

**University of New England**

**Entangled lives: representations of dogs and human–dog  
relations in selected rural Australian memoirs  
2001–2015**

**A thesis submitted by**

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## Abstract

Memoir is a popular literary genre in Australia. Memoirs set specifically in rural Australia make up a small but significant portion of memoirs published in the 21st century. Rural Australian memoirs offer intimate accounts of the writers' experiences on the land while documenting an agricultural way of life that figures prominently in the nation's history and culture. Among a range of human and non-human characters typically represented in these memoirs, dogs frequently appear as significant others in the human narrators' lives. Contemporary rural Australian memoir has, however, received limited scholarly attention, and Australian life writing scholarship more generally lacks commentary on writing about dogs. Recently published rural Australian memoirs present opportunities to explore life narratives about dogs and to consider how those narratives contribute to autobiographical identity and to understandings of human–dog relationships.

This thesis draws primarily on rural Australian memoirs published during the first 15 years of the 21st century. It identifies rural Australian memoir as a distinct subgenre, differentiated by its predominantly rural Australian setting and the narrator's portrayed agricultural way of life. Understandings around human–animal relations and relational narrative theory facilitate an examination of portrayals of dogs among the various relational others in the selected memoirs. Representations of human–dog relations in these memoirs show that dogs are valued and necessary companions for people living and working in rural Australia. Living at the junctions between humans' and other species' worlds, and between domesticity and wilderness, dogs are portrayed as helping people to navigate through the social isolation and physical hardships of life on the land in Australia. In contemporary

rural Australian memoirs, the inclusion of dog characters reflects the importance of dogs to a way of life that is redolent of the nation's settler past, helping to reinforce an identity linked to the bush.

Dogs' and people's interwoven stories in contemporary rural Australian memoirs highlight the entangled lives of people and dogs within a complex and multispecies world. Intersections between people's and dogs' lives, as revealed in the memoirs, also highlight intersections between genre theory and animal studies theory. The findings of this thesis advance life writing scholarship by: identifying rural Australian memoir as a subgenre of literary and cultural value; recognising relational narrative about dogs as an authenticating element of rural Australian memoir and as a medium for exploring autobiographical identity and human-dog relationships; and confirming the interdisciplinary significance of life writing studies.

## **Certification**

I certify that the substance of this thesis 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 thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



**Simone Lyons**

**27 May 2020**

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## Introduction

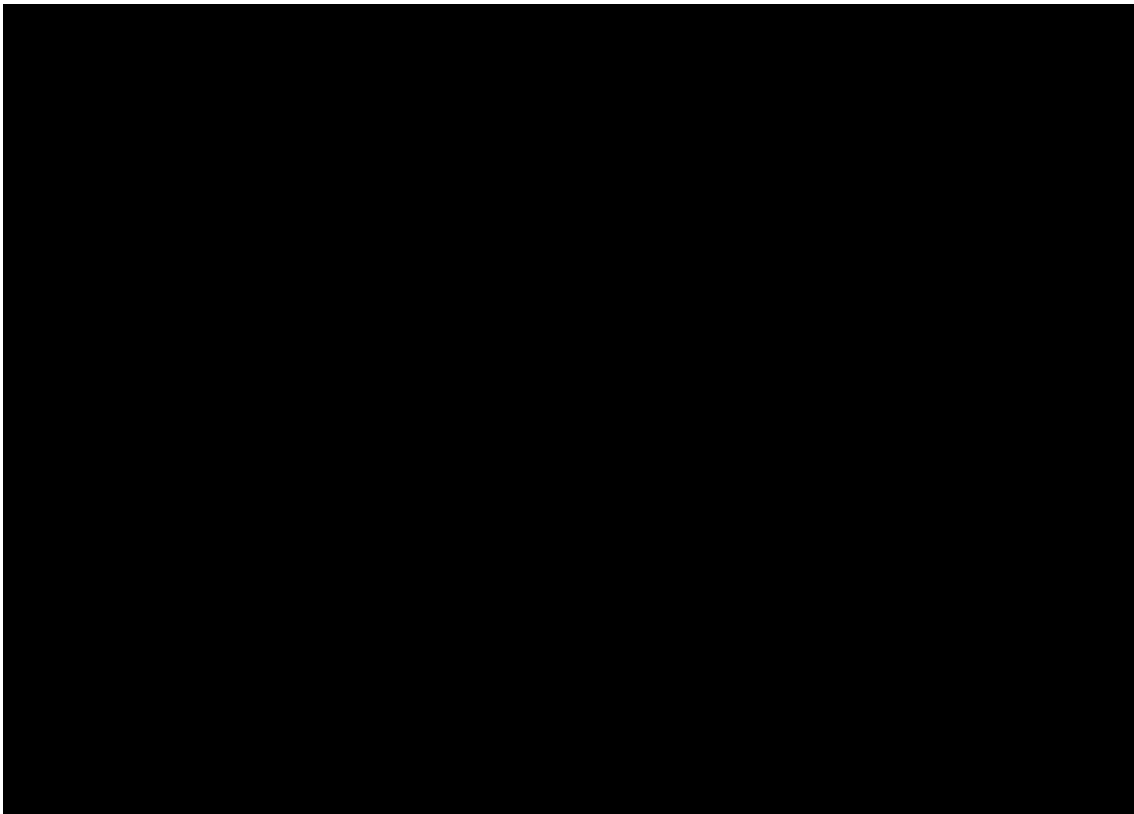
Stories about dogs abound in 21st-century Australian culture. Dogs frequently appear in Australian film, television, news and advertisements. They feature in social media posts and in everyday conversations. Australian art and literature portray dogs in a range of situations. As people's friends, family members and workmates, dogs figure prominently in the lives of Australian people. Events are held to celebrate dogs, such as the annual Australian Kelpie Muster at Casterton in Victoria; public monuments are erected in their honour, such as the famous *Dog on the tuckerbox* near Gundagai in New South Wales, and the *Red Dog* statue at Dampier in Western Australia. The many and varied ways that dogs are represented and acknowledged by Australian people are indicative of the dog's ongoing importance to Australian society.

The dog has long held a special place in Australian culture. Australia's wild dog, *Canis dingo*, has lived on the continent for several thousand years (Rose 2000, p. 101; Smith et al. 2019, p. 174), while the domestic dog, *Canis familiaris*, arrived in Australia 250 years ago. When HMS *Endeavour* landed at Botany Bay in 1770, botanist Joseph Banks's two greyhounds were on board (State Library of New South Wales n.d.). Dogs were then among the various animals who travelled with the First Fleet in 1788, and have since been credited with helping the early settlers to navigate the continent's harsh physical environment and to establish their homes and livelihoods on the land (Hull 2018). Greyhounds, spaniels and terriers were supposedly among those dogs who accompanied the people on the First Fleet (Hull 2018, p. 37); yet little is known about people's relationships with those first domestic dogs of Australia, since '[t]he early writings of the First Fleeters hardly

mention the colonists' dogs' (Hull 2018, p. 40). Pastoral occupations of the early settlers led to the development of distinctly Australian working dog breeds, such as the kelpie and the cattle dog, to suit the Australian environment and farming practices—in particular, the hot and dry conditions, rugged terrain, vast spaces, and preferences for sheep and cattle farming (Greenway 2003, pp. 131, 144–5; Hull 2018, pp. 121–45). From early colonial times until the middle of the 20th century, a thriving wool industry saw Australia 'riding on the sheep's back' (Brett 2011, p. 26), and dogs' related contributions to the nation's agricultural successes have been widely feted (Watson 2014, pp. 54–6, 116). The association of the working dog with the birth of modern Australia is ensconced in the national character, such that the dog has come to hold iconic status in Australia.

The nation's art offers perhaps the most extensive record, over time, of the domestic dog's significance to Australian people and history. Benjamin Duterrau's *The conciliation* (see Figure 1), for instance, is thought to be 'the first historical painting in the Australian colonies' (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 2013); it features two dogs mingling with people and native fauna (a small kangaroo or wallaby and a sleeping dingo) within a romanticised portrayal of George Augustus Robinson's role as 'conciliator' between the early settlers and the Aboriginal peoples. This painting is also included in Steven Miller's (2016) compilation of over 150 art works, dating from colonial times to the early 21st century, that recognises the ubiquity and significance of dogs in Australian art. Miller (2016, pp. 1–2) asserts that dogs 'came to inspire and shape' Australian art and, with specific reference to dogs in colonial Australian art, that 'they often provide a key to interpreting the works'. Another example from the period, also depicting human–dog relations in

colonial Australia, is *Homeward bound* by Samuel Thomas Gill (Figure 2), and a slightly more recent work is Walter Withers's *The drover* (Figure 3). Such depictions of people and dogs working with livestock—especially sheep—among the native vegetation and harsh, dry terrain present an image of the bush, and of rural Australian people's relationships with dogs, that remains embedded in the national psyche.



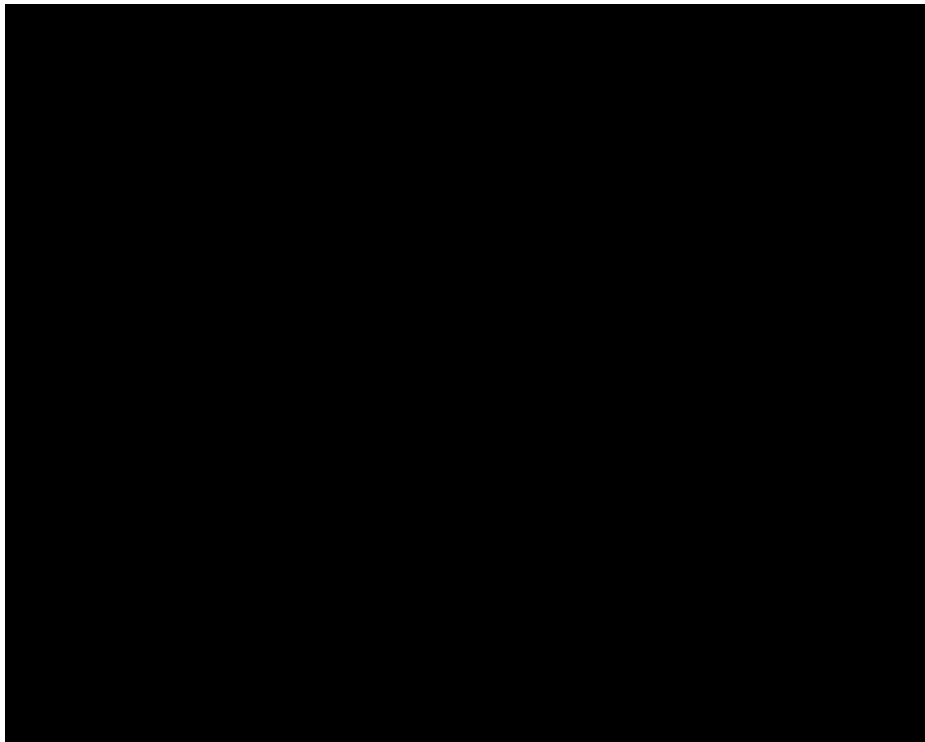
'Benjamin Duterrau *The Conciliation* 1840, oil on canvas. Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, AG79' (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 2019)

Figure 1: Benjamin Duterrau (1840) *The conciliation*



(Gill & Hamel & Ferguson 1864)

Figure 2: Samuel Thomas Gill (1864) *Homeward bound*

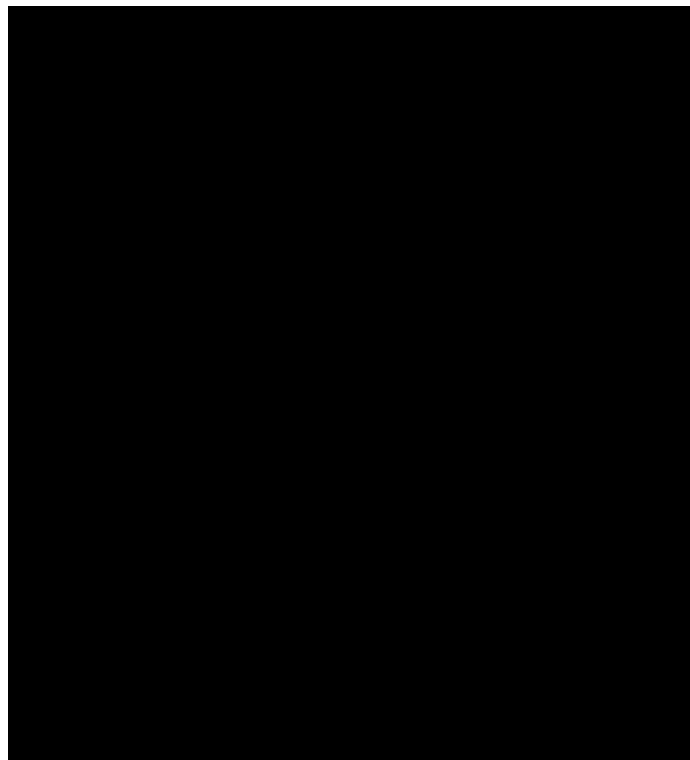


(Bendigo Art Gallery n.d.)

Figure 3: Walter Withers (1912) *The drover*

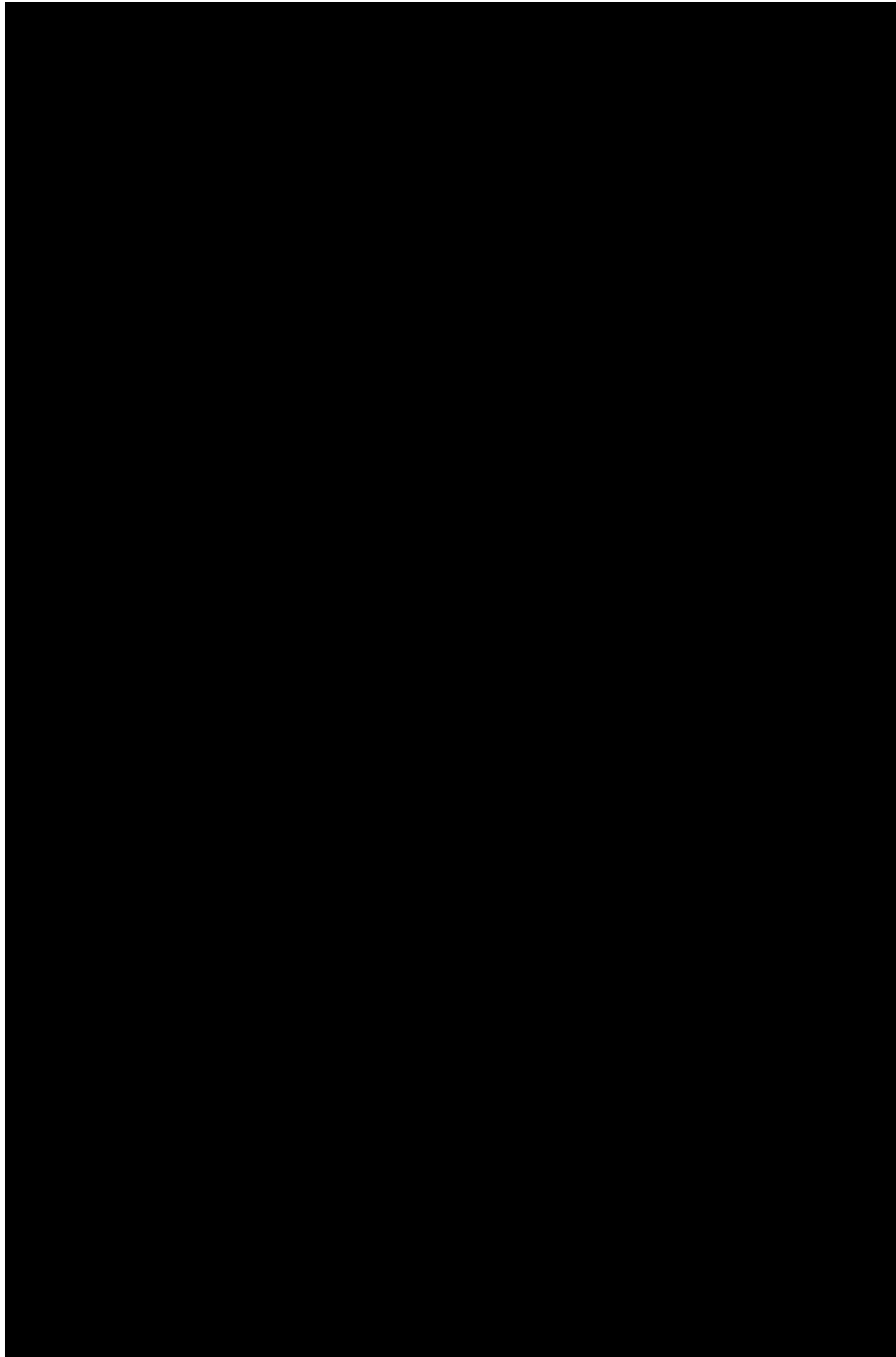
An abundance of dogs among the art works in the National Portrait Gallery's *The popular pet show* exhibition, held in Canberra from late 2016 to early 2017 (National Portrait Gallery n.d.), is a public testimony to the enduring popularity of dogs in Australian art and culture. The portraits of dogs by and with people—some examples of which are provided below—reflect the prevalence of dogs in Australian society and, by extension, recognise the continued importance of the human–dog relationship to Australian people. As part of that exhibition, Robyn Sweaney's *Walking the dog* series of paintings, which includes *Bronson* (Figure 4), portrays people and dogs on their regular outings in an Australian neighbourhood. By not showing the person's face, each piece of the series draws attention to the dog's expression and position in relation to the person; Sweaney's focus on the dog's side of the human–dog relationship also recognises dogs' individuality as well as their appeal and attachment to people. In Jude Rae's self-portrait (Figure 5), the inclusion of the dog—a kelpie named Tilly (Engledow 2016, pp. 161–2)—suggests that this dog is central to the artist's sense of self. And Noel McKenna's portrayal of a dog peering over a table set with a person's meal (Figure 6) highlights the closeness with which people and dogs live. At the same time, the alien-like representation of McKenna's dog emphasises the dog's foreignness to humans. The centrally placed bottle of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire sauce also happens to anchor McKenna's very modern composition to Australia's British colonial history and alludes to the nation's ongoing connection to the United Kingdom—a combined past and present that is pivotal to the domestic dog's place in Australian culture. The nation's settler history and the dog's place in it continues to influence the national character, even

while Australia becomes increasingly urbanised and Australians' occupations become more diverse.



'*Bronson* from *Walking the dog series* 2005 oil on paper 22 x 20 cm  
Tweed Regional Gallery' (Engledow 2016, p. 147)

Figure 4: Robyn Sweaney (2005) *Bronson*



'*Self portrait (the year my husband left)* 2008 oil on canvas 198 x 153 cm Courtesy of Annie Corlett AM' (Engledow 2016, p. 163)

Figure 5: Jude Rae (2008) *Self portrait (the year my husband left)*



'*Dog at dinner table* 2015 oil on plywood 40 x 40 cm Germanos Collection, Sydney' (Engledow 2016, p. 58)

Figure 6: Noel McKenna (2015) *Dog at dinner table*

Art has provided a continuous and public record of Australian settler history, including as a chronicle of Australian people's relationships with dogs; meanwhile, autobiographical writing has also been a popular form of expression since the time of early European settlement and has helped to document the nation's development and history. Yet, unlike the visual arts, Australian autobiographical writing in its early forms—such as diary keeping and letter writing—apparently offered little detail about people's relationships with dogs (Hull 2018, p. 40). More contemporary Australian autobiographical writing does, however, present opportunities to observe



modern Australians' perceptions of and relationships with dogs. A landmark example of popular Australian life writing about dogs is the anthology, *Great working dog stories* (comps Goode & Hayes 1990), whose popularity apparently initially surprised its publisher (Goode 2013, p. 192) but evidently led to subsequent works in a series of books about Australian working dogs. Other memoirs about dogs have been published in Australia in recent years—a popular example being Sandra Lee's (2011) *Saving Private Sarbi*, about the life of an Australian Army explosive detection dog named Sarbi—yet there are remarkably few Australian memoirs dedicated to telling dogs' stories. More often, dogs can be found among the secondary characters in people's personal memoirs. The inclusion of dogs in contemporary Australian life narratives reflects perhaps not only a shift in autobiographical writing practice but also a growing appreciation for the dogs in Australian people's lives.

Recently published autobiographical memoirs of rural Australians, in particular, often feature dogs among the key characters in the writers' portrayed life experiences. Dogs in contemporary Australian art may tend to situate dogs within a modern, urban society, yet memoirs about rural life perpetuate an image of Australia that resonates more closely with the scenes depicted in colonial artists' representations of people and dogs working together. The popularity of contemporary memoirs about rural Australian life, combined with the reliability with which dogs are included in these memoirs, signals and promotes greater awareness of human–dog relations. Even though, or perhaps because, Australia has become an increasingly urban society, autobiographical stories of life on the land continue to appeal to readers. As such, and considering the prevalence of dogs in

contemporary rural Australian memoirs, these stories can offer insights into Australian people's perceptions of and interest in dogs.

This thesis arises from an appreciation that many Australians share a fondness and respect for dogs, an attachment to the land, and an interest in reading life stories. Rural Australian memoirs, being autobiographical in nature, set on the land, and frequently involving dog characters, gratify reading and scholarly interests in these combined subject matters. And as Miller (2016, p. 2) observes in relation to dogs in Australian art, through reading and studying these memoirs, it becomes apparent that the dogs are integral to the narratives and to their interpretation. Traditional visual art forms allow for the careful, thoughtful and thought-provoking portrayals of dogs and human–dog relationships that few other mediums accommodate; memoir is, however, one of those rare other mediums in that it, too, allows for intimate and detailed portrayals of people and dogs. This thesis recognises rural Australian memoir, in particular, as a means through which interconnections between people and dogs, and the land, can be represented and explored.

Divided into five main chapters, the thesis examines rural Australian memoirs published primarily during the 15-year period from 2001 to 2015. Chapter 1 'Literature review, scope and methods' situates this thesis within existing life writing scholarship and identifies its cross-disciplinary applicability, particularly for the field of human–animal studies. It does this by first reviewing relevant commentary on autobiographical identity, Australian life writing, relational narrative, dogs in memoir, and human–dog relationships. Identifying overlapping gaps in the literature across these different areas, the chapter outlines the scope of

this study and establishes the research question: How does narrative about dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir contribute to autobiographical identity, function more broadly within the rural Australian memoir subgenre, and build on perceptions of human–dog relationships? The chapter also describes the mixed-methods approach adopted in response to that question, and it introduces the six memoirs that serve as case studies for the subsequent analysis.

Chapter 2 ‘The rural Australian memoir’ proposes a definition of rural Australian memoir as a distinct subgenre that centres around life on the land and the agricultural or pastoral activities associated with that way of life. Drawing on relevant publishing data and population statistics, the chapter considers the appeal of rural Australian memoir to 21st-century readers. It identifies and examines some distinctive elements of the subgenre, including the presence of dog characters in the narratives, and how the various elements contribute to an author’s authenticity. The chapter highlights the enduring popularity of rural Australian memoir at a time when the proportion of Australians living in rural areas is diminishing. An abridged version of this chapter was presented as ‘Rural Australian memoir in the 21st century’ (Lyons 2020) at the University of New England’s Postgraduate Conference, ‘Intersections of knowledge’, in January 2020.

Chapter 3 ‘The dog other’ recognises dogs as people’s closest non-human others within a wider network of animal species. Acknowledging speciesist attitudes and practices that see people treating non-human animals according to an ethnocentric, anthropocentric species hierarchy, this chapter examines the rural Australian memoir writers’ portrayals of dogs as non-human others within the multispecies rural Australian environment. In doing so, it considers what those portrayals reveal about

human perceptions of the dog as a non-human other and how these perceptions are mediated by and conveyed through the human-centred practice of autobiographical writing.

Chapter 4 ‘The relational self’ explores relational identity and the incorporation of narrative about dogs within the selected memoirs. It looks at the ways in which dogs’ stories become part of the writers’ life narratives and contribute to the writers’ self-portrayals. It posits that the dog characters help the narrators to realise feelings of belonging in their respective rural Australian contexts, and that narrative about dogs contributes to the narrators’ autobiographical identities. The influence of the bush and Australia’s settler past on autobiographical identity in contemporary rural Australian memoir, including how dogs help to connect the narrators to an idealised image of the land, is explored. An early version of this chapter provided the premise for the conference paper ‘Relational lives: the dog memoir within the personal memoir’ (Lyons 2016), which was presented at the 21st Australasian Association of Writing Programs Conference, ‘Authorised theft’.

Chapter 5 ‘Intersections’ considers how autobiographical writing about dogs reveals intersections between people’s and dogs’ lives. This chapter extends on the paper, ‘Living and narrating with dogs: intersections in rural Australian autobiography’ (Lyons 2017), that was presented at the 7th Australasian Animal Studies Association Conference, ‘Animal intersections’, and which addressed intersecting concepts of entanglement in human–animal studies and life writing studies. The chapter discusses events in the narratives that highlight the breaching of boundaries between the human and dog species—the entanglements—in rural Australian contexts. Specifically, human–dog interactions represented in narratives

involving travel, work, interpersonal relationships and the land are explored. The chapter considers how theories around interspecies entanglements and relational narrative have evolved, and how these evolving theories offer possibilities to extend life writing scholarship for greater understandings of human–animal relations.

Recent events in Australia—the ongoing drought and the 2019 summer bushfires, in particular—have prompted widespread contemplation about the vast and interconnected world in which human and non-human beings coexist. And at the time of finalising this thesis, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is having profound effects on people’s lives and on their relationships with others. During these times of hardship and uncertainty, many people are turning to dogs for comfort and companionship. Arguably more than ever, people are appreciating the strength and significance of the human–dog relationship. Perhaps like the early settlers’ dogs who accompanied and guided their people through challenging circumstances, the dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoirs are people’s necessary, but sometimes overlooked, others. Dogs continue to show people the way in different environments, including rural Australia, and, in the process, they enrich those people’s lives and their stories. This study of dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir acknowledges the value of dogs in people’s lives and highlights the greater possibilities that life writing studies offers to better know these important others.

## Chapter 1 Literature review, scope and methods

### 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is situated foremost within the field of life writing studies and contributes, in particular, to scholarship on contemporary Australian autobiographical writing. Through an exploration of autobiographical representations of dogs and human–dog relationships in 21st-century rural Australian memoirs, this thesis also contributes to the field of human–animal studies within an Australian cultural framework. The narrative analysis of selected memoirs published during the first 15 years of the 21st century adds to the growing body of knowledge on Australian life writing while also offering observations and understandings of human–dog relationships in specifically rural Australian contexts. In doing so, this study will make original and interdisciplinary contributions to scholarship. Representations of dogs in Australian memoir have not previously undergone focused scholarly analysis, and rural influences on autobiographical self-representation have received limited attention within broader studies of contemporary Australian life writing.

Technical distinctions are often made between autobiography and memoir—with perhaps the most commonly understood of these being that autobiography is traditionally the writer’s attempts to document the key events of his or her entire life up to the point of writing, while memoir is the writer’s more nuanced account of a certain aspect of that life. This study takes the view that memoir is a form of autobiography. From that perspective, scholarship on autobiographical identity provides a basis for understanding the influences on autobiographical self-portrayal,

the motives behind writing and reading memoir, and the expectations around truthfulness or otherwise in autobiographical writing. A brief review of key theorisations on autobiographical identity therefore serves as a starting point for the following literature review. The review goes on to consider scholarship on Australian autobiography, relational narrative, dogs in memoir, and human–dog relationships. It ultimately reveals overlapping gaps in Australian life writing scholarship—specifically, the lack of focused examination of 21st-century Australian life writing, of memoirs set primarily in rural Australia, of representations of dogs in Australian autobiographical writing, and of the links between Australian life writing studies and human–animal studies. These identified gaps highlight an opportunity to contribute to life writing studies and human–animal studies through an exploration of the portrayals of dogs and human–dog relations in contemporary rural Australian memoir.

## 1.2 Literature review

### Autobiographical identity

The practice of autobiographical writing has a long history. It is generally considered to date back to the 4th century with Augustine’s *Confessions* (Anderson 2011, p. 17); yet the study of this form of writing remains a relatively young field of inquiry. While autobiographical writing practices have continued to evolve and adapt over time to a changing world, scholarly interpretations of autobiography have also been evolving. Understandings around autobiographical identity underpin much of the contemporary scholarship in the field of autobiographical writing studies, and this aspect of autobiography provides ongoing opportunities for academic inquiry.

Philippe Lejeune's foundational scholarship in the field offers a starting point for the review of contemporary understandings of autobiographical identity. A defining feature of autobiographical writing, and the basis of Lejeune's (1989) 'autobiographical pact', is that the writer is also the primary subject. Lejeune (1989, p. 5) states that 'for there to be autobiography (and personal literature in general), the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical'. This fundamental understanding of the genre leads to a tacit agreement—a 'pact'—between writer, reader and publisher, by which all parties understand that the autobiographical text is a truthful account of the writer's lived experiences.

Lejeune (1989, p. 22) also suggests, however, that a 'referential pact'—which '[makes] allowances for lapses of memory, errors, involuntary distortions, etc.'—coincides with the autobiographical pact. These complementary 'pacts' are grounded in an expectation that autobiographical writing is about real events experienced by the writer and that autobiographical self-portrayal is rooted in fact, albeit allowing for some digressions due to human fallibility. Within Lejeune's (1989) conceptual framework, the autobiographical writer formulates an identity through the remembering of his or her actual lived experiences. Yet, a growing body of knowledge on autobiography has come to recognise autobiographical identity as more of a construct that is inevitably influenced by various internal and external factors and that crosses into the realm of fiction writing. Contemporary life writing is widely regarded as involving a creative process that goes beyond simply presenting the verifiable details of the subject's life. Life writing scholars Mary Evans, Paul John Eakin, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, and G. Thomas Couser are



among those who have built on and challenged ideas around identity in autobiographical writing.

In *Missing persons: the impossibility of auto/biography*, Evans (1999, p. 1) challenges expectations of truthfulness in autobiography and proposes that the person portrayed in autobiography is actually ‘a fiction’. Evans (1999, p. 1) questions the customary ‘nonfiction’ labelling of life writing, suggesting that it would be better to consider autobiography ‘as a mythical construct of our society and social needs’. Using the term ‘auto/biography’ to encompass both autobiographical and biographical modes of life writing, Evans considers the changing nature of life writing in the 20th century. Evans (1999, pp. 18–20) suggests that expectations around autobiography have progressed to allow for a more subjective and interpretative representation of a person rather than one that is entirely objective and fact-based. However, alluding to the ‘impossibility’ of autobiography, Evans (1999, p. 23) also notes that life writing practices still support an idea that ‘the “real” person can be identified and presented to the reading public’. Evans (1999, pp. 23–4) infers that, due to unrealistic expectations around a person being a readily identifiable, ‘stable’, ‘never-changing’, ‘integrated’ self whose life can be presented in the form of a coherent narrative, autobiography is unable ‘to sever its links with narrative fiction’. Evans (1999, p. 24) also finds that writers of autobiographical works ‘create themselves in relationship to a fantasy’ by failing to realise how fiction influences their writing. Extrapolating from Evans’s views on contemporary life writing, autobiographical identity may be regarded as largely a product of the writer’s culture and as a fictional construct that conforms to the narrative conventions of that culture.

