Chapter 5

The Individualisation of Feminine Subjects in Australian children’s fiction: girls, women and the disruption of the gendered public/private divide

Abel helped her aboard and took her home. It was true, she wasn’t your average mother. Abel decided he didn’t care about average. Out here average didn’t seem worth bothering about.

*Tim Winton, Blueback: a fable for all ages* (1997:84)

Attempts to change a society’s concepts of gender occur in the context of a sense of larger social change, a sense that the modern world calls into question the explanatory force of the systems of the past—whether social, ethical or religious—and that categories once thought of as fixed and stable, such as gender or the family, may in fact be relative.


Introduction and Theoretical Frames

In Chapter 2 the examination of the corpus of Australian children’s fictions demonstrated the validity of Peter Hollindale’s argument (1997:12) that ‘[t]he author’s textual negotiations with the child about the meaning and nature of childhood are a distinguishing feature of children’s books’. This feature is most obvious in literary fictions that, in Bourdieusienne terms, rupture dominant conceptualisations of childhood, that is, problematise or reconfigure the idealised ‘proper’ childhood that became the right of all Western children in the twentieth century regardless of gender, socio-economic positioning or race. This conceptualisation of childhood was marked by children’s attributes of innocence and dependence and conferred on them freedom from work in order to be
available for compulsory school education. Disruptive literary fictions dismantle oppositional and hierarchical conceptualisations of adult/child relations and suggest ways of being and interacting that enable and legitimate transformations to democratic intersubjective relations between children and adults.

The realist fictions I examined in Chapter 2, beyond the immediate post-war period, represented a textual dialogism where narratorial and/or child participants negotiated with, or proposed reconceptualisations of ‘child’ and ‘childhood’. In this chapter I offer a diachronic study of literary processes employed to reconfigure schemas of femininity. I examine fictions that rupture representations of feminine child subjectivities, especially that of the archetypal Australian girl, and also adult feminine subjectivities. Most significant is a rupture and then transformation in the representation of the feminine life course. In the post-war fictions there is an explicit expectation that all girls will follow a unitary life pattern: the feminine subject’s destiny is to become a ‘good mother’ devoted to the private sphere. By the new millennium, this ideology sits in a conservative dialogism beside representations of the rights of women to full individualisation as citizens actively participating across the whole social space and throughout pluralised life courses, without ageist stigmatisation.

From the corpus of fictions I examined in Chapters 3 and 4—showing transformative representations of child and adult masculinities—it is valid to claim that some children’s fictions from the 1960s onwards overtly rupture the traditional discourses and metanarratives of gendered childhood acculturation and reconfigure representations of feminine subjectivity with storylines that are more disruptive of traditional narratives than those constructed for masculine participants in these texts. I argued in Chapter 2 that Odo Hirsch’s Hazel Green series (1999-2003) exemplifies Bourdieu’s (2001:119) ‘subversive revolt leading to inversion of the categories of perception and appreciation’ in the case of children (). I argue here that this trilogy is not only significant for its reconceptualisation of
childhood in relation to adulthood but also for its reconceptualisation of feminine child
subjectivity. The other fictions I discuss in this chapter celebrate women's and girls' abilities to escape masculine authorisation and protection, what Cunningham (1995:188-9) calls 'the ghetto of dependency'. These fictions—Simon French's *All We Know* (1987), Joanne Horniman's *Sand Monkeys* (1991), and Robin Klein's *The Listmaker* (1997)—also articulate the extent to which containment of feminine subjects remains contingent upon the determination of some men to circumscribe their lives: some literary masculine subjects are represented as maintaining the traditional gender binarism employing explicit strategies of domination; others assume gendered domination/subordination unthinkingly, as 'natural'. However, there are other men and boys who are represented as promoting women's competence, autonomy and full individualisation across the Australian social space. *The Listmaker* asserts the heterogeneity of feminine experience and problematises the matrices of social power that continue to position them as subordinate across the whole social space. This accords with the views Bourdieu (2001) articulates.

In Chapter 1, I cited Hugh Cunningham's (1998:1208) review article that advocates the 'central importance' of research on gender and childhood (). He argues that in any account of childhood 'girls have always drawn the short straw—that there is, in almost any society that one cares to think of, a set of practices and assumptions resulting in differentiated and subordinate treatment of girls' but, he cautions, this often occurs in ways that are more complicated than a commonsense view might suggest (1998:1201-2). My findings, as elaborated below, support both these contentions. From the first envisioning of Western childhood as a time and place apart from adulthood, girlhood and boyhood were oppositionally and hierarchically constructed. For instance, the position of young females was different from that of boys in the contrasting ideal childhoods delineated in John Locke's 'Some Thoughts Concerning Education' (1693) and Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1764). Debates about education were primarily about raising boys (Cleverley and
Discussion of girls’ education always invoked ‘natural’ differences between males and females as determining assumptions about girls’ dependence on, and service to, men throughout their life course. This is clear in Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762), in which, for instance, the girl, Sophy, is introduced at the end of the text and her role is described thus: ‘A woman’s education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young’ (1764/1955:328). Ariès (1962:61) argues not only that ‘the idea of childhood profited boys first of all’ but also that expectations of a unitary female life pattern are emphasised: ‘the girls persisted much longer in the traditional way of life which confused them with adults: we shall have cause to notice more than once this delay on the part of the women in adopting the visible form of the essentially masculine civilisation of modern times’ (ibid).

My findings in Chapter 2 support the view that the realisation of an ideal childhood as a ‘universal experience’ came closest to fulfillment across the Western world in the post-war period. At that time, Kociumbas’ (1997:215) historiography finds that the Australian experience showed strong gender differentiation in child-rearing practices with boys advantaged in terms of time for play and freedom from responsibility. Indeed Kociumbas argues that a girl, whether in colonial, post-Federation or post-war Australia, ‘was to be trained to become a decorative ornament and plaything for her husband yet also a responsible and prolific mother. A miniature model of femininity, somehow she had always to be an adult yet forever a child’ (1997:xv). In the second part of this chapter I discuss Joan Phipson’s *Good Luck to the Rider* (1953) and Nan Chauncy’s *Tiger in the..."
Bush (1957) because these fictions exemplify the duality of the hegemonic discourse of patriarchal femininity. It is clear in the storylines of both the primary and secondary feminine participants. The feminine subjects of these fictions are represented as fulfilled while under 'house arrest' as mothers. While the discussion in Chapter 4 revealed that at least two distinct Australian schemas of literary adult masculinity—iconic pioneer and gentry masculinity—existed in the doxic moment of this study, I will argue here that there is more significance adhering to the unitary representation of girlhood-motherhood continuum across all representations of the social space.

Alongside this dominant metanarrative of femininity, Marilyn Lake’s (1993,1994) histories draw attention to evidence of the ‘seeds of critique’ of patriarchy in some socio-cultural spaces during the 1950s, especially with regard to stereotypes of ‘submissive wives and conscientious mothers’ and argues that we must not ‘... miss its vital significance for gender relations’ (cited in Murphy 2000:3). These signs of the emergent rupture of the idealised homogeneous gender order are represented in Patricia Wrightson’s The Crooked Snake (1955), as are the indicators that masculinity as well as femininity must change significantly if the gender order is to change. The difficulties to be addressed in discourse and schemas of masculinity and femininity in order to reconfigure the literary metanarratives of child and adult gender relations are evident in this text: the inherently relational meanings of gender binarism requires that schemas of both masculinity and femininity must change to enable the degendering of social structures. It is from the 1960s onwards, in a fiction like Mavis Thorpe Clark’s The Min-Min (1966), that the traditional patriarchal gender order is intellectually challenged and materially ruptured by second wave feminism (Stubbs 2003:162). The inequities of traditional gender regimes were exposed as the personal was established as political. Bourdieu (2001) argues that

[the fact that women's domestic labour has no monetary equivalent does indeed help another.]

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to devalue it, even in their own eyes, as if time without a market value were also without importance and could be given without recompense and without limits, first to members of the family, and especially children, …’ (98).

Here Bourdieu supports second wave feminist scholarship that argues that the public/private divide is a metaphysical fiction. Discussion in this chapter marks the points of rupture—not only in the literary representations of feminine subjectivity but also in storylines, story constituents and discourse—that problematise this engendered structure of the literary social space in Australian children’s fictions.

The shape of this chapter is also determined by mapping the moments of significant rupture in realist metanarratives enabled by two significant discursive shifts. First, there are representations of feminine participants explicitly rejecting a subordinate positioning in the private and public sphere. Second, there is a repudiation of an idealised unitary destiny of marriage and motherhood and of the concomitant confinement to the private sphere and the family. I am interested in comparing the different literary strategies that each fiction employs to either resignify the term, ‘mother’, or to dismantle it. I examine the varied ways that realist fictions for young readers attempt to rupture the intersecting dominant social norms and discursive formations that interpellate the ideal mother as selfless, generous, a domestic slave, a wise woman, and an omnipresent caregiver. These fictions employ strategies that allow these traditional ‘mothering’ virtues, so burdensome in their regulation of feminine behaviours, to be accessed by a wide range of subjectivities regardless of age, gender or bloodlines. An analysis is offered of the changing representations of subjectivities of all story participants because a change to any part of the family structure alters the matrix of relations of cathexis.

The corpus of fictions examined here employs diverse strategies as they attempt to deconstruct the idealisations of ‘mother’, a difficult task because the word bears such multi-faceted ideological significations, such cultural baggage. Robin Klein, the
internationally acclaimed Australian writer, a conservative supporter of the traditional nuclear family in her early writings, by the mid-1990s in *The Listmaker* rewrites the narratives of femininity and child-rearing in compelling ways so that essentialising understandings of mother either as biological entity, legal guardian or altruistic nurturer are repudiated.

Many fictions that meet a substantial number of the parameters for selection in my corpus of texts, like Rachel Flynn’s *Sacked* (2000) and Ursula Dubosarsky’s *The First Book of Samuel* (1992), also have child participants who resignify, for themselves and so for the reader, the normative expectations of ‘mother’ derived from traditional metanarratives. This is usually achieved by constructing participant subjectivities that offer comparisons of valued experiences with different caregivers in varied domestic settings. Here, however, I will resume discussion of Joanne Horniman’s *Sand Monkeys* as a hallmark fiction with regard to the re-conceptualisation of a masculine subject as a long-term primary caregiver to a child. Joanne Horniman’s *Mahalia* (2003) extends this narrative transformation further in young adult fiction.

What is significant in these *fin de siècle* texts is that parenting can be degendered, and fathers can be very successful primary care-givers to babies and children, but the call for the primacy of the parenting role is absolute. The nurturance of the child means that the parenting persons must make their child the paramount concern of their life. This ideology of all consuming child-care, a transformation of traditional ‘motherhood’ to ‘parenting’, contrasts with narratives where the needs of a whole person for social, sexual and cultural facets of life are acknowledged by all members of a family group and consideration is given according to needs and competencies to the pursuit of the happiness of everybody in a household as represented, for instance in *All We Know*.

Like the ‘child’, ‘childhood’ and ‘mother’, the ‘family’ is always a conceptualisation as much as a reality and its meanings differ across cultures as well as
Thus, in *family discourse*, the language that the family uses about the family, the domestic unit is conceived as an active agent, endowed with a will, capable of thought, feeling and action and founded on a set of cognitive presuppositions and normative prescriptions about the proper way to conduct domestic relationships. It is a world in which the ordinary laws of the economy are suspended, a place of trusting and giving—as opposed to the market and its exchanges of equivalent values—or, to use Aristotle’s term, *philia*, a word often translated as ‘friendship’ but which in fact designates the refusal to calculate; a place where interest in the narrow sense of the pursuit of equivalence in exchanges, is suspended. (65)

In conceptualising the family then, ‘family discourse’ assumes that the quality of interpersonal relationships is placed ahead of traditional normative expectations of social roles and responsibilities. The traditional heterosexist patriarchal family was certainly under attack during the 1960s and early 1970s, also deemed the ‘permissive’ era. The *Royal Commission into Human Relationships Final Report*, (Volume 4, The Family) (1977:1), edited by Elizabeth Evatt reflects the public ‘[a]nxieties’ that have arisen because ‘the family, like so many other institutions is in the process of change’ and the report shows ‘the Australian family today is different from what it was only a quarter of a century ago’. The report records that the public debate encompasses a range of views from those that advocate the family as the ‘cornerstone of society’ and those who ‘call for its abolition because they feel in its present form it destroys individuals’ (ibid). The traditional family of conjugal couple and children is no longer unequivocally the ideal or real household pattern in Australian society nor is it universally regarded as the guarantor of the best interests of its members. Sub-section 1.3 states that ‘the family, which can give the child so much, can also bring it harm’ (ibid). Twenty years later, the committee appointed in 1994 to oversee the Australian celebrations of the International Year of the Family had great
difficulty defining this social concept (Mackay 1997:74) that is generally understood to be a social reality although Bourdieu (1998:66) regards it as a ‘well-founded fiction’. Bourdieu (2001:84-5) joins feminist scholars in their critique of the notion of separate spheres for men and women arguing that the family has always been the product of forces outside the private world, shaping it and constructing idealisations of it.

Bourdieu (2001:87) argues that to comprehend the macro-context for the reproduction of the gender division ‘one should also take into account the role of the state, which has ratified and underscored the prescriptions and proscriptions of private patriarchy with those of public patriarchy, inscribed in all the institutions charged with the management and regulation of the everyday existence of the domestic unit’. As discussed in Chapter 3, the middle-class ideal of the ‘separation of spheres’—public sphere for men and private sphere for women—became integral to the Western patriarchal gender order in the nineteenth century. In Chapter 2 I examined Bourdieu’s (2001:117) discussion of masculinist societies where he argues that the ‘[t]heoretical universalism’ of liberal humanist epistemologies structurally disempowers women. The legal situation is that

The public/private divide refers to the way in which the law differentially constitutes the person, depending upon the person’s location. The idea is that in public the person is legitimately a subject of legal regulation as well as a legal actor, but in the private sphere the person is just that: private, free from law to be his particular self … .

(Naffine 1995:20)

Chambers (2001:173) concurs, arguing that full liberal personhood was in fact never granted to women: ‘[l]iberal thought is flawed because its liberalism and universalism deny the interdependencies and interconnections of society, which impinge upon women, who, as carers, cross the ideological divisions of social life into public and private spheres’. Importantly, women have always done so and only narrative idealisations of the normative nuclear family obscured these stories of feminine autonomy (Gilding 1991:60-3). My
examination in this chapter lends weight to this argument. Chambers (2001:64) argues that while issues of identity, agency and autonomy have been paramount in recent social theory ‘admitting that this process should also involve women has been so grudging and reluctant that women’s individualisation alone has been blamed for the breakdown of the family’.

Ideas about the family, then, are an inextricable aspect of the social matrix of the private sphere and a reconceptualisation of family life is an inevitable concomitant of the process of the pluralising of feminine subjectivities beyond lived or fictive narratives of ‘mother’.

Hypothesising extensive reconfigurations in the literary representations of feminine subjectivity and material conditions of girls and women in Australian children’s literature initially seems unproblematic when the temporal frame spans the women’s liberation movement and second and third-wave feminism. Yet the extent of real change remains a contentious issue in the new millennial moment with Anne Summers’ (2003) calls for a royal commission into the situation of women’s lives in Australia (265-6). Any appraisal of the substantive conditions of women’s lives in new millennial Australia leads to the commonsense view that they are vastly different to those of their mothers and grandmothers in the post-war era, let alone to those in evidence at the turn of the twentieth century. Hugh Mackay (1997:107-9) confirms that Australian women believe this also to be true in terms of women’s power and autonomy. Historiographic conjunctures of the chronotopes of children’s fictions and the transforming schemas of femininity certainly reflect these substantive and material changes. However, Bourdieu (2001) enters the gender debate explicitly to support third wave feminist scholars like Catherine Mackinnon (1987:121ff), Belinda Probert (1997:326) and Deborah Chambers (2001) in expressing gender regimes across the whole social space. Expressly Bourdieu, like Summers (2003), responds negatively to any suggestion that Western social structures are degendered and therefore that a post-feminist world has arrived.

