

# **The Discredited Dissident**

*An Exploration of Changing Perspectives on Colonial Feminist Poetry*

**ENGLISH EXTENSION 2: CRITICAL RESPONSE****The Discredited Dissident:  
An Exploration of Changing Perspectives on Colonial Feminist Poetry**

*“Ancestress: a burning witch.  
Her mouth covered by leather to strangle words.  
A word after a word  
after a word is power”<sup>1</sup>*

Will you silence me?

*“Our caress is mutually deep-seated  
Fires the furnace white hot heated...  
Oh, if only we were all so justly sexually gratified”<sup>2</sup>*

Will you oppress me?

Will you marginalise my views?

Mercilessly criticise me?

Reject me or hate me?

Probably not.

Current feminist analysis of Australian colonial and post-WWI women’s poetry is both reflective of and contributes to a critical history marked by revaluation and revision. It is that revision which has afforded a place in Australian literary history for colonial feminist women poets, whose dissident voice had been silenced by the predominantly male chorus of conservative nationalist heroism.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Margaret Atwood’s poem “Spelling” in ed. Allison, *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Norton & Company, New York, 1938 p.1378

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Amanda Nicholson’s poem “Erotica Exotica” from ed. Martin, Renee, *Public Poetry Anthology* Vol 1. Sydney

Margery Kempe 1373-1438 excerpt of the ‘*Book of Margery Kempe*’

*“She asked her husband what was the cause that he had not meddled with her...  
sithen she lay with him every night in his bed” 1426*



### **Repression - The Rejection of Colonial and Post-WWI Women's Poetry**

In the search for a distinctively Australian identity pre-Federation, political and cultural institutions engendered in the populace a sense of unity under a common banner of national pride and Australian spirit. A belief that *'literature is the creator of nationhood'*<sup>3</sup> led to the use of Australian narrative ballads to promote a distinctive culture based on masculine ethos of hardship, endurance and heroism.<sup>4</sup> Widely promoted in magazines such as *The Bulletin*, Australian literary discourse was dominated by poetry that reflected, and helped to shape, a distinctive national sentiment of the pioneering spirit. The colonial perception of women was as the 'Other', the facilitator of male needs in a passive or invisible role. An emerging feminist ethos then challenged these patriarchal perceptions.

As Australia moved toward Federation, the nationalist imperative intensified. Poetry that focussed on other subject matter, such as feminist sentiment, was seen at worst as irrelevant, or at best an emotional indulgence. It was proclaimed that *"art has no business with the conveying of emotions such as love and hate. The hallmark of all bad art is that it is emotional. We revolt against that crude emotionalism."*<sup>5</sup>

WWI saw propagandist sentiment dominate literature to forge national unity. Women were relegated to supporting their husbands in their war contribution. Post-WWI disillusionment engendered a male-dominated, bohemian literary culture which promoted nostalgic, escapist sentiment, and a concern with less conventional subject matter of energy, beauty and sexual expression.<sup>6</sup> Yet, feminist assertions of that sexual

<sup>3</sup> Wooten, Joy *Australian Literary History and Some Colonial Women Novelists* essay for Southerly Number 3, 1990. Ed. Elizabeth Webby

<sup>4</sup> Webby, Elizabeth (editor) *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* Melbourne VIC, Cambridge University Press, 2000. Essay by Michael Ackland: 'Poetry from the 1890's to 1970'

<sup>5</sup> *Bulletin* vol 42 no 2184 22 December 1921

<sup>6</sup> Ingamells, Rex, *Handbook of Australian Literature* Victoria, Jindyworoback Press, 1949  
*'The doubt of future Foes'* Queen Elizabeth 1568

*"The daughter of debate, that eke discord doth sow"* 1568

freedom continued to be disparaged and despite a willingness to defy literary precedent the movement maintained an antagonistic response to women poets, devaluing feminist sentiment more brutally than their predecessors. By either failing or refusing to conform to a tradition of ballads celebrating pioneering bravery and the bush ethos, the work of feminist poets was systemically repressed, as even the celebrated nationalist poet, Dame Mary Gilmore, experienced devaluation of her feminist poetry.

Women's labour contribution to WWII induced agitation for legal and social equality. The drive for emancipation was reflected in feminist poetry which sought to realign women's place in society, particularly through the expression of sexual enlightenment and desire. However, Australian culture persistently disenfranchised women who were cast as 'ladies' - passive, domestic chattels. In an era dominated by the pioneering ballad, women were reduced to 'muse not maker'<sup>7</sup>.

Women's poetry was assessed according to masculine aesthetic criteria.<sup>8</sup> Yet feminist poetry was based on intrinsic responses and was less concerned with narrative recount. It departed from normative syntax by using a discursive style, dissident form and content which was derided as trivial, too subjective and too 'domestic'. Critics therefore dismissed the distinctiveness of the female poetic voice and with it her expression of social identity.

The systemic devaluation of feminist poetry denied women a voice in forging a cultural identity in the emerging Australian nation. The prevalent conception of literature as androgynous was in fact a misnomer.<sup>9</sup> In reality, phallogocentric discourse,

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<sup>7</sup> Brooks, David and Walker, Brenda, *Poetry and Gender* St. Lucia QLD, University of Queensland Press, 1989. Foreword notes.

<sup>8</sup> Hampton, Susan and Llewellyn, Kate, *Penguin Anthology of Australian Women Poets*. Ringwood VIC, Penguin Publishers, 1986. See Introduction.

<sup>9</sup> Androgyny - That construction of literature is genderless and that all poets must be assessed on universal standards

'*On Monsieur's Departure*' by Queen Elizabeth 1582

"Some gentler passion slide into my mind./ For I am soft and made of melting snow" 1582



form, and subject matter effectively excluded women from an equal role in both the social and literary realm in the name of national unity. The interaction between *gender* and *genre* was borne out in this bifurcation of “male” and “female” literature.

