1989

Writing the Self: Barbara Hanrahan's The Scent of Eucalyptus

Sue Thomas

Follow this and additional works at: http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
Abstract
Currently there is a good deal of critical interest in Australian auto-biography. To my mind, though, much of it does not engage sufficiently with theoretical and methodological issues associated with the genre. One web of issues which interests me in particular is how memories are produced, shaped into pattern, and placed in narrative. Writers of auto-biography, I would argue, situate their subjectivity in varying literary and culturally specific discourses of self. Autobiographical narratives need to be read intertextually with these discourses of self. I use the term 'subjectivity' in a poststructuralist sense:
Currently there is a good deal of critical interest in Australian autobiography. To my mind, though, much of it does not engage sufficiently with theoretical and methodological issues associated with the genre. One web of issues which interests me in particular is how memories are produced, shaped into pattern, and placed in narrative. Writers of autobiography, I would argue, situate their subjectivity in varying literary and culturally specific discourses of self. Autobiographical narratives need to be read intertextually with these discourses of self. I use the term ‘subjectivity’ in a poststructuralist sense:

‘Subjectivity’ is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her relation to the world. Humanist discourses presuppose an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she is.... Against this irreducible humanist essence of subjectivity, poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak.3

I want to demonstrate my propositions about autobiography by discussing Barbara Hanrahan’s The Scent of Eucalyptus (1973). In this autobiography Hanrahan reconstitutes her subjectivity at the moment of the text’s writing in a number of discourses: ritualised incantations of grief; the narrative conventions of the Künstlerroman, or novel of the artist; and the narrative conventions of literary pastoral. The conventions of the Künstlerroman are informed by popularised Romantic discourses of artistic subjectivity. Looking back over her childhood Hanrahan sees herself troubled by the subject position offered her by popular cultural discourses of kewpie doll, suburban femininity. It is a subject position challenged in the discourse of 1960s feminism.

The Scent of Eucalyptus is marketed by its current publisher, Chatto & Windus, as an autobiographical novel. Hanrahan makes no effort to veil its autobiographical elements. It is told by a first person narrator whose family name is Hanrahan. The novel is dedicated to a real-life Iris Pearl Goodridge, who emerges in the text as the narrator’s maternal grand-
mother. The text exhibits the prime referential feature of autobiography: 'the identity explicitly posited between the central character and the narrator in the text on the one hand and the author of the text on the other.' In interviews Hanrahan has affirmed that *The Scent of Eucalyptus* is autobiographical, remarking on one occasion that she would sometimes like it to be the first stage in a minute examination of her life 'like Dorothy Richardson did hers'.

*The Scent of Eucalyptus* is based in part on diaries kept by Hanrahan between 1968 and 1971 while she was living in London. It is interesting that the text grew from diary entries because as Linda Anderson remarks: 'The diary's formlessness, its lack of continuity, its random breaks and its joining up of different moments and areas of experience - its denial of narrative - becomes the most appropriate form for a shifting, questing subjectivity.' Hanrahan endorses Anderson's point by talking of the diary keeping as a means of relocating and reaffirming what she calls her 'real self' - she feels she had 'reverted' from her real self into 'other people's real world' by becoming a 'sodal person'. One of the patterns of subjectivity which emerged in the diary - the self as watcher and recorder of 'people and situations, discussions, observations' - provides the central metaphor of the artistic self in *The Scent of Eucalyptus*, the self as 'spy, voyeur, eavesdropper'. This and similar metaphors of self as watcher are a key feature of Romantic discourses of artistic subjectivity.

The other interesting aspect of Hanrahan's account of the genesis of the diary materials is that mourning the death of her maternal grandmother triggered memories of a childhood shared with her. Psychologists and social workers who counsel the bereaved encounter as a routine part of the processes of mourning, a phenomenon they call 'intrusive imagery':

> the 'mental' pictures formed by the grief stricken or bereaved. Places, people, and specific experiences shared with the deceased predominate, often in the form of eidetic imagery.... Specific details of earlier losses may be vividly recalled, and special, comforting, hiding places (often used during childhood years) may be mentally reconstructed.