Bourdieu (2001) argues that ‘[t]he visible changes that have affected the condition
of women mask the permanence of the invisible structures' (106). He is then concerned to examine the continuing embeddedness of the 'androcentric unconscious' in masculine and feminine subjectivities and the question of 'permanence or change in the sexual order' in public policy and practices (vii). In his advocacy of an approach to gender studies that requires the critique not only of masculine domination but also of the extent of substantive macro-change achieved by second wave feminism, he opens himself to attack on all sides because he asserts that the achievements of feminism are limited and partial. This will be seen by some readers as a denigration of significant achievements in an issue of social justice. He is aware of the censorious rebukes his views will suffer but insists that

It is however on the condition that one holds together the totality of sites and forms in which this kind of domination is exercised—a domination which has the particularity of being able to be exercised on very different scales, in all social spaces, from the most restricted, such as families, to the broadest—that it becomes possible to grasp its structural constants and the mechanism of its reproduction (2001:106).

This is why, despite the operations of patriarchy having been revealed by second wave feminism and denounced by many men and women, there is now a need for a new examination of what continues to be a masculinist social order. Third-wave feminism pluralises the understanding of 'women' so that many voices contribute across the social space and so race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and the poor become centres of articulation of the different conditions of women in Australia. As Sevgi Kilic (1997:45-9) argues in 'Who is an Australian Woman?', the definition of 'women' in Australia had to expand beyond the economically and educationally advantaged to include non-Anglo-centric women, Aboriginal women and non-European women. Bourdieu (2001:117) echoes the concerns of those who see that liberal feminism only operates for some educated and therefore economically advantaged women and leaves the lives of other women untouched. Bourdieu (2001:113-6) writes self reflexively and with deference to a feminist prejudice,
very aware of these possibilities, and with the realisation that such claims could be justified, can indeed be shown as a valid critique of the work of many male scholars. In defence of his weighing into the argument, he clearly expounds the indefensibility of masculine domination and relies, not on 'good faith' claims of the male scholar but rather, he asserts, on the grounds of 'good science'. Research that is good science, he argues, will neither patronise nor sentimentalise the victims of oppression—gender or any other—and will avoid any temptation to evaluate their efforts at alleviating their condition as more socially efficacious than is really the case.\(^2\)

Bourdieu (2001:23) argues then that '[t]he particular strength of the masculine sociodicy comes from the fact that it combines and condenses two operations: it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalised social construction' (original emphasis). He argues for recognition of research that elucidates the 'transhistorical continuity of the relation of masculine domination' (102, original emphasis). This can only be examined 'by relational thinking capable of making the connection between the domestic economy, and therefore the division of labour and the powers which characterise it, and the various sectors of the labour market (the fields) in which men and women are involved' (Bourdieu 2001:106).

Bourdieu (2001) maintains that despite women's entering the world of paid work and apparently thereby gaining economic independence from men, any ideas of equality are fallacious because the 'gap' continues to exist between women's and men's life trajectories in the public sphere. In Chapter 2 I noted that Bourdieu (2001) offered an advance rebuttal of the anticipated accusations of his approach being assessed as either 'blaming the victims' or of being 'essentialist'. He argues that the

\(^2\) Bourdieu (2001:114) argues thus: 'In fact, against the apparently generous temptation, to which so many subversive movements have succumbed, to put forward an idealised representation of the oppressed and the stigmatised in the name of fellow feeling, solidarity or moral indignation, and to pass over in silence the very effects of domination, especially the most negatives ones, one has to take the risk of seeming to justify the established order by bringing to light the properties through which the dominated (women, manual workers, etc) as domination has made them, may contribute to their own domination'.
noting of the transhistorical continuity of the relation of masculine domination, far from producing an effect of dehistoricization, and therefore of naturalization’, necessitates an examination of the strategies by which each successive era has maintained masculine domination. (2001:106)

This enables the discovery of ‘the historical mechanisms and actions which are responsible for its apparent dehistoricisation and which any politics of historical transformation needs to be aware of if it is not to be condemned to powerlessness’ (2001:102-3). The possibility of individual agency is, thus, Bourdieu's (2001) foremost consideration.

Bourdieu’s (2001) view aligns with Chambers (2001) findings that dehistoricisation is critical to contemporary neo-liberal ‘family values’ arguments. Chambers argues that

[w]omen were only treated as part of the nation-state as dependants of men and the family in private and public law, not directly as citizens … as a metaphor for unions and hierarchies of race, nation and gender, the family came to represent moral order. (39)

However, this process allowed the family to be dehistoricised into a symbol and disenfranchised as a site of power (Chambers 2001:39). Much state intervention in women’s lives occurs in the name of the family (Chambers 2001:41). This process of regulation of the lives of Australian women is traced by Gilding (1991:58-9), as we will see in discussions below. Australian women, then, are experiencing restraint that is typical of Western women generally.

The other longstanding objection to Bourdieu’s theoretical frames—habitus and structures—is that they lend themselves to conservative interpretations by limiting the possibility of change in causes that require intervention in order to achieve social justice. Bourdieu (2001:56-7), however, acknowledges the potential for change as long as the problems are not ‘misrecognised’, that is overlooked or minimised, nor changes positively ‘misrecognised’ as ‘progress’, that is, as a genuine transformation of society’s gender order. For instance, he argues that a clear gender ‘gap’ is maintained in many of the
perceived changes in the position of women across the social space since the 1970s, especially with regard to women and paid work.

First, with regard to the ‘biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction’ Bourdieu (2001:23-4) argues that the gendered ‘social construction of the body only very partially takes the form of explicit and express pedagogic action. It is to a large extent the automatic, agentless effect of a physical and social order entirely organised in accordance with the androcentric principle which explains the extreme strength of its hold’. Here Bourdieu (2001:9) argues that the deeper ‘doxic experience’ of children, as either boys or girls, must be addressed and not only the representations of gender in institutions, discourse and ideology. This experience apprehends the social world and its arbitrary divisions. Australian law requires registration of children’s birth and they are assigned a sex/gender at this time. The structure of the sexual division of labour begins here, Bourdieu (2001:95) contends, in this doxic moment. Davies’ (1993) research findings support Bourdieu’s (2001) views, a major conclusion being that gendered behaviour ‘... is implicit in acts of learning to talk, learning to read, learning to be a ‘good child’ or a competent person. Because of its embeddedness in approved dominant discourses its creation and maintenance are invisible and also intractable’ (1993:198). Davies’ research demonstrates that Australian girls and boys in early pre-school years already understand their appropriate gendered behaviours. They realise that incoherences and contradictions occur but will argue the case for the idealisations and norms to be respected and observed as correct or ‘natural’. They also have the opportunity now in critically literate educational contexts to engage in what I referred to in Chapter 3 as the possibility of a triple articulation within literary discursive practices. Davies (1997) argues that

[t]his then takes us into the third (or post-structuralist) tier of feminism. Each person comes to see the multiple ways they are positioned and in which they position each other. Old notions of identity are disrupted, new discursive possibilities are opened up
through a play on language, and the unconscious, the body, desire and emotions are
made relevant in the playful construction of new identities and new meanings ...(26)

Here Davies only sees the responder to the text as taking up this rupture position in relation
to texts. My argument is that texts already exist that offer this third articulation of textual
dialogism, and that this has now become the required implied reader position constructed
within the literary discourse and narrative storylines and constituents. Bourdieu (2001),
like Australian feminist researcher, Belinda Probert (1997), identifies marriage and the
kinds of paid employment undertaken by women as maintaining the gender gap. Bourdieu
(2001) argues that there are

three practical principles that function to control women's choices and permissions:
the functions are an extension of domestic functions—"education, care and service",
that the woman does not have authority over men and lastly that men control the
management and use of technical objects and machines. (94, original emphasis)

Marriage increases the amount of unpaid work and emotional labour undertaken by women
(Probert 1997:316-17, 327) with the burdens of mothering being particularly rigorous
(Probert 1997: 312-13).3 In the world of work, for instance, women's 'careers' tend to be
in service industries that require the most prized virtues inculcated by the dominant norms
of femininity: that is, service, or 'people' occupations. These jobs are extensions of the
domestic roles traditionally assigned to women. Probert (1997:321) argues that in the
Australian context the demand for female labour is 'clearly shaped by discriminatory
forces' in that ethnicity, race and poverty determine the amount and kinds of work done
outside the home by women. Chambers (2001) argues that women are beset by
'contradictions' both in the attempt to achieve individualisation of the citizen and in not
bearing the full responsibility for the 'erosion of traditional family life'.

3 Here Probert (1997) draws on M. Bittman's Juggling time: How Australian families use time, a study
Stephens' (1996:26) argument, cited in the first epigraph to this chapter, is relevant here as he argues that gender change occurs in the context of broader social transformations. He recognises that conceptualisations of the family are intimately connected to changes in the understandings of femininity. Discussions of new millennial femininities involve negotiations with the life course expectations constructed for girls and how these are represented and responded to by feminine participants in fictions for child readers. Thus reconceptualisations of 'mother', as well as 'family', and the pluralising of femininities are new millennial issues of significance. The storylines in the corpus of children's fictions discussed here increasingly deal with the ways that the site of the family undergoes rupture and transformation. The exclusivity of a closed 1950s nuclear family, already noted, gradually opens up to offer competing representations of gender expectations and behaviours in diverse domestic arrangements, parent-child interactions and intersubjective relationships. Scutter (1996) argues of children's fiction in the 1980s:

[t]here are fewer changes in the representation of family structures, and little that is radically different: families are still nuclear, although buttressed by being extended laterally and vertically, in the manner of imagined traditional groupings. In realist texts, there is a great deal of hostility towards the traditional family, but the blame is usually assigned to a defective mother figure, and any resolution is in the direction of a nuclear family reconstituted with a proper mother, either a surrogate or even the daughter herself assuming the coveted role. (13)

Scutter examines a corpus of fictions without setting any parameters that ensure the validity of her claims. It is thus understandable that our findings differ.

Important still is the capacity of realist fiction to represent intrapsychic states so that individuals—children and adults—examine their gender positioning in a specific context. In post-war Australian children's fictions, then, the narratives reveal shifts in the paradigms of the family and patterns of homemaking, home-breaking and new forms of
home-shaping determined by the transformed life course patterns of feminine subjects, especially with regard to mothering. Just as radical is the representation of the family as 'people who belong together' where this does not necessarily mean biological kin, conjugal relationships, long-term companionate marriages, or other households legitimated and economically financed by men.

Indeed in the Western world a powerful 'family values' discourse emerged across the social space at the fin de siècle in an attempt to counter the disruption implicit in the demands of second-wave feminism for women's equality of opportunity in the workplace and equality of labour contributions in the unpaid work of the private sphere. For women the implicit requirement of a family values ideology is that they return to the secondary role in the social structure, relinquishing claims to full individualisation that masculine citizens enjoy. As Chambers (2001:143) argues, '[p]oliticians and institutions who promote the idea of a crisis in family values claim it to be related to a crisis in gender identities that can only be resolved by a return to traditional gender roles'. In the Australian context, Murphy (2000) argues of the family values ideology that the

myths have contemporary salience, especially when they motivate public policies designed to reconstitute the family in the image of the 1950s, by making child-care expensive, family tax arrangements, and the welfare system. (222)

Murphy (2000:222) argues that this, in part, reproduces the invisible welfare benefit of the dependent spouse deduction (see also Summers 2003:261). Of course, any project to degender the social order remains quite 'unthinkable' for those who consider gender binarism essential, foundational or even self-evident. Various empiricist narratives never ceased to inform powerful fields of scholarly and professional praxis which maintain an economic and intellectual investment in a concept of 'core gender identity' for members of
society. These narratives, as Bourdieu (2001) argues, contribute to the continued promulgation of gender binarism as essential to social life and its institutions. Chambers (2001:5) argues that '[t]he link made between sex, family morality and the nation gives the government an excuse to restrict people’s liberties in extraordinary ways' ().

Elided from my discussion in Chapter 2, of the universal provision of a ‘proper childhood’ for all children, is the concomitant reconceptualisation of ‘motherhood’ that necessarily underpinned and enabled this social change. By employing the gender-neutral terms, ‘adults’ and ‘parents’, I side-stepped the implicitly gender differentiated familial strategy required by this conceptualisation. The movement towards the realisation of an ideal childhood for all children had a concomitant expectation that all girls and women would become full-time mothers. Embedded here was the construction of an idealised ‘good mother’ whose function assumed a national priority in the policies of Western governments at the turn of the twentieth century. The successful campaigns for female suffrage in the Western world were in part the result of the alignment of mother as citizen with the needs of the nation-state to promote the health of its children, ‘the nation’s greatest asset’ (Grimshaw et al 1994:192). Gilding (1991:60-3) finds that during the post-war period the classist division between a ‘lady’ and a ‘woman’ disappears with all women becoming ‘mothers’ and ‘housewives’ regardless of social class. The activities of mothering become all consuming (1991:93).

Like the ‘good child’, the good mother requires feminine subjects to accept domination not only in the private sphere by husbands and fathers but also by masculine experts in the public sphere. Medical, scientific and educational authorities expounded views on all aspects of childhood and proposed regulatory family regimens to be essential

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4 Bourdieu (2001) generalises further, arguing ‘[i]n fact the whole of learned culture, transmitted by the education system, whether in its literary, philosophical, medical or legal variants, has never ceased, until a recent period, to convey archaic modes of thought and models … and an official discourse on the second sex to which theologians, jurists, doctors and moralists have all contributed and which aims to restrict the autonomy of the wife especially as regards work, on the grounds of her ‘childish’ and feeble nature, each period drawing on the “treasures of the previous one” … ’ (86).
for successful child-rearing (Cunningham 1995:167-70). Indeed the skills of ‘mothercraft’
needed special education programs (Gilding 1991:93; Cunningham 1995:154; Kociumbas
heavy responsibilities and among these was the ‘duty to exit from the labour market if at
all possible’. The idea of the family as the economic unit where money was in the hands of
the masculine ‘breadwinner’ was imposed by social policies during the early twentieth
century and continues into the post-war period and the new millennium (Gilding 1991:9,
59; Probert 1997:308; Murphy 2000:53).

White (1981:165) argues that in post-war Australia, the privatised, suburban
‘Australian way of life’ finally admitted the representation of women in some public
discourses such as advertising but this shift did not alter their essential function as being
within the family. Lake’s historical research, already mentioned above, alerts us to the
dialogical nature of gender discourses in the post-war era, the cognitive struggle from other
cultural arenas, and I argue that some children’s fictions are a part of that dialogism.
Nevertheless, the dominant discourse advocated that mothers had responsibility for the
socialisation of children in ‘the modern specialised family’ (Gilding 1991:80) in homes
with ‘children increasingly elevated to being the focus of the family’ (Murphy 2000:26).
Now mothers needed to attend to the psychological well-being and intellectual
development of their offspring as well as to issues of health and hygiene (Kociumbas
1997:210). Learning the normative behaviours of ‘sex roles’ was an integral part of
successful child-rearing. Government welfare and taxation policies continued to promote
the preferred breadwinner/homemaker division of labour (Murphy 2000:89). Medical and
social policies finally officially acknowledged women’s use of birth control to restrict
pregnancies and, as a containment strategy, the category of the ‘small family’ alongside the
single category of the ‘large family’ (Gilding 1991:79).

The dominant psychoanalytic Spockean paradigm of child-rearing advantaged boys
in terms of freedom but girls remained trapped in routines that presaged their future dependent mothering role (Kociumbas 1997:211). English classist issues re-circulated as notions of ‘lady-like’ behaviour and respectability were enforced in institutions like elite girls’ schools (Kociumbas 1997:214). As Kociumbas argues, the shift in a girl’s most prized toys from baby dolls and bride doll in the 1950s to a Barbie doll in the 1960s indicates little change in the representation of the structure of gender relations between Australian men and women offered to children. Such toys suggest a model of femininity constructed to please men, to be ‘living baby dolls’ as Barbara Brooks (1997:116) argues, childish, decorative and passive in relation to men and destined for the nurturance of men and maternity.