Some female poets stood against merciless criticism, while most resorted to meliorating stratagems by conforming to masculine poetic conventions. Other feminists silenced their expositions of a parallel culture and their contributions were dismissed by an antagonistic male colony.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Webby, Elizabeth (editor) *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* Melbourne VIC, Cambridge University Press, 2000. Essay by Michael Ackland: ‘Poetry from the 1890’s to 1970’ *Eve’s Apology in Defense of Women* by Aemilia Lanyer 1611

“Then let us have our liberty again,/ and challenge to yourselves no sovereignty... Your fault being greater, why should you disdain/ our being your equals, free from tyranny?” 1611

### **Revaluation - Rereading Feminist Poetry in a Changing Social and Political Context**

Australian Colonial feminist poets wrote a role for women in the emerging Australian cultural identity. That role was viewed as a diversion from the masculine pioneering ethos that characterised Colonial literary discourse, rather than a parallel path. Yet as *social, literary and cultural contexts change, the shifting values of an audience permit a revaluation and rereading of literature.* The “accepted” position of women in society at any given time will necessarily affect the reception of literature which explores feminist notions such as sexual equality and the socio-legal disempowerment of women in marriage. Against the background of changing social and cultural values, a *deconstruction of that literature can, as Derrida contemplated, dislocate categories like male/female or masculine/feminine.*<sup>11</sup> Like genre itself, those categories are reformulated, their edges more fluid, to accommodate developing perceptions of sexuality and gender.

Changing critical responses to the feminist sentiment in Colonial and early twentieth century women’s poetry demonstrate the way in which the role of Colonial feminist poets have been gradually recognised through a constant process of revaluation. The sexual awakening of the period since the 1920s and 1930s brought social awareness of sexual equality and recognition of gender disparity that influenced an interdisciplinary movement, Gender Theory.<sup>12</sup> The Post-WWII environment of rapid social and political change was accelerated by feminist liberation of the 1960’s which encouraged revaluation and revision of feminist poetry during literary revival in the 1980’s. The 1960’s recognition of women’s legal, sexual, and intellectual equality engendered greater respect for women poets and saw the development of a body of Gender Theory and Gynocriticism. These developing literary theories were borne out of a process, spanning the 1970’s and 1980’s, of revaluing colonial poetry.

<sup>11</sup> Collins, Jeff and Mayblin, Bill ‘*Derrida for Beginners*’ Cambridge, Icon Books, 1996, p 160.

<sup>12</sup> Gender Theory is the comparative study of gender creating literary difference.  
‘Pamphilia to Amphilanthus’ by Lady Mary Worth 1615

*“And captive leads me prisoner, bound, unfree?/ Love first shall leave mens fant'sies to them free”* 1615



An awareness of prejudice led many academics to revise their perspective and consciously employ gender theory in valuation. Academic David Brooks, in 1981 confessed *"I have begun to think that I might have been quite wrong in many of my suggestions, quite blind in my rejection of poems that I thought were poor or inept or somehow misconceived because they did not conform...to what I believed were the fundamentals of 'good' poetry...On several occasions I have mis-reviewed women poets – or, reluctant to review books that I did not like much, have not reviewed them at all... Was this a part of a pattern of suppression... extending over centuries?"*<sup>13</sup>

The process of rereading and revaluing is constant. A present day rereading of the poetry of Zora Cross and Ada Cambridge attempts to restore these poets (albeit retrospectively) to their place of cultural and literary significance. This rereading elucidates the way in which the categorisation of "feminist" or "feminine" literature, once used in the pejorative, can in fact recognise the contribution made by these women to Australian literature.

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<sup>13</sup> Brooks, David, *'Poetry and Sexual Difference'* essay for *'Meanjin Magazine'* Volume 44, Number 1. March 1985 ed. Judith Brett.

*'In the Person of Womankind'* by Ben Jonson 1640

*"Take that away, you take our lives./ We are no women then, but wives"* 1640

### Ada Cambridge (1844-1926)

The value of the poetic insight of Ada Cambridge has been embraced in the last two decades.

How can this be when her life ended in 1926?

Cambridge used poetry to express her criticism of patriarchal repression and her vision for the emerging role of women in newly founded Australian culture. This was exemplified in Cambridge's most controversial journal, *Unspoken Thoughts* (1887) which she published anonymously and withdrew soon after.<sup>14</sup> This publication embodies her central feminist motivations as she challenged the institution of marriage, social structures, the law and religious traditions.<sup>15</sup> Cambridge addressed the viability of vows of fidelity in marriage, the importance of economic independence to assert female equality, the right of women to be treated with respect and have autonomy over their own bodies<sup>16</sup> by rejecting physical relations in an unwanted marital union.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Speculations on her reasons for anonymous publication, and the withdrawal of the book five years later, have been central to recent debates on the devaluation of Ada Cambridge's poetry.

<sup>15</sup> Such views on religious, social and legal structures which disempowered woman may have been drawn from her own experiences as she resented roles she was expected to fulfil as a colonial pioneer, clergyman's wife, mother and Christian woman, rather choosing to claim a 'career' of writing at the earliest opportunity as well as holding an almost completely separate social life as she became the first president of the Women's Writers Club in Melbourne. Her poetry embodies her refusal to embrace the colonial pioneering spirit, though ironically her ballad "On Australian Hills" which employs beautiful imagery underpinned with homesickness for England, has been promoted more than poetry representative of her preoccupation with feminism and the institution of marriage.

<sup>16</sup> Tate, Audrey 'Ada Cambridge: Her life and work 1844-1926' St Kilda, Melbourne University Press 1991

<sup>17</sup> Debate as to why '*Unspoken Thoughts*' was published anonymously has divided modern critics who speculate whether Cambridge predicted rejection by a literary audience, knowing her views were before her time, or feared her husband's shock and offence at the radical comments. The latter supposition may have been well-founded as misinterpretation, such as in the poem. "A Wife's Protest" which A.G. Stephens critiqued as an autobiographical "protest against the physical side of marriage"<sup>17</sup> caused Cambridge and Rev. Cross, personal embarrassment.

'The Introduction' by Anne Finch 1689

"Alas! A woman that attempts the pen, / Such an intruder on the rights of men" 1689



Despite her ardent feminist sentiment, Cambridge publicly stated she worked to supplement the family income and to “*buy pretty things for [her] babies*”.<sup>18</sup> This comment elevated the domestic role of women as equal to their professional lives and caused a wide-reaching attack on her work by critics.<sup>19</sup>

While the nation turned to literature to signify a society with a distinctive cultural identity, Cambridge’s projections of the female role in a post-Federation society were rejected by her contemporary male literary critics. Cambridge’s opinions on sexual morality, social justice and institutions of marriage were reduced to mere ‘romance’ writing by a delicate ‘lady’ author. From the 1930s to the 1950s Cambridge’s work was trivialised by linking it to that of the romantic writers, ‘Tasma’ and Rosa Praed, hence devaluing her revolutionary comments as ‘romantic’ sentiment.<sup>20</sup> Cambridge’s critics effectively silenced her expression of woman’s role in Australia’s emerging cultural identity and few afforded Cambridge her deserved place in Australian literary history.