Eidetic imagery is vivid and persistent, recreating the visual with hallucinatory clarity. The source of Hanrahan's acutely realized memories of childhood would seem, then, to lie in intrusive imagery as much as in her 'very visual memory'. Intrusive imagery is a form of involuntary memory: Hanrahan herself says the imagery, the memories of her childhood 'possessed' her as she wrote them down. Hanrahan records in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* the mystery and pain of her dead father's physical absence in her childhood. Appropriately she recalls a visit to his
grave in the first chapter; in the last chapter she recreates the pain of impending loss of her mother to a stepfather and of her Rose Street childhood world.

Hanrahan reconstructs in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* special, comforting, hiding places of her childhood: the loving and warm Rose Street home, to which she flees for domestic, mothering comfort on two occasions (p. 41, p. 152); the garden of the Rose Street home; the outside lavatory, a night-time confessional booth in which her mother tells her about her father and calms the 'pigeon' in her chest (Chapter Seven); the front bedroom in which she escapes the heat of summer, soothing herself 'amongst its chilly lino daisies' and calming the 'wild dance' in her chest by concentrating on the magic and exoticism of its material artefacts (pp. 33-34); and the sleep-out in which she shares a bed with her mother, protected by her toy animals and the physical presence of her mother (pp. 35-36). At one point in the text Hanrahan enacts the intrusion of imagery, of memory, in her process of grieving. The enactment occurs after an adult expression of anguish at her childhood insensitivity towards her grandmother's inner life. (Such a sense of having failed dead loved ones in their lifetimes is a common feature of mourning). The mood and incantatory rhythms of Hanrahan's anguish are realized superbly, especially through repetition, echo and parenthesis:

(I was deceived by familiarity. I didn't see, couldn't hear, forgot to reason.)

Inside the workaday Iris of the ruined hands, the young girl lived on; protected by the blur of memory, chaperoned by the constant shadow, Reece. She was there for me to see in the innocent blue eyes (I didn't see); there for me to hear in the hesitating, childlike voice that surprised me on the telephone (I didn't hear). She was there in the terrible depressions, smothering possessiveness, crippling self-pity that baffled me. She accounted for the copies of *True Romance, True Story, True Confessions* that were hidden beneath the mattress as surely as she did for my grandmother's shyness that isolated her, made her lonely.

And I knew her not. I only saw the Iris whose shoulders drooped from the shopping bag; who looked after Reece for forty years; who was my grandmother.

Iris is my grandmother. She has forget-me-not eyes, bushy eyebrows, rosy cheeks, silver hair she hides behind a rinse. Her face burns to brick in summer, but her body under the dresses that are always washday damp is white. (pp. 30-31)

The intrusion into present grieving of one and a half pages of specific images of her grandmother and their relationship is marked by the double spacing after 'who was my grandmother' and the shift into the present tense.

Public discourses of grief in epitaphs or commemorative verses published in the In Memoriam columns of newspapers have their own sty-
lised, formal rhetoric, embodying partial truths at best and often overlaid with cloying sentimentality. Hanrahan includes in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* without comment her grandmother’s In Memoriam verse for her first husband:

We who loved you sadly miss you
As there dawns another year,
And in lonely hours of thinking,
Thoughts of you are ever dear. (p. 27)

The formulaic rhetoric of such public discourses of grief give them a ritual seemliness, a seemliness which suppresses the ambivalences characteristic of love relationships. Hanrahan’s public celebration and commemoration of her grandmother and her childhood world are characterised in contrast by an extraordinary emotional honesty. Hanrahan is aware of both love and matrophobia (fear of becoming one’s mother) in her relationships with her grandmother and mother and her childhood world. (Hanrahan and her widowed mother lived with Iris Pearl Goodridge and her sister, Reece, who has Downs syndrome.) Hanrahan records her appreciation of the warmth and security their love provided her, and of the sensations to which they exposed her, but she also records moments when she felt herself betrayed by the suburban ambitions her grandmother and mother had for her, moments when she felt angry about the caging of expectation and deprecation of worth to which her being sent to Technical School exposed her. She celebrates the domesticity of the Rose Street home, while also mourning the quality of the feminine lives her maternal figures live within its confines. One of Hanrahan’s prime subject positions in *The Scent of Eucalyptus* is that of mourner; her subjectivity as mourner may be placed within various discourses of mourning. This subject position is one which admits contradiction and ambivalence.