Gilding (1991:128) argues that in Australia from the 1960s onwards a diverse set of domestic households predominates but the traditional nuclear family model continues to be re-circulated. The Australian Institute of Family Studies was established in 1973 and achieved much with regard to legitimising the myriad of household types and living patterns so that stigmatising terms like ‘broken home’ and ‘dysfunctional family’ were contested and are no longer applied to all non-nuclear patterns of commitment as was once the case (1991:131). The changes are described and cause and effect argued by Gilding (1991) in this way:

‘[f]rom the late 1960s households became more diverse, but smaller again. The family was broken, as moral conservatives put it, in the sense that a great many new household forms were fragments of the old. Married couples with children declined in relative numbers; single households, groups, childless couples, de facto unions, single parents and blended families increased. “Relationships” became pivotal to household formation, while dependency and children became less important’ (128-9).

Richards (1997:164) confirms the ‘extraordinary resilience’ of these idealisations ‘even in periods of increasing evidence of new family behaviour’. Hugh Mackay (1993:269) found
that the family continued to operate as the ideal: ‘[a]fter all, the family is still widely
recognised as providing the kind of emotional security which is hard to achieve outside a
family unit: a family is expected to provide ultimate loyalty, ultimate acceptance, and the
ultimate comfort of being loved without qualification. For all the cyclonic emotions and
upheavals which family life causes, it is still thought to offer a guarantee of
companionship, mutual support and a strong sense of identity’.

Discussions below show that in *The Min-Min* the Tuckers’ ‘broken’ home is
represented narratorially as undesirable and a tragedy whereas twenty years later in *All We
Know* the ending of a marriage is represented by the main child protagonist, Arkie, as a
desirable outcome for her mother even if confusing for Arkie and her brother. Despite these
moves, Gilding (1991:132) argues that even in the *fin de siècle* and third-wave feminism
‘the family is still presented—as it was in the post-war decades—as something natural and
objective, one of the “basic units of society” yet this image has no basis in fact. It obscures
the extraordinary changes in everyday life over the past century’. New reasons for the
containment of women to their ‘natural’ dependent homemaker and mothering roles were
advanced by the terminology of ‘maternal instinct’ and ‘maternal deprivation’: ‘good
mothers’ stayed at home nurturing children whereas selfish ‘working mothers’ were ‘bad
mothers’ (Gilding 1991:118; also Kociumbas 1997:210-11).5 Since the publication of
Gilding’s (1991) research a conservative Australian government has keenly pursued
‘family values’ policies and changed social policy so that women are more likely to
remove themselves from the full-time workforce and from independent motherhood.

Placing substantive transformations of the family in a longer historical period and in a
Marxist frame, Gilding (1991) argues that

> [t]he dynamics which underpinned changes from the late 1960s onwards were

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5 The reality of women working, although not being considered the family friendly ideal, accounts for public
policies that assume the necessity of 1.6 incomes per household in order to maintain the middle-class lifestyle
to which Australians imagine that they have access (Mackay 1997:56).
basically longstanding. Prolonged schooling, state welfare and the expansion of the market underpinned the making of the Australian family from the late nineteenth century. The same dynamics underpinned the making of the broken family, and the breaking of the Australian family from the late 1960s. In fact, over the longer time frame the market and the state prevailed over kinship and neighbourhood relations. The Australian family was made and broken by the same social forces. (129)

Here he is talking of the ideal of the nuclear white heterosexual ideal of the family. This view eliminates the agency of women and the importance of first and second-wave theorising and practice in shaping the political agencies that devise and administer social welfare policies that so immediately and intimately impact on the choices available to women in Australian society.

Currently the discourse of 'dysfunctional family' circulates dialogically with terminology such as 'family diversity', 'families of choice' and 'blended families'. There are at least two generations of Australians who can testify to the successful childhood experiences provided by non-traditional or atypical familial patterns and changing family contexts. Writing a decade after Gilding (1991), Chambers (2001:5) concurs and adds, '[m]oreover it ensures that debates about family values are firmly anchored in and invested with meanings about nation, nationhood, nationality and race'. Chambers (2001) examines evidence from Britain, USA and Australia and finds that there is collusion between government policy, academic discourses and the media to re-circulate the mythology of the ideal white patriarchal nuclear family.

It was the regulatory nature of Western families and of child-rearing practices that instigated Ariès's (1962:7, 362, 399) research and he saw understandings of childhood intrinsically linked to patterns of family life. Integral to these socio-cultural processes is gender acculturation, as I have already noted. In the latter part of the twentieth century as women insisted on the same rights to individualisation as men—that is, to independence as
economic units and the right to operate autonomously in the realm of public life—there occurred demands for a reconfiguration of the dominant Western social order and its embedded gender regimes. All researchers agree that children are increasingly significant to the family and that 'parenting' seems to be one area of social life where the necessity of emotional commitment is uncontentious. Who should be required to provide this emotional commitment remains an open question. This is a major focus for the lives of contemporary women narrativised in a literary fiction such as Robyn Klein's *The Listmaker*.

In the second part of this chapter I examine the implications for young feminine subjects of the traditional family ideologies implicit and explicit in the texts of the 1950s. That there are the seeds of gender trouble in these fictions has already been briefly canvassed in the earlier chapters of this study. The second part of the chapter offers a brief examination of emergent proto-feminist fictions like *The Crooked Snake* and *The Min-Min*. The section traces the literary discursive changes employed in early attempts to rupture traditional literary gender representations of feminine subjectivity and feminine metanarratives. In the third section I examine *All We Know* in order to examine fictions that rupture representations of feminine child subjectivity of the archetypal Australian girl, and also adult feminine subjectivity. Most significant is a rupture and transformation in the representation of the unitary pattern of the feminine life course. No longer is motherhood the sole feminine subject's destiny. This ideology, by the new millennium, evinces further transformation of representations to the rights of women to full individualisation as citizens actively participating in and across the whole social space and throughout pluralised life courses. Thus in the final part of the chapter I briefly re-visit the *Hazel Green* series and *Bruno and the Crumhorn* to examine narrative strategies that reconfigure feminine child subjectivity with regard to adult masculine subjects who fail as care-givers. Most of the final section of this chapter offers an examination of *The Listmaker*.

*The Listmaker* constructs a story-world that exemplifies third-wave feminism's
diversification of femininities and feminine life-courses. The fiction is the more interesting as a socio-cultural entity because Klein is a writer whose conservative ‘family values’ ideology has been noted by Australian scholars and most recently discussed by Scutter (1999:211-14). Early second-wave feminist fiction like *I am Susannah* is very well known, indeed canonical, in its continuing presence in bookshops and school curricula. Its ideology of oppositional feminism is now, I would argue, readily recognised by readers. As in the *Hazel Green* series and *Bruno and the Crumhorn*, in *The Listmaker* the reader sees aspects of third wave feminism being narrativised so that men are not represented as having power over all women. The material conditions of women are represented as varying but this is not attributable to a generalised ‘victim’ status of all women. Women are negotiating changing life trajectories as deemed to be in their own best interests within the opportunities that are presented to them. Motherhood becomes just one possible life choice for a multi-faceted feminine identity.

**The doxic moment: gendered and gendering fictions of the 1950s**

My examinations of the 1950s corpus of children’s fictions in Chapters 3 and 4 explicates the discursive practices that enable such texts to function as an engendering force. Feminist scholars have extensively researched the discursive field and Anne Cranny-Francis (1992:265) writes that it is important to remain alert to the double sense of ‘engendered’ when talking about fictions since ‘[t]exts are engendered fictions, but they are also engendering fictions’.

Texts then are a social practice and a site of adult power and this clearly includes the fictions adults write for children. As such, they have the potential to rupture the apparently ‘natural’ gender arrangements or traditional paradigms and also to envision new social organisation and establish discursive strategies that allow these to be represented narratively. Since its inception the field of children’s literature has played its part in this
engendering of child subjects (Hunt 1994: 52-53, 74-75). The 1950s children’s fictions in the corpus reveal pervasive gendering of literary subjectivities, genres and discourses. The child subjectivities represented submit to hegemonic gender imperatives whether masculine or feminine. By the new millennium however, the double articulation—of patriarchal conventions and feminist reversion—is well recognised as a literary strategy. This is explicit in the representation of masculine and feminine child participants in fin de siècle fictions in the corpus, Bruno and the Crumhorn, The Listmaker and the Hazel Green series. It is the accurate reading/recognition of the positionings being offered the subject in any given social matrix that enables an agential decision about Simone de Beauvoir’s rubric of ‘[w]hat I make of what the world makes of me’ (1952). To expand Toril Moi’s (1999:76) elucidation of de Beauvoir’s argument in The Second Sex, our embodiment gives us certain characteristics from birth to death, but this body is a ‘situation’ and not a destiny.

The 1950s fictions also represent the sense of the closed worlds of family life that prompted Ariès’ (1962) research. This is evident, although very positively represented, in the Australian family/adventure fictions. Large families feature in all the 1950s fictions in my study although there are conventional literary reasons for this since a fair range of children enables heteroglossia—diversity of viewpoints—even in the remote Australian rural locations that national and international audiences were very keen to read about. Mothers are represented universally as ‘at home’ and they are entirely focused on family concerns; they are endlessly available to children and girls are represented at various stages of practising their maternal destiny, that hegemonic discourse of a unitary life pattern already mentioned.

Cunningham (1995:181-2) finds that the precocity of colonial children is mentioned in writings of visitors from Europe. Colonial children were generally regarded as being raised in a manner that was freer than their European counterparts especially because their separation from the adult world was achieved far less effectively (ibid). The
consequence of this, it was argued in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, was the loss of a proper deference towards adults, and authority generally, and a concomitant loss of innocence that resulted from the more regular contact with adults. Australian writers like Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce both enhanced and re-circulated a colonial mythology when they represented Australian children, boys and girls, as much less restrained in their behaviours than British children. An expectation of archetypal Australian girlhood then was an element of ‘naughtiness’ and physicality, a literary tradition famously begun for child readers by Ethel Turner’s *Seven Little Australians* (1894:1).

Sharon Pearce (1996:112)) discusses femininity as constructed by Turner and Louise Mack as typically more active and less dependent than that represented by the English writers of colonial family stories: ‘colonial girls were more self-sufficient, active and adventurous than their northern hemisphere cousins (although it is true that they never quite forgot their domestic talents) … ’. White (1985:235) discusses the ‘tomboy’ character but I agree with Pearce that there exists a more generalised archetypal Australian girlhood in the fictions rather than merely a subset of girlhood. Kociumbas’ history (1997:191) finds that throughout the twentieth century ‘even eleven year old girls’ and women knew that the desirable feminine body was ‘dainty, athletic and revealed’ and this archetypal repertoire was extended post-war to include ‘a sex life which was assumed to be athletic, competitive and skilled’ (Kociumbas 1997:223) for which acculturation during girlhood was a preparation. *Good Luck to the Rider* (1953) offers such gendered representations in a 1950s literary fiction. Here preparations are made for the four siblings’ camping trip to Piangil Valley:

George and Clive collected and packed ground-sheets and tarpaulins, cleaned the pea-rifle and laid in a stock of ammunition, greased and refilled the Land-Rover with oil and petrol and carefully stowed the spare can of petrol under the seat at the back.

Sheila whose enthusiasm for the adventure was growing every hour, spent periods in
the kitchen baking brownies and scones, packing butter, chops, tea, sugar, jam and anything else she could think of for their meals. (4-5)

The acculturation of the Trevor children presumes the complete separation of spheres as this description demonstrates.

The representation of Iggy in the second level storyline in *Tiger in the Bush* is as an archetypal Australian girl, as she proves to be ‘self-sufficient, active and adventurous’ in many situations. When Badge goes missing his horse arrives at the American intruders’ camp-site in the valley and it is Iggy who knows what to do; she takes charge of the search rather than the adults:

No longer was Iggy an awkward giggling, teenager, unsure of herself. Crisply she gave commands for a rope to be fetched to serve as bridle and reins. ‘Cut a short length for a whip,’ she told doc, ‘he won’t want to come back again— but he’s going! And keep feeding him.’

‘Back where ?’ asked Russ, obediently stuffing his best crackers in the horse’s mouth.

‘Back where he’s took Badge—and I reckon I know where that is … ’ (137)

In the resolution of the primary level story the men are congratulating themselves on the ‘defeat’ of the Americans and Iggy interrupts to assert her role in this ‘his-story’: ‘You did well, too, Iggy,’ Dad’s smile was like warm sun after frost, ‘only Harry reckons it was Badge’s idea that tricked ’em’ (168). The ‘collective collusion’ of men is an appeal to hierarchy is deployed again in the dialogue to assert masculine domination: the Old Hatter credits Badge’s ingenuity as the most important factor in diverting the Americans from the tiger. As feminine subject, Iggy’s role (168) is only secondary in traditional narratives where both masculine and feminine characters are represented. Feminine subjects are admitted to these ‘bush’ attributes and skills in order that the idealised bush community can thrive but women are still followers, secondary and subordinate, and closure reinforces
this. Iggy is not a ‘good’ daughter, as I argued in Chapter 3, choosing to break with patriarchal values and pursue her education in Hobart. She suffers contradictory impulses because while staying at her Uncle Link’s farm so that she can attend the country school (12) she longs for the valley and her family. Yet when she is at home her sense of the family ‘not counting’ does not please her. In fact Dave Lorenny takes pleasure in that idea that they are ‘off the map’.

The conflict between Iggy’s loyalty to her older brother and her dismissal of Badge is a matter of jealousy and unhappiness for Badge throughout the story (28-9). In the fiction’s thematic closure, as Liddle-ma focalises Badge and Iggy, she sees that Badge has finally captured Iggy’s interest and is leading her off to share his ‘secret’ of the active platypus nesting chamber he found and kept a secret until this point (171). So while in closure Badge’s family training exemplifies Saxby’s production of the liberal humanist hero who ‘emerges from dependency to become a unique self-determining individual’, it is Iggy’s destiny, whether in the city following Lance or in the bush following Badge, to follow men rather than to lead just as Liddle-ma followed Dave Lorenny into the wilderness (28).

The representations of both the main primary storyline participant in Good Luck to the Rider, Barbara, and the secondary storyline participants—the older sister, Sheila, and new school friend, Will or, in Tiger in the Bush, Iggy—demonstrate Cunningham’s (1998:1201-2) argument about the differentiated and subordinate treatment of girls which he argues often occurs in ways that are more complicated than a commonsense view might suggest. Just as the literary conventions of the nationalist genre of the Bush Legend determined the representation of Badge Lorenny’s subjectivity, literary conventions determine the levels of meaning attached to Barbara. In the fiction’s orientation she is not a successful archetypal Australian girl like Iggy, Sheila or Will. Barbara’s storyline requires her accession to the ideal Australian feminine subjectivity and embodiment.
Sheila is offered as the ideal within the fiction. Her father in particular compares Barbara unfavourably with Sheila on numerous occasions (31, 47, 60, 138) and also with her friend Will. Will also admires Sheila greatly because she is pretty. Will is represented as the archetypal Australian girl because she is immediately recognisable as appropriately athletic by someone like Mike. He responds ironically to Will’s self-deprecatory remark about her equestrian skills with ‘...You’ve seen a horse before’ (81). Barbara comments to her brother, George, that Sheila is ‘so clever’ and ‘pretty’ and concludes ‘I wish I could be like Sheila. Nothing ever worries her’ (12). It is Sheila’s archetypal Australian girlhood qualities that Barbara admires: independence, confidence and physical courage and endurance. The limiting case for such qualities, and the complication Cunningham warned about, is when these attributes are pitted against masculine achievement, that is, as Bourdieu or Connell argue, when the relational dimension is invoked.