“A Wife’s Protest” is a poignant ballad which presents the devastating predicament of a young woman bound in an unwanted marriage. Cambridge assumes narrative tone to express the view of disempowerment and enslavement of an arranged marriage. Imagery invokes purity, “*a white snowdrop in the spring*” and the passion of womanhood “*my star, that barely rose is set*” which are stifled by imposed domesticity. The passage “*then they twined my bridal wreath/ and placed it on my brow*” signifies the woman’s disempowered state in an arranged marriage. The motif of the bridal wreath is both commonly employed in love poetry to indicate power or

<sup>18</sup> Green, H.M. ‘*An Outline of Australian Literature*’, Sydney NSW, Witcombe & Tombs Ltd., 1930 (pp.58-61)

<sup>19</sup> Editor AG Stephens and other Bulletin critics manipulated the withdrawal of ‘*Unspoken Thoughts*’ to portray Cambridge as having been subdued by her domestic responsibilities and therefore insincere in the dedication to her feminist views.

<sup>20</sup> Tate, Audrey ‘*Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work*’, Carlton VIC, Melbourne University Press, 1991 (pp. 246- 249 Epilogue)  
‘*Reflections on Marriage*’ by Mary Astell 1700

“*So let poor contemptible women, who have been their slaves, excel them in all that is truly excellent*” 1700

ownership, and is also reminiscent of the biblical crown of thorns.

The ensuing traumatic experience of the female protagonist is portrayed through the violent image of an unwanted physical union “*a prisoner on the rack, / and suffer dumbly as I must*”. These experiences render irredeemable woman’s autonomy over her own body “*O to possess myself once more, / myself so stained and maimed! / O to make pure these shuddering limbs that loveless lust has shamed*”.

In many of Cambridge’s poems an analogy is drawn between the prostitute and married woman.<sup>21</sup> “A Wife’s Protest” sees the “*guiltless prostitute in soul, / a murderess in soul*” suffer a deeply religious guilt, a “*smouldering shame...inward torment of reproach... creeping terrors chill my blood*” and “*in the sight of God, her stain / may be less black than mine*”. The Italian sonnet, “Fallen”, similarly contrasts the sexual relations of women who are legally ordained wives and those who “*sin out of sheer need for survival or out of passion*”. In challenging wedded harlots for their condemnation of those less morally respected, Cambridge accuses them as having “*sold her body to a more vile disgrace*” as a “*wife by the law, but prostitute in deed*”.

Cambridge’s poems illustrate the dichotomy between self-respect and social respectability. In “Fallen”, the respect for the woman who “*keeps her body for her own*” is emphasised by the rejection of social or religious judgment on such woman, “*in spite of church and law, / she is more pure than I*”. In that poem, Cambridge positions the reader to respect the prostitute who is sells herself to be true to “*the natural woman in her*” despite that she engenders social stigma for “*sinning for dear life’s sake, in sheer despair*”. In both “Fallen” and “A Wife’s Protest” Cambridge’s

<sup>21</sup> Such references are made in Cambridge’s “Fallen”, “A Wife’s Protest”, “Love in the Streets”, “An Old Maid’s Lament” and “London” of her ‘*Unspoken Thoughts*’ (London, England : Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1887) and are continued in her volumes ‘*The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems*’ (London, England : Heinemann, 1913) and ‘*The Manor House and Other Poems*’ (London, England : Daldy, Isbister, 1875).

‘*Reflections on Marriage*’ by Mary Astell 1700

“*Woman has no obligations to the man who makes love to her, she has no reason to be fond of being a wife*” 1700



message is clear: that women who sell themselves to loveless marriages degrade womankind and perpetuate their enslavement to patriarchal structures.

Further criticism of the institution of marriage is expressed in "Vows"<sup>22</sup> which employs an assertive and resolute tone to challenge church and states control over the intangible emotion of love.<sup>23</sup> Cambridge utilises the sonnet form, traditionally used in the Petrarchan courtly love tradition to objectify its passive female subject

Cambridge poses opposites reminiscent of the marriage vows (to have and to hold/till death do us part), but with a cynical edge "*what bloom of growth or waste of moth and rust/ shall be our portion ere the final end?*"

The contractual restraint of marriage disempowered women, as they had no legal standing to seek divorce. Images of physical restraint such as "*bolts upon the door*" signify the passionless nature of a State/Church sanctioned union. This assertion is emphasised in the final aphorism affirming that if such legalisation of love is required "*faith is faith, and love is love no more*". Cambridge insinuates that the constraint of vows will lead to a simulation only of "*constant passion and a life-long trust*".<sup>24</sup>

"An Answer" assumes the form of an argumentative response to a marriage proposal portraying marriage and love as opposing constructs from the outset "*Thy love I am. Thy wife I cannot be*". Marriage is presented as a "*deep and dire mistake*" to which "*this old sin*" of fornication is preferable as it maintains "*soul and flesh that should be mine, and free*". Cambridge recognises the need for women to be autonomous and so

<sup>22</sup> This analysis refers to the *Unspoken Thoughts* version of this poem as the Hand in the Dark revision was deliberately made less confrontational as it was published without anonymity.

<sup>23</sup> The message of Cambridge in Vows critically reflects on John Dryden's 1673 song "Marriage a la Mode" which questions "*Why should a foolish marriage vow,/ which long ago was made,/ oblige us to each other now,/ when passion is decayed?*" from *The Norton Anthology of Literature* ed. 6 vol. 1, Abrams, M. H. 1962 p.1790

<sup>24</sup> "*Faith is faith...no more*" has ambivalent meaning as Cambridge questions Christian faith that is discredited by legalisation of vows. This view holds autobiographical relevance as Cambridge had rejected religion due to disenfranchisement in her marriage, rather believing biblical basics, while resenting the patriarchal sexist overtones imbued in religious rituals.

'*Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to her Husband*' by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu 1724

"*Too, too severely laws of honour bind/ The weak submissive sex of womankind*" 1724

recommends a boycott of marriage and its effects, by revisiting the images of restraint employed in "Vows", "*to wear the yoke of servitude – to take/ strange unknown fetters that I cannot break*". She opts rather to maintain love without legal restraint, regardless of the social stigma of "*woman's old disgrace*" that it engenders.