The importance of cultural influences on autobiographical identity is acknowledged more widely in the field of life writing studies, and the work of Eakin, in particular, makes an important contribution to scholarship on this matter. In *How our lives become stories: making selves*, Eakin (1999, p. 46) suggests that the culture in which someone lives will comprise broader identity models that feed into the person's ongoing creation and maintenance of self-identity. The self, when represented in the form of autobiographical narrative, subsequently becomes 'doubly constructed', according to Eakin (1999, p. ix), since it is produced out of pre-existing ideas of the self that have developed over the person's life—within and influenced by cultural settings—then mediated and modified by the autobiographical writing process. Eakin's (2008) *Living autobiographically: how we create identity in narrative* further addresses the centrality of culture in autobiographical identity, while also introducing ideas around 'somatic'—mainly neurobiological—influences on identity formation. In terms of culture's role in the process, Eakin (2008, p. 22) asserts that an autobiographer's narrative identity, in spite of any 'illusions of autonomy or self-determination', is formed through cultural conventions around 'what it means to be a man, a woman, a worker, a person in the settings where we live our lives'. In a discussion of the biological influences on identity, Eakin (2008, pp. 72–5) further proposes that the body is reflected in the self through emotion, language and consciousness such that autobiographical identity is more than 'the product of social convention'. While exploring somatic influences on identity, Eakin (2008, p. 63), like Evans (1999), also acknowledges the fictional dimension of autobiographical self-representation by observing how 'memory and imagination

conspire to reconstruct the truth of the past'. In this light, autobiographical identity may be seen as both performative and culturally influenced.

Smith and Watson (2010), in *Reading autobiography: a guide for interpreting life narratives*, offer further perspectives on autobiographical identity, including on memory and subjectivity and the contribution of these to identity formation. Within a more comprehensive exploration of autobiographical writing theories and their practical applications, Smith and Watson (2010, p. 31) point out that experience, as represented in autobiography, is not 'merely personal' despite illusions to the contrary. Rather, it is '[m]ediated through memory and language' and is 'an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present' (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 31). Smith and Watson (2010, p. 32) suggest that people share personal stories with others as part of a communicative paradigm which involves making sense of past experiences in the present. Through this process of self-portrayal and creative interpretation of lived experiences, the writer purportedly establishes an identity—one that is 'constructed', is 'in language', and is 'discursive' (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 39). In this way, autobiographical identity may be considered the product of self-invention through narrative that stems from and is influenced by the writer's previous experiences and his or her memories of those experiences in the present environment.

The significance of memory, and its fallibilities, in autobiographical writing is further emphasised by G. Thomas Couser in *Memoir: an introduction* (2012a). Noting that the word 'memoir', in its English usage, 'derives from the French word for memory', Couser (2012a, p. 19) points out that the 'memoir' label sends a message that a text's contents are largely constructed from the writer's memory.

Couser (2012a, p. 19) further notes that the human memory is ‘notoriously unreliable and highly selective’ and, as such, the ‘memoir’ label ‘creates the expectation that the narrative may be impressionistic and subjective rather than authoritatively fact based’. Building on this idea that memoir is not simply a factual recounting of events, Couser suggests that the autobiographical writing process is part of an identity forming process. Couser (2012a, p. 25) claims that ‘life narrative is essential to—*built into*—the formation of individual identity and human relationships’, and that it (life narrative) ‘does not just *issue* from preexisting and integrated selves; rather, it helps to develop and define them’. In this way, autobiographical writing might be regarded as a means of establishing identity through the remembering and re-enactment of lived experiences.

In the field of life writing studies, a developing appreciation of cultural influences and memory on autobiographical writing is more generally linked to understandings of the relevance of subjectivity and fiction to autobiographical identity. Such broader critical analysis around autobiography validates the genre’s cultural relevance and, therefore, its ongoing applicability and fruitfulness as an object of study. For example, Linda Anderson and Helga Schwalm each provide broader accounts of ideas and theories around autobiography that affirm the centrality of self-portrayal and identity to the reading and understanding of autobiographical texts. In *Autobiography*, Anderson (2011, p. 1) takes the view that the fundamental nature of autobiography—that is, writing about the self—makes it well suited for examining ideas around such aspects as ‘authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction’. Referring to Paul de Man’s

critique of autobiography<sup>1</sup>, Anderson (2011, p. 12) explains that the autobiographer, rather than realising self-knowledge, may be seen to engage in a process of creating a fictional or figurative self-representation; this ultimately leads to ‘the giving of face’ to hide the fictionalised self, so that what results ‘is only writing’. Schwalm (2014) also recognises autobiography’s close relationship with fictional forms of writing in suggesting that, because of its reliance on memory, autobiography ‘inevitably’ occupies the territories of both fact and fiction. Schwalm’s (2014) entry for ‘Autobiography’ in *The living handbook of narratology* outlines the evolution of autobiography and a range of perspectives around this literary form, and explains that autobiographical writing endeavours to re-enact the writer’s self-development ‘within a given historical, social and cultural framework’. In this regard, the memoir can be considered to offer a contextual account of the writer’s life experiences—a remembering and dramatisation of experiences, and a subjective and selective representation of the self—that responds to and reflects a changing world.

Autobiographical writing, in its contemporary form, is generally considered to be part of an identity-forming process—one that is not undertaken in isolation or that is merely a catalogue of facts about the writer’s life, but which is a creative act influenced by various internal and external factors. A sense of self is shaped by a person’s external reality and internal dynamics: external factors might include family, friends, and the physical and cultural environments; internal factors might involve personality, experience, memory and subjectivity. Autobiographical identity may be grounded in the verifiable aspects of the writer’s identity, yet it is widely considered to be more the writer’s self-portrayal within a framework of lived

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, de Man’s (1979) essay ‘Autobiography as de-facement’, *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 94, no. 5, pp. 919–30.

experiences amid cultural and other influences. Autobiography's accommodation of fictional writing techniques is seen to enable a constructed, rather than purely fact-based, self-representation within the context of the writer's social and cultural surroundings. Of note is that the evolution of these ideas around autobiographical writing and identity arises largely out of North American or British life writing scholarship. A study of rural Australian memoirs should take into account, not only these broader understandings of autobiographical identity and how it is formed, but also the specific cultural and locational influences on the rural Australian memoir writer's self-portrayal. Existing literature on Australian autobiographical writing highlights some of these influences and provides a base from which to further explore autobiographical narratives and representations of self and others within rural Australian contexts.

### **Australian life writing**

The range of Australian autobiography available to the reading public is rich and varied. Since European settlers first arrived on the continent, 'autobiography has loomed large in Australian writing' (Hooton 1998a, p. ix). Autobiography has remained popular with Australian writers and readers and, accordingly, with publishers. Given its popularity and its proliferation in the marketplace, Australian autobiography has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Among the scholars who have made important contributions to knowledge about Australian autobiography are Joy Hooton, John Colmer, David McCooey, Rosamund Dalziell and Gillian Whitlock.

Hooton (1990, p. x), in the introduction to *Stories of herself when young: autobiographies of childhood by Australian women*, expresses surprise ‘that critical study of autobiography in Australia is both sparse and highly selective’. Hooton (1990, pp. x–xi) notes that autobiography—particularly that written by ‘lesser-known individuals’—has lacked recognition as a credible literary form, but that this was changing towards the end of the 20th century. Hooton (1998a) reiterates this observation in the introduction to *Australian lives: an Oxford anthology*. While noting Australians’ widespread interest in reading, writing and publishing autobiography, Hooton (1998a, p. x) states that ‘it is strange that the range and extent of the genre in Australia in both centuries, but particularly until the 1950s, is largely unknown’. Hooton has helped to address this dearth of knowledge through the compilation of extracts from a range of Australian autobiographical works dating from the early 1800s to the late 1900s in *Australian lives* (ed. Hooton 1998b). This Oxford anthology, edited and introduced by Hooton, showcases the diversity of Australian autobiography up to the late 20th century. It highlights the work of 69 autobiographers, arranged under 11 chapters that are respectively labelled: ‘Convicts and outlaws’; ‘Childhood and family relations’; ‘Living black’; ‘Wilderness, sea, and bush’; ‘New chums and new Australians’; ‘Australians overseas’; ‘War’; ‘Death’; ‘Love’, ‘Occupations and vocations’; and ‘Thinkers, Questers, and Stirrers’. These groupings serve the dual purpose of organising the works according to culturally relevant themes while also outlining an apparent historical evolution of autobiographical writing in Australia. In recognising the individuality of experiences represented in the diverse range of Australian autobiography, Hooton (1998a, p. xii) also finds that a distinguishing feature of Australian autobiographical writing—that

which separates it from autobiographical writing of ‘older Western democracies’— is ‘the self-conscious negotiation of relationship with nation’. This observation touches on a common theme that emerges in scholarly commentary on Australian autobiography: that national identity is tied up in autobiographical identity.

Colmer’s *Australian autobiography: the personal quest* is based largely on the premise that autobiography is, for its writers, ‘the personal quest ... to discover the truth about themselves and society’ (1989, p. 2). Colmer (1989, pp. 3–4) claims that Australian autobiography can be grouped into six functional types: the personal story that disseminates ‘humane values’ to the reader and, by extension, wider society; writing that serves as ‘personal therapy’; the ‘personal confession’, compelled by the writer’s feelings of guilt; the ‘refracted social history’, arising from a desire to document and explore a changing society; the more specific ‘intellectual and cultural history’; and ‘the voice of the neglected or misunderstood outsider’. Colmer (1989, p. 11) regards the ‘personal quest’ of autobiography as being involved with ‘asking fundamental questions about national culture and identity’. In his study of mainly post-World War II Australian autobiography, Colmer (1989, p. 10) identifies some distinctive aspects of Australian autobiographical writing—that it is ‘primarily secular’ and that it presents an image of ‘a strongly authoritarian society, intolerant of human differences, timidly conventional, highly class-conscious, thoroughly materialistic and utilitarian in its values, and either distrustful or positively hostile towards the arts’. Colmer (1989, pp. 12–13) also notes ‘a sense of place’ and ‘[s]elf-doubt, disenchantment and gratitude for small mercies’ as identifying elements of Australian autobiographical writing.



Colmer, with Dorothy Colmer in *The Penguin book of Australian autobiography*, previously acknowledged the influence of the nation's settler history on Australian autobiography, stating: 'The impulse to write the story of one's life is particularly strong in new and rapidly changing countries' (1987a, p. 2). As with Hooton's (1998b) edited collection, Colmer and Colmer's (1987b) edited collection of extracts from 42 Australian autobiographies showcases the diversity of autobiographical writers and writing from shortly after European settlement until the late 20th century. With reference to those works, Colmer and Colmer (1987a, p. 3) claim in the book's introduction:

... in Australia the impulse to record a hitherto unrecorded world, to chart rapid social changes and to discover the truth about national identity has been as strong as the impulse to discover the self, and, moreover, is inseparable from it.

In *Australian autobiography*, Colmer (1989, p. 11) also explains that a national literature can play a part by giving life to that 'unrecorded world'—by making it real. This supports the idea that self-portrayal through autobiographical writing has a certain cultural value, in that it has the potential to offer more personal and accessible representations of national history and identity than might be found in official accounts. Alluding also to autobiography's potential for cultural disruption, Colmer (1989, p. 15) suggests that, for readers, autobiography 'should create an ineradicable scepticism towards the official myths offered us by our mythmakers and cultural historians'. This is a slight variation on a similar, earlier statement made by Colmer and Colmer (1987a, p. 11) that refers instead to 'the official myths offered us by our *literary critics* and *social historians*' (emphasis added). Colmer's

(1989, p. 15) updated version opens up possibilities for the devolution of ‘mythmaker’ status beyond literary critics, even though it may not have been apparent at the time just how pertinent this would become in the 21st century, with the internet and related technological advancements changing the ways that people interact and share information.

Another compilation of extracts, *Autographs: contemporary Australian autobiography*, edited by Whitlock (1996b), highlights the diversity of Australian autobiography published between 1980 and 1995. It draws from the texts of 42 autobiographical works, organised into five groups headed ‘Childhood’, ‘Place & space’, ‘Belief’, ‘Histories’ and ‘Voice’—groupings that ‘deliberately avoid identity-based coordinates of gender, race, ethnicity and so on’ (Whitlock 1996a, p. ix). Preceding Hooton’s (1998b) edited anthology, but covering a later and briefer period in Australia’s history, *Autographs* (ed. Whitlock 1996b) alludes to the evolution of Australian culture and a more cohesive national identity through the grouping of works under those five headings. In the book’s introduction, Whitlock (1996a) also notes the evolving nature of autobiographical writing and suggests that Australian personal life writing has come to be typified by a blend of autobiographical, biographical and fictional elements. Whitlock (1996a, pp. ix–x) writes admiringly of the ‘disobedience’ among some writers and critics of late 20th-century Australian autobiography, referring to a rejection of the strict conventions of Lejeune’s autobiographical pact and a desire to challenge genre boundaries—‘to avoid the rather singular, identity-based approaches’ of conventional autobiography. Acknowledging the increased complexity of Australian autobiography, Whitlock (1996a, pp. xviii–xxv) suggests that various international, cultural and intellectual

influences on its authors allow much Australian autobiographical writing to be situated and read in wider, international contexts. Still, Whitlock (1996a, p. xvi) alludes to the appeal of some popular Australian autobiographical works, such as A.B. Facey's *A fortunate life* (first published in 1981 by Fremantle Arts Centre Press), as relying on a lasting myth of the Australian battler.

*The Cambridge companion to Australian literature* (ed. Webby 2000) includes a chapter by Whitlock, 'From biography to autobiography', which provides a broader analysis of the evolution of Australian life writing. Like Hooton (1998a, p. ix), Whitlock (2000) notes the proliferation of autobiographical writing among early settlers in Australia. This writing took various forms, according to Whitlock (2000, p. 233), who notes: 'The early years of settlement produced an extraordinary amount of writing: diaries, journals, letters and memoirs'. Whitlock (2000, p. 233) suggests that 'the desire to establish a distinctive national culture and identity' is among the residual effects of colonisation that remain relevant to Australian life writing. Whitlock (2000, p. 233) draws clear distinctions between biography and autobiography—biography being the 'grand portrait' mode of life writing, and autobiography being characterised by the 'confessional, truth-telling "I"'. However, Whitlock's (2000, pp. 242–7) study of Australian life writing also identifies an 'equatorial zone' between autobiography and biography, in which writing about the self and other merge and in which fiction may also play a part.

McCooley's (1996) *Artful histories: modern Australian autobiography* examines the practice and purpose of autobiography, with a focus on Australian autobiographical writing from the latter part of the 20th century—mainly from the 1960s to the mid 1990s. McCooley (1996, pp. 3–4) posits that autobiography's

appeal comes from its historical value as well as its artfulness, and also because reading another's account of his or her life experiences compels readers to contemplate their own lives. *Artful histories* (McCooley 1996) addresses themes around families, childhood, secrets (or 'hidden pasts'), displacement and place, and it culminates with an exposition of some important distinctions between fiction and autobiography. McCooley (1996, pp. 164–90) acknowledges that autobiography draws on the techniques of fiction, and notes the similarities in style and subject matter between the two forms. A 'moral distinction' that McCooley (1996, p. 181) makes between autobiography and fiction, however, is that 'autobiography is always the biography of others, but fiction is always one's own story'. In pointing out that the autobiographer's other characters are necessarily real people—as opposed to the novelist, who may conjure a story's characters from imagination—McCooley emphasises the relationality of autobiographical narrative as a distinguishing feature of the genre. McCooley (1996, p. 199) sees death as being autobiography's 'great inspiration' and notes the presence of death in Australian autobiographical narratives. It may be commonplace for people to use the autobiographical form to memorialise people who have died; but also, as McCooley (1996, pp. 199–201) suggests, autobiographical writing encourages the writer to anticipate death and to memorialise his or her own past self.

McCooley's (1996) analysis intimates that national identity both influences and is influenced by autobiographical identity and self-portrayal—an idea that also alludes to the relational aspect of life writing and which is expanded on in the article 'Going public: a decade of Australian autobiography' (McCooley 2006). Referring to an increase in the standing of Australian nonfiction literature, McCooley (2006, p. 26)

recognises that ‘autobiography has made a powerful claim for itself as a form of public speech’. Through autobiography, ‘private’ stories become ‘public’, and McCooey (2006, p. 26) finds that this requirement of autobiographical writing creates ‘tension’ between identity and genre, since the truth expectations of the genre do not necessarily align with the personal image that the autobiographical writer presents through the text. McCooey’s (2006) article focuses on Australian autobiography published in the decade up to 2005, while McCooey’s (2009) chapter, ‘Autobiography’, in *The Cambridge history of Australian literature* (edited by Peter Pierce) discusses autobiography’s ‘spectral presence’ in the Australian literary scene from the late 18th century to the early 21st century. McCooey acknowledges the various forms of early Australian autobiographical writing—similarly to Whitlock’s (2000) observations—and describes autobiography as ‘the source of Australian literature, the pre-eminent mode of colonial writers, canonical fiction writers ..., Indigenous writers, minority writers, refugees, and lyric poets’ (2009, p. 323). McCooey (2009, p. 323) regards Australian autobiography as ‘spectral’ through the ways that it responds to multiple ideas of identity, in how it is both ‘central and marginal’ in the nation’s literary history, and in how it summons the ‘uncanny’ in representations of Australian life. McCooey (2009, p. 324) considers the early settlers’ choice of self-representation through autobiographical writing to be a response to feelings of displacement. Alluding to the nation’s unsettled past being reflected in more recent Australian life writing, McCooey (2009) notes that crisis—including crisis around identity—influences contemporary Australian autobiographical writing. Again, McCooey (2009, p. 339) draws on ideas of

relationality in suggesting that contemporary Australian autobiographical writers employ narrative about others to deal with their own identity crises.

Covering a similar period of Australian autobiography as McCooey's (1996) *Artful histories*, Dalziell's (1999) *Shameful autobiographies: shame in contemporary Australian autobiographies and culture* is another critical study of Australian autobiographical writing from the latter part of the 20th century, but with an emphasis on shame's manifestation in the nation's culture and identity. In terms of how culture is infused in the autobiographical self, Dalziell identifies shame as a defining element of Australian autobiographical writing. Tracing shame's origins in Australian culture to the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples by European settlers, Dalziell (1999, pp. 2–4) recognises ongoing race relations as being among the contributing elements of Australia's culture of shame. Dalziell (1999, p. 4) also identifies religion, immigration and the nation's war experiences as contributing to a particularly Australian shame. Dalziell (1999, pp. 264–5) further recognises that shame can arise from a person's reaction to various experiences, such as illegitimacy or sexuality, and that the emotion of shame is closely linked with secrecy. According to Dalziell (1999, p. 253), a person's self-identity, of which shame is a contributing factor, 'involves constructing a theory of how one is regarded by others'. Dalziell's exploration of shame in Australian autobiography finds that the autobiographers create versions of themselves by variously confronting, redirecting or evading shame. Like McCooey, Dalziell (1999, p. 6) acknowledges autobiography's relationship with fiction, claiming that 'to capture the reader's interest, the autobiographical self must be represented as larger and more interesting than life'. However, recognising shame as intrinsic to the Australian identity,

Dalziell (1999, p. 6) adds: ‘... to prevent the reader being repelled by the blatant egotism of the autobiographer’s self-display, the self may also be represented as inadequate, ashamed and in some respects a failure’. The self-deprecatory narrative might therefore be regarded as a typically Australian style of autobiographical self-portrayal, and one that was found to respond at least to 20th-century readers’ expectations of Australian memoir.

Nearly two decades into the 21st century, autobiographical writing continues to flourish in Australia. The popularity of contemporary Australian memoir, compared to other popular literature, is evident in the findings of Katherine Bode’s (2010) study of developments in Australian literary publishing, which considered the numbers of novels, poetry titles, autobiographies and biographies published in Australia between 1860 and 2007. The study found that, while the publication of novels and poetry declined from around the end of the 20th century, the publication of autobiographies and biographies increased during the same period. This, according to Bode (2010, p. 37), ‘suggests that reading tastes—and publishing trends—are not devolving but changing’. It also suggests that the popularity of early 21st-century Australian autobiography warrants further examination and understanding; yet, this is an area of inquiry that has received only limited attention. Recently, though, two scholarly collections recognise and explore the continuing and growing interest in Australian life writing within broader international contexts: *Offshoot: contemporary life writing methodologies and practice*, edited by Donna Lee Brien and Quinn Eades (2018b); and *Mediating memory: tracing the limits of memoir*, edited by Buntly Avieson, Fiona Giles and Sue Joseph (2018b).

In *Offshoot*, Brien and Eades (2018a, p. 3) acknowledge a British and North American bent to much of the existing scholarship on life writing overall—an observation that is also relevant to the more specific autobiographical form of memoir. *Offshoot* (eds Brien & Eades 2018b) responds to this gap in knowledge by presenting a collection of recent essays on life writing, along with some creative pieces, by Australian and New Zealand scholars. In the book’s opening essay, ‘Contemporary life writing methodologies and practices’, Brien and Eades (2018a) pay homage to the expanding body of knowledge in the field of life writing and to its multidisciplinary relevance. Brien and Eades (2018a, p. 4) note some of the advancements that are characteristic of contemporary life writing practices and scholarship in Australia and New Zealand—‘multiple subgenres of memoir’, for example—while also acknowledging that such innovation in the field is not confined to this region of the world. Among the other essays in *Offshoot* is ‘Strange hybrids: telling the truth and other “lies” about fiction and life writing’ by Camilla Nelson. While focusing on the work of three Australian writers, Nelson (2018) draws mainly on British and North American commentary and literature to preface her exploration of the interplay of fiction and truth-telling in the selected works. In discussing how supposed works of fiction may present as nonfiction and how nonfiction may also involve fictional techniques, Nelson exposes the fluidity of genre. A secondary but noticeable aspect of Nelson’s essay is that it reflects not only the lack of specifically Australian commentary on life writing, but also the transnational applications of scholarship in this field.

*Mediating memory* (eds Avieson, Giles & Joseph 2018b) is broader in reach, geographically, than *Offshoot* (eds Brien & Eades 2018b) while also being more



focused on the memoir form of life writing. The collection of essays in *Mediating memory* (eds Avieson, Giles & Joseph 2018b) offers insights into memoir's contribution to understandings of selfhood and community across different cultures, including from Australian perspectives. Among those perspectives, Jack Bowers's (2018) essay, 'Lest we forget: mateship, masculinity, and Australian identity', considers what Australian memoir, as individual narratives that reflect a collective narrative, reveals about the national identity. Bowers finds that the Anzac myth and the bush legend remain powerful influences on the Australian identity—an identity that is 'fundamentally masculinist, misogynist, violent, and controlling' (2018, p. 300)—and that the insights memoir offers into the broader context around self-identity suggest that this legacy will endure. The expression of national identity through gender relations is emphasised in Bowers's analysis of character depictions in Australian memoirs, with the idea of 'mateship' being a pivotal element. Implying the significance of relational narrative in Australian memoir, Bowers's (2018, pp. 310–11) observations suggest that values associated with mateship—such as brotherhood, white male privilege and the othering of women—infuse Australian autobiographical identity.

Also in terms of Australian identity and the ways in which it manifests in relational life writing, Susan Tridgell makes pertinent observations that further contribute to the understanding of cultural influences on Australian autobiographical representations of self and others. Tridgell's (2006) article, 'Communicative clashes in Australian culture and autobiography', highlights a paradox in the ways that writers represent their secondary characters in Australian autobiography. Tridgell (2006, p. 285) notes that the autobiographers 'often claim they are paying "tribute"

to their subjects, even in narratives which reveal that their subjects would not understand or agree with their approach'. Tridgell (2006, p. 286) identifies the tendencies of Australian autobiographical writers to 'transform an "inarticulate" mode of communication into one which is fully articulated', to 'use narrative elaboration to elucidate an older rural speech style which relies on minimal prosody and little overt emotional expression', or to try 'to pay tribute to an emotionally reticent subject through an exploration of the subject's psyche'. These peculiarities of the Australian autobiographer offer insight into the representation of others in Australian contexts, which may also be relevant to an analysis of representations of non-human others, such as dogs, who are largely considered 'voiceless' in a human-dominated society.

### **Relational narrative**

A notable development in the field of life writing studies has involved the recognition of other characters as being important—even critical—to the autobiographical writers' narrative self-representation. Relational narrative has come to be accepted as an essential element of memoir. In the introduction to *Mediating memory*, Avieson, Giles and Joseph (2018a, pp. 1–2) point out that the relational is an 'indisputable' aspect of memoir, with narrated versions of others—such as other members of a writer's family—being inevitably part of the writer's self-representation. Indicative of the current and ongoing interest in relational narrative among life writing scholars, Avieson, Giles and Joseph (2018a, p. 2) expand on this point with reference to relevant commentary from North American scholars G. Thomas Couser, Paul John Eakin and Thomas Larson. Considering that

*Mediating memory* explores memoir writing across different cultures, among which Australia is represented, Avieson, Giles and Joseph's (2018a) references to North American scholarship on relational life writing also highlight the cross-cultural relevance of such commentary.

Mary G. Mason is widely credited with having conceived of the relational identity model, as applicable to autobiographical writing. Mason's (1980) essay, 'The other voice: autobiographies of women writers', posits that, since the 15th century when the earliest English-language autobiography was written<sup>2</sup>, a common element in women's autobiography is that self-discovery and identity are realised through some other. Describing the identity models presented in the works of 'prototypical male autobiographers' Augustine and Rousseau as, respectively, the 'dramatic structure of conversion' and the 'egoistic secular archetype', Mason (1980, pp. 210, 234) argues that the relational set early women's autobiographical writing apart from men's and, furthermore, that relationality continued to characterise women's autobiography into the mid-to-late 20th century. Life writing scholars have more recently found the relational model of identity to be applicable more generally, and not limited by the writer's gender. As mentioned, G. Thomas Couser, Paul John Eakin and Thomas Larson offer relevant commentary on this topic, as do Nancy K. Miller, Anne Rügge-meier, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson.

Following from Mason, Nancy K. Miller expands on the discussion by recognising the applicability of relational narrative theory to autobiographical writing more generally. In 'Representing others: gender and the subjects of autobiography', Miller (1994) acknowledges that the relational identity model, as

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<sup>2</sup> Mason (1980, p. 209) points out that Margery Kempe's *The book of Margery Kempe*, from around 1432, was not only the first complete English-language autobiography by a woman, but by anyone.

founded by Mason, has played an important role in understanding the history and evolution of women's life writing. While endorsing the relevance of relational identity to women's autobiography, Miller goes on to argue for its relevance beyond gender lines. Through her reading of several autobiographical texts written by men, Miller (1994) finds that a commonality between them 'is precisely the structure of self-portrayal through the relation to a privileged other that characterizes most female-authored autobiography'. Accordingly, Miller (1994) queries whether autobiographical self-portrayal, rather than being subject to 'mutually exclusive models', might be more appropriately viewed 'as connected to a significant other and bound to a community'. In the opening 'diary' entry of her book chapter 'The ethics of betrayal: diary of a memoirist', Miller (2004, p. 147) further acknowledges the relationality of autobiographical writing in general when she claims that 'as every autobiographer knows, you can't tell your own story, especially your love life, as though it were a solo event'. This reference to an autobiographer's 'love life' alludes to the notion of relational others being people with whom the writer is intimately involved. Such a notion is supported by the rest of the chapter in which Miller examines her own memoir writing process and questions the ethics of using the contents of letters from her ex-husband when retelling her version of their relationship.

In a subsequent article, 'The entangled self: genre bondage in the age of memoir', Miller (2007) reaffirms the position that relationality is fundamental to autobiographical self-representation. On the basis that authenticity is a key expectation of autobiographical works, Miller (2007, p. 543) argues that affirmation

of the writer's genealogy is an important aspect of the genre. Miller (2007, p. 543) expounds:

The arc of becoming through self-knowledge is rooted in but never entirely bound to the stories of our familial past. The challenge that faces autobiographers is to invent themselves despite the weight of their family history, and autobiographical singularity emerges in negotiation with this legacy.

Miller (2007, p. 544) proposes that not only is the relational 'not optional' in autobiographical writing but that it is as fundamental to the genre as Lejeune's autobiographical pact. As Miller (2007, p. 544) further explains: 'Autobiography's story is about the web of entanglement in which we find ourselves'. Miller's commentary on memoir, overall, presents a view that autobiographical writing and self-portrayal is inextricably bound up in the writer's close interpersonal relationships and family history.

Like Miller, Eakin responds to Mason's relational identity model by challenging its exclusivity to women's autobiography. In *How our lives become stories: making selves*, Eakin (1999, p. 48) proposes that Mason's (1980) original model led to 'an unfortunate polarization by gender of the categories we use to define self and self-experience'. Eakin (1999, pp. 47–50) suggests that the introduction of the relational model for women's autobiography came to highlight the inadequacy and restrictiveness of existing identity models for men's autobiography. Furthermore, Eakin (1999, p. 50) casts doubt on the presumption that all (and only) women's autobiography is defined by relationality, explaining: 'I keep encountering women's autobiographies that strike me as individualistic and narrative in character; I keep

finding important evidence of relationality in men's autobiographies'. Eakin (1999, p. 50) also acknowledges that Miller has made similar observations to this last one. These authoritative voices in the field of life writing studies reinforce the conceptual groundwork from which further understandings of relational narrative have sprung.