In turning the fragmentary material of the diary entries into narrative, providing formal continuity, Hanrahan discerns an important pattern in the subjectivity of her memories. She discerns a split self, which I will summarise here as kewpie doll mimicking the conditioned ideal of suburban femininity and the night self, the ‘dark’ side of herself which is the canker at the heart of her grandmother’s and mother’s suburban ambitions for her. It is implicitly the night self which will frustrate the suburban ambitions of her maternal figures: it is the creative, coarse, sexual side of her personality. It is a source of deep ambivalence in the processes of self-development, a source of both wild pleasure and of a sense of the self as monstrous.

In the female *Künstlerroman* the artist figure usually imagines her creativity as monstrous and dramatises how she must fly in the face of
traditional expectations of women, challenge culturally transmitted notions of femininity, break out of the life script the materialistic, suburban ambitions of her family would write for her. In implicitly having broken out of the suburban life script her mother and grandmother planned for her by becoming the author and narrating I of The Scent of Eucalyptus Hanrahan dramatises herself as female artist figure. Hanrahan is also a printmaker of international reputation, a fact acknowledged in the biographical notes in various editions of the 'novel'. As Grace Stewart points out in A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877-1977 a problematic relationship with the mother energises many women's novels and forms the core of the female Künstlerroman: 'for a girl, becoming a woman means assuming the sex of the mother, to whom society offers few rewards and whose own self-esteem is consequently often low. Even if the daughter likes the mother personally, she may dislike her mother's role and rebel against assuming a similar position.' In matrophobia rebellion is fuelled by fear. Matrophobia is particularly common in first-born ambitious daughters like Hanrahan, and can often be seen at its most devastating in the wasted female body of the anorexic. The tensions in Hanrahan's relationships with maternal figures are played out on p. 165 in a refusal to eat. Hanrahan's perception of her mother's and grandmother's lives as, by her standards, mediocre, narrow, circumscribed, safe, constricted and tame is a signal of her matrophobia. The models of femininity their lives offer do not allow high cultural artistic ambition.

Hanrahan articulates her repudiation of their suburban ambitions for her in terms of a discourse made available by 1960s feminism, a discourse of which Betty Friedan's influential The Feminine Mystique is a representative example. Hanrahan repudiates in satirical style a suburban courtship and a 'happy housewife' scenario for her life (pp. 159-161), and demonstrates her own abjuring of marriage and motherhood as the apotheosis of a woman's life by relating the autobiographical fact that she lives in a de facto heterosexual relationship in which a decision has been made not to have children (p. 158). Women are often sold or conditioned into the packaged life script of safe courtship, marriage, happy housewifery and motherhood, and suburban home and expectations as an appropriate and fulfilling one in which to place and exercise their feminine subjectivity. It was a particularly popular script of the 1950s, the period of Hanrahan's adolescence; it is the kewpie doll model of femininity which 1960s feminism and Hanrahan's night self criticise for its conformity, drudgery and imprisonment of expectation. Significantly Hanrahan opens her autobiographical Künstlerroman with an acknowledgement of her disillusion with a sentimental, romanticised, kewpie doll femininity:
My mother hedged about my birth: said she found me in a rose. And I believed her - saw myself pink and perfect as a rubber dolly, added some modest gauze, even a little crown. Of course I went too far - tried to make it perfect; cheated with shears and criss-cross net - no thorn or suckers, gall or fly or chafer. (p. 7)

The story of her birth does not inscribe a female sexual body; neither does a kewpie doll have a female sexual body. Hanrahan proceeds in this first section of the first chapter to reject and criticise the suburban and feminine life scripts represented principally by the maternal figures who 'graved themselves for ever'. Suburban maternal femininity erases individuality, their real, original selves with 'cheap comforts'; when maternal obligation ceases there is 'nothing to be free for; bled so empty there was nothing left them, but to dissolve as well' (p. 8).

