‘I’ll Tell My Mother’: Dorothy Hewett and Literary Feminism after #Metoo

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NICOLE MOORE
UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

I start by acknowledging and offering my thanks to the Ngunnawal people, on whose land I live and work. Their generosity seeks to keep those of us who live in the ‘Canberra bubble’ safe and educated about the land we occupy. I pay tribute to Elders past, present and emerging, and also to any First Nations people present for the initial online video delivery of this essay, in July 2020, including members of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature.

When my colleague Paul Eggert retired from the University of New South Wales in Canberra, he passed on a portrait of the writer and critic Dorothy Auchterlonie Green that now hangs on my office wall. Paul was briefly a colleague of hers in the English discipline here and she is now a ghostly colleague of mine. In formulating this lecture in her name, I thought of her while we fight the same fights she fought—about the worth of literature and the humanities in contemporary education, now under multiform threat; about the uses of Australian literature, identified as such, in thinking and *as* thinking about the world. I thought about her involvement in the Vietnam moratorium marches and anti-nuclear protest, including protests at the Australian War Memorial against Australian involvement in what was argued to be Cold War aggression in South East Asia and even an imperial war. Anti-war protests, as well as protests calling for the inclusion of the Frontier Wars in AWM and ANZAC memorialisation, are now no longer allowed on any sites close to that institution.

Green was a small but authoritative person and her speeches on the steps of the Canberra war memorial were apparently galvanising. I have always wanted to know what it took for Green to speak out, working for the ANU and UNSW at the Australian Defence Force Academy in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, as one of the few women with a relatively safe and senior academic role in literary studies in Australia. Biographies of Green haven’t yet been able to tell us fully, waiting on access to more of her papers held in the UNSW Canberra Special Collections (McDonald 72–82, Modjeska), while in her own Dorothy Green lecture Susan Sheridan notes the irony of Green’s position (156). This essay springs from the biography of a different Dorothy, eight years younger and with some shared characteristics, especially in voicing protest—on Dorothy Hewett’s part reflecting a long and dedicated commitment to political activism, dating from 1945 when she joined the Communist Party of Australia. As photographic portraits of the two Dorothys can show, however, there were many real differences between them, too, and not least in how they thought about what it means to have had an impact on the history in which you participate. The historical character of literary protest was a pressing question for my talk, given under COVID conditions in July 2020, while the Black Lives Matter movement galvanised protests around the world, in the wake particularly of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May.

Portrait of Dorothy Green. Private Collection. Photographer unknown.

Dorothy Hewett relaxes after the benefit 'The Tatty Show' with director Wal Cherry (L) and actor George Ogilvie (R). Photograph by Oliver Frank in *Theatre Australia*, 1976.

Dorothy Hewett was one of Australia's most prominent and productive writers of the later twentieth century, a breakthrough playwright and a major poet, as well as an awarded novelist and memoirist, with a sharp critical eye. Though diverse in form, her work manifests a distinctive, often rambunctious voice that yet has tragedy and loss as its bass notes, as Hewett scholar Lyn McCredden discerns (204). My biography engages with her as a major writer but pursues the complexities of her life for their own sake, too—Hewett's life was more adventurous and richly controversial than those of most of the women writers of her generation, including Dorothy Green, even though that bar is notably high. And the biography pursues her life as an historical one, insisting on women's presence and contribution to mid-century twentieth century history proper, while tracing how her best-remembered work weaves through that life with its own self-consciousness and candour. A greater challenge, however, is presented by the hurt and trauma of others at the centre of her story—particularly her daughters, Kate and Rozanna Lilley, both writers and scholars, who have stepped forward to reveal publicly their experiences of sexual abuse by numbers of men while teenagers in their parents' care.[1]

Their revelations feature in *Tilt*, an award-winning volume of poetry by Kate, and *Do Oysters Get Bored?*, a hybrid memoir and poetry collection by Rozanna, both released in 2018. In their volumes, in short preceding pieces and in subsequent press interviews, the sisters testify to sanctioned sexual activity and sexual relationships, as young teenagers, with adult men: men who treated them as available for sex without question; men for whom their youth was a prize. Both Rose and Kate have described their anger and trauma in confronting these childhood experiences and the work it has taken to explicitly identify themselves as sufferers of sexual abuse and as survivors of it; how hard it has been to choose to act and to decide how to speak and write about it. Their writing thinks penetratingly and complexly about this very difficult inheritance.

The media storm that greeted the revelations has opened up the question of inheritance further. Besides indicting three high-profile named abusers and hinting at those unnamed, spotlighting the behaviours of their parents, and questioning many of the practices common to the literary and artistic circles in which the Lilleys lived, the scandal also places the cultural work of those circles under scrutiny, including their mother's literary legacy. Further, it highlights the seeming contradiction between Hewett's expressive feminism and/or cultural radicalism, especially in so far as she was held up as a key figure of second wave literary feminism (in 1998, Chris Wallace-Crabbe identified her as 'the public face of women's poetry' (232, qtd Sheridan 163)), and the outcomes of the milieu from which her work arose for her own daughters. It is a painful contradiction, underscored in the work of both Lilley women. For a biographer, it presents a difficult, fractured lens through which to review Hewett's broad-ranging, influential work, much of it centred on the question of women's sexual freedom.

