ducks on the Pond: An Autobiography, 1945–1976* (Ringwood: Viking, 1999).

29 Ann Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1974).

30 Cassandra Pybus, *Till Apples Grow on an Orange Tree* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998).

place across two centuries in a fishing village at the Bassin de Arachon.³¹ Garner's autobiographical *the student chronicles* is a slight, evocative record of student days at the University of Melbourne drawn from her diaries and letters, which recall those pre-computer days of the late 1980–90s when students hand-drafted their essays, typed them up with effort, used card catalogues and microfiche, kept their lips firmly closed through tutorials, and struggled at the onset of the Dawkins era when managerialism was 'sliding its cold fingers down the wrinkly collars of Arts faculty staff'.³² Keeping all her essays for the record and her scattered recollections, she reconstructs some of the confusions, rawness and habits of student life.

The second historian is Sheila Fitzpatrick, whose memoir *My Father's Daughter* offers a frank, probing and, at times, poignant account of her relationship with her father, the notorious Melbourne radical historian, Brian Fitzpatrick, and her high dependence as a child on his attention and regard: 'Daddy, are you watching? I'm going to jump.'³³ In a sense, her father was her childhood. After education in the Department of History at the University of Melbourne, she had escaped his influence by taking up a scholarship to study Soviet history and politics at Oxford University when his unexpected death at the end of her first year sent her spiralling into extended grief and a determination to distance herself physically from Australia. Fitzpatrick's essay in this volume brings the reflective skill of the historian to an examination of her own mode of writing family memoir. It provides further demonstration that, in Australia, the canvas for women historian autobiographers presents itself as Janus-faced. We have moved into the pertinent examination of the varied nature and processes of history in the telling of a personal life, while we have also remained closely tied to the remembrance of childhood and youth.

In *A Spy in the Archives*, Fitzpatrick uses her diaries and letters to her mother to provide a detailed memoir of her experience as a doctoral student in Moscow working in the Soviet Archives in the mid to late 1960s in the period of the Cold War.³⁴ At a time when the study of Soviet history was in its infancy, she and her fellow exchange students

31 Alice Garner, *A Shifting Shore: Locals, Outsiders, and the Transformation of a French Fishing Town, 1823–2000* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2005).

32 Alice Garner, *the student chronicles* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2006), 107. The lower-casing is original to the title of the book.

33 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *My Father's Daughter: Memories of an Australian Childhood* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 2, 230.

34 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2013).

from Britain ‘felt like cosmonauts who had landed on the moon’, and she writes vividly of the drabness of the Brezhnev age – the people poorly dressed, the challenge of inconvenient stores, learning Russian, a people-less life, and the gossip and obsession with spying. But the core of the book is her historian’s account of working in the archives on A.V. Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, alongside one of his former assistants, Igor Sats, who became a key mentor: ‘untapped archives’, Fitzpatrick recalls, ‘plus a primary informant willing to give you a running commentary on what you read in the archives the day before is something that only happens once in a lifetime’.³⁵ In time she would be ‘outed’ as a spy, a so-called ‘ideological saboteur’, and face scrutiny and diverse modes of bureaucrat overview and control. But, leaving Russia for marriage in England, her research task complete, she allowed, ‘I am very much at home in this funny atmosphere’.³⁶ It laid the foundation for her rise as a leading Soviet historian.

For my own part, writing autobiography as a woman in what is called the ‘seventh age’ or later, as I have done with my *A Woman of Influence* in 2014, is as yet a rare phenomenon in Australia and elsewhere.³⁷ What was my impulse towards it? I had written *Breakfast with Beaverbrook* in my late 60s, yet my life had remained richly active. I was also given a mental push by an American literary academic, Carolyn Heilbrun, who deplored that whenever she read an autobiography written by a woman in her 50s or beyond, it was always confined to her youth or romance: ‘She abandons age, experience, wisdom to search the past, usually for romance, always for the beginnings of childhood.’ But, as Heilbrun argued, ‘the story of age, of maturity before infirmity, before meaningless old age, has never been told except perhaps by Shakespeare who told everything, provided he could tell it of men’.³⁸

And so I engaged to write with some passion of my long career as a historian of Australian science, as a biographer and of those men and women who had influenced and enriched me in my personal and professional development. It is a story of interconnections. Importantly, late in life candour becomes important; one has nothing to lose, and there

35 Ibid., 170.

36 Ibid., 1, 329.

37 Ann Moyal, *A Woman of Influence: Science, Men & History* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2014).

38 Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (London: The Women’s Press, 1989), quoted in Moyal, *A Woman of Influence*, ix.

is an eagerness on the part of readers to share in the intimacy of one's story. So my text turned into a stretching, allusive conversation with my readers where identity became entwined with other lives and where my work as a historian played an integral part. For, as Alan Moorehead, whose biography I wrote working among his papers for several years at the National Library of Australia, declared: 'And so a writer's books are the chapters of his life.'³⁹

I wave to Beaverbrook returning to England in recent years as a senior historian to look at the Beaverbrook papers in the Parliamentary Archives at the House of Lords and to reassess this remarkable participant historian, archival proprietor and writer, and how we worked together when I was young. As a reviewer of my book summed up aptly: 'The act of remembrance begins as a personal, private and often spontaneous activity but once shared with others, memories become collective remembering.'⁴⁰ Or, perhaps, as Jill Ker Conway writes in her excellent *When Memory Speaks*: 'We're heard when we speak confidently out of our understanding of our own experience. ... We should play close attention to our stories. ... We are all autobiographers.'⁴¹

39 Ann Moyal, *Alan Moorehead: A Rediscovery* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2005), frontispiece. See also Alan Moorehead, *A Late Education: Episodes in a Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970).

40 Susan Steggall, 'Cultivating Minerva', review of *A Woman of Influence* by Ann Moyal, *ISAA Review*, 13.2 (2014), 101–4.

41 Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 177–80.

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