In the course of the text Hanrahan dramatises a mature perception that beneath the 'studied conformity' of their lives a real, 'strangely original' life lay in an unworldly physical and emotional intimacy. It is a perception which blunts the sharp edge of the matrophobia expressed elsewhere:

The real world sprang into being as my grandmother, my mother, Reece, and I came close. It was a delicate world that waxed and waned; constantly threatened by my grandmother's depressions and possessiveness, my mother's materialism and secret longings, Reece's stomach that rattled, my fits. It was nurtured and protected by the roses and the grape-vines, the ivy and the lavatory creeper that clung to the fences; by the arching berry bush, the plant that bloomed once every seven years. The real world came into being round the dining-room fire, as we toasted bread on the crooked fork; it lurked in the porcelain basin as my mother washed my hair with rainwater from the well, bloomed in the fusty bedroom as Reece soothed my head with little pats when I was sick, rose from the earth when my grandmother stooped in the garden and coaxed withered seedlings to life. In the sequestered haunts - behind the crinkled green glass and the roses, the grape-vines, the ivy and the lavatory creeper - my grandmother's and mother's lives blossomed secretly, unacknowledged even to themselves.

This innocence had its pitfalls: they did not value themselves; they did not realize their worth. Once they strayed from their familiar paths they were lost; their innocence tarnished. (pp. 182-183)

This mature perception gives rise to the many descriptions in the text of physical and emotional intimacy among the women. The value given this intimacy points to a sometimes tenuous domestic pastoral in which the home is celebrated as 'the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division'. Domestic pastoral is a powerful Victorian and post-Victorian cultural discourse.
Hanrahan dramatises her night self in Chapter Twenty-five as her rescuer from mediocrity, conformity and imprisonment, as her saving grace:

I was saved from my pliancy and submission - my ignorance, by something awkward and unyielding, prickly and resisting deep inside. I was saved by the crudity that made me pee in the bath, and revel in the tar-black shit that poured out of me and stank. Therefore I was different.

At night, alone, I pulled myself clear of the mediocrities of the world that sought to claim me. I freed my hair of its restricting pins and it shivered like a thistle brush. (p. 158)

She receives 'night-time half-knowledge' of 'where the real world lay' from the 'cryptic messages' of nature, 'a wild world that broke through the symmetry of prim brick borders, neat vegetable rows, tortured roses' - a symbolic message of wild, natural self breaking through the symmetries of suburban order. She also receives half-knowledge of a more authentic world through fantasies based on myth and literature rather than the seductive, packaged popular culture represented by 'the smooth voices of radio announcers, the banality of soap powder jingles, the empty glamour of film-star buccaneers', and from looking beyond 'homage without question to a sovereign and a flag and a sunburned land that were not mine' (p. 156) to the fascination of 'the desolation of the lane where old Mr Stone next but one roamed mad, where strange boys smoked tobacco in the barrel-yard, where someone shed the sanitary pad that lay bloodied and wilting further down' (p. 159).

At twelve Hanrahan has ambivalent feelings about her 'night-time half-knowledge'. It gives her a sense of difference and isolation from others she hasn't learnt how to cope with, so she mimics the manners and habits of the kewpie doll model of femininity to try to gain acceptance among maternal figures and peer group, unaware that the intensity of the mimicry gives away her difference, produces perceptible slippage from the model. To her day-time kewpie doll personality the night-time half-knowledge is unsettling, unhealthy and physically repugnant. The night-time half-knowledge masturbation provides of sexuality is reduced in the light of morning and kewpie doll perception: 'the warmth had fled. I found hairs stuck to the sheets; my fingers smelt. And I felt guilty' (p. 173). She wears gloves - the epitome of 50s femininity - to try to break herself of the masturbatory habit which to the night self is a source of delicious pleasure. The night-time half-knowledge is also imaged negatively as a 'canker' and a 'blight' in relation to transmitted cultural ideals of suburban femininity.