The conventional view of relational narrative is that the relational other is a person with whom the writer shares an intimate relationship. For example, Eakin (1999, p. 86) describes relational narrative as commonly being 'the self's story viewed through the lens of its relation with some key other person, sometimes a sibling, friend, or lover, but most often a parent'. Couser (2012a, p. 20) similarly notes that relational narrative in autobiographical writing 'arises from, and is primarily concerned with, an intimate relationship', and that the relationships portrayed in relational narratives are between people—mostly 'between siblings, between partners, and between parents and children'. This view, which stems from Mason's (1980) original concept of relational identity in women's autobiography, is also reflected in commentary on the interweaving of autobiography and biography in contemporary autobiographical writing. Schwalm (2014), for example, points out that 'autobiographies may be centred on a relationship of self and other to an extent that effectively erases the boundaries between auto- and heterobiography'. Some life writing scholars have adapted and expanded on relational narrative models to include non-human, and even non-tangible, others. For example, Smith and Watson's (2010, p. 86) interpretation of relational narrative breaks from convention by referring to the autobiographer's relational others as being 'historical, contingent, or significant'. Historical others are 'the identifiable figures of a collective past such as political leaders', while contingent others 'populate the text as actors in the

narrator's script of meaning but are not deeply reflected on' (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 86). Smith and Watson's (2010, p. 86) 'significant other' seems to align more closely with the conventional view of the relational other in life writing. Smith and Watson (2010, pp. 86–7) initially describe significant others as being 'those whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator's and through whom the narrator understands her or his own self-formation', with 'family members, spouses, or lovers' being predictably among these. Smith and Watson (2010, pp. 87–8) expand this idea of the significant other, though, to include a deity ('the idealized absent Other') and the narrator's inner self ('the subject Other') as possibilities. These others to which Smith and Watson refer include people as well as non-human entities that are generally attributed with human-like qualities, such as an anthropomorphised god who speaks in human terms. Consistent with the broader commentary on relational narrative, however, Smith and Watson (2010, pp. 7–8) also regard relational narrative in contemporary personal life narrative as having 'blurred the boundary' between autobiography and biography.

The physical setting of a narrative is also considered to permeate the memoir writer's story and self-representation. Smith and Watson (2010, p. 70) acknowledge that, often, 'the geographical location strongly inflects the story being told'. This could be particularly relevant for settings with a unique geography and distinct culture—isolated rural locations, for example. As Smith and Watson (2010, p. 71) explain:

... narratives steeped in the specifics of rural place or wilderness ... are also sociocultural sites in which struggles about environmental, familial, national, and cultural politics intersect as 'layers' of narrative location.

And location, according to Smith and Watson (2010, p. 42), ‘includes the national, ethnic, racial, gendered, sexual, social, and life-cycle coordinates in which narrators are embedded by virtue of their experiential histories and from which they speak’. The physical place where a narrative is set, which may be representative of a vast range of sociocultural influences on the writer’s identity, can therefore be perceived as an important relational element of autobiographical narrative. A regard for these broader influences on a person’s autobiographical self-portrayal is indicative of the expansive views that have been emerging around what constitutes the relational in autobiographical narrative.

Conventional views of autobiography also continue to be challenged by life writing scholars and practitioners who realise further possibilities for memoir to go beyond merely writing about the self. One such possibility involves the concept of ‘new biography’ (Smith & Watson 2010, pp. 8–9), in which modes of life writing and fiction blend to produce a ‘hybrid’ form of narrative that can also encompass relationality. While advancing the discussion on multimodal applications of relational narrative, Rüggeheimer (2011), in ‘The autobiographer as family archivist: relational autobiographies and the many modes of writing a life’, also emphasises the biographical nature of contemporary autobiographical writing. In the process, Rüggeheimer occasionally uses ‘auto/biography’, ‘auto/biographical’ or ‘auto/biographer’ to recognise the relationality of autobiographical writing and the corresponding integration of biography within autobiography. Acknowledging the work of Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms<sup>3</sup>, Rüggeheimer’s use of ‘/’ here intentionally and conspicuously reinforces the point that biography and

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Egan and Helms’s (2002) editorial, ‘Auto/biography? Yes. But Canadian?’, in *Canadian Literature*, no. 172, pp. 5–16.



autobiography are not mutually exclusive—that there is an interrelation between the two forms. Rügge-meier (2011) points out that, while autobiography is often expected to be ‘the story of an autonomous self’, this form of writing has come to focus more on other people. More specifically, contemporary autobiographical writing is, according to Rügge-meier (2011), both ‘the autobiography of the self’ and ‘the auto/biography of the other(s)’. Rügge-meier refers to Eakin’s conception of relational narrative in autobiography, which considers how ‘the self is defined by—and lives in terms of—its relations with others’ (Eakin 1999, p. 43), and builds on this by exploring the use of multimodal materials in autobiographical narratives. Rügge-meier (2011) argues that the incorporation of multimodal practices in autobiographical narratives—such as the use of photographs or letters, or references to media such as television programs or music—can serve as a valid and effective means of relational self-portrayal. Furthermore, Lejeune (2017, p. 160), in the recent article, ‘A new genre in the making?’, recognises that autobiographical practice has changed in recent times to accommodate multimodal and cross-genre elements with interdisciplinary applications.

Accepting the fluidity of genre, a person’s memoir can be regarded as being more than merely personal. In telling their own stories, memoir writers inevitably tell stories of other people and of the various influences on the writers’ own lived experiences. The reader, too, is a relational other, since the memoir writer, in telling his or her story, is presumably relating to an imagined reader. Miller (2007, p. 545) claims that ‘the autobiographer’s most necessary other’ is the reader, and that ‘this need and its limits are the burning core of autobiography’. Miller (2007, p. 545) describes the reader as ‘the guest invited in, the unknown, self-selected other whose

response matters’, and further asserts: ‘You [the writer] conjure the reader to prove that you are alive’. Smith and Watson (2010, p. 79) also highlight the importance of the reader—how autobiographical writing relies on the reader feeling a relationship with the narrator, and how the writer’s narrative voice responds in relation to the imagined reader to foster that relationship. According to Smith and Watson (2010, p. 79), the autobiographical writer’s narrative voice is ‘[i]nfllected with distinctive rhythms or cadences, idioms, tone, and styles of speech, and shaped by rhetorical strategies’, giving it ‘a charge that calls the reader to some kind of relationship with the story and the narrator’. As Smith and Watson (2010, p. 39) explain: ‘Life writers incorporate and reproduce models of identity in their narratives as ways to represent themselves to the reader’. In this way, relational identity is seen to go beyond even the characters and other relational representations within the narrative, and to extend to those others who are necessary, but external, to the writer’s story.

More generally, scholarship on relational narrative confirms that memoir is not incidentally about more than the writer—it is *essentially* about more than the writer. This recent recognition of relationality in autobiographical writing also corresponds with the widespread use of ‘memoir’ when referring to autobiography in its contemporary form. Memoir could be regarded as the metamorphosis of autobiography, with relational narrative as its fundamental feature. In *The memoir and the memoirist: reading and writing personal narrative*, Larson (2007b) argues for a clear distinction between autobiography and memoir, while still recognising that memoir involves autobiographical writing. Autobiography, according to Larson (2007b, pp. 18, 22), attempts to provide a definitive record of a person’s life—and not just any person, but a prominent public figure whose purpose in writing the

autobiography is ‘to set the historical record straight’. Larson (2007b, p. 18) explains that, in autobiography, it is not necessary for the writer to be an engaging storyteller, rather:

What is required is that the author must have accomplished something notable—he may be a scientist whose discovery eradicated a disease, or a military leader whose campaigns were decisive—in order that the tale be written.

In contrast, Larson (2007b, p. 20) describes memoir as lacking the ‘self-important voice’ and as being more reflective and intimate; while having sprouted from autobiography, memoir is supposedly more interested in exploring ‘a particular life experience’ and in the author’s self-exploration through writing about that experience. Larson recognises in memoir the narrative interplay between the writer and a vast range of relational others, including the non-human and non-tangible. Larson (2007b, p. 25) propounds: ‘In memoir, how we have lived with ourselves teeter-totters with how we have lived with others—not only people, but cultures, ideas, politics, religions, history, and more’. The contemplative and reflective nature of memoir positions the writer’s experiences within a world that is characterised by relationality.

The contemporary memoir form accommodates a wide range of others, which can also include non-human animals, the inanimate or an imagined other. Increasingly, in Australian memoir, the others are aspects of the natural environment. For example, Patrice Newell’s (2003) *The river* features the Pages River that passes through her rural New South Wales property, and Tim Winton’s (2015) *Island home* is about the Australian landscape and its role in his life and

work. Among the various inanimate or intangible others, workplaces or similar entities often feature in Australian memoirs—for example, Hilary McPhee's (2001) *Other people's words* is largely the story of the McPhee Gribble publishing house. Australian memoir writers' others are also sometimes non-human animals—typically, the authors' pets. On autobiographical representations of other people, Smith and Watson (2010, p. 80) point out that the narrator 'can embed ... an imagined interiority in the voice of a parent or sibling, a lover or friend'. This notion of an 'imagined interiority' is perhaps even more relevant in the case of relational narrative about non-human animals, who essentially have no say in how they are depicted. Couser (2012b, p. 192) notes that memoirs about pets 'extend the notion of relational life writing to include our important relationships with companion animals' and are 'generally quite conventional—often highly anthropomorphic and sentimental—in their depiction of animals'. Couser's (2012b, p. 192) remark that '[i]n the wake of *Marley & me*, ... pet memoirs have multiplied like gerbils' implies increased possibilities for extending relational narrative scholarship to include life writing about non-human animals. The recent proliferation of memoirs about dogs, in particular, has yielded opportunities for examining portrayals of dogs as relational others and for gaining different perspectives into human–dog relationships.

### **Dogs in memoir**

As with scholarship on memoir and relational narrative more generally, the study of representations of dogs in autobiographical writing is an emerging field of scholarly interest. It has also attracted commentary from scholars of different disciplines, effectively drawing attention to the cross-disciplinary relevance of life

writing studies. Yet, the little commentary that exists on dogs in life writing is only quite recent, and it tends to focus on memoirs in which the dog is the main subject—the kinds of works that American literature scholar Terry Caesar (2009, p. 55) terms ‘dog memoirs’, life writing scholar Cynthia Huff (2014, p. 128) calls ‘canine memoirs’, and sociologist Clinton Sanders (2011, p. 109) refers to as “‘me and my dog’ memoirs’. Huff (2014) and Huff and Haefner (2012) also apply the term ‘animalographies’ to define a genre that includes this type of memoir, with Huff and Haefner (2012, p. 153) explaining that this is how the biography.com website and the United States-based A&E television network label life narratives that are about non-human animals or that attempt to be written from an animal’s perspective—that is, narratives ‘in which human beings control what animals say, hiding behind an image and an inscription humans create’. The emergence of these sorts of labels in the 21st century might signify the increased popularity of life stories about dogs and other animals. Caesar, Huff and Sanders each offer relevant perspectives, from different disciplinary angles, on dogs in life writing.

Caesar’s (2009) *Speaking of animals: essays on dogs and others*, which explores people’s relationships with and representations of non-human animals, pays considerable attention to the lives and stories of dogs. One essay in particular, ‘Dog years: life and death in dog memoirs’ (Caesar 2009, pp. 55–70), discusses the popularity and characteristics of the dog memoir, with specific reference to two memoirs: Mark Doty’s *Dog years* (published in 2007 by HarperCollins, New York)<sup>4</sup> and Jon Katz’s *A good dog* (published in 2006 by Villard, New York). Caesar (2009, p. 67) observes the ways that writers relay their personal stories through their dogs’

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<sup>4</sup> While Caesar refers to the 2007 HarperCollins edition, further reference in this thesis to Doty’s *Dog years: a memoir* relates to the 2008 edition published by Jonathan Cape, London.

stories, and, referring to Eakin's (1999, p. 86) concept of relational life, states: 'Dog memoirs, precisely, give "the self's story viewed through the lens of its relation with some key other person"'. Considering Eakin's (1999, pp. 86–7) examples of different combinations of parent–child relations as types of relational lives represented in autobiographical narratives, Caesar (2009, p. 67) suggests that another type could be 'the owner-dog relation', since the dog memoir otherwise fits well within the 'relational life' form that Eakin describes. Caesar (2009, p. 58) observes: 'Because dogs live so proximately to us, we can, it seems, tell our own stories about ourselves through our stories about them'. Caesar (2009, p. 57) explains how portrayals of human–dog relationships through life writing are often guided by anthropocentric assumptions:

Notwithstanding the nature of the vignettes or the range of anecdotes any one memoir relates about the beloved animal, each narrative is richly and self-indulgently driven by human concerns, human motivations, and human meaning.

Caesar (2009, pp. 58–9) also discusses the role of death in dog memoirs, explaining that the popularity of dog memoirs stems not only from people wanting to read about dogs, but also from readers' interest in 'spiritual rebirth'. Proclaiming that 'for something to live, something has to die', Caesar (2009, p. 58) goes on to stress that most dog memoirs 'are about death—how to anticipate it, how to participate in it, how to survive it'. The effect of a dog's death on the writer may be apparent in the way that he or she chooses to write about it—or to not write about it. Expressions of grief for a dying or dead dog can offer insight into that writer's self and the narrative's cultural setting.

Sanders (2011) brings a sociological perspective to relational depictions of dogs, with reference to Dean Koontz's memoir, *A big little life: a memoir of a joyful dog* (published in 2009 by Hyperion, New York). In a review of that memoir for the human–animal studies journal, *Society & Animals*, Sanders (2011, pp. 109–10) notes how 'Koontz highlights the centrality of language and shared culture' between himself and his dog, and that this is common for those trying to investigate a non-human animal's 'inner life' and the human–animal relationship. While considering Koontz's depiction of his dog's daily life, Sanders (2011, p. 111) observes that 'in attempting to assume [dogs'] perspectives, we can experience the mundane world with renewed joy and, like dogs, value being in the here and now'. Sanders (2011, p. 111) also expresses 'conceptual discomfort' with Koontz's anthropomorphic portrayal of the dog's death, and questions the idea that dogs understand that they are going to die. Sanders (2011, p. 111) recalls a veterinarian's account of 'dead dog stories'—stories that people would subject the veterinarian to when meeting him in social situations, involving 'descriptions of the illnesses, injuries, and eventual deaths of their own companion animals'—and notes a parallel between 'these sorts of emotion-laden accounts' and the climactic depictions of dogs' deaths in recently published dog memoirs.

In 'Framing canine memoirs', Huff (2014) examines the ideologies that underpin life writing about dogs, with particular reference to three United States-published books with dogs as their subjects. The three books are Jon Katz's *Soul of a dog: reflections on the spirits of the animals of Bedlam Farm*; Susan Orlean's *Rin Tin Tin: the life and the legend*; and Alexandra Horowitz's *Inside of a dog: what dogs see, smell, and know*. The first two of these are the more apparent examples of

memoir: Katz's (2009) book is about the non-human animals who live, or lived, on his farm in upstate New York; and Orlean's (2011) book is about the life of the famous dog, Rin Tin Tin, who starred in many Hollywood films in the mid 1900s. It is interesting, though, that Huff also classifies Horowitz's (2012) *Inside of a dog* as memoir, since it outwardly presents as a book about dog cognition, written by a scientist with relevant qualifications.<sup>5</sup> Horowitz (2012) does, however, incorporate anecdotes about her own dog throughout her text, which makes the book's contents an unusual melange of memoir and science. In that regard, Huff's reference to *Inside of a dog* as memoir is sensitive to the diversity of the memoir form and its genre-crossing potential. The three books that Huff has chosen to discuss each combine text and graphics, with Huff (2014, p. 128) noting that the inclusion of visual images is central to these books' 'textual effect' and is a noticeable feature of dog memoirs more generally. Huff (2014, p. 130) also finds the 'author's choice to interweave his or her story with their respective canine subjects' to be a significant aspect of each of these books. Huff's (2014, p. 131) broader claim that 'contemporary canine memoirs are as much about the author as about a dog subject' acknowledges the relationality of life writing and recognises the dog as a potential relational other. Yet Huff (2014, p. 131) questions the extent to which these books can represent the subjectivities and intersubjectivities of the people and the dogs, and whether the textual narratives and accompanying images that purport to be about dogs might actually serve as 'a cover-up for another agenda' on the relevant author's part. Referring to Couser (2012b, p. 192), Huff (2014, pp. 131–2) argues that the

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<sup>5</sup> Huff (2014) refers to the 2009 edition of Horowitz's *Inside of a dog*, published by Scribner, New York; in this thesis, specific references to *Inside of a dog* relate to the 2012 edition published by Simon & Schuster, London.



generally accepted idea of relational life writing ‘cannot capture the tangled webs of relating between canine and human’. Huff’s (2014, p. 146) examination of the three books ultimately finds that they are narratives of ‘the ideologies from which they spring: commodification, scientism and empiricism, spiritualism, and celebrity culture’. Huff (2014, pp. 131–2), with reference to Smith and Watson (2010, p. 8), suggests that a ‘new “new biography”’ that embraces multimodal methods, such as those explored by Ruggemeier (2011), may more adequately accommodate and honour the complex relationships between, and the intertwined lives of, people and dogs.

### **Human–dog relationships**

Alongside the increased attention given to non-human animals as relational others in life writing, literature in the broader field of human–animal studies offers a widening range of perspectives on the relationships between people and other animals. Given the closeness with which people and dogs live, considerable attention has been, and continues to be, directed towards understanding the human–dog relationship. For example, scientific studies into the physiological effects of human–dog relationships have attempted to better understand and explain the bond between people and dogs. Elyssa Payne, Pauleen Bennett and Paul McGreevy’s (2015) article, ‘Current perspectives on attachment and bonding in the dog–human dyad’, provides an overview of relatively recent research in this field, which supports the view that positive interactions between people and dogs produce beneficial physiological outcomes for both parties. Citing a 2012 study by Schoeberl et al, Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 72) report that findings of low cortisol

levels in the saliva of dogs whose owners treat them as ‘social partners or meaningful companions’ suggest that such favourable treatment reduces stress for the dog. Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 76), with reference to a 2012 study by Handlin et al, also note that when people engage in close, affectionate contact with their dogs, such as by kissing them, both the people and dogs experience higher levels of oxytocin—the hormone that is understood to contribute to bonding between a mother and child. In *Made for each other: the biology of the human-animal bond*, Meg Daley Olmert (2009, p. 31) also offers a compelling case for the role of biology in the formation of the human–dog bond, with an emphasis on oxytocin’s influence on this process. Olmert (2009, p. xv) refers to a 2003 South African study which found that, following ‘friendly interactions’ between humans and dogs, both the humans’ and dogs’ blood pressures dropped and their oxytocin levels increased. And Deborah Wells (2009), in the article, ‘The effects of animals on human health and well-being’, draws on a range of sources to support a view that pets, including dogs, can have positive effects on people’s physical health. For instance, Wells (2009, p. 524) notes how several studies found that, simply through patting a pet, both the person and pet realise temporary health benefits, such as lower heart rate. These examples of literature ratify the common belief that human–dog interactions can have positive physical effects.

However, the results of a more recent study cast some doubt on findings about the physiological benefits of human–dog relationships. In the article, ‘Effects of human–dog interactions on salivary oxytocin concentrations and heart rate variability: a four-condition cross-over trial’ (Powell et al. 2020), a group of Australian-based researchers present the findings of a study into the human health

benefits of dog ownership, which involved monitoring the effects of dog walking and human–dog social interactions on people’s oxytocin levels and heart rates. Powell et al (2020) conclude that they did not find a consistent link between the observed activities and the human participants’ oxytocin levels or heart rates. By extension, this research outcome may also indicate that the bond between people and dogs, and the positive effects of human–dog relationships, cannot be explained by biological science alone.

The emotional and psychological effects of human–dog relationships are also acknowledged in the earlier findings reported by Olmert (2009), Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015), and Wells (2009). Wells (2009, p. 530) refers to attachment theory (citing Bowlby 1969, 1979) to offer some explanation for how pets offer lasting psychological health benefits for people, likening the ‘owner–pet’ relationship to that of the parent–child. Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 72, citing Serpell 1996) also note that human–dog and parent–child (or ‘caregiver–infant’) relationships involve similar attachment bonds. Referring to a range of research, Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 72) explain that connections have been made between the human–dog relationship and the realisation of emotional benefits for both humans and dogs. Engaging dogs in activities with their owners—such as herding, training or agility trials, for example—rather than keeping dogs only as companions, reportedly has positive effects on the human–dog relationship (Payne, Bennett & McGreevy 2015, p. 73, citing Meyer & Forkman 2014). Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 73, citing Lefebvre et al 2007; Arhant et al 2010) suggest that this may result from the owner spending more time interacting with the dog, since ‘owner engagement ... has been reported as critical in the dog–human

relationship'. Dogs rely on people to treat them well so that they can live happy and healthy lives, but people are also considered to benefit emotionally from the companionship that dogs offer.

Some commentary on human–dog relationships—such as that found in Donna Haraway's (2008) *When species meet*, for example—includes personal subjective qualifications and anecdotal evidence to support ideas and theories on the human–dog bond. On the value of personal narrative to the understanding of human–animal relationships, scientist, ethicist and animal behaviourist Marc Bekoff (2002, p. 47) points out that '[a]necdotes, or stories, always find their way into people's views of animals', and 'can be used to make for better science, if we only let them'. And philosopher Raimond Gaita (2002, p. 2) expresses a view that personal stories about dogs and other pets can, in part, 'show how much one can learn about our relations to animals ... by reflection of a philosophical kind on our lives with ordinary domestic pets'. Highlighting the depth of the bond between humans and companion animals, Olmert (2009, p. 242) refers to a survey in which most respondents indicated that they considered their pets not only as family members, but overwhelmingly as 'the *most* valued member of the family'. Adding support to this idea, Olmert (2009, p. 242) also notes that 'studies have found that pet owners commonly feel closer to their pet than to their [human] friends and family'. Likewise, animal behaviourist Garth Jennens (1993, p. 21) claims that '[m]any owners say their pets are better companions than people'. Olmert (2009, p. 244) also touches on a philosophical and sociological explanation for the special relationships that people have with their pets:

We may exist because we think, but we live because we love. And a growing number of people are finding it easier to love animals than humans. ... As the human-human bond that supported our social institutions is weakened by short-term, long-distance love, we feel compelled to reach out to all animals and hold them closer than ever.

Personal qualifications relevant to human–dog relations indicate how people might see their dogs as family members and treat them like their children, and also how dogs might be seen as preferred alternatives to human companionship more generally.

Haraway has made significant contributions to understandings of human–dog relationships, particularly by drawing attention to the inherent entanglements in those relationships and by reconceptualising people’s and dogs’ lives as being ‘co-constitutive’. Haraway’s (2008) *When species meet* considers the interconnectedness of human and non-human animal species, with a focus on the relationships between people and companion animals. Central to Haraway’s analysis is the idea that different species, including humans and non-humans, exist with each other in interdependence. Haraway (2008, p. 4) proposes that all living beings ‘are constituted in intra- and interaction’. Rejecting notions of human superiority, Haraway (2008, p. 5) instead sees people and other animals as ‘entangled, coshaping species of the earth’. Drawing on her own experiences with her dog, Haraway (2008, pp. 205–46) describes humans and dogs as ‘becoming with’ each other through play and training—which, in the case of Haraway and her dog, involves agility sports. Haraway’s earlier work, *The companion species manifesto: dogs, people, and significant otherness* (2003), also emphasises the mutuality and interdependence in the human–dog relationship. Recognising people and dogs as having evolved

together, Haraway (2003, p. 12) points out that a companion species, by definition, only exists in relation to another companion species. Haraway's (2003, p. 16) use of the term 'significant otherness' acknowledges both the differences and closeness between the human and dog species. Haraway (2003, p. 50) advocates being mindful of 'otherness-in-relation', since no one (and no one species) exists in isolation—rather, 'being depends on getting on together'. Through *The companion species manifesto*, Haraway's (2003) analysis of anecdotes involving companion species supports a view that both sides of the human–dog relationship come to be who they are through and with each other.

Another important contribution to scholarship on the ways that people and dogs relate to and rely on each other is made by Erica Fudge. In *Pets*, Fudge (2008) considers the relationships between people and their pet animals, including how pets help reinforce the humanness of humans. Fudge explores the various complexities of the human–animal relationship by specifically looking at pets and the ways that they live alongside people and in their homes. Accordingly, *Pets* is framed around discussions on 'living with', 'thinking with' and 'being with' pet animals. Fudge (2008, p. 10) suggests that, by considering pets' otherness and the closeness with which they live with their humans, people might be encouraged 'to think about what being other means'. Fudge (2008, p. 20) contemplates whether pets' value and importance to people, and to society more broadly, is due to pets' propensity for 'breaching the boundary' between human and non-human worlds. Fudge (2008, pp. 68–9) points out that living with a pet animal 'is to engage in an ongoing process of translation'; and, with regard to fictional representations of dogs and other animals in literature, Fudge advocates for the value of imagination in this process by

suggesting that fiction writers can offer useful perceptions about pets. Further emphasising the value of other animals, including dogs, to human lives, Fudge (2008, p. 10) states: ‘We might see also how that other being, the pet, helps us to make our world what it is: while we house-train them, you might say, they world-train us’. Pets, in other words, help their people to be better, more worldly-wise, humans.

A widely espoused notion is that the non-human other, and predominantly the dog, accentuates and reinforces the humanness of humans. Marjorie Garber’s, *Dog love* (1997), for example, which reads as a tribute to dogs and their importance in people’s lives, is premised on the idea that dogs allow and encourage people to be more human—including by being more humane. Garber’s (1997) commentary on the ubiquitousness of dogs in modern society, which includes extensive references to dogs in literature and popular media, highlights the vast and varied ways that dogs are seen to enrich people’s lives. Also using examples of dogs and other non-human animals in literature, Caesar (2009, p. 85) suggests that these others might represent what humans do not know about themselves, not just about other animals, and that such narratives reveal the human limitations in truly ‘knowing’ non-human animals. Kelly Oliver’s (2009) *Animal lessons: how they teach us to be human* discusses philosophical views on human–animal relations that reinforce the idea that people are human because of other animals. In an analysis of the role of non-human animals in psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s work, Oliver (2009, p. 176) proposes that ‘animals appear in his work to add rhetorical force to his descriptions of the distinctive qualities of man’. Oliver (2009, p. 176) observes ‘logic familiar from the history of philosophy in which animals are used to shore up the borders of man, and are called

as witnesses to man's superiority', and further explains that '[w]ithin this logic, animals are more than the constitutive outside of man, as they also teach man how to be human'. At a most fundamental level, the humanness of people is emphasised simply through the recognition of the dog as being other than human. Moreover though, human vulnerabilities and strengths may be seen to be emphasised and reinforced through people's relationships with dogs.

Some scholarly commentary on fictional portrayals of dogs and human–dog relationships further highlights the marks that dogs make on human lives while reinforcing the interdisciplinary relevance of scholarship on writing about dogs. In 'Literary studies, the animal turn, and the academy', Jennifer McDonnell (2013, p. 6) acknowledges the diverse and expanding field of human–animal studies, and points out that literary representations of non-human animals offer an abundance of material for studying human–animal relations 'precisely because humans have long conceived of themselves through animal others across most literatures and cultures'. Marion Copeland's (2009) review of David Wroblewski's *The story of Edgar Sawtelle: a novel* (published in 2008 by HarperCollins, New York) is a case in point. Copeland (2009) recognises the importance of dogs in human lives through a critique of the text under review and with more general reference to stories that, similarly, consider a dog's viewpoint. Copeland (2009, p. 359) describes dogs as people's 'teachers', 'trackers', 'guides', 'translators', 'companions' and 'familiar'. According to Copeland (2009, p. 359), dogs 'know us better (or more truthfully) than we know ourselves' and, because of their strong senses of smell and hearing, they are able to observe and absorb others' stories in ways that humans may not be capable. Copeland (2009, pp. 357–8) notes how Wroblewski tells the story partly



through the dog character, and that he is able to give the dog characters ‘voices’ by drawing on understandings of dog behaviour and cognition and through his own personal experiences with dogs. This is apparently a remarkable aspect of Wroblewski’s novel, since other stories about dogs have typically been ‘flawed by anthropocentrism, emphasizing the human drama in the human-dog bond rather than the dog drama’ (Copeland 2009, p. 358). The idea of ‘giving voice to’ or ‘speaking for’ non-human animals also suggests a tendency towards anthropomorphism in narratives about other animals.

A common observation among human–animal studies scholars relates to the anthropocentrism evident in many narratives about dogs or other non-human animals, and the consequent anthropomorphisation of these non-human others. Huff and Haefner (2012, p. 154) point out that ‘[d]espite the reality that companion animals can’t speak, humans still insist on speaking for them, on constructing them as an Other that looks, talks, and remembers in our own image’. In *What animals mean in the fiction of modernity*, Philip Armstrong (2008, p. 2) also explains that ‘novelists, scientists and scholars can never actually access, let alone reproduce, what other animals mean on their own terms’. However, Armstrong (2008, p. 3) suggests that, through a ‘reconceptualization of agency’, the ways that humans and non-humans influence each other might be better understood—that the non-human animal might be viewed as more than ‘a blank screen for the projection of human meaning’. A writer’s portrayal of a non-human animal character—even if depicted in a way that suggests the animal is demonstrating autonomy—is still a human’s representation and may reasonably be expected to offer some insight into that person’s character as well as the non-human’s.

In ‘People in disguise: anthropomorphism and the human-pet relationship’, animal studies scholar James Serpell (2005) discusses the ways that people’s anthropomorphisation of non-human animals affects human–animal relations in the home environment. Serpell (2005, pp. 124–8) suggests that anthropomorphism allows companion animals to perform ‘socially supportive’ roles for their owners—that such roles depend on people being able to interpret their pet’s behaviour in human terms. Bekoff, in *Minding animals* (2002), also sees the constructive possibilities of anthropomorphism in human–animal relations. Bekoff (2002, p. 48) concedes that humans ‘have by necessity a human view of the world’, but that anthropomorphism gives people access to the worlds of other animals. In pointing out the negative consequences of anthropomorphism, however, Serpell (2005, pp. 128–31) notes that people’s preferences for human traits in pets have led to health problems being bred into some non-human animals—for example, flat-faced dog breeds often suffer from breathing difficulties. Instead of simply appreciating the otherness of non-human animals in its entirety, people’s anthropomorphic inclinations have led to a potentially unkind desire for pets that more closely resemble humans.

In the introduction to the *Oxford handbook of animal studies*, Linda Kalof (2017, p. 1) declares that it ‘is a critical turning point in time’ for animal studies, and that this is due to widespread animal commodification and environmental damage and a greater need to share spaces with other animals. Scholarship on human–animal relations in life writing can bring different perspectives to the field of animal studies, while multidisciplinary views on non-human animal others are equally pertinent to the field of life writing studies. Huff, in particular, has made and

continues to make important contributions in promoting the cross-disciplinary applications of life writing studies; and Huff and Haefner (2012) identify a meaningful link between Haraway's commentary on human–animal relations and life writing scholarship on relationality, especially regarding Miller's (2007) notion of the 'entangled self'. Following from this, and focusing more specifically on representations of human–dog relations in rural Australian contexts, the conference paper 'Living and narrating with dogs: intersections in rural Australian autobiography' (Lyons 2017) explored memoir as a medium through which human–animal relationships can be expressed and explored, highlighting relationality as a point of intersection between life writing narrative theory and human–animal studies theory. The paper considered the overlapping concepts of entanglement in life writing studies and human–animal studies, as demonstrated in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs and with reference to Miller's views on relational narrative in memoir and Haraway's commentary on human–animal relations (Lyons 2017). Referring to that paper as an example, Rosemary Williamson's (2018, p. 448) article in *New Writing* notes how such scholarship feeds into an expanding body of knowledge around the interdisciplinary relevance of writing studies and practices. A recent issue of the journal *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* (2019, vol. 34, no. 3), edited by Huff, builds on the conversation by further emphasising the applicability of Haraway's work in particular, including that on human–animal relations, to the field of life writing studies.