For decades, explicit protest and political engagement were central to Hewett's literary practice. Her first poem published as a communist is titled 'I am Spain,' from 1946, and speaks of the grief of war in the voice of the ongoing, postwar Spanish resistance to Francoist fascism.

> In the Spanish earth the dead men lie,
> Their brains are streets in Madrid,
> With the blood caked on the white stone walls,
> And the sky a river of blue silk through their fingers. (*Progress*, 34–35)

The great resistance writers of the Spanish civil war featured on Hewett's long reading list for the first year of her communist education—especially Left poet Frederico Garcia Lorca, shot by the fascist nationalists in 1936, and his comrade the Chilean Pablo Neruda, who had rejected his own typically metaphysical, melancholic love poetry to write directly of the horror before him.

Hewett's poem is haunted by the famous repeated lines of 'I'm Explaining a Few Things,' from 1937, Neruda's poem about the coming of war to his house in Madrid: 'from every house burning metal flows / instead of flowers.'

> And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry
> Speak of dreams and leaves
> And the great volcanoes of his native land?
>
> Come and see the blood in the streets.
> Come and see
> the blood in the streets.
> Come and see
> the blood in the streets!

'I am Spain' first appeared in the newspaper of the New South Wales Labor Party, *Progress*, in mid-1946, its publication there an indication of the strength of anti-fascist solidarity across the Left in Australia, as well as Hewett's growing status as a poet.

In 1962, Hewett's poem 'My Party is the Party of Aragon' listed Neruda among those writers whose revolutionary aesthetics were keeping her in the Communist Party, despite Khrushchev's 1957 revelations about the crimes of Stalin and the murderous record of the USSR.

> I am not alone ... in the beating of my heart
> Are the songs of Lumumba, the poems of Pablo Neruda.
> 'The Rail Splitters Awake' in my heart each morning,
> Brecht's lost children wander through the Polish snow,
> With Nazim Hikmet I will see beautiful days,
> And my Party is the Party of Aragon.

Starstruck, she was there as a member of an Australian delegation to hear Neruda read at a writers' congress in East Germany in 1965, among a throng of the best loved writers from the socialist world and its allies (Hewett, 'The Challenge' 7). His 'Let the Rail Splitter Awake' from 1948 could be one of the most apposite poems of resistance, revolution and intersectional allegiance to cite for our contemporary moment, with its vision of Abe Lincoln lifting up a rail splitter's axe against the slave owners in his own home town, insisting that Black lives matter to American power, but I choose not to quote its lines to add to those above. This is because, as part of the Ni Una Menos and Me Too movements, Chilean women activists have reminded us of Neruda's account, in his 1974 memoir *I Confess that I Have Lived*, of his rape of a Sri Lankan woman come to clean his house and toilet while he was living in Columbo in 1929 (Vargas Rojas, McGowan, Eisner).

Initiated by Tarana Burke in 2006 to promote solidarity among girls and young women of colour who had experienced abuse, the Me Too movement afterward widened and began resonating strongly internationally as public testimony built against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein and other historic sexual abuse charges against powerful men were acted upon and prosecuted (Rodino-Colocino, 97–98). Neruda has become just one of the high profile cultural figures whose past actions have been re-examined and who have had the contemporary currency of their work questioned in the light of Me Too. In October 2017, Me Too was amplified massively as a social media phenomenon by a tweet from actress Alyssa Milano. In response to a friend's suggestion, she asked, 'If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted, write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.' Within 45 days, the hashtag #MeToo had been active in 85 countries and posted 85 million times (Sayej).

The movement was critical in helping Kate and Rozanna Lilley feel that the time was right for more public revelations, in the middle of 2018, which for me was a mid-point in writing Hewett's biography. Despite the shocked press reaction, their experiences were never secret, as they both stress, at least not to the people involved, not to some who knew them well from that period and not to those who know them well now. 'This has all been very well known for a very long time,' said Kate Lilley, somewhat wearily, in an interview with Claire Nicholls for the ABC. Her and her sister's experiences feature in some of Hewett's poetry from the period, notably, and are traceable too in the work of some of the men involved—most of them creative producers: poets, film and theatre makers, a photographer, actors, artists, a publisher. Kate and Rose's testimonies were already part of my research for the biography, and those experiences that Rose had discussed in print were central to my initial approach (R. Lilley, 2013, 2015; Moore, 2014). Both of them have shared with me their experiences during their teenage years living with their parents in Woollahra and Darlinghurst, as part of their supportive contributions to the biography, and again testified to how damaging and difficult those experiences were for them. But, as Kate said, the Me Too revelations showed her that 'this is a moment to risk something more explicit' (Neill, 16).

The full-blown uproar in the press through the middle months of 2018, provoked in part by the profiles of the perpetrators, shows us something of the risks Kate saw in speaking more publicly

and the risks that are still apparent to both women in identifying the men involved. They named three who are dead: film maker and speech writer Bob Ellis, celebrity artist and printmaker Martin Sharp, and British photographer and film maker David Hamilton, who committed suicide in 2016 after being accused of rape by four of his former child models, Rose having been another. Other men involved are still active, still writing and producing—more than a handful. 'They know who they are, they know we're speaking about them,' Rose revealed to the *Australian* newspaper, for the instigating article by Rosemary Neill with which she and Kate had cooperated (Neill, 'Staying Mum' 16). The press attention quickly grew to include expansive newspaper and online commentary, notably from right wing columnists condemning social licence (Bolt; Powell; Devine), while commentators on the left focused on the figure of Bob Ellis, whose long involvement with the Australian Labor Party as a speech writer and pundit made him representative (Delaney; Maley; McKenzie-Murray).