In many female Künstlerromane the problems the woman artist has in breaking free of feminine conditioning are so traumatic that her artistic
self is imaged as monster and the birds or wings which symbolize her desire for freedom are broken, crippled or strangled. Hanrahan’s artistic self may not be singularly monstrous, but it is imaged in terms of darkness and Gothic possibility, particularly in its association with her fits and faked suicide attempt. Hanrahan suggests implicitly that as an adult she triumphs over ambivalence about her night self in presenting it as the part of the personality which rescued her from a suburban fate to be the author of a high cultural literary work. The night self appears in Hanrahan’s print chosen as the cover illustration of the current Chatto & Windus paperback edition, ‘My Family - My Australia’, in inscriptions of the female sexual body over the lettering ‘My Australia’, in the top row of images, and superimposed over the Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie area on the map. This last placement may symbolise its richness as a vein of natural ore in life and art. The night self of Hanrahan the writer also breaks the suburban feminine mould by inscribing the female sexual, reproductive and excretory body in the text of The Scent of Eucalyptus.

Certain facets of typical narratives of the female artist, like those of the male artist, are informed by Romantic discourse of artistic sensibility or subjectivity. The artist in this popularised cultural discourse is presented as different and isolated from her or his peers, fleeing restraint by and entrapment in bourgeois conventionality. The artistic subjectivity is marked by qualities of intense perception. The artist characteristically watches in solitude - watches others, the physical world and the self. This watching may set up a ‘conflict between the urge to “live” [to lead a life of social involvement] and the temptation to seek solitude’. Diana Brydon draws attention to the characteristic verbs of visual perception in The Scent of Eucalyptus. Hanrahan, though, records and preserves perceptions of all senses as in this passage:

We followed a crooked track, and I breathed in eucalyptus and the spice of gum leaves burning far away. Faintly through the Mallee came the whine of a circular saw. Close to my ear I heard the chick-oo-wee of a bell-bird, the answering chirp-chirp-cherry-cherry of a honeyeater.

I saw the flash of rosellas and a black and white magpie. Uncle Will told me of the soft grey mopoke - the Boobook owl, of speckled Jack who lays chocolate-coloured eggs, of thrushes and skylarks and swallows.

(The hills are gentle, with their pale trees, their stillnesses, their drifts of smoke. Soft-bristled bushes cling to my skirt, currents of strange insects wreath my head. There are tufted ferns, black boys, and everywhere the wattle: intensely gold, on hair-like twigs; in plumes, amongst flannel leaves; fuming in a lemon fuzz; fallen to a shrivelled crust.) (pp. 88-89)

This record exemplifies the physical, aesthetic and emotional responsiveness, the capacity for minute absorption and the powers of ex-
pression linked to the freshness and wonder of the child’s recalled perception which characterises the modern meaning of the term sensibility. Hanrahan dramatises her artistic self as asocial watcher and listener. There are repeated statements of her difference and isolation from her peers, and of a desire to fit in with them, to lead a life of feminine involvement. Hanrahan’s sense of a split self realises the conflicting pulls towards sociability and towards the solitude which sustains artistic sensibility. In *The Scent of Eucalyptus*, too, there is repeated imagery of a desire for freedom, especially from entrapment in the conventionality of suburban femininity. The Romantic discourse of artistic subjectivity, then, certainly facilitates the presentation of the artistic self in *The Scent of Eucalyptus*.

The self of *The Scent of Eucalyptus* is also situated within conventions of pastoral. Hanrahan’s awareness of literary pastoral is signalled in her epigraph from Andrew Marvell’s *The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers*. In displacements of the original pastoral paradigm which involved nymphs, shepherds and shepherdesses in rural settings, the requisite pastoral simplicity, peace, and authenticity have also been celebrated in childhood and domesticity, the pastoral of childhood emerging in the seventeenth century and the pastoral of domesticity in the nineteenth century. Hanrahan’s childhood self is shown to take on nymph qualities in the relatively freer and more natural cultural spaces of semi-rural country and beach, in both of which she, like Marvell’s nymph, T.C., names the wilder flowers and trees. As the mature Hanrahan describes her earlier self’s experience of the Adelaide Hills and beaches of the 1940s, it was a source of enlightenment and intuitive half-knowledge: ‘I only saw its [Rose Street’s] ugliness, the telegraph wires and greyness when I came back from the sea and the hills’ (p. 97). Her mementos of sea and the hills wilt, shrink or fade when transplanted to the suburban home. She is struck by a contradiction between her experience of the Australian landscape and patriotic celebration of it in the singing of ‘My Country’ at school assembly. The half-knowledge the country and beach impart to the child is associated with the real self, the night self, the self impatient of suburban and unthinking patriotic commonplaces. In the suburban garden at night Hanrahan intuits cryptic messages from nature. The mature Hanrahan has the capacity to decipher the messages by articulating them, but that articulation is steeped in the conventions of pastoral and the nature/culture dichotomy.