### 1.3 Research focus

The literature review highlights an opportunity for further analysis and understandings of representations of dogs in life writing with a focus on the contemporary rural Australian context. Overlapping gaps in the literature arise from the limited scholarship on 21st-century Australian life writing, the lack of commentary on specifically rural Australian autobiographical writing, and the absence of scholarship on dogs in Australian memoir. The proclivity for autobiographical writing in Australia, the more general popularity of memoirs about dogs, and the possibilities for greater understandings of human–dog relations through autobiographical texts give rise to a study that is topical and meaningful. This leads to the research question:

How does narrative about dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir contribute to autobiographical identity, function more broadly within the rural Australian memoir subgenre, and build on perceptions of human–dog relationships?

In responding to this question, a selection of six rural Australian memoirs will be used as the basis for analysis. Within the scope of this study, memoir is regarded as a form of autobiography; it is also recognised as a close relative of biography, in that it typically includes the stories of others. This understanding of the memoir genre provides a basis for selecting the primary and secondary sources and ensuring that they fit within the scope of this study. Subsequent explanations of the rural Australian context and memoir subgenre (as detailed in Chapter 2 of this thesis), the selection of primary sources, and the choice of analytical methods flow from this.

Based on definitions presented in this chapter (see 1.6 Terminology and style) and explored further in Chapter 2, ‘rural Australia’ relates to a pastoral way of life that is typically associated with European settlement on the land that is now called Australia. Notwithstanding this interpretation of ‘rural Australia’, it is known and acknowledged that Aboriginal peoples lived off the land well before the arrival of Europeans, and that the dingo, Australia’s wild dog, has long played a special role in Aboriginal culture (Rose 2000). The histories, lives and cultures of Indigenous peoples offer extensive possibilities for further research well beyond this particular study. The influence and representations of aspects such as gender, specific dog breeds and regional distinctions in rural Australian autobiographical writing are also not the focuses of this study, but may present lines of inquiry for future research. Furthermore, while this thesis acknowledges the sometimes speciesist, confusing, contradictory, inconsistent or harmful ways that people treat and regard non-human animals, it is not intended to be a critique of agricultural practices. Rather, the focus is on contemporary autobiographical writing and the related representations of dogs and human–dog relations in rural Australian contexts.

#### **1.4 Primary sources**

The primary sources for this study are memoirs set mainly in rural Australian contexts and first published by Australian publishers between 2001 and 2015. For the purposes of this study, it is necessary that each primary source includes narrative about the writer’s dog. The dogs in these stories are of various breeds—mainly working dog breeds associated with farming life. Choosing only memoirs published in the first 15 years of the 21st century offers a contained but relatively current

perspective on the ways that contemporary rural Australian memoir writers portray dogs in their narratives.

The selection of memoirs should also provide some insight into 21st-century publishing choices and reading interests in relation to rural Australian life writing. Individual market success of a book is not a consideration in the selection of memoirs for this study; rather, the focus is on the published text, with the understanding that publishers, for all their expertise and knowledge, can not foresee with certainty whether a book will be a bestseller (Highton 2007, pp. 7–8). It is understood, though, that the texts are the products of a publishing process as well as a writing process, and that these are produced within a cultural milieu. This study of selected rural Australian memoirs acknowledges the influence of the publishing industry on the establishment of rural Australian memoir as a distinct subgenre. Publishing houses represented in the selection of primary sources include large trade publishers and a small independent publisher.

The sample comprises six memoirs written by men and women with different personal situations and rural occupations, and whose stories are set in different parts of Australia during different periods. The writers are of different genders and age groups, and their memoirs cover different life stages. This demographic and geographic cross-section helps to capture a broad representation of Australians' autobiographical stories of life on the land. Collectively, the books represent rural Australian life from the mid 20th century to the present, therefore offering a window into post-World War II rural Australia. This time frame is pertinent, since the massive immigration program that followed World War II was a turning point for Australia and the Australian identity (National Museum of Australia n.d.a).

Colmer's (1989, p. 2) study of Australian autobiographical writing noted that the post-war period was one 'in which such writing has obviously flourished, a time when the rapidity of social change naturally prompted retrospection and analysis'. As the memoirs for this study have only recently been published, they offer an updated view of self-portrayal and relational narrative in rural Australian life writing, even if the writers are looking back at their experiences of previous decades. This current view allows for an appreciation of contemporary perceptions of the rural Australian way of life, the ongoing popularity of rural Australian memoirs, and the growing understanding of the human–dog relationship.

Across the six memoirs, the representation of different demographics, geographies, rural occupations and time periods provides a cross-section of rural Australian life stories published within the 15-year time frame from 2001 to 2015; also, these primary sources form a representative sample of Australian publishers who produced rural Australian memoirs during that period. While this small selection of published texts cannot cover every lifestyle or situation represented in rural Australian memoirs, or every publisher of these types of memoirs, it covers a substantial and representative cross-section. This allows for an examination of a variety of representations of dogs and human–dog relationships by contemporary rural Australian autobiographical writers. The primary sources for this study are: *Heart country* by Kerry McGinnis (2001); *Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story* by Dennis McIntosh (2008); *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis* by James Woodford (2008); *A youth not wasted* by Ian Parkes (2012); *Through the farm gate: a memoir* by Angela Goode (2013); and *How to get there* by Maggie MacKellar

(2014). These source texts, along with some background information about their authors, are outlined below.

***Heart country* by Kerry McGinnis, 2001, Penguin**

*Heart country* (2001) is Kerry McGinnis's second published memoir. In this memoir, McGinnis reflects on a period in the 1960s when, as a young woman, she was droving and living on cattle stations in northern Queensland with her father and siblings. It follows from McGinnis's earlier memoir, *Pieces of blue* (first published in 1999 by Viking, Ringwood), which covers McGinnis's childhood and the beginnings of her family's droving life following her mother's death.<sup>6</sup> As alluded to in the title, *Heart country* is largely about McGinnis's love of the land. It is also about her desire to become a writer, and her efforts to overcome a lack of formal education resulting from the transient nature of droving work.

Themes of work, home and relationships pervade the narrative, with McGinnis's apparent desire to settle in one place being at odds with the droving lifestyle. McGinnis ultimately chooses life on the land over marriage to a man from the city, and to become a writer rather than continue droving. Her story revolves around a cast of characters that includes her father, sister and two brothers, and the family's two working dogs, Larry and Red. Larry is a Smithfield collie who was first introduced to readers as a pup in *Pieces of blue* (McGinnis 2000, pp. 76–8); Red is presumably an Australian cattle dog, since an unnamed red cattle dog pup is also introduced towards the end of McGinnis's first memoir (2000, p. 283). *Heart country* (2001) concludes with McGinnis declaring her intention to be a writer, and

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<sup>6</sup> Further references in this thesis to McGinnis's *Pieces of blue* relate to the 2000 edition published by Penguin, Ringwood.



her two memoirs and many subsequent novels are testimony to her having fulfilled that intention. McGinnis's appreciation of and attachment to the land infuse her writing, with her novels also being set in rural Australia.

***Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story* by Dennis McIntosh, 2008, Viking (Penguin)**

*Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story* (2008) is the first of two published memoirs by Dennis McIntosh. It covers McIntosh's early life, from his school years, then leading up to and during his time working in shearing sheds in eastern Australia—mainly in Victoria and New South Wales—in the 1970s and early 1980s. The narrative features Smokey, a working dog adopted as a pup by McIntosh, who accompanies McIntosh as he travels to various sheep stations for work. McIntosh's story is infused by a sense of resignation to a life revolving around manual labour—of McIntosh feeling confined by his lack of education and his family obligations. McIntosh marries and becomes a father while still a teenager, and, even though *Beaten by a blow* presents foremost as a story about his life as a shearer, it is largely about him growing up and struggling to meet his own and others' expectations around his responsibilities as a husband and father.

The reflective nature of memoir allows McIntosh to examine this early part of his life—a critical stage in his personal development—from a place of comparative accomplishment and self-assuredness. Following his work as a shearer, McIntosh was employed in various labouring jobs, became a swimming coach, completed university degrees, wrote poetry and memoir, and taught in bush schools; he also overcame the alcoholism that manifested during his time working as a shearer (Chryssides 2013; 'Dennis McIntosh's story: part 1' 2014). His second memoir,

*The tunnel* (2014), covers a period soon after McIntosh leaves shearing work, when he is employed as an underground construction worker for a major sewer project in Melbourne. McIntosh gained a doctoral degree from the University of Adelaide, and his second memoir is apparently adapted from the creative practice that he completed for that degree (McIntosh 2013).

***Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis* by James Woodford, 2008, Text Publishing**

*Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis* (2008) is James Woodford's only personal memoir. It centres around Woodford's quest to achieve an environmentally sustainable lifestyle in the south coast region of New South Wales. With his partner and children, he transforms a rural property into their self-sufficient farm and home. His story also includes the family's two dogs—first Casuarina, a cattle dog, and later Solly, a border collie. The memoir is broken into three parts, with the first part covering mainly the author's early career in Sydney and his travels to remote Australian locations, and the latter two parts taking place mainly in rural settings between 2003 and 2008 when Woodford is in his 30s. An underlying theme of this memoir involves Woodford's respect for the land and those who inhabit it.

Woodford worked as a journalist before and after moving to the country, and is perhaps best known for his writing on environmental matters. He has authored several other books, including *The Wollemi pine: the incredible discover of a living fossil from the age of the dinosaurs* (2000), *The secret life of wombats* (2001), and *The Great Barrier Reef* (2010). Woodford's (2008, p. 88) realisation that he 'needed to do more than write about the environment', that he 'also needed to do it' (that is,

he needed to live in an environmentally responsible way), is the premise on which he embarks on his sustainable living pursuits.

***A youth not wasted* by Ian Parkes, 2012, Fourth Estate (HarperCollins)**

Ian Parkes's memoir, *A youth not wasted* (2012), is his only published book. The memoir focuses on a period in the 1950s when Parkes was living and working on sheep stations in South Australia and Western Australia. After starting as a jackeroo at the age of 16, Parkes works in various stockman and station hand roles, then as an overseer. Two dogs feature in the narrative: Parkes's kelpie–border collie cross, Jiff, and his father's kelpie, Smokey. The dogs are portrayed—mostly separately—as Parkes's companions and workmates as he moves around and lives on different stations. This coming-of-age story concludes with Parkes moving to Perth to work for a radio station.

Parkes ultimately had a long and successful career in advertising ('Ian Parkes' early life working in Australia's red dirt and scrub' 2012; Parkes 2012, blurb), and his memoir reflects on his formative experiences on the land. The memoir also reads as a tribute to the Australian bush—the natural environment as well as those who have lived there and their rural way of life. His story memorialises the various characters he encountered during his time living and working on the land, as he revisits a period in Australian history when the wool industry was a major influence on the nation's economic activities and on people's livelihoods.

***Through the farm gate: a memoir* by Angela Goode, 2013, Allen & Unwin**

*Through the farm gate: a memoir* (2013) is Angela Goode's only published personal memoir. Set mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, it begins with the author, then aged around 30, living and working in Adelaide as a journalist following from her earlier employment as a youth worker. After marrying a cattle stud manager, Goode goes to live with her new husband on the farm that he manages in the south east of South Australia. Goode and her husband eventually establish their own farm, on which they run cattle and grow lucerne. The narrative includes Goode's border collie, Lucy, who moves with her from the city to the country. Goode's husband's working dogs and the family's Jack Russell terriers also appear in the narrative.

On the surface, this is a memoir about Goode's experiences of rural life—its charms and challenges. Beyond that, though, it also serves as a vehicle through which the author conveys her views on the hardships of rural life and on what she sees as the urban–rural, or city–country, divide in Australian society. Goode also describes her involvement in producing the book of short stories about Australian working dogs, *Great working dog stories* (comps Goode & Hayes 1990), that became a bestseller and led to other volumes of similar works. Having also resumed working as a journalist after her move to the farm, the publication of Goode's memoir is preceded by her many newspaper columns and radio stories on rural life and some short pieces in the 'working dog stories' series (Goode & Hayes 2009).

***How to get there* by Maggie MacKellar, 2014, Vintage (Random House)**

*How to get there* (2014) is the second of Maggie MacKellar's two published personal memoirs, both of which are set in rural Australia. MacKellar's first

memoir, *When it rains* (2010), is about her move from the city to the family farm in central western New South Wales after her husband's and mother's deaths. *How to get there* follows closely from that first memoir; it details MacKellar's move from central western New South Wales—'the country of my heart' (2014, p. 237)—to her new partner's sheep farm on the east coast of Tasmania. As the title suggests, it is also MacKellar's story of finding her way to where she feels that she belongs: 'the place I'm meant to be' (2014, p. 229). The memoir includes MacKellar's partner, children and pets as secondary characters. MacKellar's corgi, Duke (who was introduced to readers in the previous memoir), her black labrador, Dusty, and her partner's corgi, Ethel, feature among the non-human characters.

MacKellar is otherwise known as a historian and academic—her other published books include *Core of my heart, my country: women's sense of place and the land in Australia and Canada* (2004) and *Strangers in a foreign land: the journal of Niel Black and other voices from the Western District* (2008). Before moving to the central New South Wales farm with her children, MacKellar worked as a lecturer in History at the University of Sydney. Following the release of her first memoir, MacKellar's story gained public attention when it was featured on the popular ABC television series *Australian story* ('The man on the mantelpiece' 2011). In *How to get there*, MacKellar (2014) describes how her relationship with the Tasmanian farmer developed after he wrote to her in response to the *Australian story* episode.

## 1.5 Methods

This thesis is situated primarily within the field of life writing studies and, therefore, draws closely on existing scholarship in that field. It also draws on

relevant scholarship from the field of human–animal studies as well as broader information and views on human–dog relations, Australian society, culture and history, and book publishing. As such, secondary sources are drawn from a range of scholarly literature and databases, government publications and data, news reports, popular media, and other general reading and audio or visual materials. The overarching theoretical framework for this study derives from life writing genre theory and human–animal studies theory. In particular, theories around relationality—relational life narrative, and human–animal relationships—are central to the ensuing analysis of narrative representations of dogs in rural Australian memoirs.

Mixed methods—qualitative and quantitative, textual and visual—are applied in this study. Chapter 2, in particular, uses quantitative methods to examine and analyse publishing and population data relevant to the production of rural Australian memoirs, and presents the collated details as graphs. This approach is modelled on Bode’s (2010, 2012) application of quantitative methods to complement qualitative analyses of literary texts. In arguing for the usefulness of quantitative methods in the study of literature, Bode (2012, p. 13) posits that ‘quantitative methods allow us to explore aspects of the literary field, especially trends and patterns, broad developments and directions, that would otherwise remain unrepresented and unrepresentable’. For this study, the quantitative analysis of population and publishing data helps to contextualise the rural Australian memoir as an object of relevance to the national literature and, accordingly, validates the subgenre’s suitability for critical examination. Subsequent chapters adopt a wholly qualitative approach to the textual analysis of the selected memoirs. This textual analysis

follows the ‘informal approach’ advocated by Peräkylä and Ruusuvaori (2018, p. 670), which involves the close reading and interpretation of the texts, including the identification of any apparent themes, within the context of ‘the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen’. The qualitative analysis is also extended to consider graphic elements of the memoirs, such as book cover designs or photographs that accompany some texts. Images from the primary sources and from various secondary sources are provided in different chapters of this thesis, as appropriate, to illustrate or support specific points or findings.

## 1.6 Terminology and style

The seventh edition of the *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) is the preferred reference tool for word choices and their meanings as used in this thesis. Other dictionaries or relevant sources are referred to where needed to explain or interpret the meanings of words, colloquial expressions or technical terms. Australian conventions for spelling and punctuation choices take priority, except when directly quoting from sources that use alternative (non-Australian or slang) spelling or punctuation.

For a common understanding of ‘rural Australia’, this thesis applies the *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) definition of ‘rural’:

*adj.* **1.** of, relating to, or characteristic of the country (as distinguished from towns or cities), country life, or country people; rustic. **2.** living in the country. **3.** of or relating to agriculture: *rural economy*.

The strong reliance on ‘country’ in the dictionary’s definition of ‘rural’ is consistent with the vernacular use of ‘the country’ to refer to rural Australia. This understanding of ‘the country’, which is also applied in this thesis, is distinct from

the use of ‘country’ (or ‘Country’) in Aboriginal English to refer to ‘traditional land with its embedded cultural values relating to the Dreamtime’ (*Macquarie dictionary* 2017). Other terms that are commonly used in the Australian context and vernacular to refer to rural life are ‘the bush’ and ‘the land’. The *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) defines ‘the land’ as ‘agricultural areas as opposed to urban’; the dictionary further describes ‘be on the land’ as meaning ‘to own, manage, or work on a farm, etc.’. *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) definitions for ‘the bush’ include ‘the regions outside major cities, encompassing open land, cultivated land, forests, towns, etc.’ and ‘people living in rural areas, considered collectively’. References to ‘the land’ and ‘the bush’, consistent with *Macquarie dictionary* definitions, are used at various points in this thesis. Maps and definitions of rural Australia provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) also serve to refine the scope of this study. Chapter 2 of this thesis (specifically, 2.3 Rural Australian memoir as a subgenre) provides a more detailed explanation of how *Macquarie dictionary* and ABS definitions are applied in determining if a memoir is set in rural Australia.

Also in this thesis, the term ‘pet’ is preferred over ‘companion animal’. Even though ‘companion animal’ is in popular use, and that use is well justified in that it ‘emphasizes mutuality’ (Fudge 2008, p. 88), the label of ‘pet’ is less ambiguous in the context of this study. This is because the term ‘pet’ relates to domesticated, as opposed to wild, animals that might perform roles other than companionship, such as work. The use of ‘pet’ in this study is also in keeping with the *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) definition of ‘pet’ as being ‘any domesticated or tamed animal that is cared for affectionately’. In recognising the mutuality in the human–dog relationship, ‘person’ or ‘people’ is preferred over ‘owner’ or ‘owners’ when



referring to dogs' human others. The dog, as generally referred to in this study, is the domestic dog—*Canis familiaris*—as distinct from other *Canis* species or subspecies.

Formal, academic writing conventions are applied throughout this thesis. Referencing and other stylistic applications follow the guidance of the Australian Government *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (Snooks & Co 2002).

## 1.7 Conclusion

A review of literature on autobiographical identity, Australian autobiography, relational narrative, dogs in memoir, and human–dog relationships affirms that a study of dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir is well placed to make an original contribution to scholarship. The gaps in literature on 21st-century Australian autobiographical writing, rural Australian memoir, and dogs in Australian memoir present an opportunity to build on existing knowledge within the field of life writing studies. By focusing on portrayals of dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir, the analysis will draw from and build on relational narrative theory in particular. This study also has interdisciplinary relevance. Specifically, it will contribute to the field of human–animal studies by offering understandings around the perceptions of dogs and human–dog relationships in rural Australian contexts.

The texts selected as primary sources for this study represent a broad cross-section of rural Australian memoirs published during the first 15 years of the 21st century. This selection enables insights into contemporary life writing practices of rural Australians and also into 21st-century Australian publishing choices and

reading interests. The selected autobiographical memoirs include dog characters and therefore offer relevant examples of relational narrative for the purposes of this study. Literature from the fields of life writing studies and human–animal studies, as well as from a range of other relevant secondary sources, will enable an analysis of the portrayals of dogs and human–dog relationships in the selected contemporary rural Australian memoirs. Through this analysis, insights can be made into the ways that the memoir writers represent themselves through relational narrative involving dogs and into the roles that dogs play more broadly within the rural Australian memoir subgenre and in the lives of rural Australians.

## Chapter 2 The rural Australian memoir

### 2.1 Introduction

Memoirs about rural Australian life make up a small but significant portion of all memoirs published in Australia. These memoirs offer intimate accounts of the writers' experiences on the land, while also documenting a way of life that has figured prominently in the nation's history and culture but which is becoming rarer. The early part of the 21st century has seen a decline in the percentage of the Australian population living in rural locations; meanwhile, publishing figures for rural Australian memoirs have increased. This suggests an ongoing, or growing, interest in stories about rural life at a time when this way of life is becoming more removed from most Australians' realities. Publishers and authors use various visual and narrative elements to appeal to readers and to convey the impression that a book is an autobiographical account of rural Australian life.

The personal memoir writer enters into a tacit arrangement with the reader—an 'autobiographical pact' (Lejeune 1989)—by which both parties understand that the story's author, narrator and protagonist are the same person and that the story is supposed to be a true account of that person's lived experiences. While absolute truth in a person's recollections may be an illusion, memoir writers and their publishers employ various methods to establish authority and authenticity with readers. A fundamental expectation for readers of rural Australian memoir is that the writer is portraying actual lived experiences of life on the land in Australia. Accordingly, the narrative setting and the narrator's occupation help to establish a memoir's and its author's rural Australian credentials. Other elements of a memoir,

including book cover designs and secondary character depictions, can further assert the book's place within the rural Australian memoir subgenre.

A defining feature of contemporary memoir, more generally, is a focus on 'interconnected experiences' (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 274). For the Australian who lives and works on the land, those interconnected experiences typically revolve around the rural environment—both its naturally occurring and manufactured components—and the human and non-human others associated with the rural Australian way of life. A common thread that runs through rural Australian memoir is the presence of dog characters among other human and non-human animals in the narratives. Rural Australian memoirs frequently recognise the dogs' roles in the lives of rural Australians, which often involve working with livestock and living in proximity to various other animals. Consequently, these stories acknowledge the adaptability of dogs to human ways of life and their particular suitability to life on the land. The inclusion of a dog character in autobiographical narrative can, in combination with other elements, serve as a marker of the rural Australian memoir subgenre, one which helps to establish the authenticity of the narrator's claim to identify as rural Australian and, therefore, the narrator's authority to tell their story about rural Australian life.

## 2.2 The memoir genre

Traditionally, autobiography and memoir have been regarded as separate, but related, forms of life writing. Memoir would typically deal with a specific period or experience in a person's life, while autobiography would attempt to document a whole life up to the time of writing. As Smith and Watson (2010, p. 3) note, a

memoir ‘often bracketed one moment or period of experience rather than an entire life span’. Similarly, Couser (2012a, p. 24) explains that a memoir is ‘generally more focused and selective’ while an autobiography is ‘generally more comprehensive—in chronology and otherwise’. Yet, as both Couser (2012a, p. 3) and Smith and Watson (2010, p. 3) acknowledge, ‘memoir’ has become the popular label for a range of autobiographical works. The term ‘memoir’, while older than ‘autobiography’, tends to be publishers’ preferred descriptor for life writing genres that feature the writer as subject (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 3). While memoir may have previously been regarded as a form of life writing that ‘directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator’ (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 274), it has come to be viewed more as the writer’s selective account of his or her own lived experiences *with* others. Another way of seeing memoir is simply as ‘a variety of autobiography’ (Couser 2012a, p. 19). The memoir label identifies a work as being autobiographical, in that it is about events or experiences in the writer’s own life, while also recognising that the writer’s life is inevitably intertwined with the lives of others.

In practice, the book publishing industry often uses the memoir label to distinguish autobiographical writing from, as well as to group it with, other forms of life writing. A perusal of major Australian publishing houses’ websites finds autobiographical works listed predominantly as ‘memoir’. This finding is based on publicly available information on the Australian websites of Allen & Unwin (n.d.a; n.d.c), HarperCollins (n.d.b; n.d.f), Pan Macmillan (n.d.a) and Penguin Random

House (n.d.a; n.d.h) as of mid 2019.<sup>7</sup> The following discussion of Australian publishers' treatment of memoir as a literary genre in the current book market regards Penguin Random House as a single entity because, at the time of writing this chapter, that is how Penguin Random House apparently operates. However, the chapter's subsequent analysis of memoir publishing figures over the period 2001 to 2015 recognises Penguin and Random House as separate publishing houses. This is because Penguin and Random House were separate publishing houses until they merged in July 2013 and, for a period after the merger, they continued to function in Australia as two distinct publishing divisions with separate manuscript submission requirements. They also initially retained their separate websites. For example, in June 2016, the Random House Australia website provided the following advice on its 'Submitting a manuscript' page (n.d.):

Although Penguin Random House is now one company, the publishing divisions of Penguin and Random House are separate from each other, so you must send your manuscript submission to the address below if you wish it to be considered by one of the Random House imprints (ie Knopf, Vintage Australia, Bantam, Ebury Australia, Random Romance, William Heinemann Australia).

By early 2017, the two publishing divisions were sharing the Penguin Random House Australia website while maintaining separate submission requirements for adult manuscripts; according to the advice on the 'Getting published' page (n.d.d), authors were to follow separate guidelines for submitting an adult manuscript to Penguin Australia or to Random House Australia. As of mid 2019, Penguin Random

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<sup>7</sup> The cited web pages were viewed on the publishers' websites while writing this chapter in May 2019. At the time of finalising this thesis in May 2020, information on those web pages continues to support the stated finding.

House Australia appears to apply a single process for adult manuscript submission, with the publisher's 'Getting published' page (n.d.d) having been updated to advise: 'Penguin Random House Australia comprises an adult publishing division and a children's publishing division'. For the period from 2001 up to the time of writing this chapter, HarperCollins, Pan Macmillan and Allen & Unwin have each continued to operate as separate publishing houses; together with the merged Penguin Random House, these publishers are four of the largest trade publishing houses in Australia (Throsby, Zwar & Morgan 2018, p. 9). Of all the Australian publishing houses, these four also each publish the most rural Australian memoirs, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

HarperCollins Australia (n.d.a), Pan Macmillan Australia (n.d.a) and Penguin Random House Australia (n.d.a) each categorise biographical and autobiographical works under the label 'Biography & memoir'. Allen & Unwin, however, includes 'Biography & autobiography' as a category under its 'General books' listings, then 'Memoirs' as a subject for some individual book listings within that category. For example, on Allen & Unwin's website (n.d.f), information about Angela Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate* includes 'Category: biography & autobiography' and 'Subject: memoirs'. Allen & Unwin's (n.d.c) guidelines for adult fiction, nonfiction or illustrated book submissions also refer to 'autobiographies and memoirs' under the heading 'Great Aussie life (or part-of-life) stories'—the reference to 'part-of-life' seemingly cognisant of the traditional distinction between autobiography and memoir. The other three major Australian publishing houses, however, have apparently adopted the contemporary usage of 'memoir' to encompass the full range of autobiographical works. The various publishers' overriding preference for the

‘memoir’ label reflects a general understanding of contemporary autobiographical writing as being about aspects of the writer’s life and relationships with others, and that these are often limited to specific time periods.

Other terms that the major publishers use on their websites to identify personal memoirs include ‘true stories’ (HarperCollins Australia n.d.b) and ‘reflections’ (Penguin Random House Australia n.d.h). On HarperCollins’s website (n.d.c; n.d.f), the ‘Biography & memoir’ hyperlinks on the home page and a ‘Biography & true stories’ link on the ‘Books’ search results page each direct the user to the same listings of biographical and autobiographical works, suggesting that HarperCollins uses ‘memoirs’ and ‘true stories’ interchangeably. The Penguin Random House website (n.d.b) has, in addition to a ‘Biography & memoir’ category under ‘Genres’, a section labelled ‘Our lists’ that contains a publications list titled ‘Reflections’. The ‘Reflections’ page (Penguin Random House Australia n.d.h) advises readers to ‘[t]ap into lifetimes of knowledge with these unforgettable memoirs’; the page presents a selection of autobiographical works and offers this further promotional overview:

From lives in the limelight to quiet achievers, world leaders, groundbreakers, thinkers and tinkerers—memoirs open doors to the lives of others. Experience slipups, sidesteps, sorrows and successes, and learn from those who’ve survived to tell it as they saw it. Look back on life stories to brighten your here and now, and enlighten your journey.

The publishers’ references to ‘true stories’ and ‘reflections’ draw from the defining elements of the memoir genre. They also allude to important aspects of memoir’s appeal for readers and writers: the story’s supposed truthfulness, which garners the reader’s trust and relies on the narrator’s perceived authenticity and authority to tell



the story; and also the story's reflective nature, which encourages the writer to excavate and reveal the experiences and secrets of his or her past. Combined, these 'true' and 'reflective' elements of memoir nurture a sense of intimacy between writer and reader, similar to that which might come from the sharing of secrets or personal histories between friends or confidantes.

The 'true stories' and 'reflections' labels used respectively by HarperCollins and Penguin Random House reference the confessional nature of memoir as well as memoir's relevance as a documented record of personal experiences. The act of autobiographical writing is sometimes likened to the act of confession, such as that practised within the Catholic Church (Colmer 1989, pp. 3–4, 7; Dalziell 1999, p. 9; McCooey 1996, pp. 86–7). Augustine's *Confessions*, from around 400 AD, is generally considered to be the earliest form of autobiography (Anderson 2011, p. 17), and the confessional aspects of the genre have persisted in its contemporary form. As with the religious ritual of confession, autobiographical writing can involve reflection on past deeds and exploration of the inner self to realise greater self-knowledge and personal—even spiritual—growth. Colmer (1989, p. 7) describes autobiographical writing as 'the art of confession, revelation and self-discovery'. Writing autobiographically provides opportunities for self-development and, beyond this, for 'self-definition through exploring relationships with others' (Colmer & Colmer 1987a, p. 10). In describing the transformative nature of autobiographical writing, Colmer and Colmer (1987a, p. 2) explain that the writer creates a version of his or her 'past self' and, through the writing process, actually changes so that he or she 'is never the same at the end of the work as at the moment of writing the first page'. The memoirist may write to make sense of life,

relationships and experiences, to better know his or her own self, and to establish a sense of identity.

Memoir writing provides self-gratifying opportunities to offload secrets and to be heard. The religious practice of confession provides similar opportunities for people to relieve themselves of the burdens of their supposed sins, while remaining relatively anonymous or distant from their audience. Larson (2007a) suggests that the immediacy and anonymity that memoir offers are among its appeal to writers, which is also redolent of the genre's confessional nature. Practically anyone can write a memoir, and can do so at any stage of life, with the book as material object providing a figurative mask behind which the writer can hide or disguise aspects of his or her identity. The memoir writing and publishing process may be likened to the confessional booth in that both function as outlets and filters, while offering the writer or confessor<sup>8</sup>—as the case may be—assurance and validation. In the confessional booth, the priest and parishioner typically sit on either side of a screen, one talking and the other listening before offering advice and absolution for sins confessed. Unlike the sanctity of the confessional booth, however, the publishing of a memoir renounces confidentiality by bringing the narrator's confessions out into the public domain. Memoir writing is a performative act through which the writer achieves self-definition by excavating and laying out in the open his or her thoughts and experiences. Still, the exchange between writer and reader, mediated by the published text and through the 'autobiographical pact', provides a sense of intimacy between the two parties, simulating the formalised arrangement between confessor and priest.