The relational dimension is to the fore when Clive and George decide to spend a day walking through the bush to the head of the valley. Sheila joins them, sensibly subordinate at first, intending only to ‘go as far as she felt inclined’ (13). When she insists on going the full distance she is a nuisance to the boys because she ‘was always behind’ and earns herself a blister and a freckled nose for her temerity. While Sheila is seriously provoked by their derogatory claims she nevertheless ‘limped up to the fire and sat down. Her hat was on the back of her head, her shoes were scratched and dirty, and her face shone a fiery pink from exertion, heat and sunburn’ so that Barbara is ‘horrified by the wreck of her immaculate sister’ (14-5). Sheila, then, is both the archetypal Australian girl ‘self-sufficient, active and adventurous’ like Iggy, but is also an object for the masculine and feminine gaze. Bourdieu (2001:63) argues that the ‘genesis of the female habitus’ lies in all feminine subjects’ experiences of ‘the body-for-others, constantly exposed to the objectification performed by the gaze and the discourse of others’. For instance, when Sheila emerges from the homestead for the camping trip she ‘swept off the veranda with
the poise of a mannequin, and Clive whistled as he noticed her neat riding-coat and rakish brown hat' (6). Her packing for the camping trip in the bush includes 'a large suitcase, a camera slung over her shoulder and a pink eiderdown under her arm' suggesting her proper place is within the domestic world (6). Iggy in *Tiger in the Bush* finds this 'body-for-others' aspect of femininity most burdensome and complains that 'No one gives two hoots how a boy looks' (160). Iggy, of course, also objects to the expectation of a unitary life pattern and is not at all impressed when her aunt assures her that the practice of domestic tasks prepares her for managing 'a home of her own' (12). Iggy's choices of city, education and work disrupt the dominant social order of the bush community but this is only as a third level storyline. The rights of the feminine subject to make legitimate life choices become the primary storyline of Sylvie in *The Min-Min*, as I argue below.

Barbara's and Sheila's storylines demonstrate the complication inherent in Kociumbas' (1997:xv) argument mentioned above that a girl was '... always to be an adult yet forever a child'. She will be located where men choose, she will follow rather than lead and she will be confined. At the same time she will also feel privileged by her connections to enterprises deemed significant by the masculine subjects to whom she is emotionally cathcted and legally attached. In fiction, dialogues are a prime literary discourse strategy for representing power relationships (Stephens 1992:259-60; Bal 1997:44-52). Early in *Good Luck to the Rider* there are excellent examples of the literary representation of the 'good girl' speaking to power. The dialogue with the father, below, offers an apposite example. It is the morning after Barbara has dared to bring home the brumby foal that she knows has upset her father. When Mr. Trevor arrives at her bedside the next morning the dutiful respect owed to the father is represented in body, gesture and speech:

She looked up, a piece of buttered toast in her hand, as Mr. Trevor came in. She flushed and smiled at him a little nervously.

'Good morning father,' she said with a slight gulp.
‘Recovered, I see,’ said Mr. Trevor cheerfully. ‘Mind if I sit on the bed?’ She shook her head and moved her legs to make room.’

‘About this foal,’ he began at once. ‘Why exactly do you want it?’

‘I think,’ she answered after a moment, ‘because no one else does. It’s not his fault that we had to shoot his mother and—and he’s so little.’

Mr. Trevor nodded. ‘You must realise quite clearly, though that he won’t be little for long. In fact he has every chance of growing into something far too big for you. He’ll probably be wild; he’s certain to have faults all over him; and to put it plainly, he’ll certainly not be worth the trouble he’ll cause.’ (31)

Mr. Trevor assumes the power of father and therefore no justification needs be offered. The dialogue is constructed with the gesture integral to the realistic mode where the reality derives from discourse appearing to describe simultaneous actions (see Stephens 1992:250-1)—Barbara eating and looking up and Mr. Trevor entering the room). Speech reporting tags offer another discoursal strategy that shows the physical evidence of the inculcation of masculine domination. Mr. Trevor’s speech represents the literary schema of a masculine habitus in its bluntness and air of busyness constructed in the tag ‘he began at once’. Speed and clarity of purpose are foremost. On the other hand when Barbara replies she is represented as hesitant, implying her understanding that she must think carefully before speaking to power. Barbara’s bodily hexis and speech both suggest a subordinated subjectivity. The formality of address, ‘father’ is classist and instantiates gendered and ageist subordination. Bodily hexis represented as ‘flushed’, ‘smiled … nervously’ shows appropriate deference. She is inarticulate when he questions her about sitting on her bed, actually showing consideration for her comfort. Barbara’s nod and ‘slight gulp’ signal her permission although her hesitancy suggests that on her part a refusal is impossible.

The embodiment of domination is represented and Barbara’s bodily hexis is clearly represented as figuring subordination. Bourdieu (2001:11) demonstrates that in complex contemporary Western societies masculine domination prevails despite the consciousness
raising of feminism. From early in the fiction, metanarratives of motherhood implicitly and explicitly shape Barbara’s desire to raise the young brumby. From the outset her interest in the horse is constructed for the reader as being a caring role, preparation for the nurturing adult role. When her father questions her about her reasons for keeping the foal Barbara replies: “I think, ... because no one else does. It’s not his fault that they had to shoot his mother, and— and he’s so little” (30). Mr. Trevor does not identify maternal motives in Barbara’s behaviour but the fiction has Sheila speak them to her father later in the text. The narrator describes the horse as ‘more goose than swan’ (57). Sheila tells her father that she is sure it is Barbara’s desire to help a ‘lame duck’ that determined her sympathy for the foal. The latter is also referred to as an ‘ugly duckling’ on more than one occasion. The dialogue above foreshadows the closure of Barbara’s storyline.

As for all Australian feminine literary subjects, becoming the archetypal girl means first becoming more like Sheila and Will. This requires the achievement of the requisite levels of athleticism and independence. However these activities must be contained in the adult feminine subject so Barbara’s storyline closure anticipates domesticity and motherhood and reinforces the concept of a feminine habitus. Barbara is sensitised to her destiny as a ‘good mother’ in the closure of the episode at the Bungaribee Show when the pattern of the patriarchal woman as a wife/lover is foreshadowed (145-8). Many literary discursive signs operate as an intertexts to ‘motherhood’ metanarratives, for instance, in the extract ‘mother and—and he’s so little’. However, story closure makes this reading clear metonymically. The neighbour’s young daughter, Fanny Barker, ‘materialising from nowhere in particular, sat herself in folds of crumpled pink on Barbara’s knee and gazed darkly into her face’ (148). Barbara’s destiny in ‘motherhood’ is prefigured.

In Good Luck to the Rider traditional literary narratives of desiring, as well as mothering, femininity shape the outcomes and closure of the story for the main feminine participants. Literary discourse conventionally employs allusion and intertextuality as a
marker of significance and it is particularly crucial in the construction of ideology here: fairy tale, nursery rhymes and romance are integral to the discursive practices employed in the fiction. Allusion to the nursery rhyme from which the fiction takes its title and several chapter headings is gendered, the salient line being ‘[a]way goes the mare’. The use of the Ugly Duckling fairytale was mentioned above, and unsurprisingly perhaps, with girl and wild horse as participants, the *Beauty and the Beast* narrative is also employed as an intertext. A plethora of literary allusions occur which invoke the romance genre where the feminine subject transforms, or tames, the ‘beast’. Barbara is destined to inherit the traditional lot of Beauty in *Beauty and the Beast*, prepared to tame her man as she did her beast, prefigured in the last lines of the novel. Everyone wonders why Barbara’s confidence and physical prowess improved so with the large and ungainly Rosinante.

Barbara and her horse win in the under-sixteen hunt event at the Bungaribee Annual Agricultural Show. The narrative closure is traditionally gendered. When Barbara wins a competition riding Rosinante, or Rozz, Mr. Trevor says: ‘I am proud of you, … and I’m proud of Rosinante’ (143). Her brother Clive’s praise is more unreserved. Mr. Barker, the neighbouring farmer who laughed outright at Rozz when he first saw him, also congratulates Barbara (144). He had pronounced that ‘It takes a clever man to be a clown. Remember that’ and Barbara dutifully assures him that she will (103). Barbara knows how to defer and to play the gender game so that she will be regarded as a ‘Good girl’ (82). The episode demonstrates that the achievements of women and children are interpreted under patriarchy as being the result of a structure efficiently run by one man or another—Mr. Trevor did not predict Rozz’s potential accurately but Mike the horse-breaker did. Any part Barbara plays in the horse’s success is displaced onto a masculine subject.

In the novel’s closing paragraph, Sheila questions Barbara: ‘What I can’t understand is why, when you were always so afraid of Ting-a-ling, were you never in the least frightened of Rosinante?’ (149). Barbara replies, ‘You can’t be afraid of anything you
love’ (149). Her reply makes clear that this is only a short step away from Bourdieu’s (2001:79-80) ‘eroticisation of domination’. The beast qualities are of course the conventions of romance genre: the horse is ‘wild’, is ‘far too big for you’, has ‘faults all over him’, and is ‘trouble’.

The motherhood narratives of the families of *Tiger in the Bush* and *Good Luck to the Rider* are constructed in the tertiary level storylines and both Mrs. Trevor and Liddlema are represented as emotionally and psychologically significant to the child participants. They demonstrate Cunningham’s argument that motherhood carried heavy responsibilities and neither mother works outside the home. Both mothers attend to the intellectual well-being of their offspring as well as to issues of health and hygiene. Mrs. Trevor and Liddlema are represented as possessing the ‘female intuition’ that enables women to understand and meet the needs of their children to which men are traditionally represented as being insensitive.

Liddle-ma then exceeds the archetypal requirements of the Australian country woman, being valiant and independent. Representations of this Bush Legend literary femininity re-circulate. For instance, in the first epigraph to this chapter, taken from Tim Winton’s *Blueback* (1997:84). Liddle-ma and Iggy are the mythic pioneering bush women so they are active and skilled and as useful as men. The capability of performing ‘a woman’s work and a man’s, too’ assumes the idea of separate gender spheres but also implies that these are not a ‘natural’ or biological division but, rather, a constructed sociocultural distinction, as I commented in Chapter 4. The mutuality and reciprocity exist to a far greater extent than in the Trevor family. Chauncy represents Liddle-ma and Iggy as ideal types despite their lack of elegance or sophistication, indeed Liddle-ma overtly rejects such feminine attributes. Nevertheless the separation of spheres exists symbolically and in the division of domestic labour. For instance she would prefer to ‘cook a hot meal’ for the family than have to leave the house to deliver a message to her husband (109).
Some of the attributes ascribed to Liddle-ma are traditionally masculine: her physical size, her work capabilities, her knowledge of and commitment to the landscape and its flora and fauna. These contrast with the middle class/gentry femininity of a 'lady' mother such as the representation of Mrs. Trevor in *Good Luck to the Rider*. The classist division between a 'lady' and a 'woman' is superficially reasserted as Kociumbas (1997) claimed, but it is also clear that for both Liddle-ma and Mrs. Trevor being mothers and housewives is their predominant vocation. As mothers both women are constructed within the dominant ideology of the good mother. The social norms and discursive formations represented interpellate the ideal mother schema as selfless, generous, a wise woman, and an omnipresent caregiver, attributes displayed in this description of Mrs. Trevor:

Sheila and the boys left their packing till the last minute and then kept finding holes to be mended, uniform to be pressed, skirts and trousers to be let down. Mrs. Trevor advised, assisted with needles and cotton and a hot iron, and maintained in the household a precarious calm and orderliness that threatened to be shattered at any moment by some unforeseen crisis in the packing. (33)

While Liddle-ma's vegetable gardening is for subsistence Mrs. Trevor tends a flower garden in the manner of the gentry. In an iconically literary cliche of femininity Mrs. Trevor is cutting japonica in the garden and placing the flowers in a basket. When Barbara arrives to talk to her the good daughter takes the basket from the mother and they proceed to talk and cut flowers. This episode contrasts with the previous discussion between Barbara and Mr. Trevor, discussed above, where power and domination are implicitly in masculine hands. As with Liddle-ma, Iggy (30-1) and Badge (33-4), there is easy conversation between Barbara and her mother. There is no assumption of authority on the part of the mother and no need to fear speaking on Barbara's part or with her usual anxiety when addressing her father (52). It is Mrs. Trevor who articulates the father's emotions and ideas to Barbara about her riding skills and about her new friend, Will (33, 73-4).
Barbara’s response indicates that she had no idea of her father’s feelings and that it is a psychological burden to fear his apparent disapproval. Mrs. Trevor is not involved in any of the outdoor horse activities and is told of Barbara and Rozz’s progress. Mrs. Trevor is allowed to give full expression of emotions physically as she embraces Barbara (53). Her silence as she embraces her daughter expresses her ‘female intuition’, her knowledge that her daughter always had the potential to be the perfect Australian girl and only required the right stimulus in order for this to develop (33-4, 53).

Good Luck to the Rider offers an example of a coalition of the subordinate and Bourdieu (2001) describes ‘female intuition’ as one example of

a particular form of the special lucidity of the dominated ... inseparable from the objective and subjective submissiveness which encourages or constrains the attentiveness and vigilance needed to anticipate desires or avoid unpleasantness. (31).

Mrs. Trevor, Barbara and Mike the horse-breaker work together in an understanding that all is not as it seems, that there are things known intuitively that those who assume power may miss. Mike assures Barbara that with regard to the horse’s unconventional appearance: ‘Looks aren’t everything, you know’ and ‘You don’t want to let them put you off him’ (81). Barbara replies ‘firmly’ that she won’t let them influence her against the horse. Later when Mike speaks positively of Barbara’s qualities to her parents, Mrs. Trevor agrees with him unreservedly while her father only jokes that ‘All our geese are swans, eh?’ (89). Again the masculine subject is represented as unable to see the emotional impact of his views on the people he denigrates.

Lake (1997, cited in Murphy 2000:3) argues that seeds of feminist critique are evident in the 1950s. She argues that ‘[t]hose who would characterise the 1950s as a dreary, dull and dutiful decade miss its vital significance for gender relations’ and argues that the condition of women described as under ‘house arrest’ needs revision. Seeds of critique are clear not only in the physical independence and autonomy of movement shown
by all the daughters but also in the foregrounding of education as enabling changed life
course in Lorenny’s isolated world as well as for Mr. Trevor’s daughters who attend a
private girls’ school. For Iggy life in the valley is exile and alienation: ‘[f]rom outside
we’re nothing. We don’t count’ (6). While she expects her father to approve her words she
is in fact planning her escape to the metropole by means of her women’s craft that gives
her the means of economically sustaining herself beyond the valley. Her entrepreneurial
activities employ feminine crafts, she is always ‘knitting, knitting, knitting’ but it is ‘[a]ll
done for a purpose’ so that she can pay for her board with Aunt Edna in the city to enable
her to have a better education (75-6). Her father, when he learns of her purpose, is quite
accepting of her initiative and has amused admiration for her capacity to forge her own
destiny (76). Barbara and Sheila are not likely to face any need for independent
entrepreneurial activity in their advantaged economic family context. Lance, too, as we
saw above, is moving forcefully in a different direction to his father ideologically. The
children prepare to accept the gendered division of society as inevitable and desirable. In
this next section I examine the emergence of pro-feminist ideology and experiments with
literary strategies that begin the task of literary reformation to enable the eventual
emergence of degendered storylines in Australian realist children’s fictions.

Seeds of critique: echoes from the women’s movement

So far in this chapter I have argued that Australian post-war realist fictions for children
continued traditional patriarchal literary metanarratives: that is, they typically represent a
gendered society and implicitly re-inscribe a gender order and gender regimes as a
‘natural’ and oppositional dichotomy. From the mid-1960s feminist epistemologies provide
the impetus for reconfiguration in the representations of gender sociality that challenge
traditional patriarchy. Changing gender representation in narratives is not a simple matter
of reformulating the gender attributes of story participants or redesigning participants’
physical and emotional competencies. Alone, these discursive changes allow traditional social relations and structures to be reinstated by aspects of narrative such as dialogues and genre conventions (Stephens 1996b; Pennell 2000). For further gender reconfiguration in literary texts to proceed, the gendered subject in children’s literature requires, at the very least, the birth of new metanarratives in order to rupture the post-war expectation that all girls will follow a unitary life pattern and are destined for motherhood and the domestic sphere.