In line with the conventions of pastoral the values of the city are exposed and scrutinised critically. The city is associated with the transmission of popular cultural values through film, radio, and consumerist, uncritically patriotic practices which penetrate home and school. Chapter
Sixteen, which records a visit to the city centre, for example, is full of detail of public monuments which signals complacent civic pride in royalty, exploration and colonisation, imported architectural styles, patronage of traditional institutions of learning, the British flag, Scottish heritage, and noble sacrifice of life in war. The high cultural life of the city, represented by the Art Gallery, screens itself from Australian nature 'under parasols and trellised vine leaves' (p. 102) and is measured by its collection of sentimental paintings, pastoral paintings of nymphs and Pan, nationalistic celebration of shearing sheds, and jolly, exotic 'girls', a term of trivialised womanhood (p. 103). The city is also associated with the unreal social selves Hanrahan's mother and grandmother adopt to negotiate it. These are artificial, unfamiliar social selves which intimidated Hanrahan as a child; they are constricted by corsets and caught up in a world of feminine social appearances.

The pastoral of domesticity and the cryptic messages of the Rose Street garden are disrupted in the concluding chapter by the impending remarriage of Hanrahan's mother and removal to the new marital home. The disruption of pastoral, precarious as that pastoral may have been, occurs as Hanrahan awaits the final loss of childhood marked by the onset of menstruation and is realised in imagery of the sullying, hardening and dissonance of the symbolically maternal15 and imagery of death, decay and abandonment in the final paragraph. Hanrahan prefigures a growth in her self-division during adolescence, a growth which will make her childhood seem more simple. The organisation and articulation of Hanrahan's memories of childhood and her evaluation of that world are profoundly affected by her situation of her subjectivity within the discourse of pastoral.

Hanrahan's subject position as daughter of Maurice ('Bob') Hanrahan, who died when she was one, is interesting, particularly in the recent Chatto & Windus paperback edition. In the written text of The Scent of Eucalyptus Bob Hanrahan is associated with mystery and loss. Hanrahan records herself as child having reasoned that the corpse under the begrimed cemetery slab bearing her father's name did have a physical life - 'by being my father' as the adult Hanrahan puts it (p. 11). She can know her father only by speculatively piecing together through reason and intuition fragments of information from her mother, from photographs, and from his possessions. She perceives her father in some ways mirroring herself in wanting to break out of the tameness, monotony and mediocrity of the suburban world and factory; the discourses within which she tentatively situates his reconstructed subjectivity are those of 1960s and 1970s criticism of suburbia and factory work. In the current Chatto & Windus paperback edition of The Scent of Eucalyptus the father's importance is highlighted by the representation of him in
her screenprint ‘My Family - My Australia’ on the front cover. Bob Hanrahan has the same physical presence as her mother, grandmother and great-aunt. Beside his head is a representation of vegetable love dated 1940, the year of his death. The representation of vegetable love (a root vegetable, with a heart-shaped root) is an allusion to Andrew Marvell’s poem ‘To His Coy Mistress’, lines 11-12: ‘My vegetable love should grow/ Vaster than empires and more slow.’ The allusion reminds the reader that for Barbara Hanrahan her father’s death has, in the words of Marvell’s poem, turned ‘into ashes’ all her ‘lust’: ‘The grave’s a fine and private place,/ But none, I think, do there embrace.’ The allusion hints, too, at a possible placement of self as daughter/lover in a Freudian discourse of female psychosexual development. Bob’s name is represented twice in the print with stars over it. As a representation of the artist’s love it suggests Bob’s place in her heaven and chaste adoration. It alludes in its imagery to the Petrarchan love convention, a central feature of which is that the loved one is unattainable sexually because of marriage to another or death, the lover only being able to worship chastely from afar. These allusions are an afterthought to the original edition of The Scent of Eucalyptus; through them Hanrahan takes up the subject position of petitioner for love and physical intimacy.