The concept of socially imposed marriage as foreign to love, and akin to prostitution is again explored in this work, critically reflecting on the colonial conception of marriage as a patriarchally controlled conjugal unit in which women assumed the role as wife and mother.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, feminists rejected their own when Cambridge published "An Answer". Her feminist sentiment was viewed as offensive, even by some of the most radical reviewers such as Rose Scott, a leading suffragist and social reformer. Scott regarding "An Answer", commented "*This poem is one I am sorry is in this book*"<sup>26</sup> as she felt it did not express the suffragist's promoted image of women as a superior moral force, with a role to purify society. A modern reevaluation of Cambridge's poetry can, however, recognise that Cambridge's projections of the female role was not at odds with the contribution to modern Australian culture made by her contemporary feminist writers and activists.

In "The Future Verdict" Cambridge recognises the importance of feminist poets' projection of the female role in the culture of Federated Australia. This ballad positions women working with male pioneers who toiled to establish nationhood as women pioneered the new frontier of the Australian home. The biblical metaphor of the three wise men "*these men had gained the light / these women knew the right*" is extended throughout the poem but applied to womankind. Cambridge's female

<sup>25</sup> Bradstock, Margaret 'Unspoken Thoughts: A Reassessment of Ada Cambridge' Australian Literary Studies Vol 14 No 1 May 1989 ed. L.T. Hergenhan

<sup>26</sup> This comment was made in an annotated note in the copy of 'Unspoken Thoughts' held by the Australian National Library and later reiterated as Scott's view in Alec Chisolm's letter in George Robertson. Reference MS Aa 93/4, Mitchell Library  
'Contentment' by Anna Wickham

"We, vital women, are no more content./ bound... first to passion, then to sentiment" 1884

pioneers journey to seek the birth of freedom from patriarchal repression and to enter the "*Promised Land*" or new frontier of both federation, and a new female role.

Cambridge agitates her society to forge their vision of woman in the emerging Australian culture and criticises the lack of feminist vision in her society. She envisages a post-Federation future where womankind remains repressed "*How will our unborn children scoff at us... for that, like driven sheep, we yielded thus, / before the shearers dumb!*" This challenge utilizes the icon of Australian trade and pioneering success as a metaphor for woman's cultural contribution in the emerging Australian identity. The juxtaposition of this image with the extended religious metaphor emphasises the pre-ordained nature, or "*martyr's portion*", of the struggle for gender equality in Australian culture. She projects the journey of womankind towards emancipation through biblical references, traditionally employed by patriarchal religious leaders, "*they were the first to hear the gospel preached.... Yet they remained in sin; / they saw the Promised Land they might have reached, / and dared not enter in.*" Cambridge signifies female emancipation by employing masculine icons of pioneering shearers and the Three Wise Men to assert woman's role in the emerging Australian nation.

Cambridge's ambiguous radicalism is evidenced by the revision of poems in *Unspoken Thoughts* to her next book, *The Hand in the Dark* (1913). These 'improvements' ultimately subdued and omitted the most outspoken criticisms of love and marriage and projection of future feminist social reform.<sup>27</sup> Cambridge was sensitive to the effect of critics in dictating audience valuation, and was aware that the provocative content of her poetry debased their patriarchal views, engendering rejection and repression of her feminist assertions. Thus, for a woman to be accepted

<sup>27</sup> Cambridge entirely denied her controversial assertions as she requested no direct quotation be made from '*Unspoken Thoughts*' after its withdrawal, and the omission of most controversial feminist comments, suggests that Cambridge was sensitive to the response of critics and her audience to her poetry.

'*In The Concert Hall*' by Nettie Palmer

*"I wonder if he guesses / how his casual stare / stabs and oppresses, / the woman"* 1914



in a sexist literary world she must dispel her feminist views and conform to form content and voice that met masculine aesthetic criteria.

While men were canonized after their death, the affront of Stephens intensified after Cambridge's death to dilute her powerful image and therein dismiss her projected female role. Stephens gloated that Cambridge had "[done] her duty. She strangled her dreams, silenced her mind and conformed"<sup>28</sup>. The disparagement of the writing style, values, views and life of Ada Cambridge has taken decades of feminist advocacy to restore. However, Ada Cambridge's dreams, once strangled, are being revived due to efforts of feminist scholars.

Feminist critics have re-valued poetry to restore Cambridge, and other colonial women poets, to their deserved position in Australian literary history. The process of republishing Cambridge's early novels and poetry, advocating for greater representation in poetry anthologies, and producing several biographies and essays to promote Cambridge's significance has begun to achieve this. A contemporary audience readily relates to the once unorthodox, provocative sentiments as relationships between the sexes are universally relevant. In historical retrospect Cambridge's poems are valued by the contemporary liberalist audience who appreciate the fruition of their projected female image. Cambridge's assertions in criticism of the colonial position of women and her anticipation of the future female role have been recognised and valued for their contribution to establishing a distinctive Australian cultural identity.

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<sup>28</sup> This criticism was made due to circumstances surrounding publication of her most radical collection of poetry '*Unspoken Thoughts*' in 1887, which A.G. Stephens reflected on in '*The Bulletin*' after Cambridge's death. This quotation was made from the following essay: Roe, Jill, '*The Scope of Women's Thought is Necessarily Less: The Case of Ada Cambridge*'. *Australian Literary Studies* Volume 5, Number 4, October 1972, edited by E. Stokes  
Helene Cixous 1955

"Her language does not contain, it carries, it does not hold back, it makes possible" 1955

### Zora Cross (1890- 1964)

Feminist critics of Zora Cross have recognised the courageous dissidence of her poetry in liberating feminine sexuality, thus challenging a masculine nationalist societal tradition. According to one of her contemporary female critics *“There breathes in every line a spirit of emancipation from the trammels of convention which is wedded to the love of Australian life.”*<sup>29</sup> Similarly, a recent anthology remarked

*“The work of Zora Cross, whose poetry presented an image of the passionate and sexual woman, was mocked by the men who saw their myths of mastery and mateship as paramount.”*<sup>30</sup>

The poetry of Zora Cross was, indeed, remarkable for her time – projecting female sexuality to a society in which women were perceived as sexually passive and demure. This caused a minor sensation *“to find a woman saying over and over again that she was passionate”*.<sup>31</sup> Cross’s preoccupations diverged from the dominant literary thrust of nationalist sentiment which had the objective of engendering cultural unity against post-war disillusionment.