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<sup>8</sup> In the context of this discussion, the word 'confessor' refers to 'someone who confesses' (*Macquarie dictionary* 2017).

Contemporary memoir could be regarded as a substitute for ritualistic confession. Foucault's (1978, p. 58) observation that 'Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth' is relevant to readers' expectations of memoir and of power relations between writer and reader. Readers of memoir demand the confessional narrative because this also speaks to truth and authenticity, which are integral to the genre. Yet, as Eakin (2004, p. 3) points out, readers may decry life writers for not being truthful enough as well as 'for telling too much truth'. Memoir writers may be limited not only by what they wish to share but also by what readers wish to know. Of the act of confession, Foucault (1978, pp. 61–2) writes that it is 'a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship' and that, within that relationship, 'the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing'. With memoir, the anonymous reader is the silent listener who validates the writer's story; it is this validation on which memoir's worth apparently lies. Ritualistic confession follows certain conventions, with limits and boundaries regarding what and how the confessor divulges information to the listening other; similarly, memoir follows genre conventions, including how and to what extent readers expect to be privy to the writer's inner world.

By its confessional nature, however, memoir risks being a self-indulgent work with limited value beyond a writer's inner exploration, exhibitionist urges or self-indulgence, as alluded to in Colmer's (1989, p. 7) description of autobiographical writing as 'both a form of literary striptease and an archaeology of the self'. This self-discovery and self-revelatory aspect of autobiography is thought to lead some autobiographical writers to tell their stories through multiple works. Colmer (1989,

p. 159) posits that the proliferation of multi-volume autobiographical works may be because many autobiographers realise ‘that what they are recreating is a continuous process of self-discovery which only death can end’. Gutkind’s (2008, p. 116) edited guide for creative nonfiction writers, however, includes the advice that the purpose of writing a personal memoir is not to partake in the kind of deep self-examination that ‘involves navel-gazing and nothing more’, but rather it is to connect with readers and ‘show us something true about ourselves, about what it means to be human’. According to Larson (2007a), memoir appeals to readers because of its intimacy and accessibility, and because it implies the possibility that anyone—they included—has a story to tell. Colmer and Colmer (1987a, p. 10) suggest that the popularity of autobiography and biography among readers is because these ‘forms satisfy a basic curiosity in the mysteries of the human personality and the processes of growth and fulfilment’. Autobiography, in particular though, reflects to readers aspects of themselves and allows them to live vicariously through the writer’s experiences. The reflective nature of memoir allows not only writers but also readers to indulge in their memories of past experiences—to enjoy ‘the pleasure of remembering’ (McCooley 1996, p. 3). Memoir encourages readers to reflect on their own lives and on how the memoir writer’s experiences and relationships relate to their own. As McCooey (1996, p. 4) observes, ‘we make sense of our own lives with reference to the lives of others’. For readers, memoirs offer access to lives with which they may relate or in which they may picture themselves.

Memoir can also enlighten and inform, providing readers with opportunities to discover aspects of history or of a way of life that may be unfamiliar to them.

Autobiographical writing can serve as a valuable record of a country's social and cultural history, as McCooey (1996, p. 4) points out:

Much of what is most interesting or pleasing in the reading of autobiography has to do with its evocative particularity: the descriptions of work, clothes, books read, films seen and so on.

The historical value of memoir is part of the genre's appeal. In the Australian context, the memoir set in rural Australia performs some key functions in terms of recording history. It provides a documented record of a way of life from which modern Australia grew, but which is becoming rarer and less familiar to most Australians' urban reality. It also keeps the rural Australian way of life alive by providing readers with access to it, by making it real somehow and not merely an imagined, idealistic image of life on the land.

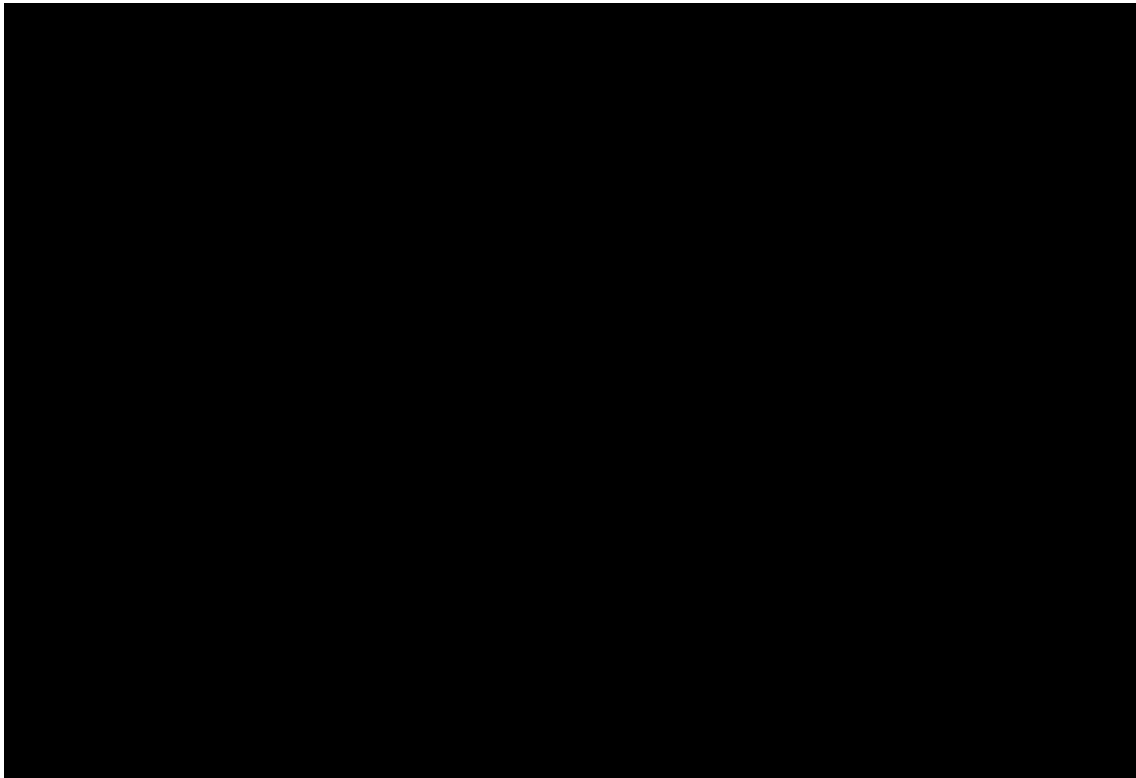
The increasing numbers of autobiographical works published in Australia, including memoirs set in rural locations, are testament to their appeal to Australian readers. Larson (2007a), referring specifically to the North American experience, describes memoir as 'the literary form of our time'. But this observation could also apply to the Australian experience. The early 21st century has seen a rise not only in the number of commercially published memoirs but also in the number of self-published or 'vanity-published' memoirs. Technological advancements have made self-publishing easier, and the recent abundance of self-published memoirs suggests a growing interest in documenting personal and family histories. This abundance may, however, also be linked to a self-indulgent tendency of some autobiographical writing practice combined with a narcissistic propensity for self-exposure becoming normalised in the age of social media. Still, the increase in commercially published

memoirs in Australia reflects the genre's strong and enduring appeal to Australian writers as well as to readers.

The AustLit online database, overseen since 2002 by The University of Queensland in cooperation with other institutions, provides reliable and comprehensive information about Australian literature, including published forms of life writing (AustLit n.d.a). The database's contents are catalogued and classified to facilitate detailed searches for published works, such as by publication year and literary form, making it a useful resource for the study of Australian literature and publishing trends. AustLit-sourced data used in this chapter relates to bibliographic information for the period 2001 to 2015 and was extracted in October 2018 from the AustLit database. Drawing on that information, a focused analysis of publishing data for the first fifteen years of the 21st century reveals an overall increase in the number of memoirs published annually in Australia. The following graph (Figure 7) shows this upward trend.

The data for this analysis was obtained from the AustLit database by using the 'Advanced Search' online form (AustLit n.d.b). The search values 'Separately published', 'Exclude international works', 'Form: autobiography', and 'Type: single work' were applied for each year from 2001 to 2015, with the relevant year entered in both the 'First known date' and 'Date of publication' fields. Applying these search terms produced bibliographic lists of memoirs that AustLit identifies as having been published for the first time as books in Australia for each relevant year. The AustLit classification of 'autobiography' for the form of work corresponds with the use of 'memoir' as a genre label in this study. The 'Genre' search field in the AustLit database includes terms such as 'humour', 'travel' and 'war literature',

which correspond more closely to possible subgenre labels for memoir. The ‘Subject’ search terms provide scope to further refine the search. Available subject options such as ‘rural life’, ‘country life’, ‘farms and farming’ and ‘station life’ may be relevant to memoirs set in rural Australia, but no single term in the AustLit database enables the definitive identification of a rural Australian memoir, as this chapter goes on to define.



(Data source: AustLit)

Figure 7: Australian memoirs 2001–2015

The AustLit search results produced lists of autobiographical books published for a given year, including many self-published works. To capture rural Australian memoirs published for a general audience, further analysis of the search results sought to identify only those memoirs that were published by trade publishers in Australia. This required a detailed examination of the autobiography listings in AustLit to confirm the publishing source and to exclude books that were not produced by Australian trade publishers. Memoirs published in locations outside Australia were excluded<sup>9</sup>, as were memoirs that were apparently self-published, published as part of a community program, or otherwise published through an arrangement that most likely required the author to pay for publishing services. For example, the Sydney Jewish Museum's 'Community stories' program encourages people to write their personal or family stories; under this program, the museum offers writers mentoring, editing, publishing and book launching services on a 'fee for service basis' (Sydney Jewish Museum n.d.). Trade publishing houses—whose book production processes typically include manuscript assessment, book printing, marketing and book distribution, and who cover the associated costs and provide contracts and payments to book authors—aim to provide books that have a place in the market because they appeal to a wide readership. An audience, or even the writer's desire for an audience, cannot be assumed for books that are published by other means. To capture works intended for readers beyond a writer's immediate circle of family or friends, and which have been assessed as having wider appeal, the

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<sup>9</sup> Although the 'Exclude international works' field was selected in the AustLit database searches, the results occasionally included a listing for a book that might have an Australian connection (such as the author being Australian born) but was published outside Australia. For example, the search results for works published in 2015 included John Baxter's *Five nights in Paris: after dark in the City of Light*, published by Harper Perennial, New York.



analysis of AustLit search results attempts to identify trade-published memoirs as separate from works published by means other than through trade publishing houses. The figures represented in the graph at Figure 7 show not only an overall increase in all memoirs published between 2001 and 2015 but also an overall increase in trade-published memoirs. The dotted line represents this upward trend for Australian trade-published memoirs.

The above graph also suggests an increase in the production of self-published memoirs, as indicated by the widening gap between the line representing all AustLit-listed Australian memoirs and the line representing Australian trade-published memoirs for the period 2001 to 2015. This apparent rise in the popularity of self-publishing autobiographical stories may offer opportunities for further exploration beyond this particular study.

### **2.3 Rural Australian memoir as a subgenre**

Given its autobiographical nature, a memoir's primary subject is purportedly the narrator. The narrator's story, though, is highly contextual, with other subjects being critical to the narrator's experiences. The primary character—the narrator—and any secondary characters in a memoir's narrative help to establish its subgenre; the setting and depicted events are also contributing factors. Types of memoir particular to Australia, and which frequently appear in searches for contemporary Australian autobiographical works, include those that centre around Aboriginal culture, the immigrant experience, outback travel, country childhood, or life on the land. Other popular forms more generally, but which may also be situated within an Australian context, include memoirs about military service, political life, performing arts

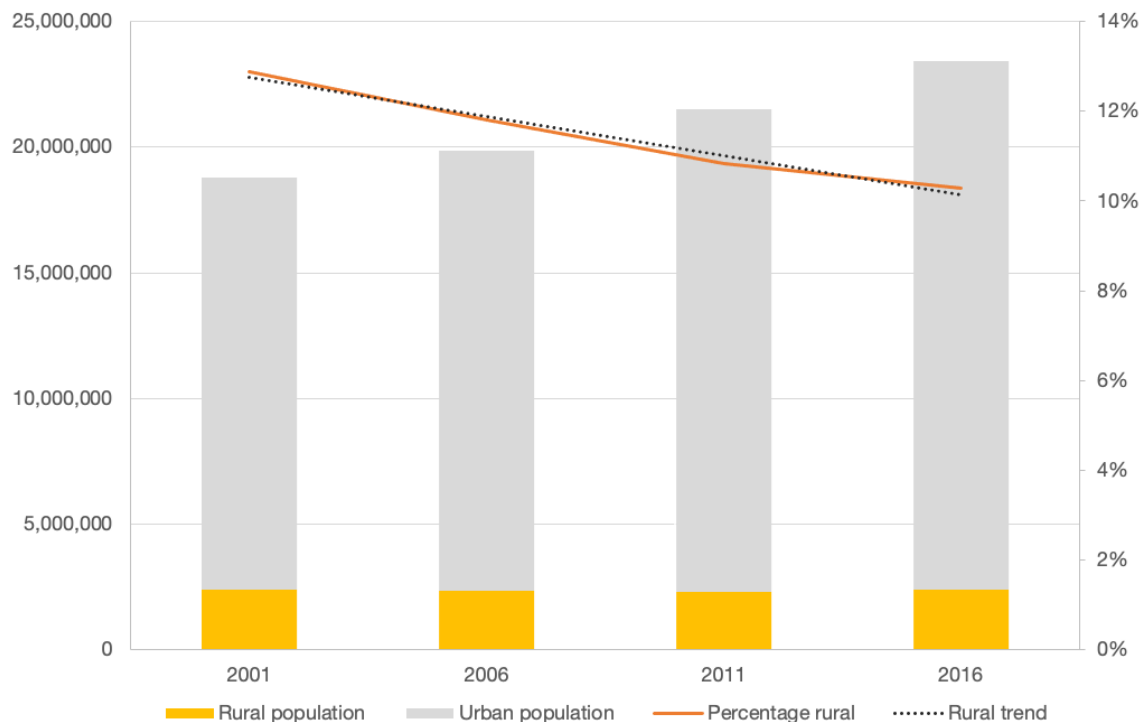
careers, sporting achievements, romantic pursuits, humorous experiences, or tragic or traumatic events occurring, for example, through illness, injury, accident, abuse or natural disaster. Many memoirs deal with multiple subjects, essentially straddling different subgenres. For example, Rob Cook's (2013) *When the dust settles* is both about life on the land and about dealing with personal tragedy; it recounts Cook's experiences living and working on his family's cattle station, and how his life changed after a helicopter accident left him with quadriplegia. Another example is Sami Shah's (2014) *I, migrant: a comedian's journey from Karachi to the outback*, which is about the immigrant experience in regional Australia, interwoven with humorous anecdotes. *The power of Bones*, Keelen Mailman's (2014) story about growing up in an Aboriginal family and eventually managing a cattle station in Queensland, encompasses childhood experiences, Aboriginal culture, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and life on the land.

The absence of an established definition for the rural Australian memoir subgenre is perhaps unsurprising, given the range of memoir subjects relevant to rural Australian life. Yet there exists a distinctly Australian type of memoir that centres around life on the land and the agricultural or pastoral activities associated with that way of life. It is those memoirs that this study treats as rural Australian memoirs. The rural Australian memoir is foremost a memoir because it is about the narrator's lived experiences—it is an autobiographical narrative. As a subgenre of memoir, it is 'rural Australian' because the narrative is mainly set in rural locations within Australia and because the story centres around the narrator's agricultural way of life.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definitions and mapping provide a starting point for determining if a memoir's setting is in rural Australia. The ABS's (2018) Australian Statistical Geography Standard uses Section of State (SOS) identifiers to categorise areas according to their population density. Under this system, SOS identifiers 0 and 1 represent 'Major Urban' and 'Other Urban' areas respectively; SOS identifiers 2 and 3 represent 'Bounded Locality' and 'Rural Balance' respectively, which the ABS (2019d) also regards as collectively representing rural areas. ABS (2019c) maps, which show the different urban (SOS 0 and 1) and rural (SOS 2 and 3) areas across Australia, provide a geographical reference for identifying memoirs as rural Australian. More specifically, *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) definitions of 'rural', as noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis (see 1.6 Terminology and style), combine to form a comprehensive description of rural life, settings and occupations. Memoirs set in locations that ABS maps show as being in rural Australia and with narratives that reflect the *Macquarie dictionary* definitions for 'rural' are, for the purposes of this study and for defining the subgenre, rural Australian memoirs. The application of this definition in the analysis of AustLit data identifies 38 rural Australian memoirs published between 2001 and 2015. These memoirs are listed at Appendix A.

Rural Australian memoirs represent only a small portion of all memoirs published in Australia, as the graph at Figure 7 indicates. A closer look at publishing and population figures, though, finds that the rise in publication of rural Australian memoirs defies population trends. The following graph (Figure 8), which uses Australian census data 'by geography' (ABS 2019c), shows that, while the number of people living in rural Australia has remained fairly steady since the beginning of

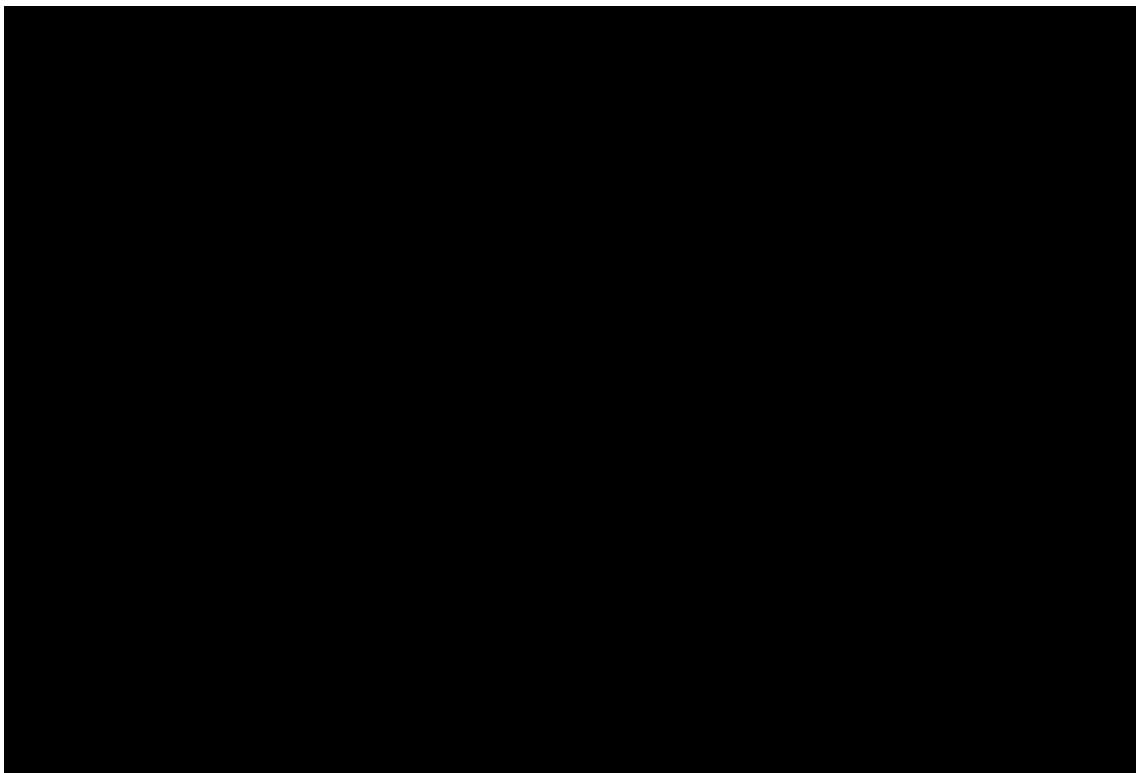
the 21st century, the overall Australian population has increased significantly through greater numbers of urban dwellers. Therefore, during the period from 2001 to 2015 when publishing figures for rural Australian memoirs rose, the percentage of the national population actually living in rural Australia markedly declined. The graph, which is based on an analysis of five-yearly census data from 2001 to 2016, shows the total Australian population broken down into its rural and urban components. It also charts the rural population as a percentage of total population—the unbroken line represents actual percentages and the dotted line represents the percentage trend for the same period. The axis on the left relates to the total population numbers; the axis on the right relates to the percentages of the total population.



(Data source: ABS)

Figure 8: Australian population 2001–2016

The following graph (Figure 9), which is based on further analysis of the data sourced from AustLit, shows rural Australian memoirs and all other Australian memoirs as composite elements of Australian trade-published memoirs for each year from 2001 to 2015. This graph also charts rural Australian memoirs as a percentage of all Australian trade-published memoirs, again with the unbroken line representing actual percentages and the dotted line representing the percentage trend for the same period. The axis on the left indicates the total number of works published; the axis on the right indicates the percentage of the total number of works.



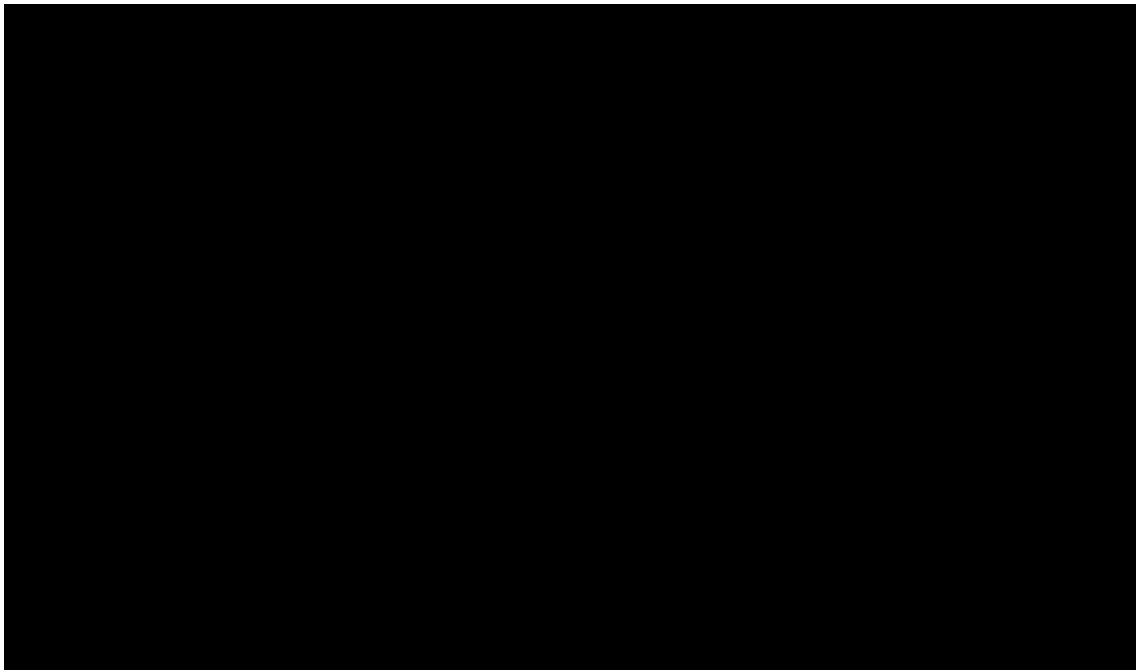
(Data source: AustLit)

Figure 9: Trade-published Australian memoirs 2001–2015

The periods covered by the above two graphs (Figure 8 and Figure 9) closely, if not precisely, align. As this study is most interested in rural Australian memoirs published in the first 15 years of the 21st century, the AustLit data search covers the 15-year period from January 2001 to December 2015. The ABS collected census figures in early August of 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016; therefore, the population figures cover a 15-year period from mid 2001 to mid 2016. The periods covered by the two data sets therefore sufficiently correspond to enable meaningful comparison of the findings.

Of particular interest for this study is how the above graphs (Figure 8 and Figure 9) show that, overall, a greater proportion of rural Australian memoirs were published at the same time that the proportion of the Australian population living in rural areas was decreasing. Australian publishers—who, importantly, are catering to a market—chose to produce more books about rural life at a time when this way of life was apparently becoming more removed from most Australians' realities. A breakdown of the quantities of rural Australian memoirs published by different publishing houses during the period 2001 to 2015 shows that, industry-wide, Australian publishers were recognising and responding to an interest in autobiographical stories about rural life. The following chart (Figure 10), which is also based on the data sourced from AustLit, illustrates the spread of rural Australian memoirs published across the major Australian trade publishers and a significant portion of small publishers who were operating during the study time frame. The figures reflected in this chart also encompass each publisher's imprints, as applicable. For example, Parkes's (2012) *A youth not wasted*, published by Fourth Estate (a HarperCollins imprint), is included in the figures for HarperCollins. While

ABC Books has been an imprint of HarperCollins since May 2009 (AustLit 2009; HarperCollins Australia n.d.a), it is shown separately in the graph to allow for the prior period when it operated as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's book publishing business. The two memoirs indicated for ABC Books were published in 2004 (*The station at Austin Downs* by Jo Jackson King) and 2005 (*What do you do with them on Sundays?* by H.S. Kent); however, a memoir published by ABC Books as a HarperCollins imprint in 2013 (*When the dust settles* by Rob Cook) is included in the figures for HarperCollins.



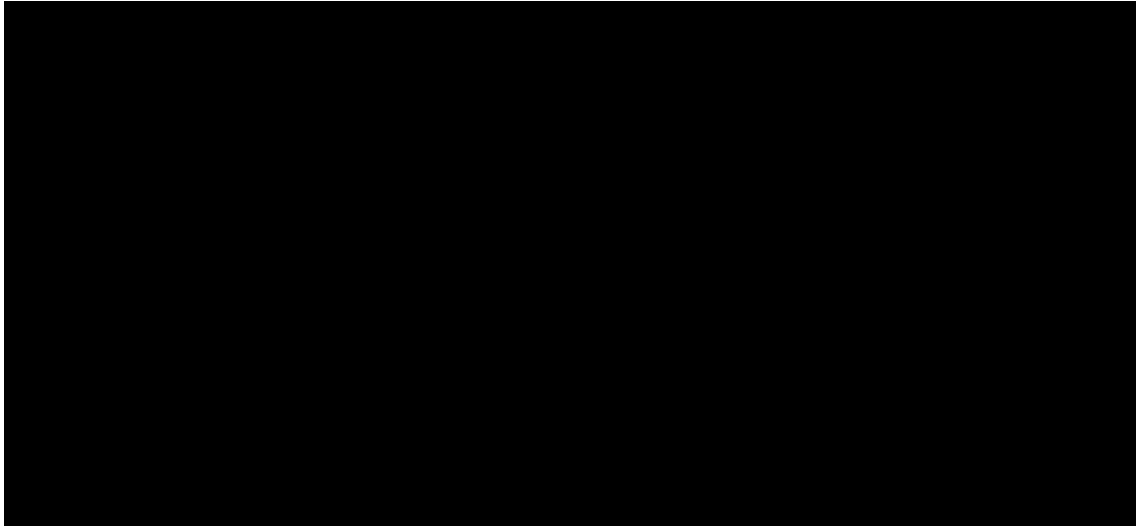
(Data source: AustLit)

Figure 10: Rural Australian memoirs by publisher 2001–2015

Considering that a publisher is expected to have a ‘sense of what makes a book succeed’ and should ‘be aware of market trends’ (Highton 2007, p. 7), the overall increase in the number of rural Australian memoirs published between 2001 and 2015 suggests that publishers were responding to an increasingly urban population’s ongoing—or growing—interest in stories about rural life. Allen & Unwin, for example, produced more rural Australian memoirs than other publishers did during the period under analysis; it published nine memoirs, all within an approximately five-year period, from John Fenton’s *The untrained environmentalist* in July 2010 to Jacqueline Hammar’s *Daughter of the Territory* in March 2015 (Allen & Unwin n.d.a; AustLit). This comparatively late surge in publishing rural Australian memoirs suggests that Allen & Unwin may have been following the lead of other publishers who had already realised readers’ interest in the subgenre. The next two largest publishers of the subgenre were Penguin and Random House who, while operating as separate entities (as noted earlier in this chapter), spread their publishing of rural Australian memoirs over more extensive time frames within the period under analysis—Penguin published six rural Australian memoirs in separate years between 2001 and 2013, and Random House published five in separate years between 2003 and 2015.

In absolute quantities, yearly publication figures for rural Australian memoirs followed an upward trend during the first 15 years of the 21st century, as the below chart (Figure 11) shows. The solid line represents actual numbers for each year, while the dotted line reflects the overall trend for the 15-year period.

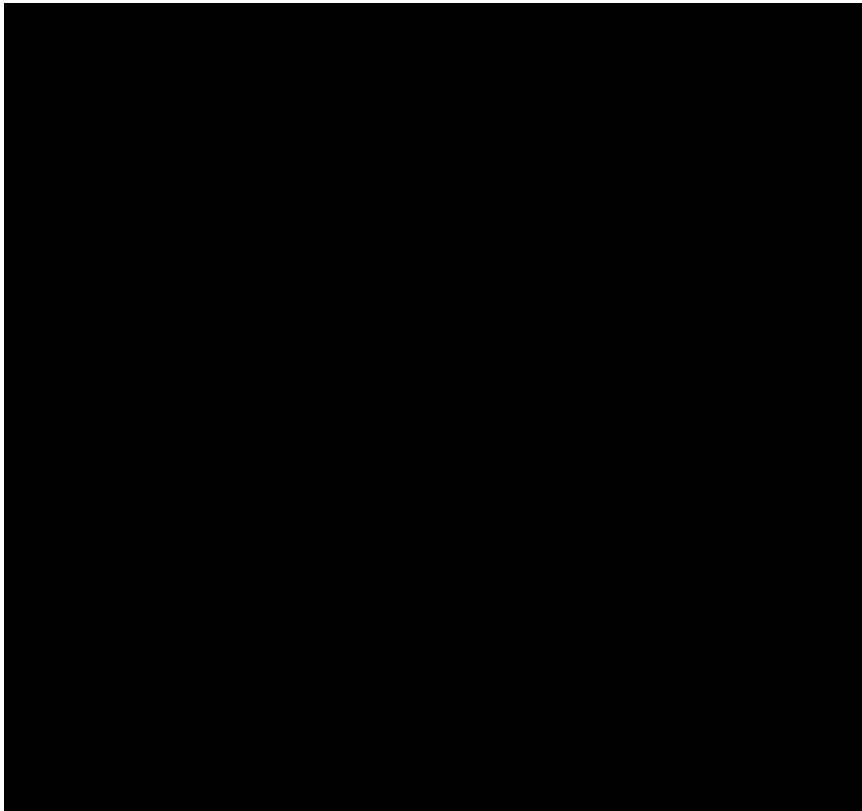




(Data source: AustLit)

Figure 11: Rural Australian memoirs by year 2001–2015 (line graph)

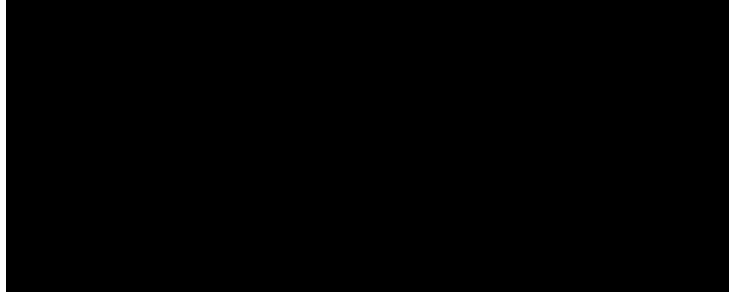
This same information represented as a pie chart (Figure 12) also indicates that, in terms of the number of rural Australian memoirs published each year from 2001 to 2015, the later years generally received greater shares of the pie. Dividing this pie chart in half vertically, for example, clearly shows that the number of memoirs published over the first nine years (2001 to 2009) is equal to the number published in just the next six years (2010 to 2015).