There is a risk for this essay, too, under Australia's current defamation laws, in too transparently describing any living individual's participation in Kate and Rose's abuse. But the risk is not only to the reputations of the perpetrators or, thus, via defamation law, to Kate and Rose as accusers. Both sisters have been insistently asked to consider the impact of their revelations on the literary reputation of their mother and to a lesser extent their father, the writer Merv Lilley. Conservative pastor and commentator Mark Powell declared in the *Spectator* that 'Dorothy Hewett is the perfect illustration of what happens when feminism turns feral.' Amid other calls, right wing Senator Corey Bernardi put a motion to federal parliament that the Dorothy Hewett prize for an unpublished manuscript, administered by University of Western Australia Publishing, be renamed (Australian Senate). While agreeing with Kate that the name of the prize be retained, Rose has been insistently clear in the press coverage, however, that this is not her risk to bear. Kate, as one of her mothers' literary executors, editor of Hewett's *Selected Poems* and a literary scholar, has held a complex position and insisted in her turn on the importance of keeping attention on the perpetrators (Jervis-Read, 'With Complexity'). Even when, as in this essay, Hewett is central to discussion, it remains important to resist a dangerous cultural reflex to deflect blame onto the mother primarily, in lieu of the abusers. Discussing Heather Clark's newly expansive biography of Sylvia Plath, acclaimed biographer Hermione Lee declared herself 'fascinated by the question of blame,' noting, as we might, that the question of who is responsible for 'whatever suffering is in a life' often becomes the central thematised concern of biographies of women.

As we can see them now, in 2021, these revelations form a key Me Too moment in Australia, in the wake of which, what some have viewed as the betrayals of sexual liberation and second wave feminism have been held up for new scrutiny. In this essay, I want to review Hewett's work, and perhaps especially her writing from the 1970s, through this lens, by considering her daughters' works as examples of what Leigh Gilmore identifies as 'Metoolit.' At stake, it seems to me, is a complex pairing of two cultural or social reflexes that both position and bind their work together in a retroactive dynamic addressed to the 1970s. I'm interested in the period's investment in the question of women's freedom, on the one hand, and the circulating judgment attached to shame or humiliation and its repressive powers, on the other, as an historical emotional or moral structure that reacts to liberation, and that can be at once traced through their work and contested by it. What I hope to be able to do is to centre and thus examine the contrary and yet perhaps interdependent rhetorical work of shame and what we may call freedom—both sexual or more broadly political liberation and the freedom to speak—in the thickly populous intertexts of rape culture that surround Hewett's biography.

1. The Rape Archive

In Rozanna Lilley's hybrid memoir poetry collection, titled *Do Oysters Get Bored?*—from a question asked by her son, whose life with autism she also explores in the book—she muses, 'Poetry, I think it would be fair to say, has partly written my life' (*Oysters* 78). Kate Lilley's poetry collection *Tilt* is at least as self-conscious in its concentrated engagement with the literary and filmic archives that have been determining for her. Its title is a reference to the Brooke Shields vehicle of 1979, in which Shields plays a pin-ball wizard, aged 14, and which was filmed between her role as a child sex worker in Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby*, aged 11, and her starring role, nude, in *Blue Lagoon*, aged 15. *Pretty Baby* caused what Rachel Cole couches as a moral panic on its release in Australia, as in the US, the concern its effect not on audiences but on the child actor (121).

Teri Shields, Brooke Shields's mother, has been famously defiant about suggestions that appearing in the film was damaging for her daughter, however, reportedly asking her 'Are you proud of what you did? Well, then fuck 'em.' In her 2014 memoir, *There Was a Little Girl: My Mother and Me*, Brooke Shields continues to defend the film and the actions of her mother (cf. Vickery 112). Teri Shields's position throws into relief the key role of shame in how such harm is both experienced and enacted, locating it, for her, in the judgment to which her daughter was subject rather than in the forms of what can be called sexualisation she faced while performing her role, in so far as these are separable. The question she seems to raise is the degree to which the harm could reside in the shame—how much of the harm is concentrated there? Could such harm be effectively shrugged off, refused or resisted, as Teri Shields and Dorothy Hewett both perhaps believed?

