

***Flights of Imagination:
Fictional biography and writing the life of
Australia's first woman pilot, Millicent Bryant***

A creative project and exegesis

by

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Acknowledgments

This project would in no way have been possible, or have reached completion, without the assistance of many people and the mentorship, friendship and support of a vital few.

The first lines and pages were sketched from the same study, and looking out at the same view of her garden, that Eleanor Dark had when she wrote *Waterway*, the novel focused around and fictionalising the sinking of the *Greycliffe* in 1927. It was therefore remarkable, many years later, to dream of this event, perhaps with Eleanor's inspiration, and to imagine its aftermath for Millicent's son, Bowen, as a way of beginning to tell her story. My grateful thanks go to Mick and the Eleanor Dark Foundation for giving me this opportunity, as well as to return to 'Varuna' in 2011 to finish the first draft. Helen Barnes-Buley's reading and discussion of the work with me was also extremely helpful.

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I thought I knew the Bryant family well but have learned much more thanks to my uncle, John R. H. Bryant, whose enthusiasm for seeing Millicent's story told was inspirational in the early days and who has contributed to the detail of the project with documents, recollections and the Bryant Scrapbook which contains newspaper clippings of Millicent's exploits. I also warmly thank Marion Alford, Sue Joyce, Libby Turner, Mary Taguchi and Maki Taguchi. John MacRitchie, Local Studies Librarian at Manly Library, was extremely helpful in helping me to see what Manly was like a century ago. Lynette James shared her memories of Alice Bryant and the former Bryant family home, 'Hirondelle'; I also acknowledge the help and interest of Sydney Grammar School Archivist, Gordon Cooper.

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Certification

I certify that the substance of this creative project and exegesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this creative project and exegesis and all sources used have been acknowledged within.



James B Vicars

Foreword

This project is presented in two parts: a creative (biographical) project on the life of Millicent Bryant, Australia's first woman pilot, and an academic exegesis. The creative project is presented in the form of fictional biography and the exegesis in conventional scholarly style, although it necessarily incorporates a more personal style of address.

The creative project appears as the *raison d'être* for the exegesis, in which reflective discussion of the project can occur; in this sense, the exegesis references the former and articulates its approach. But the creative project also offers itself as a symbiotic foundation for the exegesis, providing a field that nourishes the latter's creative thinking and contributing to ideas about how the writing of a life in fiction can be understood. In this way the two closely interrelate, their differences of purpose and form mutually influencing one another; in the context of fictional biography, Ina Schabert speaks of 'a continual mirroring of the biographer's and the biographee's consciousnesses within each other'.¹

This suggests a kind of dialectic, both in the Socratic sense and in the Hegelian framing of thesis, antithesis and sublation (*aufheben*); it is through such movements that the creative project and the exegesis together open the way to possible moments of meaning.

NOTES

¹ Ina Schabert, 'Fictional Biography, Factual Biography, and Their Contaminations', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1982), 8.