The emergence of the women’s movement, the forerunner of second wave feminism, is explicitly addressed by Niall’s (1984:289) commenting that ‘[c]hildren’s fiction in Australia has so far heard few echoes from the women’s movement’. Niall, I contend, overlooks the presence of some of the ‘echoes from the women’s movement’ that are evident to literature and gender researchers. Niall was, after all, interested in identifying general themes rather than the extraordinary or disruptive and she was not concerned with the complexity of narrative strategies or literary discourse that such discursive transformations involve. As I noted in Chapter 1, Niall (1984:1) writes about the purpose of her work that she was ‘as much concerned with Australia in children’s books as I am with Australian children’s books; the one preceded and influenced the other’. And the signs of change are quite rare. Indeed writers were not cognisant of the extent of the discursive problem entailed in rupturing gendered metanarratives and envisioning degendered social order or degendered schemas of social relations. Niall (1984:289) argues correctly however that thematically ‘[f]eminine conflicts begin and end at home’. Mackay (1993:129) argues that after the mid-seventies ‘those women who chose not to work find themselves having to explain their decision to stay home’. Some modification of this was emerging as the society decided it needed to put a value on the domestic and child-rearing work undertaken by women in the home. (Mackay 1993:44). Australian realist children’s fiction of the 1960s-1980s however continued to offer gendered fictions with patriarchal
storylines, especially story closures and participant attributes, schemas of subjectivity and social practices. Examining the literary discursive practices employed by rupturing texts is then crucial to any intellectual project that seeks to imagine a degendered sociality. First I will briefly return to Patricia Wrightson’s *The Crooked Snake* (1955) and Mavis Thorpe Clark’s *The Min-Min* (1966) to demonstrate the ‘echoes’ of the women’s movement that these fictions evince.

I discussed *The Crooked Snake* with regard to models of masculinity in Chapter 2. I examined the way that this fiction has an overt gender agenda with the Crooked Snake Society’s members sharing power in decision-making as well as the group’s activities and projects being degendered. Narrative problems are clear, however, and the future impasse of pro-feminist fiction is foreshadowed in the relational dimensions of gendered participant intersubjectivity. Masculine domination is explicitly covert as part of the double articulation strategy that, while attempting to transform and enhance the attributes of girl participants, also reveals emergent discursive problems for degendering narratives. Traditional masculine schemas of gender relations are privileged in terms of the boys offering protection and ensuring the safety of the girls. The girls, however, are represented as very independent and physically competent, thus not in need of such masculine care. The storyline is degendered too in that the boys are represented as acknowledging that they need the girls’ ideas to complete the ambush plan in order to trap the sanctuary poachers. The storyline is constructed—because of the way the jobs need to be allocated—so that the girls are the ones who actually ‘man’ the fort and take part in the battle with the DPs (128-9).

That this arrangement is disruptive is explicit in the concern John expresses to the other boys and the instructions that he gives to Pete about abandoning the fight if the girls are under physical threat (146). John is represented as having an appropriate regard for the feminine subject as deemed passive and delicate in adult understanding—he is after all
concerned by what the parents will think, not by what he fears for them himself. Roy
enunciates the fact that these girls need no such mollycoddling concern, and this is not said
in admiration of competence and independence. Nevertheless Pete, the youngest ‘proves’
himself at the fort and is thrilled to be in cahoots with John in his secret role as the girls’
protector (146). Squeak accuses John of ‘turning into a Citizen’ with his patronising
attitude to the welfare of the girls (130). John’s chivalrous ire is raised by the assault on
Jenny when her hand is cut and the camera is dropped and broken (143). His anger leads to
the defeat of Miller’s mob as he furiously attacks them with stinging nettles (144). When
the girls find out that the boys had a contingency plan in case the battle at the fort became
‘too rough’ for the girls, they are indignant. Importantly Pete tells them all that he never
thought that it would be necessary (146). Evidence of the impasse of oppositional gender is
narrativised again when, considering what to do about the provocations of the Miller’s
mob, John is pretty sure that his father would say ‘Handle it the best way you can and
leave the girls at home’ (75).

In *The Crooked Snake* then, good boys must still protect good girls even though
girls do not expect, or need, and may even eschew, such protection. In drawing attention to
the failure of full autonomous citizenship being accorded to the feminine subjects and their
implicitly subordinate role in masculine focalisation and dialogue, I do not imply that the
text seeks to approve masculine domination at all. In fact, the fiction narrativises the ideal
mutuality and reciprocity between gendered subjects. What the text reveals is the difficulty
of reconfiguring in literature the intrapsychic schemas and explicit embodied practices that
constitute Bourdieu’s ‘androcentric unconscious’. The boys’ behaviours and attitudes
would normally be a part of what Hollindale (1988) calls the third level of textual
ideology, namely the fiction’s ‘climate of belief’, the unmarked cultural assumptions
revealing what is considered ‘natural’ in a particular historical moment. In *The Crooked
Snake* the rupture is caused by the hint of a double articulation, where the girls’ dialogues
foreground a conflict in relational issues of oppositional gender schemas. In the field of children's literature critique, Hollindale was the first to argue that this 'climate of belief' with regard to the gender order entails expectations that feminine subjects will not receive the same individualisation as masculine subjects. *The Min-Min* also represents this 'climate of belief' with regard to masculine subjects protecting feminine subjects. As I argued in Chapter 3, Joe Edwards' failure in this regard is one aspect of his transgressive masculinity. Ironically even Sylvie's wayward brother Reg, whom she is leading across the desert to escape trouble with the police, nevertheless thinks of protecting her safety before escaping on his own: ‘... he couldn’t let her walk the thirty-five miles of lonely track to Gulla Tank alone. He would have to see her safely that far. She was older, but he was a man’ (57). Again the framing of this duty of a 'man' is explicit. Again the literary gender impasse is clear: no substantive rupture of the social order occurs if gender transformation only occurs in schemas of femininity.

Saxby (2002:43) writes that '[f]rom the late sixties onwards families are exposed as not always being happy and caring. Rents in the fabric of family life begin to become apparent in such books as Mavis Thorpe Clark's *The Min-Min* (1966)'. Importantly, I argue below that the fiction's closure reflects the climate of belief at the time: regret that the idealisation of the family has been undermined and the attempt to suggest that the normative ideal can be re-established in the next generation. Post-1950s the represented families become less exclusive, less private. The represented social spaces are broadened by employing a number of different narrative strategies. One major pro-feminist literary strategy that emerges is the representation of transgressive masculine subjects within the family, often the father, as discussed in Chapter 3. In *The Min-Min* it is both father and son, as mentioned above. When the range of participants and the number of families increases there is the possibility of representing diversity and difference. Large families do not disappear although size becomes problematised in *The Min-Min* as it is the mother's fourth
pregnancy that leads to her decision to leave the family home.

_The Min-Min_ ruptures the traditional discourses and metanarratives of gendered childhood acculturation and reconfigures representations of feminine subjectivity and storylines more radical than those of the masculine participants. For instance, the fact that Sylvie and Reg journey across the desert country is not just significant because it demonstrates, as Pearce (1996:112) argues, that the archetypal Australian girl is 'self-sufficient, active and adventurous'. It also appropriates a significant artistic motif in Australian literature and art, the journey and its quest. Sue Rowley (1991) writes:

> [t]he journey becomes a quest to claim territory on which the nation is to be built.

Nationalism appropriates this journey as metaphor to lend men's lives as Australians apparent specificity and meaning. (69)

The female child appropriating the journey is subversive in the extreme. In the Anglo Australian artistic texts, the desert is the place for men. Women are immobilised in this traditional ideology, as is the case with Liddle-ma and Mrs. Trevor in _Good Luck to the Rider_, and provide either the literal or metaphorical place of return and journey's end by the maintenance of home, signifying emotional and physical security (Rowley 1991). It is a most significant subversion that Sylvie's destination is another home and a woman. The woman is empowered at least within her domestic scene and this reconfigures the outback as a place of home-making, although not without its special difficulties, where women may be living satisfactory everyday lives. This offers an important counterbalance to the fact that Sylvie's mother has not survived the rigours of 'outback' life, and lays the blame for this with the father rather than figuring it as entirely an outcome of landscape. Other wives living at the siding raise families there without the kind of crisis faced by Sylvie's family. So _The Min-Min_ employs a significant literary trope as Sylvie leads Reg across the Australian desert on an archetypal quest to discover her future (72-3). The idea of the unitary destiny seems to me to be disrupted here as Sylvie seeks to make her future
different from what has happened before. The echoes set up by Iggy in *Tiger in the Bush* are to the foreground in Sylvie’s story. The problematising of a feminine destiny, that it requires a quest, following a guiding light, ruptures the expectation of the unitary feminine life pattern. The positioning of the feminine subject as subordinate, in this case in terms of class and gender and childhood, is clear in the discourse of the embedded text, in the note Sylvie leaves for her mother: ‘[w]e are not running away. Just going to get advice about our future’ (42).

Interesting aspects of story closure link Sylvie’s success to courageous journeying and an implication that all who undertake such a quest are rewarded because they are stalwart in embracing change (205). The min-min light of the fiction’s title, which ‘beckoned from afar’ has functions as the central motif in the fiction. Sylvie tells Mr. Scott what the Aboriginal people say about the strange star that ‘glows like a ruby’ at night and swings ‘provocatively’ just above the horizon apparently beckoning watchers to follow it (9-10): ‘[a] min-min wasn’t so exact, so sure of its direction—a min-min beckoned, and receded, and when you went after it, taunted you by dousing its light’ (78). This light leads Sylvie to Mrs. Tucker and with Mrs. Tucker’s help, Sylvie is able to plan for her future. The men working at the Whyalla shipyards and steel mills, migrants representing forty-five different nationalities, again take up the journeying motif. These are others who have also been beckoned to journey across the world in order to secure a different future; to be a part of ‘a fantasy of dreams come to life’ (201). Despite Sylvie’s accession to dominant masculinist literary tropes and storylines, men’s dreams and fantasies are clearly represented as larger and more dramatic than those of feminine subjects. Here we have transformation of feminine subjectivity but also clear evidence of Bourdieu’s (2001:102) ‘transhistorical continuity of the relation of masculine domination’ as the ‘structural constants and the mechanism of its reproduction’ (2001:106) are narrativised. The fiction maintains a ‘climate of belief’ that accepts a natural gap between the masculine and
feminine social spaces. The text’s assumption of marriage, a ‘structural constant’, as a woman’s destiny, is overt. Even Sylvie’s choice of paid work continues traditional feminine vocations that are typically devalued when compared with those of men (Bourdieu 2001:107).

The literary representation of subjectivity and participant focalisation are more extensive in *The Min-Min* than in the 1950s fictions where dialogue is the most important strategy for including participants’ interiority and so a range of points of view. The closure presents Sylvie’s focalised thoughts about the necessity for education which are similar to those offered in 1950s fictions. Her work outside the home as a seamstress, her intention to own her own business and her ideas about marriage and the need to exercise rationality in any decision about marriage all undermine traditional family story and romance genre metanarratives for feminine subjects. The inability of the mother to speak from the subordinate position within marriage is focalised at length by Sylvie. She understands that she speaks to her father about her needs and desires as her mother never could (196-7).

Subjective change on the part of the feminine subject is advocated in the narrative but the fiction focuses on the sanctity of the family despite the clear acknowledgement that things go wrong. Reaction to her father’s plight offers a traditional familialist ideology where the ‘broken family’ is appalling and is constructed as the failure of the father:

> He needed her. His whole future depended on her cooperation. She saw that he was lonely and afraid; that whatever had been bad in the past years was as nothing to this breaking-up of the family’, to ‘this splitting of the mother-father unit. (197)

Motherhood is concomitantly constructed as a pivotal feminine undertaking and Sylvie’s focalisation understands that her father is now seeing her as ‘capable’, and possessing enough ‘maturity’ (197). The fact that Reg is to be released if he has a home to go to helps Sylvie’s decision ‘but Sylvie was not forgetting that such a short time ago, he had struck her. And, perhaps too in the dignity of the new role she had to play, was feminine reserve.
It was not that he had to earn forgiveness … but acceptance’ (198-9, original ellipsis). He is reformed and accompanies his daughter to night classes across the town, always putting on ‘his new sports coat’, metonymically marking respect to her by this gesture of gentry masculinity (202). In terms of literary masculinity this in fact only reinstates the textual problems identified by the representations of the boy participants in *The Crooked Snake*. Nevertheless Joe Edwards insists upon the other boys and girls sharing domestic chores and reinforces the importance of schooling for his sons’ futures (203).

I agree with Scutter’s (1999) general contention that motherhood remains sanctified in children’s fiction. In the closure of *The Min-Min*’s tertiary level narrative of motherhood, Sylvie as a mothering subject runs ‘a tidy house’ (201). Here again the metonymic significance is greater than the literal significance as is the case with Mary Tucker’s ‘very full kitchen’. For instance, the implicit gendered assumptions:

‘... Did you find what you were looking for, Mrs. Tucker when you were growing up?’

Mary Tucker looked contentedly around her very full kitchen. ‘Yes,’ she said; ‘I found what I was looking for—what I wanted. Now, let’s get on with this sewing until Clive gives a shout.’ (139)

Even if the reader understands the full metonymic burden of ‘her very full kitchen’ many readers would no longer feel that this idea of feminine self-fulfillment should go unchallenged. It is Mary, the iconic mother, who is represented as the patient listener, who is caring and intuitive; the extract offers a conventionally gendered domestic setting where there is a clear ‘separation of spheres’. Yet the discourse demonstrates the tendency in hegemonic masculinity to mark difference as inferiority which then legitimises domination. Saxby (2002:507) argues that ‘Mary Tucker is no doormat. She outwits her husband through a feminine ruse and is not above rubbing salt into his wounds when Chris fails to extricate the car from the bog … ’. From a feminist perspective Saxby has enunciated the problem but not identified the traditional patriarchal ideology that requires
those who are subordinate to use deceit and subterfuge in order to advance their interests and concerns. The need for such ‘underhand tactics’ is a narratorial strategy that indicates oppression generally and gender oppression specifically here. This is why the closure of the fiction, with open honest frank exchange between father and daughter, is a clear rupture with the traditional feminine ways of being in the world, either that of Sylvie’s mother—silence and withdrawal—or Mary Tucker’s ‘froda’, a resort to deceit. The concomitant requirement of masculine subjects is a willingness to dispense with the masculine ‘illusio’. Joe Edwards is represented as taking this choice.

*The Min-Min* certainly risks being castigated for its conservatism if it is inappropriately examined outside its historical context but consideration of macrotextuality avoids such anachronism. The constraints of the domestic sphere are loosened. The shift in domestic tropes to Sylvie’s ‘tidy house’ from Mary Tucker’s ‘very full kitchen’ is significant. Ruptures in the adult feminine narrative appear in Sylvie’s primary storyline. The shift in the tropes is a significant rupture of the containment of women to the domestic sphere. There is agential representation of feminine participant’s subjectivity in relational issues and in actively negotiating change in the conditions of the private sphere. The constraints of the domestic sphere are loosened if by no means removed. Mary Tucker dutifully exited the work force to become the ideal mother but Sylvie views her potential working life much more ambitiously. She studies dressmaking and English at the technical college and the Pygmalion myth is invoked as she focalises that one day she will own a dress-maker’s shop: ‘She would call her shop “Sylvie”—written in a gold scroll across the plate-glass window … ’ (205). This desire is positively represented unlike Iggy’s necessarily transgressive behaviour in order to pursue her goals of economic independence. Here there are implications not just about economic independence but also about aspects of her identity forming in the public sphere. Of course this must not lead to misrecognising the fact that both girls are still pursuing economic activities that fall within
the traditional feminine habitus. Sylvie also has fixed ideas about a marriage partner: 'Of one thing she was certain—when she married, her husband would be a young man like Mr. Scott' (206). The school teacher had taken an interest in her education when she was at the siding and was sure that she could with effort have been a good enough student to attend the Whyalla high school. Reg's troubles and the need to flee the siding with him end that possibility. Sylvie's admiration for her teacher is not the eroticisation of domination but the privileging of a masculine subject who is committed to others and understands education as potentially a force for social justice rather than limited to social reproduction. Such rational focalisation on the subject of a marriage partner is very different from George's covert eroticised scrutiny of Will in the attenuated romance storyline in Good Luck to the Rider (Phipson 1955:89-91).