The *Vision* bohemian poets similarly embraced freedom of sexual expression, as had Cross, but their elitist notion of art effectively excluded women. The antagonistic literary milieu of the 1920’s and 1930’s isolated women and discouraged them from writing. Therefore, ironically, Cross found little support from literary or feminist

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<sup>29</sup> West Australian Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918

<sup>30</sup> Spencer, Dale *Two Centuries of Australian Women Writers* London, England: Pandora Press, 1988 (p.249)

<sup>31</sup> Modjeska, Drusilla. *Exiles At Home*. Sydney, NSW: Sirius (Angus and Robertson) 1981. (pp.20-23 and Note 11)

*‘Grave Fairytale’* by Dorothy Hewett 1975

*“The thighs jack-knifed apart, the dangling sword thrust home,  
pinned like a specimen – to scream with joy”* 1975

groups.<sup>32</sup> Cross's scandalous affair with David McKee Wright, the editor of the *Red Page* was the focus of merciless scorn from critics of *The Bulletin* as it was viewed as contrary to her feminist agenda.

Cross encountered rejection from a conservative women's literary network founded by Nettie Palmer, a poet and critic, who "made no gesture towards Zora Cross"<sup>33</sup> presumably due to Cross's 'immoral' reputation. Australian literary tradition had devalued the work of colonial women poets so dramatically that there was no support afforded her in the face of merciless scorn. Jack Lindsay, a leader of the *Vision* group admitted: "we treated her rather as a joke, in part because of her connection with David McKee Wright... it seems to me [now] that we should have taken her seriously as a woman trying to express her sexual being"<sup>34</sup>.

Cross's dissent from the patriarchal perception of women's sexuality is inextricably linked to the devaluation of her poetry. The prejudices of critics excluded her valuable feminist contribution to the establishment of Australian culture.

The values of the male poetry of the *Vision* group during the 1920's and 1930's drew on Petrarchan courtly love tradition and perpetuated a patriarchal perception of woman's passive sexuality. Jack Lindsay's influential love poetry denied the individuality of a woman by relegating her to be a facilitator of male artistic expression. The work of John Shaw Neilson, exemplifies a common idealism in male love poetry by portraying his muse as virginal, indicating perception of sexual experience as the sinful corruption of a woman. Christopher Brennan similarly

<sup>32</sup> There is no record of Cross joining any feminist activist groups though she supported feminist ideals of higher education for women, equal pay for women and the recognition of motherhood as 'labour' according to Michael Sharkey's essay 'Zora Cross's Entry Into Australian Literature' featured in *Hecate* Vol. 16 No. 1-2 (pp. 65-89)

<sup>33</sup> Saunders, Julia. 'A Writer's Friends & Associates: Notes from the Correspondence in the Zora Cross Papers' *Hecate* Vol.16, No. 1-2 1990 (pp. 90-96)

<sup>34</sup> Modjeska, Drusilla. 'Exiles At Home'. Sydney, NSW: Sirius (Angus and Robertson) 1981. (pp.21) 'Mother Who Gave Me Life' by Gwen Harwood 1986

" I think of women/ bearing women. Forgive me the wisdom/ I would not learn from you" 1986



distanced his egocentric sexual sentiment from eroticism, by the use of excessively religious language, portraying women as passive beings whose role is to facilitate the solitary male transcendence toward sexual enlightenment.<sup>35</sup> The poetry of Kenneth Slessor indicates idealism as he employs the archetype of 'Venus' (beauty) distancing his portrayal of women from both realism and erotic expression. Therefore, the literary context which Cross faced reflected the social perception of feminine sexuality as being devoid of independent desire and erotic pleasure. Female sexuality was a facilitator of the male experience, the muse, the idealised archetype.

The love poetry of Zora Cross also utilised the traditionally Petrarchan, masculine poetic form and iconography, but imbued it with the distinctively feminist sentiment of autonomous expression of female sexuality. Her controversial love sonnets featured in *Songs of Love and Life* reflect both a sense of sexual liberation and an attendant lack of faith in the capacity of men to provide sexual and spiritual fulfilment. It is interesting to note that Cross draws so heavily on the Petrarchan sonnet form in this series of poems. The more preferable reading is that Cross deliberately utilized this form to at once subvert the dominant male poetic structure and the prevalent picture of the passive female courtly lover. A more cynical view is that Cross in recognition of potential rejection of her explicit sexual poetry, adhered to Petrarchan sonnet conventions to mask her dissident feminist notions. Passages such as "*My arms were round him and his hands held me. /Close...close...we pressed in bosomed ecstasy*"<sup>36</sup> conform in style to the traditional sonnet form but dissent in content from the common perception of passive womanhood by depicting radical images of feminine sexuality.

<sup>35</sup> Walker, Shirley. 'Towards an Australian Male Aesthetic' *Island Magazine*, Vol 20 Spring 1984 ed. Denholm, M

'The Stone Dolphin' by Fay Zwicky from *Three Songs of Love and Hate*

<sup>36</sup> Quotation from "The Triumph of Eve" from Cross's anthology '*Songs of Love and Life*'  
'A Quartet for Dorothy Hewett' by Gwen Harwood

"Heaven's long emptied of its gods./ Fill the void with a woman's voice"  
"Under each inert hour of my silence/ died a poem, unheeded"

In *Sonnet X*, Cross employs the Petrarchan love sonnet form. This sonnet form was traditionally used to objectify the woman who was the unwitting recipient of courtly love. The opening two lines of *Sonnet X* employ light fragrant imagery reminiscent of the Petrarchan tradition “*I know a violent bed where we may lie / Beneath the shady alleys of the air.*” This convention is subverted to present woman as a sexual aggressor in the image “*Venus holds Adonis by the hair*”. Where Petrarchan poets focus on distancing the desired object, Cross emphasises the proximity of her subject for immediate gratification in the first quatrain. The second quatrain of the sonnet positions woman as a dominant partner and challenges the adequacy of her male partner to fulfil her desire as she “*drains his sweetness till he fain would die*”. Cross’s intensely sensual poetry portrays a woman who dominates relations and initiates illicit rendezvous through her beckoning, “*creep out tonight with me/merge in ecstasies of hunger there/ my body moist on yours*”, an unequivocal expression of desire.