(Data source: AustLit)

Figure 12: Rural Australian memoirs by year 2001–2015 (pie chart)

Grouping the yearly figures into five-year periods, as indicated below, finds that the number of rural Australian memoirs more than doubled in the period from 2006 to 2010 when compared to the previous five years. Then from 2011 to 2015, the number of rural Australian memoirs published was comparable to the previous five-year period, having only slightly increased. These patterns further suggest that publishers, following earlier indications that an audience exists for rural Australian memoirs, were appreciating the market potential for such kinds of stories.



(Data source: AustLit)

According to ABS findings, not only has the nation's rural population been declining but occupations in rural areas have been changing. The 21st century has brought new challenges and opportunities for rural communities. The ABS (2013) describes a 'population churn', with large numbers of people moving into and out of rural areas due to changing employment opportunities and skills demands. For example, 'drought has had an impact on employment in certain areas' and 'there has been substantial growth in employment opportunities in mining in some country inland areas' (ABS 2013). While, in reality, occupations in rural areas are moving away from farming and into other industries such as mining, the idea of the 'Australian legend' (Ward 1978)—by which the Australian self-image is based on the bush—persists in the Australian imagination (Brett 2011, p. 33). Rural Australian memoirs help to sustain this idea and, through autobiographical storytelling, prolong the Australian legend.

As the traditional farming lifestyle becomes more elusive, rural Australian memoirs capture and preserve the prevalent idea of rural Australian life. For city

dwellers, rural Australian memoirs may offer a sense of the exotic or the romantic. Ross (2011, p. ix), for example, believes that all Australians, including those living in cities and overseas, 'are moved by words written—yesterday or long ago—about the experiences of the bush'. For readers who have lived in rural areas, rural Australian memoirs might offer opportunities to reminisce about their own experiences on the land. As Adam-Smith (1982, p. vii), in contemplating the impressions left by Australian bush poets of the past, proffers:

To those of us who lived in the bush, the outback, much of what they wrote was part of the life around us. To city dwellers the poems were like a whiff of gum leaves, scented with the dust of this wide, barren country whose inland rebuffed us as if we were pirates trying to board a treasure ship.

The contemporary rural Australian memoir—which, in the current book market, is perhaps more accessible to general readers than bush poetry might be—now performs similar functions and provides a point of connection between rural and urban dwellers. Rural Australian memoirs offer relatability to those who share similar experiences, appealing to a sense of nostalgia about rural life—a way of life that is becoming increasingly rare in Australia. These memoirs also allow others to access a way of life that is an enduring part of the Australian imagination and to nurture their illusions about that way of life. Their appeal relies on a 'collective memory' (Plummer 2001, p. 236) as part of a cultural framework that values and nurtures stories about the past. In the case of rural Australian memoirs, these stories do not reflect the reality of most Australians living in the 21st century.

While the number of Australians who live and work on the land is becoming increasingly small, the rural worker continues to be recognised and celebrated as integral to the Australian identity. As Robin (2007) points out, ‘the imagined bush life has been important to Australian identity’. Aitkin (1988, p. 56) claims that, for most of the 20th century, ‘country themes and figures were woven into the image that the outside world had of Australia’, and that this was similar to Australians’ own self-image. Also according to Aitkin (1988), the ‘countrymindedness’ ideology that relied on this image, while no longer having practical relevance, ‘may have a future as part of the romantic past’. Brett’s (2011, p. 57) examination of the changing nature of life in Australia—the shift towards a more urbanised, and multicultural, population—finds that ‘despite the confidence of Australian cities in their global sophistication’, an attachment to the rural ideal is ‘surprisingly durable when it comes to our sense of national identity’. Towards the end of the 20th century, as Brett (2011, pp. 57–8) observes, rural Australian imagery was relied on to sell Australia and its products both domestically and internationally. More recently, the Australian Government (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2016) presents an image of Australia as a nation with an ancient Indigenous culture, as a multicultural society, and as having diverse economic assets—including in mining, manufacturing and services, as well as in agriculture. Despite this, the popular—or populist—view of Australia as a settler nation that ‘rode on the sheep’s back’ has endured into the 21st century. Entrenched ideas about the bush and its significance to a national identity are central to the appeal of memoirs set in rural Australia.

## 2.4 Rural Australian memoir's appeal

Writers and publishers of rural Australian memoirs use various mechanisms, apart from a book's narrative content, to appeal to readers' interest in life on the land. These can include book title choices and cover images. Book titling, as an editorial function of the publishing process, is 'an important skill' (Clark & Phillips 2008, p. 103)—an effective book title will gain a potential reader's attention and also suitably reflect the book's contents. Titles might achieve this through clear, direct labelling—'Sometimes the book "does exactly what it says on the tin"' (Clark & Phillips 2008, p. 103)—or through clever plays on words. Cover images are aspects of book design that should also entice the reader and build expectations around a book's contents. As Scharf and Brown (2005, p. 31) explain, for a book cover to be effective, it must not only 'catch the eye' but should also 'reflect the sense and sensibility of the words inside'. Australian book cover designer Sandy Cull (Black Inc. n.d.) elaborates on this idea, explaining that the ideal cover will 'honestly and refreshingly represent, interpret and visually translate the text inside' such that it attracts and encourages people to buy it. Emphasising the relationship between words and images on a book cover, Chong Weng Ho (2019), design director at Text Publishing, explains that a book designer will aim to find an appropriate balance between the two in a way that respects the book's contents. Weng Ho (2019) recognises that a strong photographic image on a book's cover will overpower the text, and points out that this is why designers and publishers often choose large typeface and relatively subdued images for book covers. Book cover designs can also be visually representative of a country's 'cultural heritage' (Seltzer 2006, p. 56). McCooey's (2006) examination of Australian autobiography's public

and literary functions highlights the trust that readers put in cover photographs—specifically, the assumption that an autobiographical book’s cover will be an honest reflection of its contents. A book’s title and cover combine to create an important first impression and, as with the book’s contents, these may reflect a range of influences, including from writers, publishers, readers, and broader society.

The inclusion of photographs inside a book can, in the case of memoir, help to further engage with the reader and to inspire trust in the narrator’s authenticity. Photographs, like with autobiographical narrative, may be illusory, as Timothy Dow Adams (2000) highlights; yet, the resemblance of some memoirs’ photographic compilations to actual family photo albums can foster an impression of candour and relatability. Describing autobiographical works as ‘artificial representations of lives’ and photographs as ‘manufactured images’, Adams (2000, pp. 5, 20) posits that these complementary forms of self-expression function in ‘parallel’ to each other, ‘both deliberately blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, between representation and creation’. Even in the knowledge that photographs can distort reality, readers—or ‘viewers’—tend to be attached to ‘the popular idea that there is something especially authentic or accurate about a photographic likeness’ (Adams 2000, p. 4). In considering readers’ expectations of books marketed as memoir, Nancy K. Miller (2007, p. 541) links photographs to ‘genre satisfaction’, in that the viewing of photographs included in autobiographical works become part of the enjoyment that readers gain from stories about real people’s lives. In an examination of dog memoirs, Huff (2014, p. 136) considers how visual images are integrated within these memoirs, noting in particular that an ‘authenticity effect’ results from the use of photographs to supplement the written texts. The chosen images, and the

‘family album’ feel they bring to a memoir, can also have a seductive effect (Huff 2014, pp. 134–5). For example, Huff (2014, p. 135) observes how, in Jon Katz’s 2009 memoir, *Soul of a dog*, photographs of the author’s border collies and other animals in rural settings ‘validate the naturalness of this idyllic life’ and ‘seduce the viewer to follow Katz and leave the complicated life of the city for the lure of the innocent by entering the soul of a Border collie’. Devices such as these are used selectively and in combination with other tools, such as book title choices and cover images, in the published rural Australian memoirs under consideration in this study.

While notions of ‘rural’ and ‘the land’ might encapsulate agricultural settings and lifestyles, these terms are remarkably absent from the titles of those rural Australian memoirs identified through the AustLit database search. However, other terms that are commonly used in relation to rural Australia and which tend to be more vernacular in nature—such as ‘the bush’, ‘the country’ and ‘the outback’—do appear in some rural Australian memoir titles. Examples include Jim Gasteen’s (2005) *Under the mulga: a **bush** memoir*, Anne Gorman’s (2015) *The **country** wife*, and Mary Groves’s (2011) *An **outback** life* (emphasis added). Still, and even though the use of such terms in a memoir title may allude to the story being about rural Australian life, it does not guarantee that the book is a rural Australian memoir.

‘The bush’, ‘the country’ and ‘the outback’ can have more liberal applications beyond the rural Australian way of life and agricultural interests, with these labels often being applied to both rural and urban areas away from major cities. For example, Alice Springs and Broken Hill are often associated with perceptions of the outback, although they happen to be significant urban hubs. Meanwhile, the use of ‘outback’ in memoir titles, especially when combined with certain cover imagery,



can give the impression—sometimes falsely—that the memoir is about rural Australian life. The following memoir cover images (Figure 13) offer two such examples; citation details for these and for all other book cover images included in this chapter are listed at Appendix B, with full source details provided in the reference list. Deb Hunt's (2014) *Love in the outback* is mostly set in the cities of Sydney and Broken Hill, yet the book title and its cover—which includes a photograph of a windmill amid sparsely vegetated red-dirt plains juxtaposed with a photograph of wild strawberries in an enamel cup, as the image at Figure 13 shows—are suggestive of rural life. Similarly, the cover image for Beth McRae's (2015) *Outback midwife* draws on clichéd ideas of rural Australia. Even though McRae's story is mostly set in the town of Derby and the Aboriginal community of Maningrida, which are both coastal locations with population levels that meet ABS criteria for urban categorisation (ABS 2019a, 2019b, 2019d)<sup>10</sup>, the book's cover image of a house with a bullnose verandah and a eucalyptus tree in silhouette against a vast, flat landscape imply a rural location and a corresponding sense of isolation. Use of the term 'the outback' implies remoteness, as does 'rural', but the two terms are not necessarily congruous. The choice of evocative terms like 'the outback' in book titles, along with rural Australian imagery on book covers, present both rural and non-rural memoirs in ways that play on the allure of stories about rural life.

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<sup>10</sup> The ABS lists both Derby and Maningrida under the SOS classification 'Other Urban' (ABS 2019c). The ABS's urban and rural classifications are briefly explained earlier in this chapter (see 2.3 Rural Australian memoir as a subgenre).

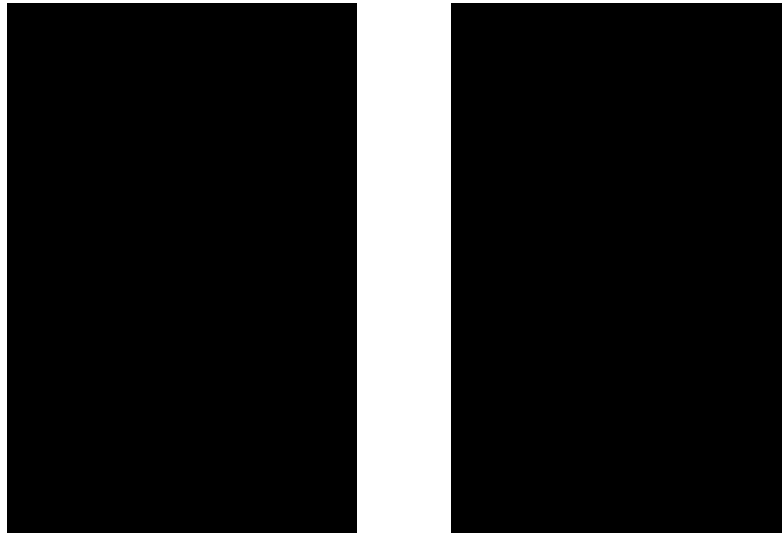


Figure 13: Examples of 'outback' memoir cover images

Rural Australian stories appeal to the pioneer spirit in Australian culture, often by presenting romanticised and sanitised versions of life on the land. The reality of some farming practices—such as those involving animal exploitation, environmental damage or destruction, or disregard for the traditional custodians of the land—tend to be avoided, ignored, dismissed or glossed over. References to the natural environment and to work, as reflected in rural Australian memoir titles, help to reinforce romantic ideas about life on the land. Specific references to dirt, dust and drought are reminders of the ruggedness of the Australian rural environment and, therefore, of the supposed resilience of the people who live there. Consequently, titles like *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis* (Woodford 2008), *Diamonds and dust* (McCorry 2007), and *Love in the age of drought* (Higgins 2009) signal to readers that these stories are about rural life. Metaphors that play on the bush environment and the weather, such as *When the dust settles* (Cook 2013) and *When*

*it rains* (MacKellar 2010), also allude to the hardship and unpredictability of life on the land—a sense of being at the mercy of environmental factors beyond a person’s control.

In titles like *The view from Connor’s Hill: a memoir* (Heard 2007), *The station at Austin Downs: one family’s adventure on the land* (King 2004), and *Bullo: the next generation* (Ranacher 2003), the names of certain places—either specific properties or geographical locations—serve as signposts to readers, directing them to rural destinations through the writers’ stories. Many rural Australian memoir titles include more general references to place, indicative of an attachment to the land; for example, *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001) suggests that the memoir is set in a geographical place for which the author holds a special fondness, *Through the farm gate: a memoir* (Goode 2013) makes a clear reference to a farming location as the narrator’s ultimate destination, and *Daughter of the Territory* (Hammar 2015) implies that the Northern Territory is part of the author’s genetic constitution. Other titles that reference the writer’s occupation, such as *Jackaroo: a memoir* (Thornton 2011) and *Beaten by a blow: a shearer’s story* (McIntosh 2008), also signify a distinctly rural Australian life. Such titles appeal to romantic or sentimental ideas about Australia’s pastoral heritage and of bush occupations being hallowed in Australian folklore. Pike (1970, p. 1), for example, intimates that a yearning for or fascination with the bush is particularly and traditionally Australian, with the observation: ‘Adventurous boys do not run away to sea; they go bush instead’. This desire to ‘go bush’ is recognised, even celebrated, in these titles that reference Australian rural locations or occupations.

Rural Australian memoir titles frequently have double meanings, indicative of the different layers of a person's life, which the memoir writers selectively reveal through their narratives. *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008), for example, offers a reference that goes beyond being about life on the land; the title also alludes to Woodford's earlier career as a newspaper journalist, in which 'dirt' can relate to newsworthy secrets or scandals. *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008) is a clear reference to shearing, as many Australians would be familiar with this expression from the traditional song, 'Click go the shears'; alternatively, being 'beaten' or experiencing 'a blow' can relate to being physically or mentally defeated, which also fits with McIntosh's narrative. Others provide little clear indication of the rural setting—for example, *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012) and *Educating Alice* (Greenup 2013) could apply to a range of situations. Yet other elements of these books, such as the cover images, more overtly reference their rural Australian settings.

While some rural Australian memoir titles may be open to different interpretations, or offer little insight into the rural nature of the stories, cover images of rural Australian memoirs reliably reflect rural settings. If a book's cover 'should inform as well as attract, be true to the contents, and be tuned to the market', as Clark and Phillip (2008, p. 148) assert, then an examination of the covers of contemporary rural Australian memoirs should reveal pertinent information about the subgenre. They often show landscapes, livestock animals, people in hats and farming clothing, or a combination of these. For example, the covers of Greenup's (2013) *Educating Alice* and Heard's (2007) *The view from Connor's Hill*, shown below (Figure 14), respectively depict people in country attire and a rural landscape,

and the cover of Thornton's (2011) *Jackaroo* depicts both of these elements as well as livestock.

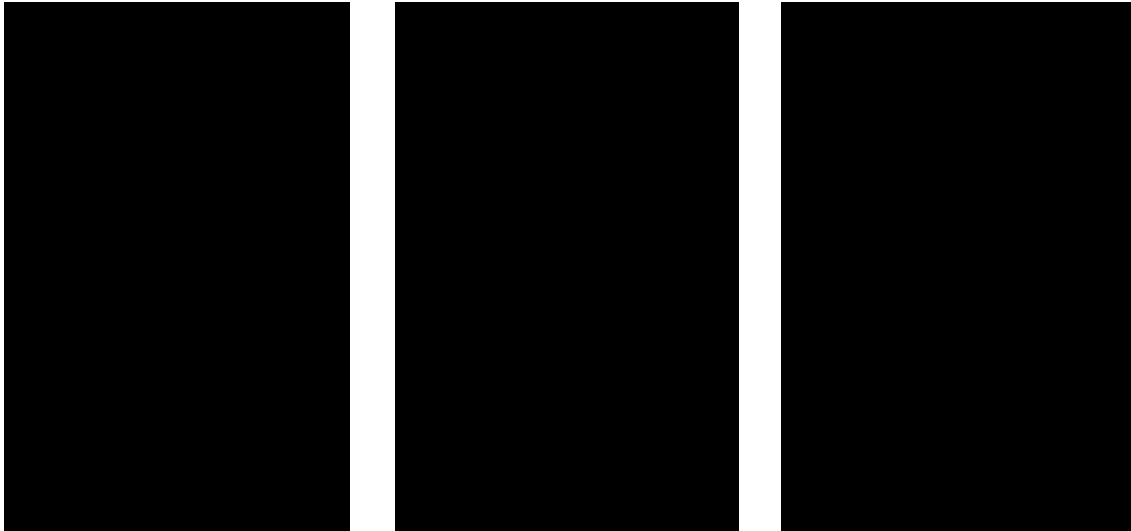


Figure 14: Examples of rural Australian memoir covers depicting people, landscapes and livestock

The people in the cover images often appear to be dressed according to a certain style, which can be likened to that marketed by traditional rural Australian clothing suppliers such as R.M. Williams. The R.M. Williams style that some of the memoir cover images appear to represent or mimic is promoted on the clothing brand's website, which further encourages ideas around the nature of the rural Australian land and its people through text like: 'Originally built for the men and women of the rugged, unforgiving Australian outback, our iconic one-piece-leather boots ...' (R.M. Williams n.d.). The non-human animals in the memoir cover images are also predominantly those species and breeds—cattle, sheep and stock horses—that conform to traditional ideas of rural Australian life.

As well as connections to the land, many cover photographs portray the importance of family—see, for example, the below cover images (Figure 15) for Cook’s (2013) *When the dust settles*, Gasteen’s (2005) *Under the mulga: a bush memoir*, and King’s (2004) *The station at Austin Downs*. These images collectively encapsulate the inextricable combination of family, work and natural environment that is typically associated with the rural Australian way of life. The cover designs also predominantly depict the open-air lifestyle of rural Australians. Images of blue skies, clouds, trees, grass, dirt, hills or plains indicate the narratives’ connections to the rural environment and provide some assurance to potential readers about the memoirs’ contents.



Figure 15: Examples of rural Australian memoir covers depicting family

The few covers that do not show any aspect of the natural landscape instead imply rural-ness through depictions of different rural ‘uniforms’. For example, as shown below (Figure 16), the cover of Gorman’s (2015) *The country wife* depicts a

woman in a gingham frock, reminiscent of the idealised images of rural Australian life portrayed in popular magazines like *Country style*; the cover of McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow* features an image of a typically outfitted shearer in blue singlet, jeans with double-layered leg sections, and fleece-covered boots; and the cover of Woodford's (2008) *Real dirt* shows the author in farming attire—hat, jeans and work boots. Woodford is also holding an enamel cup, similar to the one that Sara Henderson is pictured with on the original cover of her 1992 memoir, *From strength to strength*, as shown in the subsequent image (Figure 17).



Figure 16: Examples of rural Australian memoir covers depicting rural clothing

Henderson's memoir could be regarded as a founding work within the rural Australian memoir subgenre; given its commercial success and widespread appeal among readers, it is reasonable to expect that aspects of that book would be used as a model for the marketing of other memoirs within the contemporary form of the subgenre. Henderson had already gained national fame for being awarded

Businesswoman of the Year in 1991 (Pan Macmillan Australia n.d.c), and it was on the back of this fame that her first memoir was published. With her story being largely about her life on the land, the book's popularity must be credited with helping to establish a firm place in the market for the rural Australian memoir subgenre. It may also be argued that the cover imagery used for Henderson's memoir, which plays off rural Australian stereotypes, established a standard of sorts for subsequent works within the subgenre.

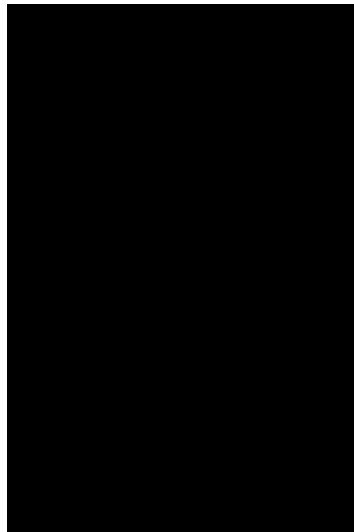


Figure 17: Sara Henderson's (1992) *From strength to strength* cover image

Book covers are often 'historically referential', with book designers drawing on old covers for design ideas (Seltzer 2006, p. 56). While the inclusion of the enamel cup in Woodford's memoir cover image might be inspired somehow by Henderson's earlier one, both cover images are representative more generally of rural Australian life. The photographs of these authors—who are also pictured in the types of wide-brimmed hats that are typically worn by rural Australians—offer an assurance of the



rural Australian credentials of the narrators and their stories. The enamel cup further reinforces this through its association with early European settlement and life on the land in Australia. This simple artefact is representative of rural Australia as its use harks back to a time when agricultural pursuits were driving the country's economy and growth. The following image by Charles Kerry (1900), for example, which was used as a postcard in the early 20th century, shows men in a drover's camp holding enamel cups (see Figure 18). Apart from the cook, the men are also wearing wide-brimmed hats and other clothing, such as boots, that help to identify them as rural Australian workers. Photographs like this, according to Ashton (1987, p. 12), 'contributed to the development of an image of rural Australia, both in Australian cities and abroad'. More recently, the enamel cup has become something of a trope, frequently appearing in film and television depictions of rural Australian life, including in noteworthy feature films like *We of the Never Never* (1982) and *Sunday too far away* (1975) and from the first episode of the long-running television drama series *McLeod's daughters* ('Welcome home' 2001), each of which relies heavily on romantic ideas of life on the land to appeal to local and international audiences. The depiction of a stylised representation of an enamel cup, with an arrangement of strawberries, on the cover of *Love in the outback* (see Figure 13)—which is not a rural Australian memoir—also highlights the contrived nature of that cover. The use of such imagery, or the emulation of cover images of rural Australian memoirs, appears to be an attempt to draw on the appealing elements of the rural Australian memoir subgenre to attract readers.

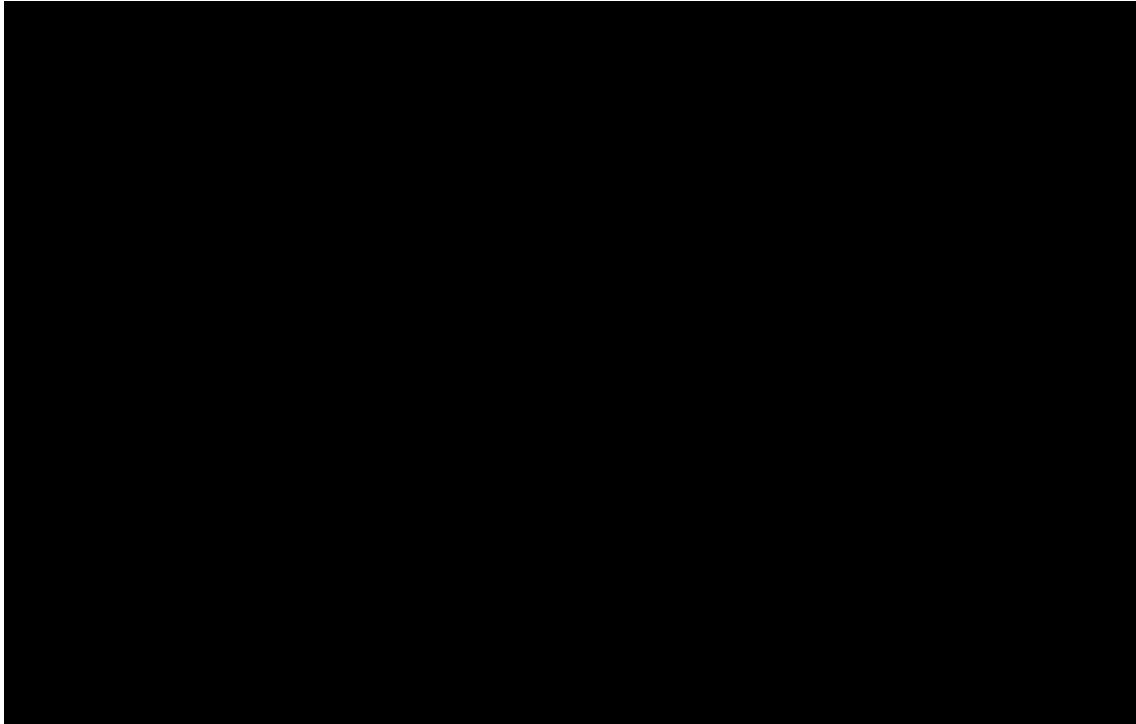


Figure 18: *Breakfast in a drover's camp, Australia* (Kerry 1900)

The cover images of rural Australian memoirs consist primarily of photographs rather than illustrations. Photographs on book covers, as Vanderschantz and Timpany (2013, pp. 11–12) recognise, give the impression of ‘truthfulness’. With believability being important to a memoir’s reception, the cover photographs provide verification of sorts that the depicted people or places actually exist—and it is imperative that those images correspond with the narrative content. The photographs on rural Australian memoir covers often appear to include the authors themselves, which lend an even greater degree of authenticity to the works. By representing the people or places that are the subjects of these memoirs, the cover photographs serve two main functions: they set the scene as being rural Australian,

and they help to reinforce a sense of truthfulness that necessarily establishes the book's status as memoir.

The authors' names are rarely the most prominent feature of rural Australian memoir cover designs, which suggests that the autobiographical subject is not the main attraction—the appeal is the rural Australian life more so than the person who lived it. This contrasts with memoirs of famous people—sporting stars, actors, politicians, or other public figures—whose names usually feature prominently in the cover designs. For example and as shown at Figure 19, the personal memoir of well-known Australian writer and feminist, Anne Summers (2018), features the author's name in large font on the cover, while the book's title, *Unfettered and alive: a memoir*, is smaller and less conspicuous. The memoir of Australian rugby league player Johnathan Thurston (2018) includes the initials 'JT' (the nickname by which Johnathan Thurston is widely and affectionately called) as a very large and eye-catching watermark on the cover and his full name as the highlighted part of the book's full title, *Johnathan Thurston: the autobiography*. The cover of former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's (2005) political memoir, *The truth of the matter*, presents his name in large, bold font towards the centre of the image, and the title in smaller font at the bottom. As is common among the memoirs of famous people, Thurston's and Whitlam's memoir covers feature large, close-up photographs of them. It is the names and faces of these people that are recognisable and attract a potential reader's attention. The appeal of these memoirs lies in readers' interest in the individuals—the personalities and their legacies—who are the autobiographical subjects, and the cover designs reflect this. This further distinguishes the rural Australian memoir subgenre within the wider memoir genre, since rural Australian memoirs are mostly

written by people who are not very famous, and their appeal—as their covers reflect—mostly centres on the rural lifestyle and experience.

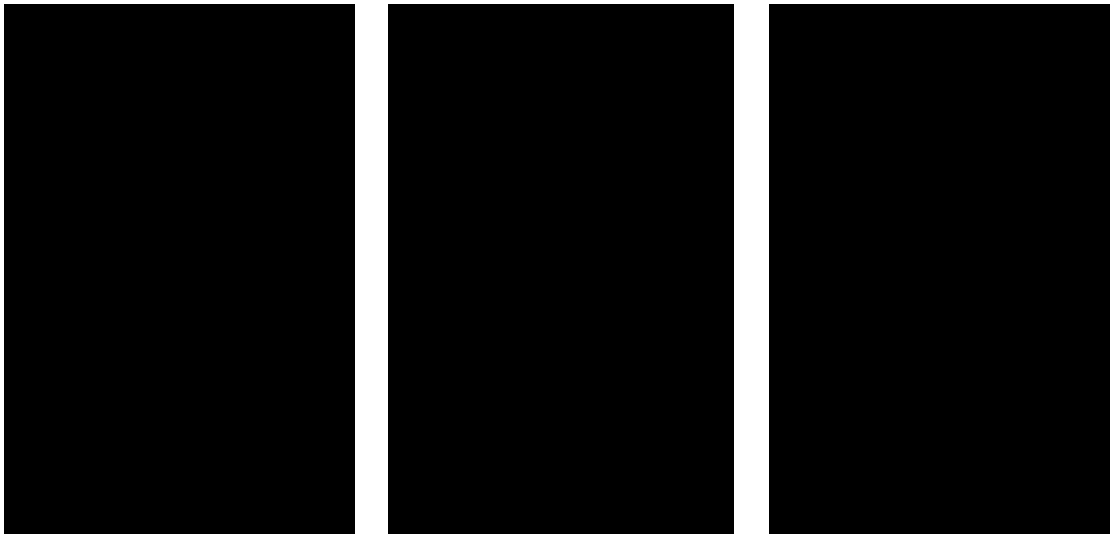


Figure 19: Examples of famous Australians' memoir cover images

The covers of rural Australian memoirs generally bear little resemblance to those of other books within the memoir genre. Rather, the imagery on rural Australian memoir covers tends to more closely resemble that found on the covers of rural Australian romantic fiction—a popular subgenre of the novel, sometimes referred to as ‘RuRo’ (an abbreviation for ‘rural romance’) or, more sardonically, as ‘Lust in the Dust’ (Daniels 2017). A main difference between RuRo and rural Australian memoir covers, though, is that the authors’ names, rather than the books’ titles, are usually emphasised on RuRo covers. For RuRo, as with rural Australian memoir, the story’s setting is established through the cover image; but with RuRo, the author is more likely to be presented as a key point of attraction. Beyond this, the RuRo novel

uses the allure of the rural Australian lifestyle to appeal to readers, and these fictional works draw inspiration from the experiences of those who have lived on the land, including in the book cover design imagery. But, in contrast with the rural Australian memoir subgenre, the use of more idealised imagery on RuRo covers reflects the more fantastical content in books of this fiction subgenre. For comparison purposes, some examples of RuRo book covers that show clear similarities with, as well as differences from, rural Australian memoir book covers are provided below (Figure 20).