While The Min-Min clearly is not yet offering Bourdieu's (2001) 'subversive revolt leading to inversion of the categories of perception and appreciation' (119), change is occurring and I would argue that Joe Edwards and Sylvie are no longer represented as assuming gendered domination/subordination unthinkingly. Niall (1984:317) therefore is only partly correct to argue that 'feminine conflicts begin and end at home'. I argue that a significant rupture is evident in the traditional literary representation of the formerly unitary feminine life pattern. As outlined in Chapter 3, the dialogism of The Min-Min's writerly discourse enables it to rupture traditional patriarchal ideology. This is achieved by offering readers a range of different subject positions and so requiring the adoption of different implied reader positions. The text then represents the social space as dialogic rather than monologic as happens in Phipson's fictions. The fiction illustrates how literary reading is ideally an interactive cognitive process rather than an 'immersion process' that assumes the effacement of its reader's subjectivity. Thematically there are clear signs here of the girl child breaking out of Cunningham's (1995:188) 'ghetto of dependency' and also indicators of the way that not only for children, but for feminine subjects, there is also
evidence that ‘the shift in the balance of power’ (1995:184) between adults and children can be extended to include that between masculine and feminine subjects.

It is possible from our historical position to see why gender issues in the earlier pro-feminist texts for children were inadequately addressed: re-plotting the feminine roles in narratives and the demonisation of the masculine were not in fact a re-negotiation of gender in literary discourse. An oppositional dichotomised social order remained intact and was usually implicitly, if not explicitly, reinforced. As I argue in previous chapters, amelioration in gender relations is not achieved when misandry replaces misogyny. To move beyond these engendered fictions for children it is necessary for writers to pay attention to genre and discoursal strategies as well as to the story constituents of patriarchal metanarratives. Dismantling the configuration of social structure remains a challenge for writers who want to disrupt the gender order and regimes. Effecting such literary ruptures is examined in the next section of this chapter where I focus on All We Know.

The individualisation of the Australian girl and the citizen-mother

Negotiations with the life course expectations constructed for girls and how these are represented and responded to by feminine participants in fictions for child readers are successfully reconfigured in All We Know (1986). This reconfiguration represents feminine subjects whose democratic intersubjective relationships with men and children negotiate and often repudiate the traditional dichotomous patriarchal schemas of oppositional masculinity and femininity. Thus significant reconceptualisations occur of the archetypal Australian girl, of the ‘mother’, and of ‘family’ too. The storylines in the corpus of children’s fictions discussed here increasingly deal with the ways that the site of the family undergoes rupture and transformation. In Chapter 3 I argued that within the constraints of its historical context, All We Know exemplifies that desired pro-feminist shift in the focus of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity from assumptions of dichotomy and domination.
in gender relations through to privileging a concern for the interests and aspirations of girls and women. In Chapter 3 the discussion of masculinities included Michael’s storyline. Here I discuss the main participant and focaliser, Arkie Gerhardt, and the primary level story and the secondary level story of her mother, Susan and grandmother, Nan.

All We Know, like The Min-Min, is an example of the Entwicklungsroman as well as the family story genre. The capacity of realist fiction to represent intrapsychic states—subjectivity—is most significant in this generic shift (Stephens 1992:256). It enables the representation of participants as self-reflexive about gender, and other social positionings in specific contexts. The statement is understood on several levels when Susan comments to Arkie’s grandmother, Nan, ‘Half the time when we look in her direction … she’s got her camera pointed at us’ (119). Susan then describes Arkie as ‘going through a quiet time at the moment’ (119). The negotiation that Cunningham (1995:190) argues is now a part of parent-child relations is also expressed here as Susan says ‘Michael and I don’t want to force her into anything she doesn’t want to do or be part of’ (120). They thus remove Arkie from regulatory feminine practices of cheerfulness and deferential cooperation. Arkie’s subjectivity is foregrounded by the italicisation of her thoughts throughout the text and demonstrates that subjectivities are represented with increasing narrative and discursive complexity. Twelve-year-old Arkie’s storyline offers her focalised view of the everyday experiences and encounters which have her continually engaging with rupture and transformation in her final weeks of primary school. Arkie is not an archetypal girl as she rejects athleticism and beach culture and refuses to construct her ‘body-for-others’ as her friend Kylie does. She is pensive and artistic in her use of photography. The latter produces visual texts that serve an intertextual function which, Stephens (1992) argues, are a realist convention for encountering the ‘other’ (281). These visual intertexts, then, are part of the fiction’s dialogism: they enable the inclusion of numerous points of view and problematise Arkie’s perceptions. They record how
temporality effects change in people and places. This strategy also allows a re-negotiation of the self, often as a multi-faceted and changing individual, as is the case with Arkie. She is daughter, grand-daughter, an older sister, a young friend to Michael, a school peer, a school student, and powerless to interfere in some social welfare problems like those to do with the young family friend, Ian, whose mother regularly abandons him.

Arkie observes the public sphere and notes the power differentials at work, functioning to empower some people while continuing the life chances of others. Education which was represented in the earlier fictions by writers like Wrightson, Phipson and Clark as holding out so much promise is problematised here: school and welfare agencies are represented as functioning as mechanisms of social reproduction and institutions that sustain inequity. Subjectivity and intertextual strategies enable a postmodern acceptance of mutability, incoherence and fluidity in identity and intersubjectivity. This is offered to the reader in Arkie's 'Atrocity Cabinet' where 'its mirrored shelves, once intended for crystal and glass, now held Arkie's bizarre collection of objects' (8). The reader sees that the symbolism of these disparate items ranges impressively across epistemologies of childhood, hegemonic patriarchal discourses of family and femininity. The discourses of femininity are metonymically implied in the cabinet itself and the expectations of its being the 'very full' cabinet, rather than 'the very full kitchen' or 'the tidy house'. The mention of 'crystal and glass' metonymically figure the classist expectations of the material possessions that traditionally signify a woman's 'successful' marriage. This is undermined by the fact that Susan wants to put the cabinet under the house away from sight, while Arkie, a generation further away from uncontested patriarchy, subverts its purpose by letting it hold many of the 'atrocities' that have come into her life. These symbolic items speak of expectations of childhood from relatives and hopes and aspirations that others have had for her and interests that they have tried to promote. The bird's nest speaks of the space of the block of land next door which has
given some interaction with flora and fauna to the local children and the chance to see something of natural cycles occurring. Old masculine sporting Australian and active athletic girl/childhood as separate space are figured in the snowstorms: ‘Swaying surfers’ and ‘skiing resorts’ which are ‘imprisoned in their plastic bubbles’. Importantly too, Arkie’s real interests are degendered activities and some are linked to Michael’s concern for her general education. The atrocity cabinet contains the items that symbolise for Arkie how she has been positioned by the adults in her life. Later in the fiction her own photographic texts become the means by which she creates her own textual reading of the world and her way of being in it (227-8).

Arkie is represented as aware of and implicated in social justice issues concerning the family through Ian Koh’s storyline. Arkie understands that the idea of ‘family’ in Australia has a multiplicity of meanings and a diversity of contexts. Likewise childhood is experienced very differently. Negotiation between parents and children in the private sphere is valued and expected in Arkie’s relations with her mother and with Michael. Despite not being her biological father, Michael is committed to her welfare and the provision of a room of her own. French’s fictions from his juvenilia, Hey, Phantom Singlet to Cannily, Cannily to Change the Locks represent the ways that the state monitors and interferes in the lives of families and children. It is implicit in Hey Phantom Singlet and retroactively understood when we learn that Mat’s father has been in prison. The fiction does not question the need for the father’s imprisonment but certainly represents the psychological and economic hardships of the single parent family and the child subject’s sense of alienation. In All We Know the fiction gives explicit approval for the subaltern, Ian Koh, and his absent alcoholic mother, to be taken into care (1987:230). In Change the Locks, on the other hand, the police, welfare agencies and the school are all represented as authorised to interfere in citizens’ households yet incapable of, or at least having difficulty, doing so in an empathetic way. This is partly why Chambers (2001) argues that
Public policies continue to shore up the ideal of the male breadwinner and to pathologise mothers without a male partner or those who wish or need to enter the paid employment, and also other types of living arrangements and sexual relations that do not conform to the nuclear ideal. (142)

These fictions represent the ways that 'all the institutions charged with the management and regulation of the everyday existence of the domestic unit’ have the capacity to abject children and single parents, especially when they are women. The implications for the role of women are clearly detrimental to the pursuit of full citizenship and economic independence.

Pro-feminist fictions typically attempt to rupture the traditionally unitary life course expectations of girls. One strategy for representing these changes is by the dialogism of a range of feminine participants. Susan’s identity is not linked to tropes of kitchen or a house as Mary Tucker and Sylvie’s are, but rather to her profession as a secondary teacher, and her musical interests as well as to her relationship with Michael and her children. Susan’s identity is no longer a ‘second hand’ one derived from her male partner as had been the accepted practice for generations of women before 1975. However it is a significant aspect of the participant that Susan has tried marriage and has found that the hegemonic expectations that accompanied masculine understandings of this gender regime meant a denial of her rights to full individualisation as economically independent, to work in her profession, let alone seek advancement in it. Susan’s story ruptures the unitary life pattern of patriarchy after she has tried that idealisation of marriage and children and the requirement on the part of a husband that she leaves paid work (18, 116, 216). She has experienced the limitations of this life pattern. Divorced after having two children, still regarded as a disgrace by Nan (117), she lives with a partner who does not require her to conform to the patriarchal model of adult femininity. Neither did traditional marriage allow the freedom to pursue artistic and leisure interests as these inevitably require child-care on
the part of the masculine partner and negotiations about time for such activities. Michael takes Arkie and Jo to see Susan at work as a musician. Arkie focalises: ‘Mum in action. 
Like she was at the party, laughing and having a good time. Playing that great music without even trying’ (236, original emphasis). She is positioned as more successfully individualised than other mothers in the fiction (208). Of course, in Bourdieu’s (2001) terms, despite her rejection of hegemonic marriage, the kind of paid employment undertaken by Susan—a secondary teacher—is a vocation that maintains the gender gap: ‘education, care and service’ jobs, ‘providing the woman does not have authority over men,’ are fields in which women may work without undermining the gender order of the society.

All We Know overtly problematises the positioning of women in the dominant Anglocentric Australian culture. This is represented in the text in both minor and major orders of discourse. For instance a minor discourse of Australia as hybrid and international culture mentions Arkie’s name being a Greek one, a shortening of Arkravi—her mother spent three months living in Greece. Problematisation of the major discourse on the family occurs most significantly by the strategy of contrasts between domestic spaces. These spaces metonymically represent transformations in family ideologies.

The spatial framework of Arkie’s grandmother is an impressive home with large rooms, a lounge-room lined with oak bookshelves and a tennis court to one side. Nan’s home is constructed as more than a ‘tidy house’; it is an ostentatious showpiece which speaks of order and decorum. Arkie focalises the italicised words and the narrator expands what Arkie would not articulate: ‘This must have been an amazing place to have grown up in. Arkie breathed in the odours of furniture polish and aerosol air freshener that seemed to permeate each grandly furnished room of the stately house’ (117). Arkie’s focalised thoughts here turn out to be ironic because her mother, Susan, did not enjoy her childhood here. The framed portrait on the wall of Susan interpellated as good girl and good student
in her private school uniform, and as ‘accomplished woman sitting at a piano’ symbolises
Susan’s childhood entrapment in this space. Susan was expected to become a decorous
ornament to the stately house. She has failed this expectation altogether, as she is divorced,
in a de facto relationship, living in an unfashionable suburb and in Nan’s view, not taking
sufficient control of Arkie’s life (119).

Arkie realises that Nan’s power resides in the discourse she uses: ‘Sometimes she
[Nan] really reminds me of mum. Sometimes I think they look exactly the same, but when
Nan speaks she says everything so differently’ (92). Nan uses this discourse of power to
control everything she considers hers to dominate. She effectively uses this discourse to
keep her daughter’s partner, Michael, distanced. Arkie notes that Nan ‘often spoke to
Michael as though meeting him for the first time’ (118). Michael sits in Nan’s loungeroom
enduring the disapproval of his de facto relationship with Susan offered by her wedding
photographs which show Susan with her ‘legitimate’ partner. Nan’s language even has the
power to transform Arkie’s normally casual home in Ramsay Street, with ‘the house
becoming quieter, restrained and bound by unshakeable order’ whenever Nan was
babysitting (93). The text is unequivocal in its rejection of Nan’s world-view. While she
continues to presume power, her daughter and granddaughter remove themselves to spaces
far from her site of authority, a site where spatiality is constructed by dominant cultural
practices, like ‘Family tradition’, seeking to turn each of them ‘into a particular kind of
person’ (250). What Arkie then learns from Susan is to resist coercive discourses of
powerful social norms with regard to gender and class. Instead of submitting to the gender
regime for a woman in her family’s social space, Susan resisted Bourdieu’s (2001:37)
‘amor fati—love of one’s social destiny’. He also draws attention to the connection
between the possibilities of a woman’s access to divorce and her access to employment
(ibid).

Thus reconceptualisation of ‘family’ is dependent upon the pluralising of
femininities and the representation of democratic and degendered household organisation. The storylines in the corpus of children’s fictions discussed here increasingly deal with the ways that the site of the family undergoes rupture and transformation. Narrative strategies for representing participant subjectivity are significant as they enable the representation of subjects who examine their gender positioning in specific contexts. Here the representation of the family as ‘people who belong together’ begins. These people are not necessarily biological kin, or in conjugal relationships, long-term companionate marriages, or indeed any household legitimated and financed by men. Indeed the fiction asserts that biological kin relationships and married relationships are not stable, and should not be expected to be, given the forces that impinge upon choices of marriage partners. The family is undergoing transformation. The ‘broken family’ is not regretted but is essential for Susan’s individualisation, and, as I argue below, is understood and endorsed by Arkie. What remains the same and is strengthened is the concept explained by Bourdieu (1998:65), that quality of relationships signified by the term ‘philida’: ‘a place where interest in the narrow sense of the pursuit of equivalence in exchanges, is suspended’. This implies that the quality of the interpersonal relationships is placed ahead of traditional normative expectations of social roles and responsibilities. Arkie is surprised when the word ‘stepfather’ is applied to Michael: ‘Stepfather. After all this time it didn’t sound like Michael. Michael was Michael’ (235). The difficulties for the removed father are not ignored or downplayed (17-8, 241-2), and the sorrow is clear in Arkie’s focalised: ‘Like our dad hardly knows Jo. Or me’ (167). This problematisation is resonant as the comparison is between Arkie and Jo and the Arcana boys whose father has died in a motorcycle accident (166-7).