Hanrahan’s subjectivity as it is presented in The Scent of Eucalyptus is constituted in a range of discourses: the discourses of 1960s feminism, mourning, pastoral and love; Romantic discourse of artistic subjectivity, the discourse of the female Kunstlerroman. To this list one might add a popular discourse of childhood and adolescent female friendship in Hanrahan’s depiction of her relationship with Carol. Chris Weedon writes:

As we acquire language, we learn to give voice - meaning - to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness, and the positions with which we identify structure our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity. Having grown up within a particular system of meanings and values, which may well be contradictory, we may find ourselves resisting alternatives. Or, as we move out of familiar circles, through education or politics, for example, we may be exposed to alternative ways of constituting the meaning of our experience which seems to address our interests more directly.16

For Hanrahan the identification of self as artist and as a sympathiser with the inner liberation of women made available seemingly powerful new ways of constituting and articulating her subjectivity. Her identification of self as artist is a very strong one. She speaks of her sense of vocation as artist: ‘I felt I had sloughed the false “me” away and was
in touch with the deepest part of my being which, in turn, was in touch with something so much greater than itself. She remarks of her reading which inspired her vocation as writer, a vocation first tested in *The Scent of Eucalyptus*:

> I was reading D.H. Lawrence all the time - his novels and stories, his letters. Apart from his writing, his life is important to me. His dedication, his freshness, his extremes. I like to have a set of heroes in my mind - examples to test myself against, to feel humble against. I'd read a writer's books, then I'd read of that writer's life.

Not only was Hanrahan looking for standards of heroism in reading of the subjectivity of writers; the largely literary discourses in which she constitutes her subjectivity - pastoral, high cultural love, artistic subjectivity - are ones which are often characterised by a first person subject position or narrative voice.

The discourses within which Hanrahan constituted her subjectivity in 1973 deeply affect the organisation and articulation of memories in *The Scent of Eucalyptus*. They edit and shape the fabrics of experience and memory presented and provide continuities of evaluative perspective. It is a commonplace of criticism of autobiography that

> Firstly, the observer who is a measurer of his past self changes the object in the very process of observation and recreation. And, secondly, the transformation of the past self changes the nature of the observer, who is never the same at the end of the work as at the moment of writing the first page.

My approach to *The Scent of Eucalyptus* points to particular reasons why this should be so. In writing the self the autobiographer inevitably constitutes it at any given historical and cultural moment within a range of discourses which offer competing or complementary subject positions. The conscious or unconscious identification with particular subject positions in writing an autobiography will certainly alter or strengthen a writer's sense of those positions and offer modes of articulation and analysis of past or present self or selves. A post-structuralist reading of autobiographical subjectivity will insist that the autobiographical self will inevitably be constituted within different discourses at different historical and cultural moments, or indeed at different autobiographical moments. The theoretical underpinnings of my reading of *The Scent of Eucalyptus* lead me to question the methodology of criticism of autobiography which assumes that it is a direct transcript of social reality.

It is not impossible to deduce from Australian autobiographical writing aspects of Australian material and cultural conditions at any given historical moment. It should, however, be an important rule for admission of evidence of those conditions that the critic takes into consideration
in the processes of deduction the discourses within which the autobiographical self or selves she or he is discussing are constituted.

NOTES


12. Stewart, p. 177. Hanrahan's mother, a commercial artist, is described as 'a lark whose tongue was cut, a gull with clipped wings' (p. 17).

13. Stewart, p. 175.
15. ‘As the chrysanthemums lurch, their petals stained with mud, my mother tells me she is to marry ... the chrysanthemums are sullied, the earth is hard, rain falls on iron’ (pp. 186-187). Chrysanthemums, earth and water are traditional symbols of the maternal.
17. Mott, p. 44.
20. I would, for instance, place Richard Coe’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Australian: Childhood, Literature and Myth in this category.