Part of Lilley's *Tilt* is deeply embedded in the culture of the mid 1970s and film forms a prominent intertextual interlocutor for the whole collection. Her figuring of classic Hollywood's queer cinema and the object realia of Greta Garbo's estate, in particular, builds self-consciously on the investments in femme performance and the practised stylistics of glamour articulated by her mother and also Susan Sontag, both of whom didn't just adore Garbo but wanted to be her (Hewett, *Wild Card* 34; Moser 600). In 1978, due in part to their mother's connections in the Sydney theatre and film world, Kate and Rose appeared in Fred Schepisi's film of Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, aged 16 and 14, playing a pair of murdered sisters, alongside Keneally himself and Alexandra Schepisi, the director's baby daughter. The year before, Rose had featured prominently in the film *Journey among Women*, an extraordinary part of Hewett's otherwise minimal writing for the screen. Co-written with John Weiley, who went on to establish Sydney's IMAX cinema, and its director Tom Cowan, *Journey among Women* had the tagline 'Nine women convicts escape from a prison hell-hole and dare to create a savage world free of man …' With a cast of feminist actors, including now acclaimed Pitjinjara/Yungkuntjara actor Lillian Crombie and a number of feminist crew, its premise is to expose the sexual violence at the base of the settler national narrative, though it ignores such violence directed at Indigenous people. With a conflicted cinematic gaze, however, often dominated by the camera's assertive objectification of the women, it was given an R rating (Thornley). Aged fourteen, Rose played a convict called Emily who, along with other female characters, appears topless and is raped, and is scripted into naked sexualised touching with an older woman. Merv Lilley too spent much time on the set, advising the production on bush craft and appearing briefly in a scene helping the women convicts to escape. This experience, among others, informed Rose's contributions to the recent Royal Commission on Child Abuse's inquiries into the entertainment industry. Her poem 'Soap Opera,' from *Do Oysters Get Bored*, records her father discovering Rose on set, 'crouched and vomiting/ plied with cheap booze /

he'd seen too much,' and taking her home, where she found her mother upstairs having sex with one of Hewett's former students.

Besides that of Brooke Shields, Kate uses the cases of Juanita Neilson, a journalist active about the Green Bans campaign in Kings Cross, close to where they lived in Surry Hills, who disappeared in July 1975, and Anita Cobby, a nurse who was raped, beaten and murdered by five men in 1986, to highlight the jeopardy then frighteningly proximate to Sydney's teenage girls and young women. In 'Tilt,' the title poem, the Academy Twin cinema in Paddington is a 'second home,' which opened with Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* in 1974, as the poem records, and where she watched Philip Noyce's *Heatwave* with Judy Davis starring as a 'Neilson-style activist' in 1982. A poem called 'Pastoral' recalls a school friend inviting her to 'a Sunday afternoon double / of *The Story of O* and *Emmanuelle*'—the two most famous of the French softcore feature films of the 1970s, released in mainstream cinemas in the wake of 1972's *Deep Throat*, the first conventionally pornographic film to reach blockbuster status. It made a star of Linda Lovelace, who soon afterwards testified that she was coerced and sexually assaulted during its filming. In *Tilt*, 'Pastoral' is a queer retrospect and an assertive re-versioning of a requested 'poem about the seasons,' addressed to the school friend who had invited Kate to the screening and in later life wrote to question her poetry's 'lesbian themes, / you used to be hetero.'

From Sydney's 1970s, it is worth noting at least three more of the film and theatre intertexts that sit at the boundaries of both Lilley works. There is Patrick White's *The Night the Prowler* from 1978, directed by Jim Sharman, who also directed Hewett's doomed play *Pandora's Cross*, produced to open and then bankrupt the new Paris Theatre in the same year—the year Kate finished high school and Rose followed her in leaving home. The poster for *Pandora's Cross*, designed by Martin Sharp and featuring a woman wearing only a heart-shaped G string, was condemned by Fairfax media as obscene and by some Sydney feminists as sexist and inciting rape ('Granny Wouldn't' 84). *The Night the Prowler* is centrally about sexual assault, notionally inverting the narrative by having a young woman, stalked in her bed by a prowler, herself become the sexual aggressor, breaking into men's bedrooms with a knife. It features a short cameo from Hewett herself, with Merv Lilley, as bystanders scripted in for fun. The other, of course, is *Puberty Blues*, the film released in 1981 from the 1979 novel by Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey, just two years and one year older than Kate, and in 1979 aged 21 and 20. Rose was a school mate of Nell Schofield, the actor who played the central character, and auditioned for the role herself. The central sexual assault in *Puberty Blues* is a gang rape of a teenager in the back of a panel van.

When we trace the connections also to the writing scene, via Hewett's work, for both Lilley texts, it can become quite difficult to find a way through the thicket of intertextual references to coerced sex, underage sex and exploitative sex. The way through might be called 'Harm's Way,' coopting the naming work of the second section's title in *Tilt*. Yet the poems of the first section, those that address the revelations explicitly, are perhaps the most direct of Kate Lilley's career, with an anger that culminates in a poem addressed to her mother in bold capitals, throwing insults at the myths that both lampooned and sustained her.

FAT FEMINISM
FAT COMMUNISM
FAT ADULTERY

YOUR UNFORGIVABLE LARGESSE

FUCK
THE
OBITCHUARIES

At least you'll never read them (you who read everything)

And the poem from Kate in which readers of Hewett—as I have been, an author of one of the obituaries—are hardest met is 'Party Favour.' Initially about a sexual assault of Kate by a 'man twice my age' in his bathroom, the poem finishes with her mother's reaction to a more brutal, second instance, with 'the man who won't take no / a few months later (the visiting poet).' The last stanzas read:

> Pushed up against the metal rim of the shower
> his nails rake my back
> hard enough to break the skin
>
> I guess he must be high but I'm no expert
> I'm too drunk only mildly surprised
> to find myself locked in a bathroom
> with a man twice my age
> […]
>
> It's a curtain raiser that's all
> for the man who won't take no
> a few months later (the visiting poet)
>
> I'll tell my mother and she'll say
> she asked him he said I was into it
> from then on I know it's pointless
> she's not on my side

This instance of rape, if named differently from the kinds of sex the underage Lilley girls felt compelled to perform, or felt met the approval of those around them, or felt made them into adults, is brought into speech in some of the most unadorned, pared-back language Lilley has reached for. With its fluid movement between present and future, the voice floats in time, its sharply vernacular testimony made yet distanced and cold in the telling. Stripped of punctuation, the syntax is sheared away.