In All We Know’s the primary storyline is about arkie but thematically the reconceptualisation of the family is a significant issue. The discourse constructs how both Michael and Susan make decisions about child-rearing and the domestic arrangements in
opposition to their own childhood experiences of the hierarchical rigidity in traditional nuclear families. Arkie and Jo experience this traditional kind of family routine whenever Susan’s mother, Nan, comes to stay. She is represented as complicit in patriarchy, a woman exercising the hierarchical power devolved to her in the domestic sphere. The children find ‘the unspeakable order’ of her autocratic rule and inflexible organisation most oppressive (93-9). Successful communication between members of the household is foregrounded as a key to harmony in the domestic scene. Here All We Know addresses that area of contention that the narrator’s voice in The Min-Min highlights so powerfully: democratic gender relations that permit negotiation without power games. This is endorsed repeatedly in the dialogues in All We Know that are quite unlike the communication sleight of hand and deceitful behaviours Mary Tucker requires with her husband, or the complete lack of communication as in Joe Edwards’ case, or the deferential tenor in the dialogues with Mr. Trevor.

The reconceptualisation of ‘girlhood’ and ‘motherhood’ and ‘the family’ away from former literary idealisations is evident in numerous transformative fictions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Further dismantling and reconceptualisation of such structures of social relations remains a challenge for writers in this new millennium moment when postmodernist, third wave feminism and queer theory intersect to oppose all hegemonic discourses including second wave feminism. All We Know allows comparison of three generations of Australian women who are socially and economically advantaged, the elite as Bourdieu (2001:91) argues. The Listmaker is of special interest in the way that it examines women’s lives across a broader social space.

These literary examples offer further evidence for Cunningham’ (1995:189) argument that the universalising of childhood as ‘innocence and dependence’ has gone into reverse. While Sylvie’s storyline in The Min-Min ruptures the traditional conceptualisation of Australian literary girlhood, Arkie in All We Know represents a transformation of it. This
transformation occurs with the encouragement of her adult carers, her mother and Michael.

*All We Know*, indeed French’s fiction generally, empowers children. This requires narrative configurations that allow the broadening of the definition of the family and the employment of strategies that represent the ‘shift in the balance of power between adults and children’ (Cunningham 1995:184). Not only French’s fictions, but also those of Horniman, Klein and Hirsch attest to the mutual importance to one another of adults and children. They are concerned to open the lines of communication further and to restructure power relations. They also show a concern with valuing schemas of non-traditional domestic organisations where mutuality and reciprocity are extended to children in a degendered way. The narrative functioning in this way is the focus of the final fiction in this chapter, Robin Klein’s *The Listmaker* (1996). This fiction offers the definition of the family as ‘people who belong together’. This the ideology of childhood promotes the primacy of the care of children in society and demonstrates Cunningham’s (1995:184-5) view that ‘the sacrilisation of childhood’ continues as evidenced by the economic sacrifice and emotional commitment some adults are prepared to make for a child.

**Fin de siècle and new millennium femininities**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Bourdieu’s (2001) approach to research of a society’s gender orders and regimes requires critique not only of masculine domination but also of the extent of substantive macro-change achieved by second-wave feminism. Such a position is represented narratively in *The Listmaker*. Bourdieu (2001) argues that there is commonly an acceptance by the dominated, women—and children, I argue—of the rationale for their subjugation:

> “To speak of domination or symbolic violence is to say that, except in the case of subversive revolt leading to inversion of the categories of perception and appreciation, the dominated tend to adopt the dominant point of view on themselves.” (119)
The material outcomes of second wave feminism may have meant that some privileged women escaped ‘the ghetto of dependency’. However that gain often strategically meant feminine subjects adoption of masculinist values and practices in order to prove their equality with men (Bourdieu 2001:58-9; Cunningham 1995:188-9). This involved work outside the home, emotional autonomy and economic independence as schematised in the attributes of Agatha, Bruno’s mother in Bruno and the Crumhorn. The Listmaker, like Bruno and the Crumhorn, problematises the attributes of the second wave woman so a dialogism is established between the ontologies informing the storylines about making new homes. Sarah’s aunts are setting about an ‘ideal’ home (5) for Sarah and themselves (33, 215) which at first Sarah only sees as a ‘shabby old house’ (46). On the other hand, Piriel Starr desires to marry Sarah’s father, Brett Radcliffe, despite his being a chauvinist of global dimensions and is determinedly decorating a city apartment to impress him. Sarah mistakenly believes that she will be a part of family planning in the city apartment (45).

Third-wave feminism argues for the pluralising of representations of women: as diverse individuals and unevenly privileged across the social space, and in different kinds of relationships with men and other women. This means that there are times when a woman may have more in common with masculine subjects but a number of things in common with other women. There is a clear need to resist totalising discourses about feminine subjectivity, motherhood, family; all women repudiate any metanarrative that assigns them to a unitary life pattern of wife/mother. In the second section of this chapter I cited Niall’s (1984) view that in Australian children’s fictions of the mid-1980s ‘Feminine conflicts begin and end at home’ (289); in the new millennial moment this is clearly no longer the case for all women. Fictions like Hazel Green, with Mrs. Gluck the florist, and The Listmaker with Aunt Dosh the factory worker assembling electrical goods, reconfigure women’s stories to show that it was never an accurate reflection of Australian women’s lives. These narrative representations of the heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity, of
Australian women, show that not all women bear children or desire to do so; most women work outside the home but not in work of their choosing or under circumstances that they find satisfactory in terms of pay, conditions, or awareness of familial/child responsibilities. Probert’s (1997:321) argument is also relevant to The Listmaker in that the fiction demonstrates that opportunities for female labour are ‘shaped by discriminatory forces’ so that factors such as ethnicity, race and poverty determine the amount and kinds of work done outside the home by women.

In these fictions the doxa of the unitary life pattern of Australian women is not just ruptured as happens in All We Know and Bruno and the Crumhorn. The failure to represent the diversity of Australian women’s life stories is exposed. Exposed, too, is the illusory nature of the claims of equality between masculine and feminine citizens. Bourdieu (2001) insists that women are

*separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient ... which affects everything* they are and do ...’ and furthermore, he argues that ‘women remain separated from each other by economic and cultural differences. (93, original emphases)

*The Listmaker* on the one hand validates such arguments but on the other suggests that these distinctions are economically based in patriarchal social structures that some people have moved beyond, because their life opportunities have denied them any reason to support its institutions and ways of being in the world. At the beginning of the 1990s, Hugh Mackay (1993:146) writes of the ‘shrinking’ of the universal middle class of the Australian way of life and discusses the statistical indicators that highlighted the plurality of ways of life and the increasingly unequal distribution of household incomes. Presumably if all kinds of Australian child readers are to understand the multifaceted diversity of the social space then fictions must attempt to represent such a sociality. This requires changes in conventional storylines in children’s fictions and schemas of family life and childhood experience that rupture dominant idealised conceptualisation of
childhoods of material prosperity. Renunciation of the traditional means to power is integral to the struggle for a reconfigured degendered social agency.

Raising children means that parenting must be a foremost concern for those associated with the child. However the ideology of all consuming child-care is transformed from being entirely the responsibility of traditional 'motherhood' to 'parenting' in which many people may be involved regardless of age or gender. Unlike the mother's unrelenting devotion, narratives like All We Know, Hazel Green trilogy, Bruno and the Crumhorn as well as The Listmaker, acknowledge the needs of the whole person, children and adults including mothers/parents, for social and cultural facets of life to be pursued so consideration is given, according to needs and competencies, to the pursuit of the happiness of everybody in a household. Despite the ruptures and reconfigurations of adult femininities, Davies (1997:129) argues that school reading pedagogies underpinned by critical literacy and critical social literacy paradigms aim 'to give students some skill in catching language in the act of formation and in recognising and assessing the effects of that formation'. The fictions discussed here seem to offer such reading opportunities. Students need to develop their narrative literacy in order to be more articulate about what discoursal strategies and narrative codes and conventions they can see functioning as they read such texts.

This process of 'catching language in the act of formation' is found, for instance, in the new millennial situation discussed in Chapter 2 with regard to Hazel Green. There the child subject's failure to submit to masculine and adult domination marks Hazel as disruptive, a 'troublemaker'. Mr. Murray who is Mr. Volio's rival neighbourhood baker, imagines that Hazel can be duped. He makes the mistake of patronising her: ‘... he patted Hazel on the head, as if she were just a little girl who shouldn't worry about the things that grown-ups do' and Hazel ends their conversation, because 'They had finished their talk. Mr. Murray just didn't realize it' (67). The word 'little' indicates her awareness of being
positioned as a child, and the mentioning of 'girl' suggests the double domination to which she is meant to submit. Hazel consciously refuses the subject position offered her by Mr. Murray's strategies of domination and enacts the refusal bodily by removing herself from his shop despite the high modality of his command that she should return (68).

The closure of *Bruno and the Crumhorn* also presents a poignant moment of 'catching language in the act of formation' in the gendered interactions between Sybil and Jeremy. As recounted in Chapter 3, Sybil honestly articulates her anger at Jeremy's inability to do anything other than play games with her and her mother, so she determinedly, if sadly, frees herself from his emotional domination. In Chapter 3 I argued that in *Bruno and the Crumhorn* the important extension beyond liberal feminism's misandry is that Jeremy is not rejected out of hand. Refusing Jeremy's emotional domination of her life, Sybil nevertheless saves the two postcards he sent them while he was away (176). Intertextually this episode recalls Alice's parting from the White Knight in Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass* where she acknowledges her gratitude for what he meant to her in the past. So while Jeremy Fisher is unable to be an ideal father, his contribution to her life is valued. Furthermore, the storyline infers the possibility that Jeremy's ability to be emotionally responsible may improve. This reading emerges because he eventually manages genuine concern for both his lover and her child. Jeremy arrives at the Early Musicians concert on a motor-bike, this being metonymic of transgressive masculinity linked, as it often is, to eroticised risk-taking. Below, his solicitous offer to pillion Hilda home afterwards is connected to desire, as indicated by his placing his arm around her. His thoughtless effacement of Sybil occurs only minutes after she has upbraided him. Jeremy is exposed when Hilda catches his solipsistic language and reminds him about her responsibility to attend to Sybil's needs as well as her own:

‘Oh God!’ said Hilda the Lucky to Jeremy Fisher, as they picked their way in the darkness down the dipping sandstone steps. ‘Wouldn’t you know it! I knew it would
‘I could give you a lift on the bike,’ offered Jeremy, putting an arm around her shoulders.

‘Oh yes, and what about Sybil?’ replied Hilda drily. (173)

Accepting Hilda’s reprimand, Jeremy’s next dialogue links Hilda and Sybil and in a new high modality paternal discourse as Jeremy next demands that they take a taxi home. Sybil also rejects this language formation by asserting her desire to walk as she ‘triumphantly’ reminds him ‘... I can’t drown ...’ (177). Sybil has the courage to become a hero, rather as Bruno does, too, by refusing incorporation into disempowering games of patriarchal gender regimes. Her own re-formation of Jeremy’s language is enabling her independence and joie de vivre.

The discussion in Chapter 2 about Hazel Green and of Sybil in Chapter 4 shows the construction of the idealised emotionally autonomous child feminine subjectivities. They are independently negotiating intersubjective relationships and the discourses and practices of public spheres. They move towards individualisation as citizens. They confront the ruptures in the ‘ideal’ and the ‘natural’ hegemonies of gender and family, moving towards empowerment, often partial and always contingent, and genuine reciprocity with children and adults where possible. They show the need to accept adults’ limitations and potentialities. Hazel Green quickly, and Sybil more painstakingly, learn to develop their competencies in negotiating a place in the social space. Indeed both Hazel’s and Sybil’s storylines narrativise the situation Cunningham (1995:190) describes where there is currently ‘a disjuncture between romantic ideal and lived reality’ of childhood. While much more could be said about these texts with regard to adult femininities I now discuss The Listmaker because of its deliberate focus on a household of women which welcomes men but does not depend economically or emotionally on them and does not need to subordinate their needs to the masculine hegemony. The main participant is Sarah, whose
recognition of the process of 'catching language in the act of formation' is developing much slower than Hazel Green's. Nevertheless she gradually recognises and accepts that the discourse of others, even of a father, may indicate a refusal of democratic intersubjectivity. Despite Sarah's constructions of her father as ideal and Piriel as a glamorous, independent woman and potentially the ideal 'mother', Sarah learns to read the language formations that signify her marginalisation in their lives (125). Relations of cathexis, Sarah discovers, can be found outside the traditional patriarchal nuclear family.

_The Listmaker_ offers an analysis of the lives of both the wealthy and those on limited incomes in the Australian population but in a way that is ideologically conservative, confirming the myth that the 'posh' and the 'snob' are reprehensible and materialism makes them unfit for parenting. Unlike her other fictions however the schematic stereotyping here is very extensive and encompasses a large number of social milieu and social moments. This allows for the 'bad'. The bundle of behaviours and attitudes being condemned in the parents are those of the 1980s 'yuppies', named as such by Ed Woodley (118), and those pursuing the ideals of that lifestyle are shown to hold values antithetical to Klein's notions of the needs of the child: jet-setting, gym-attending, image conscious, work before family, high rise secured apartment living. The chronotope is also a conservative Australian one as the binaries of city/country, community/individuality are pervasive. However it also represents a significant literary shift in the understanding that the traditional family is not the only place that children can be successfully nurtured.

The move to Avian Cottage that is the orientation for the fiction signals that the fiction is primarily about women. A plethora of clichéd feminine tropes to do with birds and feathers appear self-consciously and strategically throughout the text to humorous effect (32). The fiction creates in the micro-context Connell's (1994:166) idealisation of the feminist state imagined as 'an arena for a radical democratisation of social interaction'.
Sarah’s first person narration distances the reader because Sarah’s obsessive behaviour, typified by her keeping of endless lists, metonymically represents her as judgmental, hypercritical and bossy. The inversion of the power relation between the child and her carers, the two aunts, Dosh and Nat, is humorous. The democratic relationships they offer Sarah are not appreciated by Sarah but read as a sign of their inability to take control as Sarah assumes adults should. Sarah needs her lists in order to create a sense of control similar to Piriel’s and her father’s and in opposition to the ‘muddle’ of her aunts (10). Sarah’s assumption of the correctness of her father’s authoritarian, unemotional treatment of her—with the same attributes being displayed by her father’s latest fiancée—is based on her idealisation of the nuclear family as always having the child’s welfare at its heart.

Sarah, like Klein’s memorable narrator in the Penny Pollard diaries and letters, is an unreliable narrator. The humour that devolves from the convention of the unreliable narrator is as successful in The Listmaker as in the earlier fictions, although possibly more poignant because closure refuses the usual ‘happy ending’ of the family story, as I discuss below. The strategy of the unreliable narrator empowers readers, by making them aware that they are more socially astute and emotionally honest than the narrator; they are better at ‘catching language in the act of formation’ than Sarah. Sarah’s subjectivity is more fully delineated than Penny Pollard’s as Sarah must reshape how she values people and reconfigures her understanding of ‘family’ outside the traditional metanarrative closure.

Sarah waits expectantly for the day that she will live with her father and a stepmother. This promise has been held out to her in the past and is being offered again (33). The expectation of traditional and affluent family life prevents Sarah understanding that she is already receiving the unconditional love of two great-aunts, Nat and Dosh. In Sarah’s eyes the aunts are entirely unsuitable as parenting figures, as they are elderly (Nat is sixty). Ageism is in action as is masculinist disdain for all that is traditionally deemed feminine. Yet readers see beyond Sarah’s views and understand that the aunts are lively,
generous, loving and humorous. They are democratic in their style of household management, longsuffering with regard to Sarah’s snobbishness. They are represented as having entirely different life courses and very different personal habituses. Until both come to live in Avian Cottage they have performed femininity very differently (27-9). Only when compared with her economically successful father are these women unsatisfactory; their lack of ‘style’ is a constant affront to Sarah who believes she needs to ‘mother’, that is, control and organise them continually:

‘They’ll be tramping in with the furniture soon, so I don’t see why you’re fussing about a few little grains of sugar, Sarah. When I had my caravan I only used to sweep it out once a week.’