The second tercet of *Sonnet X* critically reflects on the concept of woman as providing sustenance to the male lover by subverting Jonson’s image “*Or leave a kiss but in the cup, / and I’ll not look for wine*”.<sup>37</sup> In Cross’ version, her female lover subjects herself “*Come drink me as the living wine and best / And, when your lips have languished to a drouth*” only then to reclaim the agency “*I’ll wet them, till they melt in mine*”. Cross has appropriated the biblical metaphor of a vineyard signifying woman as self-sacrificial in physical relations, and providing spiritual refreshment as an elemental source of life. Exemplifying the way in which Cross’ poetry helped form a foundation for contemporary poets, the vineyard image has been reappropriated by Judith Wright in the phrase “*I am the stem that fed the fruit*”.<sup>38</sup> The politics of the image are distinct

<sup>37</sup> “*Drink to me only with thine eyes,/And I will pledge with mine; Or leave a kiss but in the cup,/And I’ll not look for wine,*”, Ben Jonson in Allison (ed) *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* Norton & Company, New York, 1983 p 223.

<sup>38</sup> Quote taken from “*Woman to Child*” from Judith Wrights anthology of verse *A Human Pattern: Selected Poems* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson 1990). The poem was originally published in *‘Woman To Man’* 1949.

*‘Forgive My Unwritten Poems’* by Fay Zwicky 1982.

“*Under each inert hour of my silence/ died died a poem, unheeded*” 1982

however, as Wright applies this image to portray woman as a nurturer, whereas Cross pointedly denies the role of woman as a mother and equates passion with life, viewing woman as the catalyst in this renewal.

Cross's perception of the female role detached lovemaking from reproduction. She challenged the patriarchal vision of feminine sexuality by depicting degradation of dependence that women experience in sexual relations. She radicalized perception of women by expressing a desire for autonomous expression of female sexuality and erotic passion which did not depend on a masculine reference point<sup>39</sup>. She employed traditional imagery of male pastoral sonnet form to subvert male treatment of women and emphasise the equal intensity of female desire by using the sonnet form but in a female voice, offering her body to a partner and, as truly autonomous, challenging the sexual ideology of a literary milieu which saw women's sexuality as passive.

Similarly, Sonnet 'V' intensifies argument by using the English sonnet form to emphasise the turn "*our two wild souls will meet/ In rich incense of kisses chaste as fire*" which asserts that a physical relationship of reciprocal passion is chaste, despite social and religious prejudices. The first quatrain employs superficially innocent images which are imbued with sexual messages. Though this language appears to submit to male power and adhere to patriarchal stereotypes in phrases such as "*bring my beauty to your waiting feet, / as a young virgin her demure desire*". This in John Milton's "Paradise Lost" "*had wove/of choicest flowers a garland to adorn/Her tresses, and her rural labours crown, /as reapers oft are wont their harvest queen.*"

<sup>39</sup> Modjeska, Drusilla *Exiles At Home*, A&R Classics 1981 pp 22

'Import' by Gig Ryan from ed. Kinsela, John 'Contemporary Australian Poetry' North Fremantle, WA: Freemantle Arts Press, 1999

'The Stone Dolphin' by Fay Zwicky

*"In a fiercely fathered and unmothered world/ words are wrung from the rack"*



Similarly John Keats male subject “*made a garland for her head and bracelet too*” as was tradition for male to adorn his lover.<sup>40</sup> In a subtle shift, the female subject of Sonnet ‘V’, directs her lover, insisting “*I’ll have you take a rose from here, from there/A sprig of jasmine, white and passion fanned / and drop the precious wreath when I demand/Upon the stream of my dark falling hair.*” The red/white flower motif, traditionally used to symbolise courtship is demanded by, rather than bestowed upon, Cross’ female subject.<sup>41</sup> The oxymoron in the turn, “*kisses chaste as fire*”, signifies the challenge faced by the sexually self aware colonial woman. Fire is self-destructive sexuality whereas chastity conforms to patriarchal image of woman.

Cross’s ballad “Wedded” challenges the Christian belief that sin and sex induce death by depicting an erotic pleasure without an Eve-like Fall. Cross challenges Milton’s references to sex and death “*might have lived and joyed immortal bliss yet willingly chose death with thee*” while Cross responds “*Death cannot touch us with her scarlet sword... What should we fear?*”<sup>42</sup> “Wedded” elevates female sexuality, despite social degradation, by endorsing the holiness of passion in pagan religious references of “*the valley my being shrines*”. Further religious reference is made in a “*mute prayer*” implying this desire is silenced by society’s patriarchal repression of woman’s sexual self, though sexual experience itself is sinless. Cross again portrays woman as a directive lover in narcissistic images such as “*You are a flock of doves that round me float*” inverting the Petrarchan vision of elevating woman, for woman to elevate herself. This challenge to the biblical basis for society’s condemnation of sexual freedom was provocative to its 1917 audience and patriarchal vision of woman, presenting an alternative vision of sexuality and the virtues of passion, divorced from religious guilt.

<sup>40</sup> Quotation made from Keat’s ballad “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”

<sup>41</sup> “Of thee, kind boy, I ask no red and white”, Sir John Suckling “Sonnet II”

<sup>42</sup> John Milton’s “Paradise Lost IX”

‘On Mother’s Day’ by J. S. Harry 1996

“I’ll wear my sex like/ a great figure with no clothes on it” 1996

Writing some thirty years later, Cross' "Wedded" responds to Cambridge's question in "Vows" "*What worth are promises?*". Both poems question the value of marriage, which only functions to dispel religious consequences and social stigma. Cross's ballad provocatively disproves the Fall of Eve myth, challenges religious arguments against erotic pleasure and dismisses social scorn on fornicators expressed in Cambridge's "Fallen".

Despite her invaluable contribution to Australian literature and feminist theory, the poetry of Zora Cross was so brutally disparaged by her contemporaries that her projection of the sexually driven woman had limited impact during her lifetime. Many critics expressed their offence at such radical eroticism.<sup>43</sup> Cross had limited literary and personal support and experienced sensations of intense isolation and inadequacy due to brutal reviews of her poetry. Inspection of Cross's personal papers reveal her vulnerability to criticism as she treasured two positive reviews of her work by feminist critics. These critics commended her courage with comments such as "*nature is not silenced by our respectable niceties... her genius lifts her above the littleness of our social customs and conceptions*"<sup>44</sup> and another review by Dame Mary Gilmore professes "*she has stepped beyond ordinary bounds...most men writers have trodden the path insincerely...Zora Cross has used their language and made it feminine...so that all women feel as Cross writes.*"<sup>45</sup> However, most acknowledged how unacceptable the poems were to a patriarchal society with comments such as "*the appearance of 'Love and Life' in 1917 shocked the nerves of the Australian public.*"<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> The effect of negative reviews was a notoriety of Cross's love sonnets which encouraged George Robertson, a publisher who had previously rejected her manuscript, to reprint '*Songs of Love and Life*' and he offered Cross a contract equalled in generosity only by that signed by C.J. Dennis

<sup>44</sup> A scrap of a review from the West Australian (newspaper) Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February 1918. See Zora Cross's Personal Papers: See Zora Cross's Personal Papers: Box 11/27, Rare Books Collection, Fischer Library, University of Sydney.