Of the poetic intertexts that precede this poem, the most devastating is Hewett's untitled, opening poem from the 1979 collection *Greenhouse*.

> In this romantic house each storey's peeled
> for rapists randy poets & their lovers
> young men in jeans play out seductive ballets
> partner my naked girls
> scripts by Polansky Russell Nabokov
>
> black butterflies fly tandem in the garden
> the golden ball is tossed to make its shadow

tired of loving men who love my daughters
I wrinkle waiting for a Prince

in streams of airy light you hesitate
they are your surrogates …
Ah Flatterer! Behind the hedges of pittosporum
& mock orange
waits pander madam maiden

'The very definition of romantic!' joked Rose bitterly, on social media (9 June 2018). In an interview with me, Kate recalled going with her sister to readings when they were aged around 13 and 15, where such poems would feature: 'complaining about us, you know, tired of loving men who loved my daughters, or something, the line. Or very sarcastic things about my beautiful daughters. And me and Rosie would be standing there, look at each other and go, yeah.'

Greenhouse is dedicated to fellow poets Robert Adamson, Michael Driscoll, Tim Thorne and Gwen Harwood—'obsessively loving Rimbaud and Wittgenstein'—and this is what Hewett means by 'romantic.' Elsewhere, she glossed 'romantic' as 'the "risk" life, and the search or the journey to find "the other,"' as she outlined in a 1979 review of collections by Adamson and Michael Dransfield—the latter, before and after his drug-related death in 1973, one of the most 'romantic' of the seventies new-wave poets in Australia. Hewett identified what she saw as the dangers of the position occupied by these drop-out, male hero poets:

> There was always the danger that the freeing of the ego for good or evil through the principle of energy would turn out to be only a circuitous trip back to the cell of the small round skull by a stranger, a wanderer unable to gain ego-room or to be 'at home' in the world. (Hewett, 'The Voyage Out')

It is clear that the promise of romanticism, this 'freeing of the ego,' was nevertheless greatly appealing for her, even during her university years—'Poetry is ego-bound' she wrote in her notes for her Modern Poetry course at the University of Western Australia in 1941 (Dorothy Hewett Collection, NLA Series 5 Folder 1)—while this is yet a position barely occupied by women poets in Australia's history. Gwen Harwood she had met in Tasmania, their senses of humour chiming with a shared love of mischief and gossip, though Harwood's work, disrupting patriarchal suburban pieties in the 1960s, as Hewett's did, is too polished and formalist for such an epithet. The male poets, though, and more than those Hewett named, dedicated their works to Hewett in turn, and some of them, we can note, to her daughters.

What do we do with such poems now—seemingly, if such a reading might be possible, in the voice of a rapist? Dedicated to a 15-year-old Rose Lilley by a 33-year-old man, one describes:

> the vital white, the calm face,
> the person who does not know
> and is small.

This one was mailed to Rose in 1978. It is cited in one of her 2018 poems, which she denotes itself a 'verse returned.' And we can see that her collection knows what to do with such poems. Many of the poems in *Do Oysters Get Bored* are such coded ripostes, the identities of their

addressees—her alleged abusers—possibly decodable if you know how to read them. 'My mother's lover scuttled across the room …'

> Ink barely dry, the belt unbuckled
> Tan trousers slid down skinny legs
> Pale as an undertaker in a B-grade midday movie
> I'm watching with my sister on mid-century's sofa

And what do we do with a poem such as this one, which I won't name here, in which the scene of writing could be read as, perhaps, and too appallingly, the scene of a crime?

> This is the transition.
> You have freedom now,
> passive. No violence is being done
> to your breasts as areolae recede
> leaving the nipples like sten barrels.
> As you unlearn trust,
> your demands will settle into shape;
> you will aim from the heart.

It was an intently literary culture in which this abuse was enabled and, tellingly for us, this is also where the evidential traces remain. The perpetrators were poets, artists, film makers, as noted above. Both Dorothy and Merv were writers, and Dorothy's son Tom Flood is an award-winning novelist and a song writer. The Lilley sisters' experiences were mediated even at point of origin by what a Hewett scholar might frame as the mythic literary. '[R]aised in a present and future literary archive' is how Kate described it in her 2010 Dorothy Green lecture about such archives, including Green's and her mother's own, figuring thus her role as editor of Hewett's *Selected Poems* ('Archive' 10). And it is not a different moment for Kate and Rose, when at the end of this poem, the speaker demands of his subject muse—naked, vulnerable, betrayed—'Collect your thoughts and turn / them over to us.'