Years ago, before moving in with Aunty Nat to keep her company, Aunty Dosh had been living in a tacky caravan park. At least Dad had said it was tacky. I didn’t see it personally, because he’d never let me visit her there. (Come to think of it, neither had Dad.) (5)

Hence in Sarah’s opinion her endless lists are necessary to see that their ‘irritating habits’ (19-20) and casual, or ‘muddled’ (10) lives, depending upon your point of view, have some order and dignity. Agency is granted to Sarah within her household but she abuses it. This can only confirm for the reader her father’s elitism and solipsism. Avian Cottage, as a home, is not represented as the traditional 1950s private sphere—that is, a place of containment. It is an open place where friends come and family come and go formally and informally, where work is enjoyed and creative and leisure activities are pursued. Individualisation of subjects occurs here independently of responsibilities to children or men. Masculine legitimation is not needed and disparate feminine views are welcomed and weighed on their merits.

*The Listmaker* is scathing in its representation of the commodification of the child and childhood and the reification of the child as object of social status: boarding school,
acting lessons, the computer—which is not to be shared—all designed to attain an
excellent offspring and so ‘to get your money’s worth’ from the adult’s financial
investment in the child. To Brett and Piriel the child is a status symbol and a form of social
capital. The list that Sarah makes of New Year’s resolutions indicates the way she believes
she needs to fashion herself to be approved of by Piriel and Brett. They fail to see family
discourse, as Bourdieu (1998) describes it, as ‘a world in which the ordinary laws of the
economy are suspended, a place of trusting and giving—as opposed to the market and its
exchanges of equivalent values’; for them the market still pertains. It is the aunts for whom
philia applies; their ‘refusal to calculate’ (65) in their relationship with a very unkind and
snobbish Sarah is privileged in the text (29, 90, 161).

Bourdieu (1998) argues that little has changed in the work place with regard to the
gap between men and women’s power, prestige and payment and The Listmaker
narrativises this through the participant, Piriel. She is stereotyped as greedy by being
represented as a real estate agent, a work role parodied as always seeking economic
advantage (10). Her apparent success economically leads her to ‘misrecognise’ the
symbolic domination that she still suffers (94). Undermining this traditional secondary
function of women in children’s literature as being only involved in motherhood,
representations have been transformed from the effacement of Wrightson and Phipson’s
adult feminine subjects in the post-war fictions evincing subservient respect to a husband’s
views and behaviours, through to rejection of the mothering role as occurs with Emma’s
biological mother in Sand Monkeys. Piriel then represents a feminine subject who
explicitly repudiates motherhood (12). Klein’s condemnation of Piriel begins with the
name of course. The connotations of brightest and best—which she is in Sarah’s eyes—and
celebrity status in the popular culture understanding of the word—a star. Piriel’s seat is the
lowest seat in Hell in traditional Scottish literature and this is the place to which she is
ultimately consigned by Klein’s text and that hell happens to be her banishment from

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Sarah’s life and to marry Sarah’s father, Brett Radcliffe.

Sarah’s father maintains economic control and therefore power over her but is in no way forming an intersubjective relationship with his daughter as he is largely absent. Sarah focalises:

It was depressing when people could only talk to one another with a lot of fussy details about time zones. (Actually, Dad always preferred to ring me when he was overseas, not the other way round .... It seemed ages since he’s last phoned. It would be nice, I thought, if he didn’t just keep vanishing for weeks on end. It must feel good to have a parent who was around permanently, in the same place. Then you wouldn’t have to build up a relationship all over again each time you met. (64)

Brett is mainly mentioned by other participants and his representation in dialogues is as a misogynist (196-7). This happens, for instance, when he requires Sarah to deliver unpleasant news to his sisters (194-5). The participant attributes for Brett schematise the kind of global masculinity that Connell (2000) describes:

[transnational business masculinity appears to be marked by increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), and a declining sense of responsibility for others (except for the purposes of image making). (52)

These attributes disqualify him as good parent material because of the impossibility of honest reciprocal intersubjectivity.

The Listmaker in elaborating the habitus of the economically independent woman is concerned with the subject of second-wave feminism who has in fact subverted the ideology of feminine reform by adopting those masculine attributes that are oppositional to values and practices that were the virtues of a traditional feminine habitus. Piriel’s storyline demonstrates how this is a betrayal of many women and contributes to the maintenance of masculine domination. This is a class or social group of women that has
the wealth to pursue the distinction as long as their salary holds. *The Listmaker* represents these women as incapable of enjoying the pleasures of intersubjective relationships because of the need for a body-for-others that is only maintained by long hours of work as well as expense (45, 58, 90). The irony is that Piriel continues the traditional labour of women in nurturing and maintaining men attending to their egos and emotional physical needs. Piriel is solipsistic like Sarah’s father but not emotionally autonomous. She undertakes enormous emotional work on behalf of her partner both with the purchasing of gifts, attendance at family celebrations and negotiating ritual occasions as well as aestheticisation of both the body and the domestic scene. Piriel is represented as more concerned to establish the whereabouts of Brett’s expensive chess set than to have a conversation with Sarah (181). The needs of men are still central to the way that Piriel constructs her identity and allocates her time:

‘I’ve taken today off to get everything straight. There’s still heaps to do, but with a bit of luck everything will be done by this evening. Brett’s timing’s very crafty—being away on the other side of the globe and not having to lift a finger. I just hope he appreciates all my hard labour when he comes back!’ (162-163)

Piriel’s understanding of ‘what I make of what the world makes of me’ comes from the necessity of pleasing dominant men who determine what is desirable, pleasurable and worth knowing; Piriel submits to patriarchal regulation of body and mind constructed around the tastes of hegemonic masculinity’s current ideals of privileged femininity (190). Not changing her family name when she marries in no way indicates individualisation (125). It is symbolic action rather than effecting any true change from a dominated state. She is economically and emotionally dominated by patriarchal imperatives because without financial success she cannot compete in the arena of desirable body image or maintain the tasteful consumption that make her an object of distinction to the masculine gaze as Brett’s previous wife was (190).
When Piriel visits Aunt Nat’s nearly renovated house and sees Aunty Dosh’s transformation of the garden she is surprised to find the idea of the garden wedding now has potential (119). She accordingly seeks to dress Sarah in a long cream-coloured dress, covered in violets and plain satin shoes with straps. This of course constructs a quaint, anachronistic innocent child femininity (80). This is an image that Sarah believes is not at all appropriate for her. Sarah’s wishes or tastes are not considered at any point in this matter, but at first she cannot believe that Piriel can get something wrong. Piriel is also often alone and she is denied the garden wedding she wants because Brett will be in Sydney at the time of the wedding. Piriel and Sarah are chattels to him (195). Just as Brett demeans the aunts by referring to them as ‘the girls’ (30) so Piriel reduces Sarah’s importance in her modes of address by referring to her as a ‘quaint little article’ (82), ‘honey’ (83) and ‘sweetie’ (81, 164). Bourdieu (2001:59) discusses the use of such tactics of power in masculine/feminine relations. In the fiction these subordinating strategies are used by the feminine subject to demean the child and assert power and establish a hierarchy. This reduces Sarah to powerlessness and denies her a voice. Sarah is denied a voice in choosing her own dress pattern and material for the wedding or furnishings for the bedroom in the apartment, with Piriel certainly not allowing any negotiation (80-1, 173-4). As Bourdieu (2001:59) argues, the subordinate are dismissed with mollifying words. Thus we see in Piriel ‘love of the dominant and his domination, a libido dominandis, (desire for the dominant) which implies personal renunciation of libido dominandi (the desire to dominate)’ (Bourdieu 2001:80). Sarah eventually rejects interpellations placed upon her by Piriel’s pretensions.

It seems that the Australian realist fictions examined in this chapter increasingly offer interrogations of the assumptions that underpin the family as the place where ideal human relationships will be enshrined. Child readers are positioned to be actively weighing the normative mythology of family against the variety and diversity of familial households.
that they encounter. Mackay (1993:270), like Gilding (1991), finds that the fastest growing household type in Australia is the ‘non-kin household’—that is, people who have decided to live together, without any familial or sexual connection, simply because of the urge to create a ‘family’ and to enjoy the benefits which flow from being identified, recognised and acknowledged as part of the human herd. Chambers’ (2001:175) argument that ‘high price is being paid for idealising the nuclear family form and using it to promote and defend fixed moral virtues. This ‘high price’ has been narrativised in the case of motherhood in Emma in Sand Monkeys (64-5) and with Sarah in The Listmaker. In representing the family as ‘people who belong together’, The Listmaker does not deny the biological and conjugal household as a positive kind of group. Sarah decides to speak disapprovingly of Corrie’s family because she is jealous of their closeness:

Strangers were coming up the footpath. There was a man and a woman carrying an old swing-couch, between them, and a kid about my age following behind with a stack of cushions. They were talking to each other in that kind of shorthand people who belong together use, where you feel like an outsider just by listening

‘Should have come back for the trailer.’

‘Someone else might have got there first. Bit of a find right on the holidays.’

‘Can’t it go in my room?’

‘You’ve got enough junk in there already. The veranda or maybe down under the ash tree. Get off, Corrie, you dag!’

‘Carry me home the last bit. Go on, Dad, be a sport.’

‘Let’s park her out the front with a freebie sign.’

‘No takers.’

‘Plenty of takers. They’d think she was a garden gnome.’

Their hands touched as they put the load down and hoisted it up again. Their voices overlapped, blending into each other. You could tell they were a family even without eavesdropping. (7)
The good humour, good fellowship and physical caring are not exclusive and the generosity of spirit and practice of the neighbours are at first understood by Sarah as a lack of decorum or politeness (26-7). There is an assumption throughout *The Listmaker* that oppositional distinctions between people, whether on the grounds of age or gender, are less likely in households where materialism is rejected. This rejection of consumerism is traditional in working class and underclass literary subjectivities and seen earlier in this chapter in *Tiger in the Bush*. In *The Listmaker* Aunty Dosh’s relationship with Ed Woodley, the local builder, seems more likely to be mutually advantageous with their reciprocal interests in gardening than is Piriel’s marriage to the never-present globe-trotting Brett. The novel admits the possibility of mutuality and reciprocity in heterosexual marriage with Ed Woodley who is a builder and keen gardener. He and Aunty Dosh ‘get together’ so that there will be a garden wedding eventually and Sarah symbolically decides to buy a frock of velvet—indepedently operating on her own tastes; it is a winter dress to be kept until Aunty Dosh’s wedding rather than the perfunctory registry office union of Brett and Piriel. Brett tells Sarah that ‘[m]arriage is really just something between the two people concerned’ (196).

*The Listmaker’s* representations of a range of Australian feminine adult participants suggest the plurality and diversity of their ways of being in the world. This pluralising of feminine life courses, along with the denial of the unitary destiny of the good mother/citizen, reconfigures adult femininity in Australian children’s literary fictions. Not only do many feminine subjects not desire to become mothers, good or otherwise, some do not have the opportunity while others have the opportunity thrust upon them as in the aunts’ situation. The private sphere is not seen as a place of containment for woman and the nurturing of children, but rather an open site of sociality and work, leisure and aesthetic pursuits. Family and home are reconceptualised to connote inclusivity and identity in a network of community relations and activities (63-4, 91, 201). They are concerned to open
the lines of communication further and to restructure power relations (202). They also show a concern with valuing schemas of non-traditional domestic organisations where mutuality and reciprocity are extended to children in a degendered way. This is clearly a long way from the exclusivity of the homes and families in 1950s children’s literary texts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined fictions that rupture representations of feminine child subjectivities, especially the archetypal Australian girl derived from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century colonial fictions for girls. The significant reconceptualisations of adult feminine subjectivities have also been examined. Most significant is the disruption, and then transformation, of the representation of the feminine life course. In the 1950s fictions there is an explicit expectation that all girls will follow a unitary life pattern: the destiny of the literary feminine subject is to be a ‘good mother’ who is devoted to the private sphere and the acculturation of Australian children. By the new millennium, this ideology sits in a conservative dialogism beside representations of the rights of women to full individualisation as citizens who actively participate across the whole social space, throughout their many and varied life courses and without ageist stigmatisation. This requires a rejection of essentialism, and so the adoption of an argument such as Toril Moi (1999) argues from Beauvoir:

To say that my subjectivity stands in a contingent relationship to my body is to acknowledge that my body will significantly influence both what society—others—make of me, and the kinds of choices I will make in response to the Other’s image of me, but it also acknowledges that no specific form of subjectivity is ever a necessary consequence of having a particular body. (115)

This feminist view is one with which Bourdieu (2001:11) fully concurs. He argues for the internalisation of a gendered habitus and bodily hexis and he is at pains to argue that these
very behaviours and attitudes are the product of a continual labour of reproduction (2001:34). This is not only the case for women but also for men. Bourdieu (2001:114) extends his argument to impact upon men’s lives and the necessary complementarity of masculininity studies. Feminists are not appeased by such arguments but just as great is the concern that younger women born in the 1970s in Australia believe that the old structures have disappeared. This is the facile thinking to which Bourdieu and third wave feminism (Summers 2003) draw attention; to be alert to the repressive practices of dominant discourses, even those like feminism that may once have identified themselves as liberatory. The heteroglossia of intersecting accusations directed at the hitherto unquestioned regulation of bodies and minds constructed and reiterated as a ‘natural’ oppositional gender order requires the interrogation of the gendered discourses embedded in both patriarchal and pro-feminist literary metanarratives.

As cultural formations, these metanarratives interpellate gendered subjectivities that not only reiterate the existing patterns of gender alienation in our society but also regulate the ways such gendered subjects should behave at specific periods of their lives from the cradle to the grave. I have argued in this chapter that Australian children’s literature in the 1990s, in fictions like *The Listmaker*, overtly engages with the cognitive struggle that surrounds such issues. The literature for children, then, needs to pay particular attention to this pervasive gendering of literary genres and discourse in order to allow the representation of child subjectivities that are free of hegemonic gender imperatives, whether masculine or feminine. In this chapter the conservative moves to restrain women in the Australian social space are traced with rather gloomy implications for those who regard full individualisation of girls and women as a socially just goal.

The findings of sociological and historical research mesh with my literary findings, that the family exists as a part of the wider community as a sanctioned arm of the state. Bourdieu (1998) concludes that the family is
a fiction, a social artifact, an illusion in the most ordinary sense of the word, but a
“well-founded illusion”, because being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of
the state, it receives from the state at every moment the means to exist and persist.

(73)

This well-founded fiction of the family impinges upon the reality and the possibilities for
the individualisation of feminine subjects in Australia. For women, the implicit
requirement of the contemporary ‘family values’ ideology that they return to the secondary
role in the social structure, relinquishing claims to full individualisation that masculine
citizens enjoy, is being resisted in the fictions I examined in this chapter.

In the next chapter I focus on the ways that fictions attest to the immanent presence
of the state and its institutions in determining conceptualisations of childhood. I examine
the strategies these fictions employ to rupture the apparently benign power that operates on
child subjects to instantiate normative values and practices in order to effect submission
and conformity. These fictions undermine dominant discourses and make their operations
visible to readers; again the process of ‘catching language in the act of formation’ is an
integral tool. In particular, in examining issues of the nation as constructed in Australian
children’s literature, I focus on the discursive formations of ‘multiculturalism’ and of
‘cultural diversity’. These concepts are problematised for readers as they are represented as
emptied of agency for large numbers of political subjects across the social space. This
happens in the third fiction in the Hazel Green trilogy, Have Courage Hazel Green. Like
Bruno and the Crumhorn, Have Courage, Hazel Green schematises the Australian social
space as a contradictory sphere and uses literary discursive practices to demonstrate that
‘the world is not actually a unitary linear place’ (Davies 1989:29). In the light of my
findings in this chapter, it is most significant that feminine as well as masculine
participants offer political challenges to the operations of power in the public sphere in
these fictions. Here the Bourdieusienne ideal is pursued as the oppressed, namely women,
join forces with other oppressed and stigmatised groups across the Australian social space
to question the legitimacy of actions occurring in the macro-context and the structure of
state/citizen relations.