<sup>45</sup> A scrap of a review by Gilmore, Mary for the '*Australian Worker*' 1<sup>st</sup> November 1917 regarding Zora Cross's Love Sonnets. Zora Cross's Personal Papers: Box 8/27, Rare Books Collection, Fischer Library, University of Sydney.

<sup>46</sup> A scrap of review in '*Aussie: The Cheerful Monthly*' on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June 1922 as a feature of the '*Aussie Woman's Section*'. Zora Cross's Personal Papers: Box 8/27, Rare Books Collection, Fischer Library, University of Sydney.

'*Import*' by Gig Ryan 1998

*'We shelter beside the pool of voyeurism/ marriages go past, austere hypocrite'* 1998

Had critics not been so affected by traditional misogyny they may have respected Cross's comment on the female experiences of jealousy and dependence in sexual relations and appreciated an expression of feminine sexuality which did not require a masculine reference point. Yet Cross' poetry was not only devalued by most male critics, but it prompted her to amend her style in later editions of her poetry. Cross succumbed and began to address 'light' issues that conformed to some nationalistic ideals and relied predominantly on journalism for her income. Cross's changes to form and subject matter reflect her recognition that patriarchal values and their systemic influence over literary criticism would limit her poetic success.

A contemporary audience, however, values Zora Cross's erotic poetry from a cultural perspective which more readily accepts the expression of feminine sexuality as the role of women has changed dramatically and continues to evolve. Feminist critics have re-valued the poetry of Cross according to contemporary Australian values in which women are permitted equal sexual desire? The recognition of valuable feminist *projections made by Cross* is enabled when her poetry is valued from this perspective. Cross's work is valued for its technical skill, universal social relevance, and aesthetic worth, enabling Cross to resume her rightful place in Australian literary history.

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*'Erotica, Exotica'* by Amanda Nicholson 1999

*"He thinks if he buys me another drink/ he'll be on the brink of getting me/  
to stand behind his kitchen sink" 1999*



## The Future

The political, social and literary values of a particular context determine valuation of their literature. Due to this variable in valuing literature, the patriarchal prejudices of Australian colonial society induced devaluation of women's poetry and thus limited the recognition of many Colonial and early twentieth century poets, such as Ada Cambridge and Zora Cross. Women's poetry was not recognised for the valuable contribution women sought to make in establishing a culture reflective of liberated womanhood.

The exclusion of women in developing Australian cultural identity was perpetuated as misogynist critics devalued women's poetry by assessing literature according to masculine aesthetic criteria. Colonial Australian literary theory restricted female expression by prescribing nationalist sentiment and the use of masculine form and tone as the only valuable poetry. Ada Cambridge's poetry, with its dissident voice and style was excluded from mainstream literary discourse. Poets such as Zora Cross who portrayed woman as having desire and pleasure, as sexual equals rather than sexless, complementary 'Others' were mocked by critics as 'immoral' and excluded from the canon of Australian literature.<sup>47</sup>

Social and literary repression of that which dissents from prevalent social values has characterised Australian cultural history, in an attempt to unify beneath one national banner. The work of women writers, silenced by the patriarchal values of their time, has in the last few decades been reread and re-valued in a changing social, cultural and literary context. This process of revaluation sees a gradual recognition of the cultural contribution made by colonial feminist poets and offers them a place in not only a

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<sup>47</sup> Sharkey, Michael. 'Zora Cross's Entry Into Australian Literature' *Hecate* Vol. 16, No. 1-2 1990 (p.86)

'I Am Woman' by Jasmin Cori 2001

*"Though they may/ bind my feet/ I shall always walk/ and if they sever my legs/ I will fly"* 2001

feminist poetic tradition, but in Australian literary history. When women poets are given the respect and unprejudiced criticism that they deserve, a chorus of female poets will fill the Australian literary Eden at last.

*'The Autumn of a Woman's Life'* by Jasmin Cori

*"A woman now laughs/ having discovered in her body a/ great and free land/  
far beyond what any man can/ conquer" 2002*

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# Reflection Statement

## REFLECTION STATEMENT

*"Let us dear friend in mutual strength arise*

*Against our tyrant custom, and demand*

*Free souls and bodies at our own command."*<sup>1</sup>

Upon reading words like these I felt a passionate sense of injustice that the voices of visionary colonial poets had been silenced as they tried to forge an Australian cultural identity. On the journey to my own identity, the search for my female heritage has led me to recognise the absence of woman's voice in a uniquely Australian literary past, and I have grown increasingly determined to assist my contemporary critics in the restoration of our ancestors to their deserved literary prominence.

The purpose of my thesis is to revalue the poetry of colonial women writers from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, with an understanding of contemporary methodologies of criticism<sup>2</sup>. I hope that my work will contribute to an interdisciplinary movement<sup>3</sup> which aims to expose past misogynist criticism and advocate restoration of past women writers to their rightful place in an Australian literary and cultural continuum.

Why choose poetry? Since I was a child I have expressed my feelings by writing in the emotionally dense form of poetry, so I could instantly relate to Cambridge and Cross as they articulated their sense of injustice at the devalued female role, legal inequality, relational subordination and sexual repression of women. I enjoyed the early immersion stage of my process, reading a diverse range of women's poetry from

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *Reaction*, a sonnet in *Unspoken Thoughts* Cambridge, Ada and edited by Barton, Patricia. Campbell, ACT: English Dept, University College, 1988 (orig published in London 1887)

<sup>2</sup> I researched many methodologies including Androgyny, Gynocriticism, Gender Theory, Misogynist Criticism, Feminist, Post-Colonialist, Modernist and Post-modernist readings of literature. In my own reading I was particularly conscious of Androgyny (That construction of literature is genderless and that all poets must be assessed on universal standards) employed by past critics while I employed Gender Theory (the comparative study of gender creating literary difference)

<sup>3</sup> Australian Studies, Women's Studies and English faculties



the colonial era to the present. This was part of my plan to contrast an historical and contemporary poet<sup>4</sup>, illustrating that as the role of women in society has changed, so has the freedom with which feminists could express themselves. Then, comparing women and men's poetry, I recognised a distinctive female voice noting the differences in tone, form and content that had been devalued by past critics.