So, and we might say necessarily, both daughters speak through the literary too. In the Western archive of poetic rape, their story of abused sisters can be seen to be framed, though perhaps only forcibly, by the shared myth of Philomela and Procne, particularly the version in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* in which Philomela is raped and her tongue cut out by Procne's husband Tereus, to prevent her testifying. Silenced but not expressionless, Philomela weaves her story into a tapestry for her sister—a form of feminist art practice shared with the Lady of Shalott, one of Hewett's favourite mythic figures. Horrific revenge is then enacted by the sisters' murder of Procne's son with Tereus, and then all three become birds, in a profuse figuring that metaphorises ethics through poetic practice itself. Philomela becomes a nightingale, able to sing, Procne a swallow and Tereus a hoopoe, able to make sound only, rather than song.

The motifs of silencing and enraged speech repeat structurally, as if inherently, in the expanding archive of Me Too lit, which, like second wave literary feminism, has invoked Philomela's story repeatedly. Paisley Rekdal uses the myth, via Shakespeare's retelling in *Titus Andronicus*, to situate these motifs temporally, and to suggest that what she terms traumatic time 'works like lyric time: the *now* of terror repeatedly breaking back through the crust of one's consciousness.' In turn, they figure centrally—really generically—in what has been identified as the 'Me Too Lyric.' Mia You discusses the form in a recent essay on Brazilian–German poet Adelaide

Ivánova's 2019 volume *The Hammer*, translated from its original Portuguese. You cites the last lines from Ivánova's poem 'The Sow':

> she asks me why didn't i
> scream since i wasn't
> gagged i don't answer but i know
> we're all born with the gag

With its lower case I, 'The Sow' has even less mediating punctuation and formal syntax than Kate Lilley's 'Party Favour,' and its voice seeks a revelatory candour that not only testifies to but asserts a shared reality, unspoken till this moment, but known: the speaker can't answer about her own gag. You reads this last line, 'we're all born with the gag,' as an instance of Ivánova's refusal of the Romantic 'lyric I'—'feeling confessing itself to itself,' according to John Stuart Mill's oft-cited formulation,' as she notes, and we could return to Neruda's apparent confession, his memoir's exculpatory title *I Confess that I Have Lived*, as an indictment of the notional freedom claimed by this 'I' and its feelings. Ivánova refuses the lyric I in favour of what You terms a 'lyric me': 'the direct *object* of a globalized system of repression and violence that absolutely determines the time, context, and body from which the speaker can speak.'

If we look for them, rape and coerced sex are everywhere in Hewett's work. In her poetry's preoccupation with Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' is a thread about despoiling and shame—for Rapunzel too, as Hewett explained in an interview (Digby). Her version of 'Leda and the Swan,' via Yeats, is called 'Weathercocks,' from 1972.

> a cold beak nuzzling at our napes,
> a talon probing at our will,
> gripped fast beneath the darkening beast
> before the giddy fall …

Also re-versioning Yeats' 'staggering girl' is 'The Witnesses' from 1968, one of her most anthologised poems, with its accomplished rhyme and sonority, and its repeated line, 'the hawk in the high sky hung,' in the shadow of Hopkins. Its violence witnesses the threat to young white women in the bush; to the 'golden girl' of the utopic settler landscape of her childhood.

> The girl with the haystack hair awry
> Her legs outflung and her brief blood dry

Mrs Porter and the Angel, a now barely performable play she wrote in 1968 after the reviews of *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* found it too old-fashioned, took on the tenor of the times as a suburban satire taken up an absurdist notch, with sex and confrontational obscenity as its keynotes. One surviving ending includes a 'violent and terrifying gang bang,' as she scripts it, which simulates the rape of two young people, naked on stage, while the grandmother figure boasts about her 'foot long' rubber dildo: 'Beat that you bloody fairies' (Fryer typescript). Both of her late novels feature fatal sexual violence for central women characters.

Wild Card, Hewett's memoir covering the first half of her life, from 1990, recalls an instance in which as a young woman she fended off attempts to have sex with her against her will, with bitter words, a version of which features in *The Chapel Perilous* too (*Wild Card*, 97–98), as well as a different lover's attempt to strangle her when she broke off their relationship (97). She was subject to years of domestic violence in her nine-year relationship with Les Flood, in the

1950s, though she describes no sexual violence. There is also the instance of sexual harassment in her youth highlighted recently by Anne-Marie Priest, as evidence of a vulnerability for Hewett and of the double standards of the adults in her life (*Wild Card* 94; Priest 47–48). This is even as Hewett describes her interest in frequent and varied sexual activity as a young woman during the second world war and later, recording her own reputation as the university 'bike' (Interview with Peter Ross), but determinedly, in her candour, refusing the shame required by such.

2. Freedom and Shame

Theorists debate whether shame is an emotion or an affect. In so far as it may be embodied and not linguistic, shame can be an instance of those affective 'moments of opacity' traced by psychoanalysis as 'disassociated from their cause and non-linear in their manifestation' (Sullivan 100, quoting Enterline 28). Elspeth Probyn in her 2005 book *Blush* uses affect theory and the ideas of influential American psychologist Sylvan Tompkins to pursue the question, but Tompkins wants to argue that shame is a response that only operates 'after interest or enjoyment has been activated'—that is, towards the person by whom you feel shamed (Qtd Probyn, ix). In so far as shame is an intersubjective affect, you can only feel shamed by someone in whom you are invested, he suggests. If you don't care, you're not ashamed. With its close focus on the individual intersubjective realm, this formulation is yet relatively uninterested in shame's force for normativity as a social structure, however, or its deployment via what might be perceived as morality. For Probyn, shame is assertively individualised: 'what shames me may not shame you' (x).