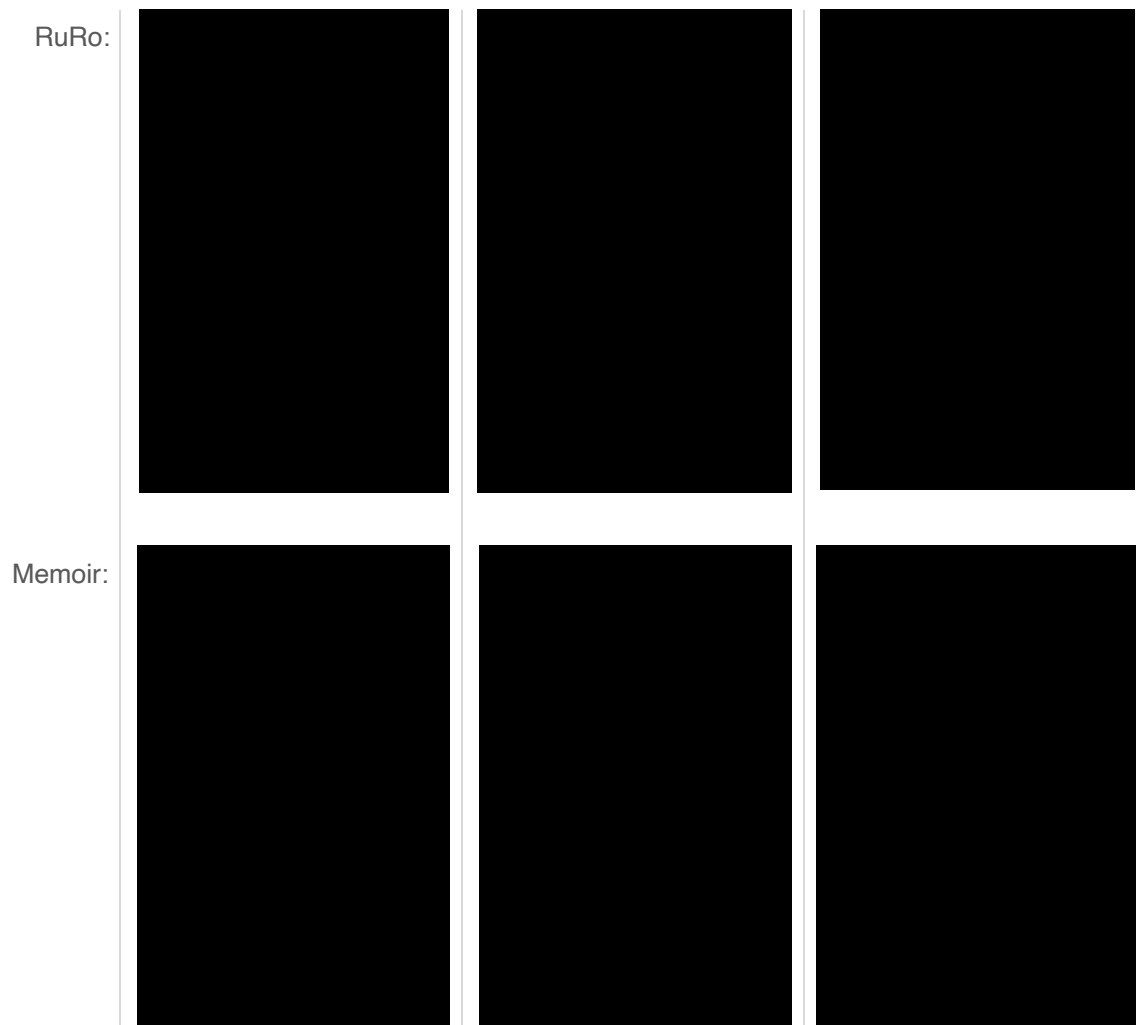


Figure 20: Rural romance fiction ('RuRo') and rural Australian memoir cover design comparisons

Similarities are apparent, for example, in the cover designs for Karly Lane's (2012) novel, *Bridie's choice*, and Mary Groves's (2011) memoir, *An outback life*—the layout and images are very alike, with each cover showing a rural station scene beneath a portrait of the book's main character. The people pictured on these two cover images are similarly dressed in rural attire, as is also the case with Rachael Treasure's (2011) novel, *The girl and the ghost-grey mare*, and Joanna Fincham's (2012) memoir, *Out of the blue*. The people in rural Australian memoir cover photographs tend to be pictured looking directly into the camera, as with Groves's and Fincham's memoirs, or otherwise going about their business on the farm, as with Maggie MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there*. In this way, the authors of rural Australian memoirs are portrayed as relatable and authentic—as ordinary farming people. RuRo cover images, however, tend to show people looking dreamily away, and the images are sometimes sexualised, such as through the use of more revealing or gendered clothing. The cover of MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there* is unconventional for a memoir in that the author is pictured from behind, much like the cover image for Tricia Stringer's (2017) novel, *Come rain or shine*. Other similarities between these two book covers include the women's straw hats and the backdrops of grassy, hilly landscapes. The golden hues and airbrushed quality of the cover image for *Come rain or shine*, and the picture of the woman in a dainty, lacy top and pristine hat present a saccharine impression of rural life. The cover of *How to get there*, however, represents a grittier version of rural Australian life through the image of MacKellar's tattered straw hat and practical clothing, and in the purposeful manner in which she is portrayed walking towards a group of sheep while carrying a horse blanket. In case any doubt remains over the genre of *How to*

*get there*, the words ‘a memoir’ are also included in small print inside brackets on the book’s cover.

More generally, the similarities between RuRo and rural Australian memoir covers mean that, at first glance, it may be hard to identify which book is a fiction title and which is memoir. As with those memoirs that are not necessarily rural Australian but present themselves as being set in ‘the outback’, both subgenres rely on the romantic appeal of the rural Australian way of life. The cover of a rural Australian memoir may initiate a potential reader’s interest, but it is, of course, the book’s contents that determine its subgenre.

## 2.5 Case studies

The various material and graphic components of a book signal to a reader that it may be a rural Australian memoir, but the narrative contents ultimately confirm the book’s subgenre classification and distinguish it from works of fiction or other types of memoir. Various elements of a book combine to authenticate the story first as memoir, then as rural Australian memoir, and to give the reader confidence in the narrator’s authority to tell that story. Autobiographical writing is a performative act (Abbott 2008, p. 141) and, in rural Australian memoir, a performative aspect of the text is that it confirms the writer’s rural Australian connection. Beyond a memoir’s rural setting and its narrator’s rural occupation, works that are consistent with the rural Australian memoir subgenre encompass a range of lived experiences, as evidenced by the narratives of the six contemporary rural Australian memoirs selected for this study: Kerry McGinnis’s (2001) *Heart country*, Dennis McIntosh’s (2008) *Beaten by a blow: a shearer’s story*, James Woodford’s (2008) *Real dirt*:

*how I beat my grid-life crisis*, Ian Parkes's (2012) *A youth not wasted*, Angela Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate: a memoir*, and Maggie MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there*.

Readers should at least feel confident from the outset that these books are each memoirs because the publishers, under the tacit terms of the autobiographical pact, present them as such. The front cover of *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001) includes, beneath the title, the elaboration: 'A Woman's Inspiring Life in the Outback' (see Figure 21 below).

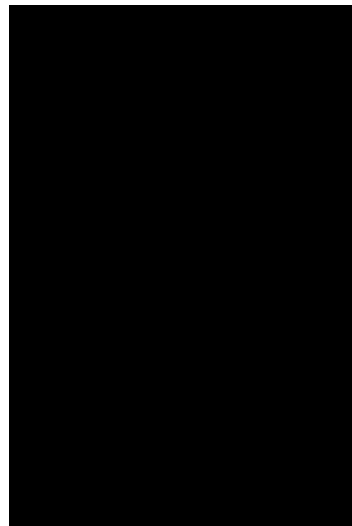


Figure 21: Kerry McGinnis's (2001) *Heart country* cover image

Furthermore, the blurb on the back cover refers to McGinnis as the book's protagonist:

After seven years on the road with her family, Kerry McGinnis is tired of the wandering life and yearns for a proper home. When her father, the irascible but loveable Mac, buys a property in Queensland's Gulf Country, it seems like she might have found one.



The subtitle of McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story* also alludes to the book being a memoir, and writer Robert Drew's endorsement on the book's cover (see Figure 16), describing it as 'The genuine article' and 'gritty and honest', promotes the work's authenticity. The blurb further confirms that it is the author's personal story by indicating that the 'shearer' in the book's subtitle is McIntosh himself:

Dennis McIntosh was always determined not to get stuck in a factory like his father, but it's only once he takes a job as a roustabout that he discovers what he really wants to be: a shearer.

The subtitle of Woodford's (2008) *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis* uses first-person pronouns, and the cover (see Figure 16) includes a photograph of the author—who by this stage had achieved recognition as an author and journalist on environmental matters—to indicate that it is a personal story. The book's blurb confirms the autobiographical nature of the story by referring to Woodford as the protagonist and by explaining:

REAL DIRT is the most personal book yet from the award-winning author of *The Wollemi Pine* and *The Secret Life of Wombats*. The true story of a sea-change, the life that led there—and what you have to go through to get where you want to be.

In the case of *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012), the inclusion of 'a memoir' on the front cover announces the genre (see Figure 22).

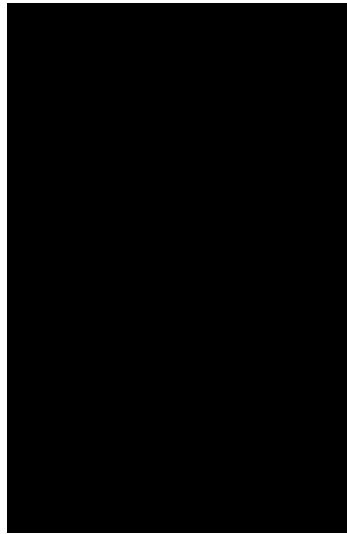


Figure 22: Ian Parkes's (2012) *A youth not wasted* cover image

Inside the front cover, the book's blurb further confirms that the story is about Ian Parkes's own experiences:

In the early 1950s, Australia was riding on the sheep's back and no-one doubted the wisdom of making a life in the wool industry, certainly not sixteen-year-old Ian Parkes.

Having grown up with his grandfather's stories about the bush, he was eager to earn his way on sheep stations in the Australian outback.

The cover of Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate: a memoir* includes a prominent photograph of the author and, immediately below the book's title, the explanation, 'A Life on the Land' (see Figure 23).

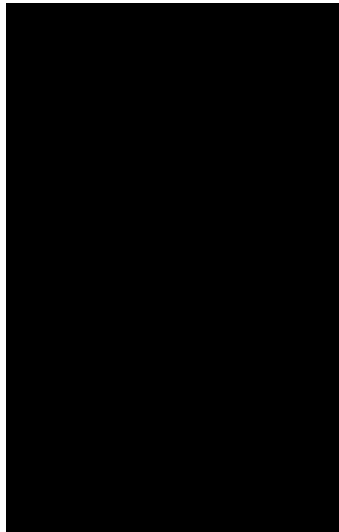


Figure 23: Angela Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate* cover image

The book's title page includes the subtitle, *A memoir*, and the blurb on the back cover reaffirms that the book contains the author's personal story:

Angela Goode grew up enchanted by farm life. Having spent long sunny days yabbing and riding horses on friends' farms, she looked set to replicate those idyllic rural times when she married Charlie, a cattle breeder.

...

*Through the Farm Gate* takes us through the pain, the joys, the fears, dedication and complexity of what it takes to live on the land. Angela's honesty and her enduring love affair with the farm shines through every page of this funny, heart-warming memoir of dreams and determination.

For MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there*, as well as including 'a memoir' in brackets on the front cover (see Figure 20), the book's blurb confirms its genre:

In Maggie MacKellar's highly acclaimed book *When It Rains*, she charted her profound grief after the loss of her husband and her mother. In this second memoir, she describes with characteristic candour and perceptiveness her move to Tasmania, for love, and the struggles and joys of settling there.

Descriptors like 'candour' (MacKellar 2014), 'honesty' (Goode 2013), 'most personal' and 'true' (Woodford 2008) in the blurbs for some of these books also reference the truthfulness and the confessional aspects that readers expect of memoir.

Having established that the author is also the protagonist for each of these respective works, the books also satisfy the autobiographical pact by being written predominantly in the first person. While the first-person narrative is not the exclusive domain of the personal memoir, it is fundamental to the genre. It also works to create a sense of intimacy between writer and reader that may be further developed through the narrative content. And it is through the narrative that a memoir establishes itself as being about rural Australian life. This is largely achieved through references to specific rural locations and through representations of events and characters that fit within the rural Australian cultural landscape. In general, the narrated events in contemporary rural Australian memoir reflect an austere lifestyle that centres around work and family, and which often involves responding to various contingencies of the rural environment. Other characters include not only people but also non-human others, with the narrator's dogs frequently being among those others.

In *Heart country*, Kerry McGinnis (2001) recounts her experiences as a young woman droving across vast areas and living on cattle stations with her father and

siblings in northern Queensland in the 1960s. The story continues from McGinnis's previous memoir, *Pieces of blue* (2000), and it follows a mostly chronologically linear narrative. In keeping with this straightforward sequential approach, the book's 23 chapters are simply headed by numbers rather than descriptive headings. For most of the early chapters, McGinnis recounts her droving family's itinerant lifestyle; then Chapter 14 of her memoir presents a pivotal event in the story when her father buys their own cattle station near the Nicholson River in north-western Queensland. As the memoir progresses, McGinnis's love of the land and her desire to settle down on the family station and to focus on her writing become increasingly apparent. The memoir starts with the family out on a droving run with their dogs and horses, and it concludes with McGinnis living with her brother and sister on the family's station and completing her studies to gain entry into university. In the closing scene, McGinnis (2001, pp. 310–11) declares that she has found 'a place to belong' and that she is 'going to be a writer'.

The other characters in McGinnis's story include her human family members—her father, sister and brothers—as well as the family's two working dogs and several stockhorses. McGinnis's narrative relies heavily on dialogue to illustrate events and to give her human characters voice; in doing so, her incorporation of colloquial expression contributes to a rural sense of place. Dry humour in representations of the everyday challenges of life on the land also paint a picture of the rural Australian character. For example, in an early scene where she and her sister, Judith, have to bathe in a cold creek, McGinnis (2001, p. 8) writes:

‘Gives you a good warm glow afterwards, though.’ Judith, her hair pinned high, towelled herself vigorously.

‘Yeah. Banging your head feels nice when you stop, too.’ I hopped on one foot to keep my clean sock out of the dirt. ‘I’m sick of cold baths and washing in a bucket. ...’

Frequent references to the billy—swinging it, putting it on, or pulling it off the fire—set a distinctly rural Australian scene, much like the use of the enamel cup in some memoir cover images, as noted earlier in this chapter.<sup>11</sup> Charles Kerry’s (1900) *Breakfast in a drover’s camp, Australia* image (see Figure 18), which shows men holding enamel cups, also includes two billies hanging in the foreground. The National Museum of Australia’s (n.d.b) ‘Symbols of Australia’ exhibition features the billy among its exhibits, with the explanation:

Australians invested it [the billy] with human qualities such as reliability, hospitality and egalitarianism – qualities that were celebrated as distinctively Australian.

The billy became a source of comfort and companionship; ultimately it became a mate.

The billy today is largely an object of nostalgia, symbolic of a way of life that has almost disappeared.

This way of life that the billy symbolises is represented through McGinnis’s memoir, and frequent references to the billy in the narrative remind readers of the story’s rural setting. In establishing that setting, the billy is introduced in the opening scene of McGinnis’s (2001, pp. 1–2) memoir:

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<sup>11</sup> A billy is a metal, sometimes enamel-coated, container that is traditionally used in Australia for boiling water on an open fire, usually for making tea.

‘Well, are you gunna swing the billy?’ Dad limped past, banging on the mudguard, and I sighed mutinously and thrust the cab door open. I was tired of that part of it – camp cooking was for boy scouts – but I got the billy off the load and threw down Dad’s folding chair while I was at it.

The introduction of the dog characters in the opening scene, when they ‘jumped off the load and began to nose around’ (McGinnis 2001, p. 1), also contributes to the overall setting and helps to establish a rural sense of place. The family’s working dogs, Larry and Red, are prominent characters in *Heart country*, with McGinnis pointing out on one occasion that ‘[a] dog made the loneliest camp homely’ (2001, p. 182). The dogs are portrayed variously as useful workers and protectors, but more often it is their companionship that McGinnis acknowledges. While McGinnis’s laconic style leaves little scope for affectionate descriptions of these dogs, their frequent inclusion in the narrative affirms their importance to her. The mere presence of the dogs is an apparent source of comfort for the McGinnises in an otherwise harsh environment. Larry’s death, which McGinnis (2001, pp. 305–6) describes towards the end of the book’s final chapter, prompts a rare digression from the narrative’s chronological flow:

Turning away, I had a memory out of childhood of all of us – Sian and Patrick, Judith and me – standing round the body of the first horse ever to die on us. Larry had been a pup then, all feet and head, and I had been about twelve.

This moment of reflection signals the imminent conclusion of McGinnis’s story. It is immediately followed in the narrative by McGinnis’s father going to live in town, leaving the younger generation of the McGinnis family to run the station.

Dennis McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story* is about his time as a shearer, including his efforts to balance the shearing lifestyle with his responsibilities as a young husband and father. A prologue foretells the emotional and physical toll that this lifestyle takes on McIntosh; otherwise, the memoir also follows a chronologically linear structure for the most part. Following the prologue, the first chapter opens with McIntosh recounting his family's move to Werribee South—a semi-rural area of Melbourne—in 1971 when he was almost 13 years old. McIntosh describes how, after a difficult time at school, he starts working in shearing sheds at the age of 17. The memoir traces his life over several years in eastern parts of Australia as he goes from one shearing shed to the next, progressing from roustabout to shearer while developing an increasingly unhealthy relationship with alcohol. The narrative is interspersed with personal events, such as the adoption of his dog, his marriage at the age of 19, and the birth of his daughter. The memoir concludes with McIntosh leaving shearing work, moving back to Melbourne to be with his family, and taking a labouring job in an underground sewer construction project. Secondary characters in McIntosh's story include his immediate family members, his shearing colleagues, and his working dog, Smokey. The early part of his story, which deals with McIntosh's adolescence and his introduction to farming life, includes a range of non-human animals—mainly horses and dairy cows. Otherwise, and given that his story is mainly about shearing life, the narrative includes frequent references to sheep.

McIntosh's (2008) story is delivered as 50 chapters with headings that signpost the main setting or event covered in each. Most headings refer to the names of different stations—such as the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters, which are headed



‘Warrigal Creek Station’, ‘Lal Lal Station’ and ‘Ulonga Station’—where McIntosh works as a roustabout or shearer. The first few chapters of the memoir, which are followed by 13 consecutive chapters with station names in the headings, give clues to McIntosh’s work ethic and inclination towards rural work through the headings ‘Onion picking’, ‘A good worker’ and ‘A working life’. Otherwise, successions of chapters headed by station names in McIntosh’s memoir allude to the monotony, repetitiveness and relentlessness of shearing work, and also to its nomadic nature. Smokey is introduced as a pup in the first of these chapters headed by a station name—‘Warrigal Creek Station’ (2008, pp. 28–46)—when McIntosh describes adopting him on a weekend visit home. Subsequent narrative includes frequent depictions of McIntosh and Smokey travelling together to various sheep stations for McIntosh’s work. The occasional chapter that is not headed by a station name interrupts the monotony and often signals a critical event in McIntosh’s story. For example, the 17th chapter is headed ‘The church’ and is a very short one—less than one page—in which McIntosh (2008, p. 152) dispassionately recounts his wedding. Towards the end of the memoir, a chapter headed ‘Smokey’ (2008, pp. 243–5) describes Smokey’s death following McIntosh’s move back to the city; significantly, no other chapter title refers to the name of a living being. Highlighting the importance of McIntosh’s relationship with his dog, Smokey is the only character—human or non-human—to which a chapter in *Beaten by a blow* is explicitly dedicated in this way. The narrative in this chapter also makes a rare digression from the otherwise chronological structure of his memoir in that McIntosh (2008, p. 244) includes references to his earlier experiences with Smokey:

I thought back to when I first saw him in the litter with his mum; to him licking my blistered hands at Lal Lal Station; sleeping in the back of the car on long trips; finding me in the bush at Brewarrina; waiting for me when I got out of the slammer in Bourke.

McIntosh's reflection on his life with Smokey and the different places they went together signifies not only their strong relationship but also reinforces the association of dogs with rural life. The depiction of Smokey's death (which is discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis) is a culminating point in the narrative, signalling McIntosh's deep despair and his transition from rural to city life.

James Woodford's (2008) *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis*, which is about the author's quest to create a sustainable farm on the New South Wales south coast, is presented in three parts plus a preface. The parts are simply labelled 'Part I', 'Part II' and 'Part III', without further labelled chapters. Part I, although it covers a period when Woodford lived and worked mainly in the city, reveals Woodford's growing appreciation for the natural environment. That first part opens with Woodford explaining, 'I didn't know how to spell the word environment until I was in my early twenties' (2008, p. 11), and it concludes with an unhappily married Woodford having bought his first rural property—a 'cow paddock' (2008, p. 73)—and setting up a makeshift, occasional residence there. Part II sees Woodford finalise his divorce, move to a rented home in an isolated part of the Southern Tablelands and, with his new partner, buy a much larger rural property on which he plans to build their sustainable home. This second part concludes with a crucial turning point in Woodford's story: the death of his family's dog, Casuarina. Casuarina's death, which Woodford blames himself for (and which is also discussed

in more detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis), provides Woodford with the impetus to start building the sustainable home and farm—a venture that becomes the focus of Part III of his memoir. In the process of learning to live off and with the land, McIntosh also expresses his growing awareness of the harm that European settlers have caused to it and of the nation's shameful history in the treatment of the traditional owners of the land. He describes, for example, visiting the Land Titles Office and viewing a computer screen on which was displayed a map showing the boundaries of his and his neighbours' properties: 'Those millions of little boxes that have blanketed the continent – if Aboriginal dispossession is represented by any one symbol it is surely the rectangle' (Woodford 2008, p. 228). This observation by Woodford is consistent with an underlying theme of his memoir, which is about respecting the land and those who inhabit it.

The characters in *Real dirt* include Woodford's first wife, present partner, four children, and two dogs. Various other animals, including kangaroos, cattle, chickens and rabbits, are also referred to in the memoir, particularly in relation to Woodford's sustainable farming lifestyle. The dogs—first Casuarina, a blue heeler, and then Solly, a border collie—are important characters in his story, even though they are given relatively small amounts of space in the narrative. Woodford only introduces Casuarina towards the end of Part II when he recounts the series of events leading to her accidental death, but it is also at this point that Woodford reflects on Casuarina's life with his family. Woodford (2008, pp. 125–8) describes Casuarina as 'an insane, hyperactive blue heeler' and 'the lunatic dog', but also as 'this creature who had loved me, would love me, more than anything else'. Following Casuarina's death and the move to the new property, Woodford's family adopts Solly, who is,

according to Woodford (2008, pp. 171–2), ‘as hairy as Chewbacca the Wookie and as smart as any creature I have ever met’. Photographs included in Woodford’s memoir, such as those provided below (Figure 24), show the two dogs at home with other family members. In telling his own story, Woodford pays tribute to these dogs’ individual personalities and their importance to him and his family while acknowledging their otherness as ‘creatures’. The memoir’s cover image also features Solly alongside the book’s author (see Figure 16).

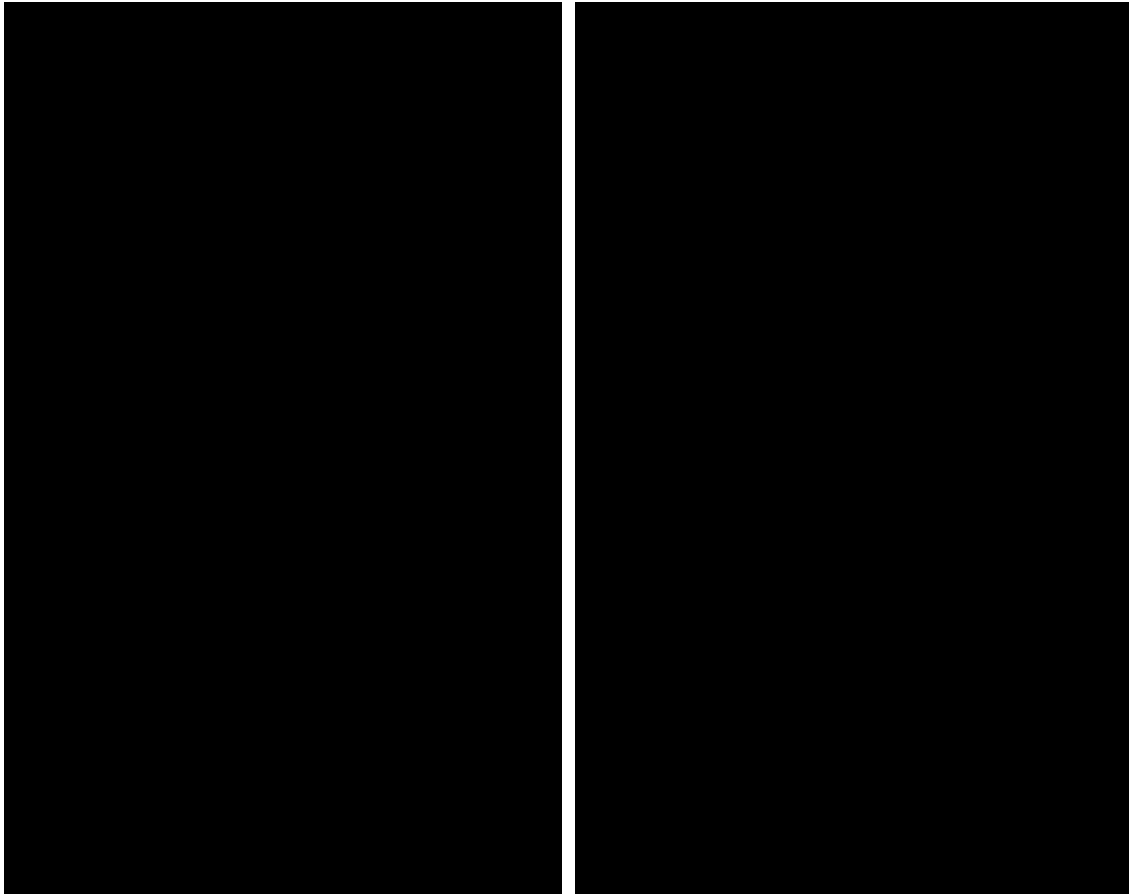


Figure 24: Photographs of Casuarina, Solly and others (Woodford 2008)

*A youth not wasted* is Ian Parkes's (2012) memoir about his experiences as a teenager and young man working on sheep stations in Western Australia and South Australia. The book also includes a prologue and epilogue which emphasise Parkes's ongoing connection with the land. The main part of his story starts in 1949 when, aged fifteen, Parkes leaves his family's home in Perth to begin working as a jackaroo at a merino stud in South Australia. The text comprises 26 chapters with headings that variously refer to people (such as '2. Len Boothby'), to places (such as '6. The dominion of Mount Augustus'), or to other key characters or events in Parkes's story (such as '11. Top dogs and great horses' or '21. New challenges'). The chapters are organised into five parts labelled with the different roles that Parkes performed while working on stations: 'Part one – Jackeroo', 'Part two – Stockman', 'Part three – Station hand', 'Part four – Head stockman' and 'Part five – Overseer'. Parkes's story follows his progress through those different station jobs, his transition to adulthood and, ultimately, his move back to the city.

As with many coming-of-age stories, the author's close family members are integral to the narrative; their influence on his desire to work on sheep stations is made clear in the opening chapter when he states 'my big dream was to emulate my grandfather and my uncle and do what my father had always regretted not doing' and '[a]nother of my dreams was to be a horseman like Jack [Parkes's uncle]' (Parkes 2012, p. 13). Various other human and non-human characters are introduced as his story progresses, including two dogs—his father's kelpie, Smokey, then his own kelpie–border collie cross, Jiff.