Why feminist revaluation? I was impassioned by understandings gained in Preliminary English Extension 1 Unit 'Battle of the Sexes', to further research women's experience of patriarchal structures. The skill of recognising the influence of one's cultural, political and social context on their valuing of a text, as I had learned in both English Extension 1 and Advanced English Module A 'Comparative Study of Texts and Context', helped put these feminist understandings into practice by comparing changing perspectives on feminist poetry over time.

As my research progressed I found my notion of comparing an historical and contemporary poet to be fundamentally flawed, as the highly subjective form of poetry afforded little correlation between radicalism in poetry and historical liberation. This important realisation was significant to the development of my thesis as I understood that research must shape one's thesis, rather than attempting to pre-determine an argument without research base. I felt like I'd met a dead end and so, in frustration, sought the advice of academic mentors from both Sydney and Newcastle University<sup>5</sup> who recommended a change in direction to deconstruct the work of two historical women poets. My new notion was enhanced by researching and analysing

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<sup>4</sup> I had originally planned to compare Ada Cambridge or Lesbia Harford with Judith Wright or Dorothy Hewett

<sup>5</sup> Namely, Dr Kate Lilley and Dr David Brooks both from the University of Sydney, and Dr Rosalind Smith from the University of Newcastle.

the valuation of their work over time to gain insight into the process of revaluing literature.

With my work back on track, I was challenged by the necessity of understanding literary theory, as texts were aimed at an academic audience. My struggle with this taught me an important life lesson; weaknesses can become strengths with perseverance, in fact the more difficult the challenge the more resolute I grew to overcome it. Slowly I developed an understanding of methodologies and grew in confidence. I wanted to set myself more challenges by studying a more obscure poet who was previously unexplored by critics. With this in mind I rescinded my plan to analyse Anna Wickham's poetry, and chose to study Zora Cross about whom there was only very limited resources, rendering my local rural library, and internet resources, inadequate. This decision signified a growth in my personal independence as I made numerous trips to Sydney to use the Mitchell Library, Fischer Library and Jessie Street National Women's Library resources.

My intensive research was one of the most demanding, yet stimulating, components of my process as I tenaciously strove for quality research necessitating access to primary resources such as newspapers and reviews dating as early as 1913, original publications of poetry as early as 1874 and the personal papers of Zora Cross, only accessed by two other researchers since her death in 1964. Having searched the 'Austlit' database I found secondary resources very limited<sup>6</sup> and this heightened my understanding of the place of my contribution to the restoration of discredited dissidents. Encouraged by the importance of my cause I sought to exhaust any

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<sup>6</sup> For example less than five essays have been written on Zora Cross, and Cambridge's poetic techniques have rarely been analysed. The 'Austlit' database is available by subscription only. I was able to access it through the permission of Dr. Kate Lilley.



available resources, no longer perceiving my work as a part of my HSC, but a part of my purpose as a young woman, integral to the discovery of my own personal and cultural identity. Upon completion of my investigation I felt assured that my research was thorough<sup>7</sup> and began to collate this information and clarify my concept by applying understandings of literary theory.

The next step in the development of my thesis was to analyse the poems I had chosen and contrast them with popular poetry of the era. Utilising skills I had learnt through the close study of Gwen Harwood's poetry in 'Area of Study: Changing Self', I analysed the use of poetic techniques<sup>8</sup> which conformed to, departed from, or subverted, the poetic conventions of their literary context to present notions of the female role. Detecting commonalities between the work of Cambridge and Cross with preceding poets and succeeding women poets<sup>9</sup> enabled me to position female colonial and post-WWI poets in a literary continuum previously denied to them by critics who devalued their literary and cultural contribution.

Why essay form? I had originally planned to discuss the role of women via the medium of speech, but recognised the limitations of this form in foregrounding research and establishing a comprehensive argument. I decided the essay form would best execute dense argument and persuasively express my complex notion. For my thesis to be a valuable contribution to the process of revaluation I knew the

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<sup>7</sup> Upon the completion of my research, my aim to be thorough was achieved as the 'Austlit' database indicated there were only three further texts listed, which I had not been able to access, that mentioned my chosen poets.

<sup>8</sup> Including the sonnet and ballad form, and the use of symbolic images, rhyming pattern and metaphor

<sup>9</sup> Preceding poets such as Owen, Johnson and Dryden and succeeding women poets, particularly Judith Wright

importance of professional construction and so I undertook rigorous research into conventions of the essay form.<sup>10</sup>

I chose to employ a formal tone throughout the body of my composition reflecting that my intended audience are academics of Australian, Women's Studies or English faculties, as well as an adult, educated audience with an interest in feminism, or the Australian literary continuum. I departed from formal essay convention by featuring a confronting epigraph which positions my thesis with avant garde essays, as a parallel to my contemporary 2002 valuation of this poetry, which offers a new perspective on a little explored era of literature. My experimentation with layout, by running chronological poetry excerpts below my main text, aimed to further illustrate changes in women's poetry, and position women writers in a literary continuum.

*I arrived at the final realisation of my concept after extensive editing and redrafting, as I recognised that it was not simply the patriarchal social context of colonial society that silenced women. Rather a systemic repression of the parallel cultural identity feminist poets offered to the federating nation, which had hoped to achieve social unity, but rather, perpetuated the subordination of women. This realisation clarified the relationship between the contextual place of women and rejection of their poetry in a literary continuum, and revaluation, making my thesis more cohesive. Upon completion of my major work I reflect on my personal growth towards a deeper awareness of the commonality of women's experiences which transcend generations. I reflect on the role of my ancestors in agitating social and cultural change, and my*

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<sup>10</sup> This included research of the form in textbooks, advice from academics, and analysing the structure of traditional essays.

own role in sharing this Australian cultural heritage with my generation, who can enjoy a greater sense of equality, just as Cambridge has foreseen women would.

*“They leap to liberty, and recognize  
The golden sunshine and the morning skies  
Their own inheritance by inborn right.”<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted from the sonnet Influence in the journal Unspoken Thoughts by Cambridge, Ada and edited by Barton, Patricia. Campbell, ACT: English Dept, University College, 1988 (originally published in London 1887)