Timothy Bewes, in his work on shame and postcolonial writing, distinguishes between what he discerns as 'a rhetoric of shame, operating ideologically as a frame' and what he calls 'a shame event whose existence one might attempt to theorize without getting ensnared in discourses of ideology, power inequality, or interests' ('The Call to Intimacy' 5). This latter is a category it is difficult to accept, even if we agree that there may be a difference between a rhetoric of shame and an event. In so far as shame is a socially impelled affect—impelled in fact by judgment—there is no liberal freeing it from social and political hierarchy. Bewes is pursuing an argument that shame is related to inadequacies of form in representing experience, at least in the colonial/postcolonial context. Reading Coetzee—more precisely, reading Coetzee's *Disgrace*, with its galvanising scenes of sexual harassment and rape from the point of view of the older abuser, though Bewes does not address this explicitly enough—he questions whether shame is, in fact, 'iterable.'

> Is shame iterable? The question dramatises a deep misgiving at the heart of literary activity in the modern period. The most direct manifestation of that misgiving is the thematic presence of shame in the work of a number of writers such as Coetzee, which should be understood as an *intimation* that there is no positive ethical or political dimension to writing, or to intellectual activity in general, or to any such index of the presence of humanity. Action, expression, and perception are, in this thematisation, regarded not as positive entities but negative ones. The very ontology of writing is negative, or, to use a more technical, less tendentious term, *subtractive*. (Bewes, 'The Call to Intimacy' 9, italics in the original)

Such an intimation we might also contest—or, particularly, its absolutism. Bewes reads Coetzee's ambivalent colonial shame as a silencing and then reads the silencing of such white settler men, these Romantic 'I's, as an ontological negation manifest in writing itself: a grand

and encompassing nullification of both politics and expression, or a founding censorship, common to all. If we read more closely, however, we can see that this shame is the shame of the perpetrator, specifically, felt for all by Coeztee's Professor David Lurie—for whom, moreover, as for Bewes, a victim is equal to an effect, merely, and not an agent; not a speaker/writer. In discussing the work of Turkish scholar Dicle Koğacıoğlu, on the concept of tradition in honour killings, Bewes uses just such a formulation: 'As an effect, tradition also has effects, which is to say, victims, predominantly women' ('The Call to Intimacy,' 4).

It is not shame paradigmatically that confronts 'equally unacceptable alternatives—silence and speaking' as Bewes suggests (10), for Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*, but the shame of the perpetrator, whose existence has presumed the freedoms of speech and agency. The shamed, rather than shameful, victim may confront such alternatives, but these are not at all necessarily unacceptable. Silence remains perfectly acceptable for the social functioning of shamed subjectivity—often required, in fact, for the performance of it. 'Silence protected me,' says Paisley Rekdal, about her own assault. And speaking may be unacceptable for the shaming social world, but the grasping at speech, where this is possible, is enabling rather than unacceptable for the shamed victim; for those rendered object, speaking as 'me.' Such a speaking is impossible in Coetzee, it seems, with his silenced Friday in *Foe*, waiting for that day 'till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday' (qtd Bewes 14), rather than a Friday who spoke all along, his anger unheard by 'art.' A negative ontology for writing is impelled by shame only in so far as such shame may be felt to be deserved.

For Linda Alcoff, in her recent work on rape, 'Shame is a self-directed feeling with both moral and cognitive content. It involves a sense of one's own state in relation to a world of others, one's physical as well as moral state.' As she agrees, it is necessarily relational—one feels shame only in relation to others' perceived judgment or one's difference from others' perceived superiority. And as Alcoff notes, 'It is a condition long attributed in many societies around the world to the victims of sexual violation by a logic that we now consider absurd. Yet the fact that victims sometimes experience shame in place of anger looks to be a good candidate for the claim that a person is following a conventional script' (454). Analysing those scripts, Léon Wurmser's 1981 Freudian study *The Mask of Shame* identifies the defensive relationship between anger and shame as a classic 'reversal of affect' (137, qtd Frevert 231).

If we want to look at shame as a structured social emotion—not only an affect then—and with attention to what historian of emotions Ute Frevert pursues as 'the fine normative balance between humility in the face of wrongdoing and humiliation—between shame as righteous and shame as abject' (as Thomas Laqueur finely couched it, in reviewing her new history of shame and humiliation), then this thicket of intertexts around Hewett and her daughters' experiences is one complex site where we can examine how those structures are built and inhabited. Hewett's broad body of work, including *Wild Card* and her poetry but also, and perhaps in particular, her writing for the theatre of the late 1960s and mid-1970s, embraces a refusal of social shame about women's sexual desires and activities—about sex in general. Such social shame can be seen to have been otherwise socially pervasive via those conventional scripts, and even politically enforced via regimes of censorship in mid-century Australia. In so far as there is a model of women's freedom at issue in Hewett's work—in *The Chapel Perilous* centrally, from 1971; in *The Beautiful Mrs Portland* and *The Tatty Hollow Story* of 1976; in her *Rapunzel in Suburbia* collection from 1975; and in *Journey among Women*, just to highlight work from the seventies—the form that liberation takes is often expressed by desirous sexual behaviour and what women are usually being liberated from is social shaming. Shame is what Hewett was trying to remove, refuse, or resist—for herself certainly, in her disinhibited embrace of many

