Aboriginal Women's Autobiographical Narratives and the Politics of Collaboration

Jennifer Anne Jones

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In
Gender Studies, Department of Social Inquiry
Adelaide University
October 2001
Contents

List of abbreviations
List of Illustrations
List of tables and diagrams
Abstract
Acknowledgements
Declaration

Chapter One: Introduction
Sally Morgan's *My Place* and the eclipsing of Aboriginal women's foundational autobiographical narratives

Chapter Two: Methodology
Situating myself and this research

Section I
Re-membering *Karobran* by Monica Clare

Chapter Three: Literary links
Monica Clare and left wing politics

Chapter Four: Invisible workers
Invisible workers leave a mark: Editing *Karobran*

Section II
Re-membering *If Everyone Cared* by Margaret Tucker

Chapter Five: Contesting memory
The contested memory of Margaret Tucker

Chapter Six: God's Guidance
Editing according to the guidance of God
Section III
Re-membering Stradbroke Dreamtime by Oodgeroo of the Tribe Noonuccal, Custodian of the Land Minjerriba

Chapter Seven: Publishing and Politics 137
Political activism and the writing life: From poetry and pan-Aboriginal politics to children’s prose and cultural education

Chapter Eight: The Mythologised Indigene 174
The resurrection of the mythologised indigene

Section IV
Re-membering foundational Aboriginal women writers

Chapter Nine: Reading Other-wise 229
Reading Other-wise: Colonial mimicry and editorial double mimesis

Chapter Ten: Conclusion 260

Appendices

Appendix I 264
Extracts from the original Karobran manuscript with editorial corrections

Appendix II 266
Extracts from the original hand-written manuscript and typescript of If Everyone Cared

Appendix III 269
Extracts from the original hand-written manuscript and typescript of Stradbroke Dreamtime

Bibliography 273
Abstract

Since their groundbreaking publication in the 1970s, foundational autobiographical texts by Aboriginal women writers have been the subject of little critical discussion and have failed to gain space in the public memory. Oodgeroo published Stradbroke Dreamtime (1972) in a children's picture book format. Margaret Tucker's If Everyone Cared (1977) was the first conventional autobiography. Karobran (1978) by Monica Clare, became the first autobiographical novel by an Aboriginal woman. These three Aboriginal women authors were outspoken, active and successful advocates of Aboriginal rights. The loss of status suffered by their foundational autobiographical narratives can be linked to each text's overt political enunciation, uncompromising ideological stance or mobilisation of an unfashionable generic style. Monica Clare, Margaret Tucker and Oodgeroo were women of conviction, working within their Aboriginal communities, pan-Aboriginal lobby groups, religious and political organisations. These organisations included non-Aboriginal people who were sympathetic to the Aboriginal struggle. This thesis investigates the role of these 'communities of commitment' in the publication of their foundational autobiographical narratives. It considers how and why the Aboriginal woman elicited outside support and how the ideology of the group informed the epistemology of the text. My research highlights the role of collaborating white editors, drawn from a community of commitment or a professional editor, as crucial in influencing the style and content of the published piece. I quantify and describe the changes implemented by the editor by comparing the original manuscript of each text with the published edition. This comparison lays bare the hidden ideological work of the editor and the surviving Aboriginal subtext. Following Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, I characterise the adoption of a white ideological artifice by the Aboriginal woman author as the white mask of colonial mimicry. I demonstrate how compromise in the editorial phase also becomes a site of potential political subversion. Significantly, my work discusses the outcomes of cross-cultural impersonation performed by the white editor. The editorial collaboration is the site of editorial double mimesis, the imposition of stereotyped representations of Aboriginality. This thesis accepts the scars of editorial effacement as evidence of struggle and celebrates the substantially unheralded achievements of these women.