sexual partners, and, in supposedly 'freeing' her daughters to experience sex without moral strictures or condemnation around 'sin,' for them too. And yet this is precisely what her daughters can feel as one of the biggest burdens their experiences have given them. On the one hand, speaking out and naming these experiences as abuse may free them from shame. On *The Sunday Project* with Lisa Wilkinson, Rose Lilley observed that going public with the story was 'very tiring,' but that 'every time you tell it, you feel a little bit less ashamed' (Wilkinson; 'Daughters of Dorothy Hewett Speak Out'). On the other, as the press attention has shown, shame is another weighted risk that speaking presents for them. Kate voices a sense of having been shamed in the wake of the release of their work, in multiform ways. The shaming reflex lies beneath broad-brush expressions of moral opprobrium, such as Murdoch columnist Miranda Devine's, which pronounce a contemporary contempt for that world as a whole, while the voices that protested at Kate and Rose's notional disrespect for that world can also be seen to mobilise a form of shaming.

This archive of intertexts from the 1970s allows us to think about whether what we are viewing, in this movement between freedom and shame, might be shifts in what William Reddy describes as an 'emotional regime.' His influential work thinks of an emotional regime as an emotional 'normative order' enforced by '[a]ny enduring political regime' (124). In so far as emotions can be both descriptive and performative, they are simultaneously personal and social, creating meaning for individuals but also contributing to an overarching emotional culture, or order, which is, in turn 'shaped by reigning systems of power' (Sullivan 96; Rosenwein; Reddy 'Against Constructionism'). We can make a case that what this abuse archive shows us is an historical crisis in the emotional regime of shame, perhaps specific to the mid-1970s in the Western world, when some of the complex and contradictory outcomes of the critiques of its operations as a form of power offered by feminism and sexual liberation opened cracks in the policing of the regime and thus, paradoxically, created opportunities for its furtherance in different forms. Opportunism is what we see in the jarring visual dissonance of *Journey Among Women*, for instance; that, and evidence of what it meant that it was then and still is so difficult for women to fully control the means of cultural production.

On one side is early liberation's focus on the rights of the child and the validation of teenage sexuality as a form of self-expression; on the other is the exploitation and co-option of children and underage young people by adults for adults. In 1976 and 1977, on a visit to Sydney, US experts on child sex abuse Dr Judianne Densen-Gerber and Dr Michael Baden claimed that the city had the largest circulation of child pornography of any city they knew. Media reports drew links between this increased availability and what were reported as increasing rates of child abuse (Moore, *Censor's Library* 298–99). In the history of print censorship in Australia, this is the point at which the post-sixties, hard-fought-for social consensus that all censorship was bad and that what mattered most was the rights of adults to read and view what they chose, can be seen to have ended its brief life (Moore, *Censor's Library* 299). In the cultural economy of the period, the movement between expression and exploitation was fluid and unconfined, and vulnerable, in its ascriptions to freedom, to dangerous power differentials. As Frevert notes, 'power is also clearly at stake whenever shaming occurs' (13).

Conservatives have called the 1970s 'the Devil's Decade,' as did Miranda Devine in her polemical contribution to newspaper debates after the sisters' revelations. Jeff Sparrow's response in *Overland* defended the achievements of sexual liberation and second wave feminism, including, notably, the belated legal requirement for consent to sex in marriage (established as late as 1994 in some states, as Lisa Featherstone reminds us) and, principally, the central tenet of a woman's right to control her own body. We might reflect, too, that if the

personal is political, that re-definition itself is a refusal of shame. Liberation movements have been part of the long history, traced by Ute Frevert, of the democratisation of the right to dignity and honour (218), in the struggle by dominated peoples to create themselves as self-governing subjects. She recollects a feminist motto—'the shame is over'—and, citing David Halperin and Valerie Traub on *Gay Shame*, notes its validity, in turn, for forms of 'Gay Pride' (218).

Frevert reminds us that sexual abuse itself can be an act of shaming, especially in war. And in her history, the Me Too movement participates in what are identified as forms of counter-shaming. Refusing what Gilmore and others term the 'burden of doubt' borne by testimonies of sexual abuse—which can operate as a further form of shaming—Rose and Kate's work also performs such counter-shaming, in different ways, in a context where legal recourse is not sufficiently accessible under Australian law. If Me Too is participating in or creating a moment of epistemic friction (Medina; Alcoff 31–33), disrupting emotional regimes, it is also clear, as Yxta Maya Murray observes, that Me Too Lit, specifically and powerfully, can 'create a forum for litigating sexual violence claims outside of the failed state.'

An Amy Witting story from 1974, called 'A Piece of This Puzzle Is Missing' and published in the period's quintessential alternative literary magazine *Tabloid Story*, is narrated by a woman who literally is unable to say no. The man she thus ends up supporting, enabling his career writing about sex, pressures her for anal sex.

> 'Why can't you understand we are free to do as we like?'
> With my back to the wall, so to speak, I did better than usual.
> 'Is there such a thing as being free not to do something?'

The solution is to write her refusal down, so she writes him a note with the words three inches high: 'Piss off. Piss off. Piss off' (160, 161, cf. Moore, *Censor's Library* 292).

NOTES

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