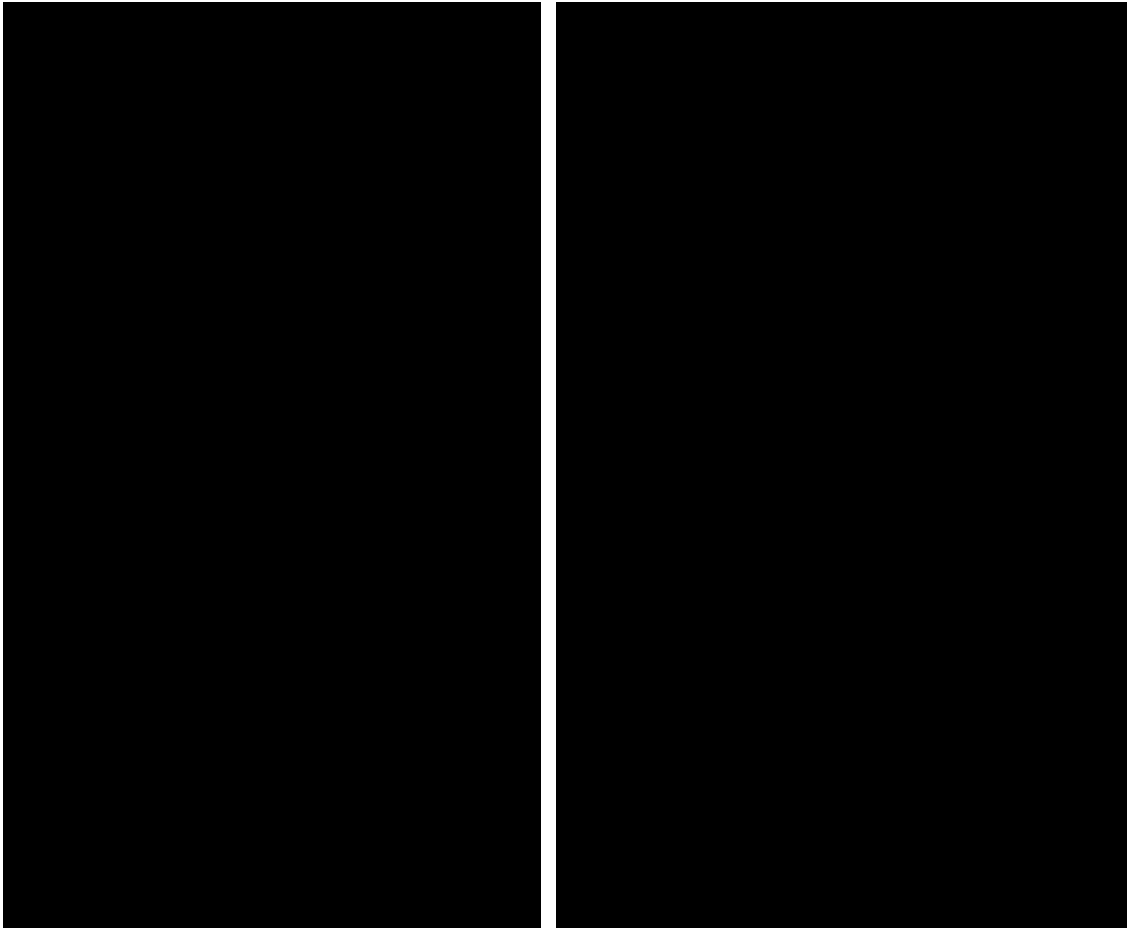


Figure 25: Photographs of Jiff, Smokey and others (Parkes 2012)

Parkes's memoir reads not only as a coming-of-age story and a tribute to the Australian bush, but also as a rejection of the shame that, according to Dalziell (1999), pervades much of Australian autobiography. Starting with the book's title, Parkes defies suggestions that his time spent living and working in the bush was a 'wasted' youth. In the memoir's prologue, Parkes (2012, p. 4) recalls the deep connection that he developed with the land:

When I listened to the silence and the stillness of the country, there was communication. ... What the country says is beyond words. You feel it – or you don't.

So I discovered something that I was not looking for, something profoundly important and beautiful. How grateful I am that I listened. And when people ask me why I wasted my youth working on sheep stations in the vast Australian outback, all I can say is that my youth was not wasted. It was not – wasted.

The memoir includes images of Smokey and Jiff among an assortment of photographs of animals, family members, friends, colleagues and places referred to in the narrative, as well as of the author himself. Some examples of these are provided above at Figure 25. Parkes's inclusion of pictures of Smokey and Jiff within his more extensive gallery of photographs highlights these dogs' significance to him and to his related experiences.

Angela Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate: a memoir* spans the author's life, from her childhood in the mid 20th century up to the time of writing her memoir when she is in her 60s. It focuses, though, on Goode's life on the land following her move from the city when she is in her early 30s to join her partner, a cattle stud manager, on a farm in south-east South Australia. Secondary characters include her partner, children and dogs. Goode's memoir comprises 37 chapters, simply numbered without additional subheadings. While the narrative follows a mostly chronological structure, Goode occasionally elaborates on and provides additional context to various events through reminiscences and reflections on earlier experiences. One such event involves the death of her border collie, Lucy, which Goode recounts near the middle of her memoir. Prior to this, Lucy is depicted accompanying Goode as she travels to different places and then moving to the farm.

A central theme to Goode's memoir is the city–rural divide, and, together, Goode and Lucy navigate around and across that divide. In recounting Lucy's death, Goode (2013, pp. 182–3) reflects on their relationship and expresses her gratitude for Lucy loving her even when she (Goode) 'was sometimes a distant, racing blur' and for teaching her 'how powerful the bond between dog and human is'. Goode (2013, p. 184) goes on to state: 'Life with Lucy has softened me up to the power of a dog to pull heart strings'. Goode apparently draws on the lesson that Lucy left her with—about the power of the human–dog bond—to produce the popular book, *Great working dog stories* (comps Goode & Hayes 1990). Goode (2013, pp. 190–4) credits that book with convincing her publisher of 'the power of working dogs to sell books' and, consequently, with allowing city dwellers to gain a greater appreciation for rural life and the dog's role in it.

Maggie MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there* is about the author's move to Tasmania to live on a sheep farm with her new partner and, in particular, about MacKellar's adjustment to her new home and relationship. Her partner and her children are included among the important secondary characters in her story, as are her dogs Duke and Dusty—a corgi and a labrador respectively—who appear at various points throughout the narrative. *How to get there* comprises ten chapters, plus a prologue and epilogue. The numbered chapters include one-word titles like '1. Rain', '2. Stone', '3. Earth', '4. Solitude' and '5. Fleece'. Each chapter is preceded by a short passage in which MacKellar examines her inner self and her relationship with her new partner, adopting an unconventional use of the second person and italics to address herself. For example: '*You wish there was a handbook for second relationships. You wish you could stop comparing him in your head,*



*weighing him against a ghost*' (MacKellar 2014, p. 145). In this way, a biography of a relationship is interspersed with a personal memoir that is otherwise written in the more conventional first person. The use of second-person narrative also deepens the sense of intimacy for the reader as it gives the impression of MacKellar sharing a private internal conversation.

In the book's 'Acknowledgements', MacKellar (2014, p. 241) refers to her memoir, *How to get there*, as 'a mud map', with 'the moments along the way' being the 'landmarks' that show how to reach the destination. Throughout the memoir, as she narrates her experiences and growing sense of contentment, Duke the corgi and Dusty the labrador are part of her story, and narrative involving them is intertwined with narrative about her children, partner and new home. Key events in MacKellar's story often involve the dogs, such as in the opening chapter, where she describes travelling to Tasmania to live, and Duke and Dusty are depicted as her travelling companions. Duke's inherent skills as a sheep dog also become important to MacKellar in her new home and relationship, as their working partnership helps her to find a sense of purpose and usefulness on the farm. In a closing scene, MacKellar acknowledges the company of the dogs, among other things, as contributing to her feeling that she may have found the place where she belongs. MacKellar's memoir also includes a dog in the cover image (see Figure 20).

## 2.6 Setting the scene

In each of these memoirs, frequent and prominent references to rural Australian places, occupations or associated elements cast the author as someone with direct experience of rural Australian life. The inclusion of maps in the front matter of some

of the books further help to guide the reader to the rural locations referred to in narratives. For example, the map included in *Real dirt* (see Figure 26) helps the reader to visualise Woodford’s farm, its location, and the agricultural activities that take place on it. The map from *Heart country* (Figure 27) shows the remoteness of the places depicted in McGinnis’s story—including ‘Bowthorn’, the McGinnis family’s station, located towards the top left of the mapped area. And the maps from *A youth not wasted* (Figure 28) indicate the various rural places where Parkes travels and lives during his time working on sheep stations.



Figure 26: Map included in *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008)

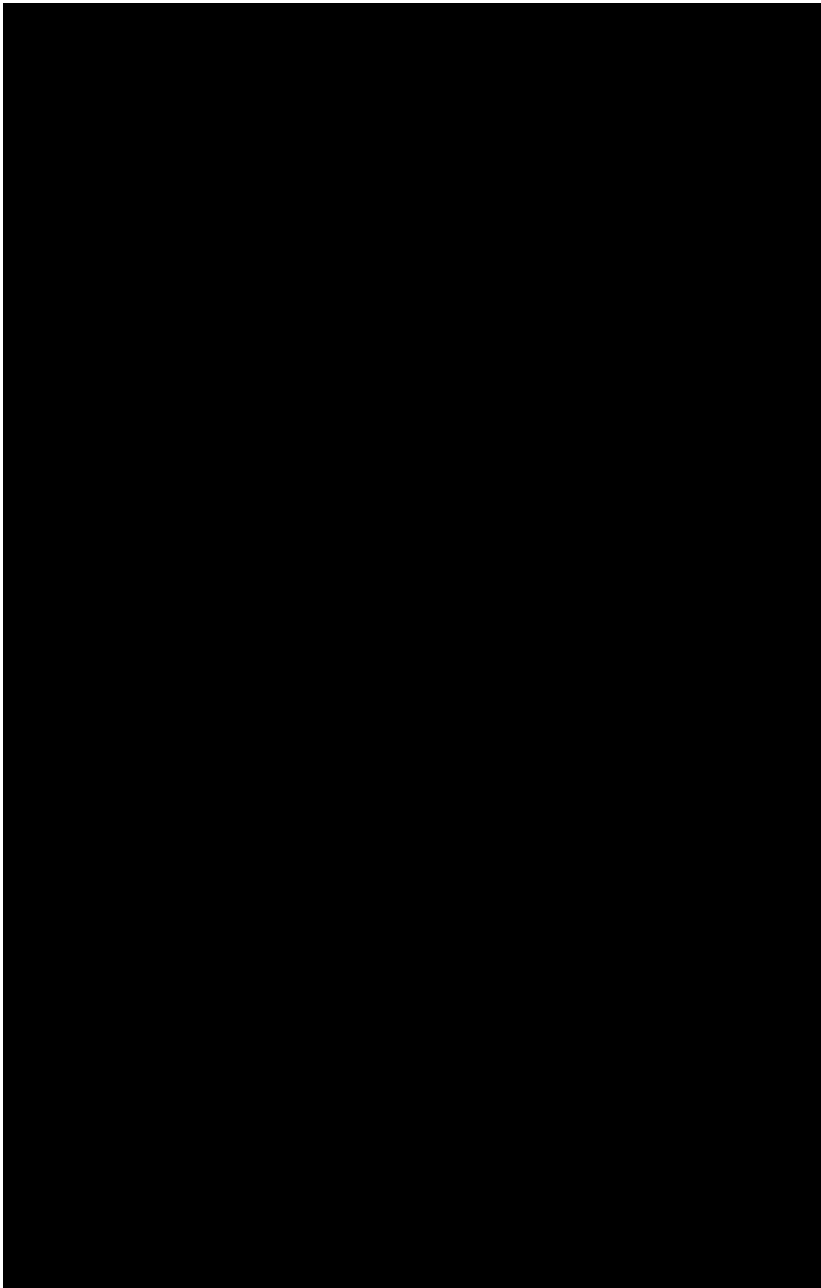


Figure 27: Map included in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001)



Figure 28: Maps included in *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012)

Parkes's (2012) use of station job titles as headings for each part of his memoir, and McIntosh's (2008) use of station names as chapter titles, also offer prominent signals of these authors' rural Australian lived experiences. The chapter titles in *How to get there* provide more subtle references to the rural way of life depicted in MacKellar's (2014) story; for example, the first chapter title refers to 'rain', a precious resource for farmers in Australia. A reliance on water for their livelihoods combined with the propensity for drought conditions in Australia is the reality for many rural Australians; therefore, MacKellar's reference to rain in the first chapter of her memoir provides a link to rural Australian concerns, such as a preoccupation with water supply. Also, in this way, depictions of drought and bushfires in some of the memoirs help to situate the narratives in rural Australian settings, especially as these hazardous events are more strongly associated with the bush than with cities. *Though the farm gate* (Goode 2013), for example, includes extensive narrative about drought and its devastating impacts on Goode's farming community in 2005 and 2006. Goode (2013, pp. 275–86) writes of the physical and mental exhaustion that rural people deal with during drought, of the expense of having to handfeed stock with hay bales, of how all the nearby farmers are 'chasing diminishing supplies of grain and hay and towing plumes of dust through the paddocks', and of 'the daily pain of seeing our animals vacuuming empty paddocks for remnant threads of dried grass'. Goode's (2013, pp. 73–4) depiction of bushfire threatening her farm also highlights the vulnerability of inhabitants—human and non-human—of rural locations:

How will I protect my baby and what will the school do to look after the big girls? No-one is around to tell me what to do in an emergency. Charlie went off after lunch in answer to the call for volunteers. I hear nothing from him all day.

...

When he returns at dark ... He can hardly speak for tiredness and sadness. He has spent the day shooting burnt livestock, ending their pain where they have mounded themselves against fences trying to escape the approaching blowtorch of flame. ... Men and machinery from all over the district bury rotting corpses for weeks.

In *Heart country*, McGinnis (2001, p. 284) describes bushfires as being 'an annual summer event'. McGinnis's (2001, pp. 290–91) depiction of trying to fight a fire alongside her siblings exemplifies the tenacity of people who live in the bush, and also the overwhelming nature of the threats that they sometimes face:

It was back-breaking toil. We worked spread out in a line within sight of each other, shovelling earth onto flames, scraping and digging to clear a break, whacking the back of the blade over break-away blazes, resting when we must, then shovelling again. ...

It was slow but effective, until the wind came.

... It would have taken an ocean to stop it.

In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, p. 93) describes fighting a fire caused by a Dutch colleague who discarded his cigarette in long grass, apparently unaware of the dangers of the rural Australian environment:

It was as if the grass was lying in wait. The speed with which it ignited shocked me. By the time I reacted and ran to the fire, the wind had caught it and it was spreading fast. ...

Pieter said, 'Why we don't let it just burn?'

'Because it'll burn the whole bloody place,' I screamed.

For the next two hours we fought the fire.

Given the well-known associations of drought and fire with the rural Australian environment, depictions of these events read as authentic experiences of people who live on the land.

Beyond the occupational and locational identifiers in rural Australian memoir, a common thread that ties these six stories together is the presence of non-human animals in their narratives. The inclusion of non-human animals in these stories and the range of animal species represented—encompassing companion animals, stock animals, other introduced species as well as those who are native to Australia—are indicative of the rural Australian environment and way of life. O'Sullivan (2011, p. 2) points out that, with the increasing urbanisation of countries like Australia, cities are becoming 'human-only spaces' where non-human animals are practically invisible. Writing from an urban-dweller's perspective, O'Sullivan (2011, p. 1) declares: 'The animals who become meat must come from somewhere, yet I never see, hear, smell or even sense them'. Even companion animals, O'Sullivan (2011, p. 2) points out, are subject to controls, such as laws around animal keeping, that further reinforce an ideology of cities being places for humans only. The life stories of rural Australians are distinguished by the abundance of non-human animals in their narratives, with the dog being consistently the most visible of these. The presence of dogs in these narratives, and their portrayals as workers, companions

and family members, points to the importance of dogs in the lives of rural Australians.

The rural Australian working dog is widely regarded with affection and admiration. Stemming from the nation's rural heritage and the dog's role in settlers' agricultural undertakings, the working dog is even seen as an icon in Australian culture. Just as dogs have long been integral to life on the land, they also appear to be integral to autobiographical accounts of life on the land. Jeannie Gunn's (1908) *We of the Never-Never*<sup>12</sup>, which is possibly the earliest commercially published rural Australian memoir, includes dog characters, as do more recent 20th-century examples of autobiographical depictions of rural Australian life. For instance, Patsy Adam-Smith's (1964, p. 123) *Hear the train blow: an Australian childhood* includes a dog called Nip, who 'was a great snake-catcher and rarely a week went by that he didn't bring one home'; and in A.B. Facey's (1981, p. 19) *A fortunate life*, the author's uncle buys a kangaroo dog—'a good dog [that] would kill a kangaroo, then come back to whoever took it out hunting'. In Jill Ker Conway's (1989) *The road from Coorain*, dogs are also referred to in various scenes. For example, Conway (1989, p. 31) describes how '[t]he sheepdogs sat on top of their kennels gazing at the water swirling by' when the family farm is flooded. And, while recounting how the consequences of severe drought force her move to the city, Conway (1989, p. 79) explains that she mentally prepares to leave her country home 'by trying to engrave on [her] memory images that would not fade'—images that include 'the dogs [she] loved best'. Such examples of narrative involving dogs in rural Australian settings do more than simply depict the dogs' roles or behaviours, or people's perceptions of

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<sup>12</sup> Published under the name of Mrs Aeneas Gunn.



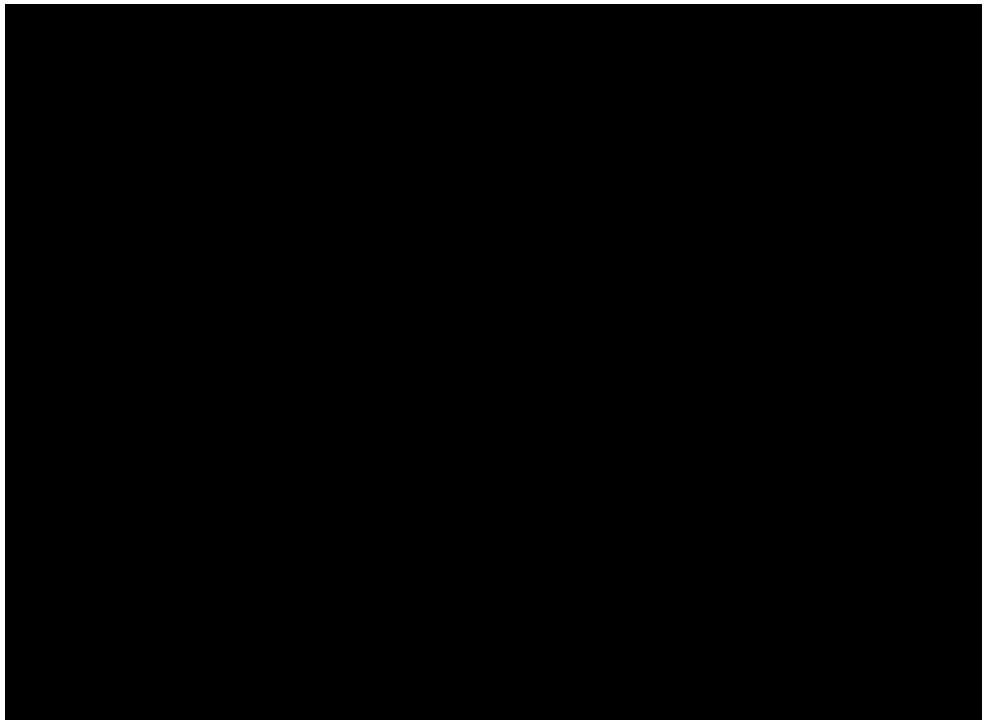
these dogs—references to snakes, kangaroo hunting and weather-related crises also allude to some of the potential hazards, hardships and challenges of the land. The adventure and danger depicted in these scenes involving dogs may also contribute to the allure of stories about rural Australian life.

Sara Henderson's (1992) bestselling memoir *From strength to strength*, which arguably confirmed a market for the rural Australian memoir, also includes narrative involving dogs. In one particularly memorable scene, Henderson (1992, pp. 135–6) describes an outing to the river with her children and dogs:

Marlee's dog, Shad, was swimming for shore. Marlee was calling frantically, Bonnie was crying. Behind Shad was a large crocodile closing in fast. ...

I charged down the riverbank, branding iron raised. Shad was swimming for her life, literally, into Marlee's arms. ... Marlee grabbed Shad's front paws and heaved as the croc snapped at the dog's back legs. I brought the branding iron down across the croc's snout.

The depicted encounter with a crocodile firmly situates Henderson's story in remote northern Australia, while Henderson's and her children's determined rescue of their dog in such dangerous circumstances highlights not only their combined fortitude but also the importance of the dog to their family. *From strength to strength* (Henderson 1992) is complemented by photographs, such as the following image (Figure 29) which suggests that Henderson's dogs are considered to be part of the family.



‘Family photo, including the dogs, in front of the homestead, early 1980s. Me, Charlie, Danielle, Marlee and Bonnie sitting with the dogs.’ (Henderson 1992)

Figure 29: Photograph from Henderson’s (1992) *From strength to strength*

Relatively soon after the success of Henderson’s book, the memoirs of several other rural Australians were published—popular examples from the late 20th century, again with dogs in the narrative, are Terry Underwood’s (1999) *In the middle of nowhere* (first published in hardback in 1998 by Bantam, Sydney) and Kerry McGinnis’s (2000) *Pieces of blue* (first published in 1999, as previously noted). As well as being included in various parts of Underwood’s story, dogs feature in some of the photographs of people and other animals that complement the narrative; the following examples (Figure 30) include ‘Precious the snake dog’ (Underwood 1999). Underwood (1999, p. 289) describes Precious’s snake-catching abilities in a scene involving one of the station workers:

Frankie loved Precious too, and reckoned he wouldn't mind a dog like her, especially after she had saved his life. He had almost trodden on the giant king brown lying in the shadow of a fuel drum, when the rotund blue heeler had pounced, attacked and killed. I discovered the triumphant dog racing around the house dragging from her mouth the ripped and bloodied reptile as though she was enacting some kind of a victory ceremony.

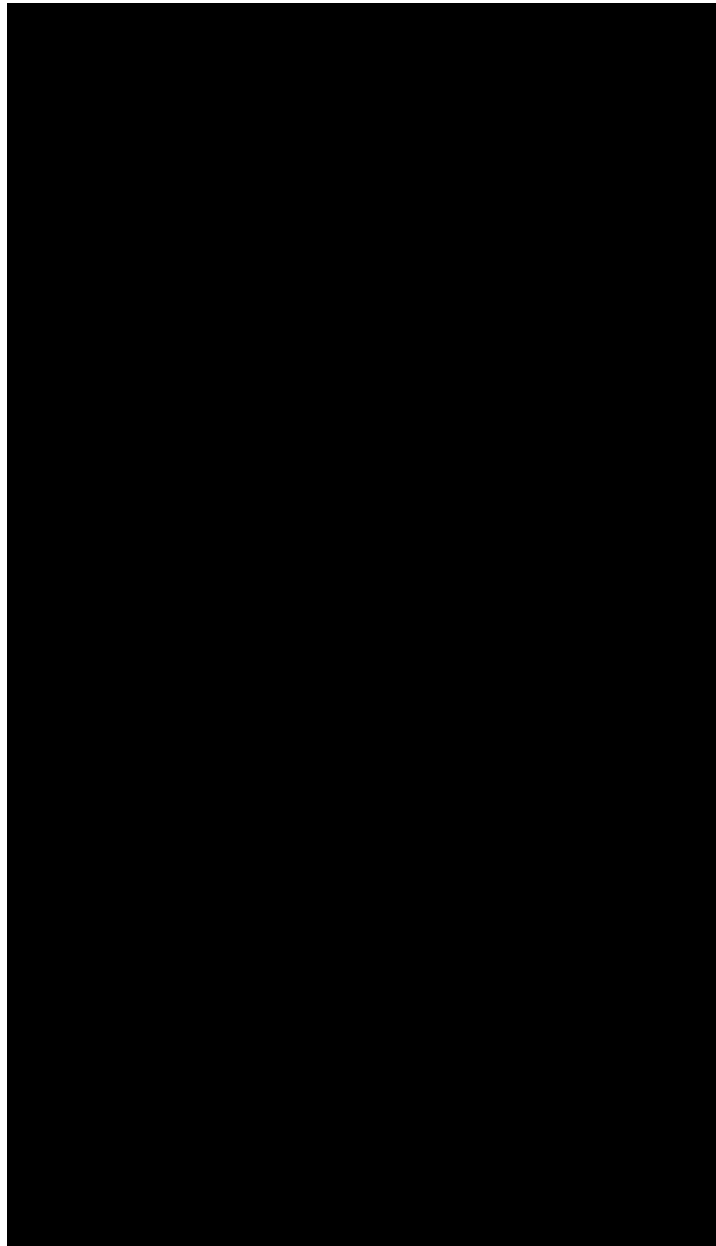


Figure 30: Photographs from Underwood's (1999) *In the middle of nowhere*

McGinnis's (2000) story also recognises dogs as being integral to rural life. Of note, McGinnis (2000, p. 76) opens the scene in which the family adopts Larry the Smithfield collie by stating her father's belief that 'No camp ... was complete without a dog'. However, a later scene in *Pieces of blue* (McGinnis 2000, pp. 270–1) in which Larry and another dog, Biddy, intervene when a stallion is attacking McGinnis's brother, Patrick, illustrates how rural life can be hazardous—even fatal—for dogs:

Larry got a hind leg; Biddy, being faster, a front one. The pain and weight of the attack broke the stallion's stride, and when Patrick hit him again he threw it in.

Biddy streaked at his head – you couldn't teach her not to – and he stabbed, lightning-quick with his forefoot, tumbling her into the grass as he galloped away. ...

... she lay sprawled, the snarl still in place, her tough skull shattered.

This first memoir of McGinnis's includes photographs that mostly feature people and horses, but also offer evidence of the dog being part of the family's droving life. In the following photograph showing some of McGinnis's family members (Figure 31), a dog is partially visible to the right of the image, just below a horse's head. Scenes involving dogs in these earlier rural Australian memoirs help to situate the narratives in the rural Australian environment by illustrating the challenges and dangers specific to that environment. The image of rural Australia as a hazardous and harsh environment also appeals to romantic ideas of the bush and the toughness of those who live there. Just as the rural Australian memoir has remained popular into the 21st century, contemporary versions of this literary form, which include

dogs in the narratives, help to perpetuate this image of the rural Australian way of life.

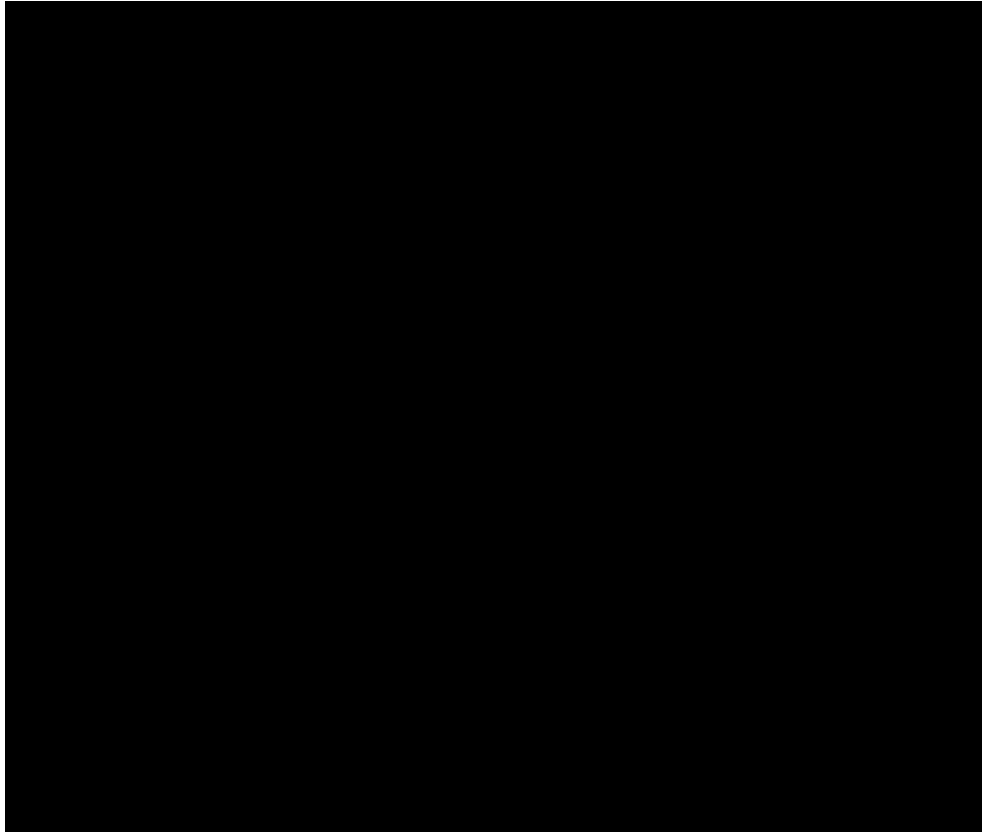


Figure 31: Photograph from McGinnis's (2000) *Pieces of blue*

The expression of sentiment in relation to a dog is a particular aspect of the rural Australian autobiographical narrative that counterbalances the often harsh interactions with others and the environment, and this is evident in the contemporary rural Australian memoirs chosen for this study. The idea, such as that put forward by Garber (1997, p. 42), that ‘it is the dog that makes us human’ is exemplified in these stories, as the narratives about dogs help to humanise the narrators. Depictions of key events involving dogs provide opportunities for introspection and reflection,

sometimes with a confessional element. For example, the accidental death of Casuarina in *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008), which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis (specifically, 3.5 Subjective affection), is a scene in which the narrator's regrets and self-examination are evident. Woodford (2008, pp. 128–9), who blames himself for the incident that caused the dog's death, writes:

It was the kind of devastating blow that leaves you changed. My grief accentuated by guilt, I was chastened in the most humbling way. My anger at my ex-wife evaporated, my moping about being stuck in the wilderness in a half-powered house evaporated, my anxiety about my father evaporated. It was my self pity that had wrought this sadness on my family: it was my failure to control my feelings that had killed the dog.

Scenes depicting dogs' deaths are included in several of the case study memoirs—specifically, in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001), *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008), *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008) and *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013). In each case, the depiction of the dog's death is accompanied by the narrator's reflection on earlier experiences, which also provides the reader with greater insight into the narrator's character.

As with memoir more broadly and with earlier examples of rural Australian memoir, some contemporary rural Australian memoirs include photographs as part of a book's contents. These photographs contribute to the narrative voice, helping to establish the narrator's identity while providing a point of connection between writer and reader. They also help to affirm the identity of secondary characters and to give a sense of the rural settings in which the narratives take place. Given the supposed ordinariness of the people who are the subjects of rural Australian memoirs, there is

a ‘family album’ feel to photographs included in these memoirs. The inclusion of dogs in the selected photographs create a similar effect to that described by Huff (2014, pp. 134–5) in relation to Jon Katz’s use of dog photographs in *Soul of a dog*, in that they have the potential to ‘foster family resemblance and nurturing’ and to ‘function as speaking likenesses’ that ‘seduce the viewer’. As noted, *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008) and *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012) each include photographs, such as those provided at Figure 24 and Figure 25. The photographs help to authenticate Woodford’s and Parkes’s stories by showing the reader images of the people, animals and places referred to in their stories, and by depicting the ruggedness and isolation of their memoirs’ rural Australian settings. Photographic representations may contribute to and conform to a cultural identity and a geographical identity, with the ‘who’ and ‘what’ represented in the photographs providing important information about the narrator’s identity. Brett’s (2011, p. 3) idea that ‘[t]he country and the city are cultural as well as geographic locations’ is pertinent to the use of photographs in rural Australian memoirs. The ‘cultural location’ of rural Australia is a key aspect of the appeal of the rural Australian memoir, and photographs help to reinforce ideas around rural Australian culture. The photographs included with rural Australians’ autobiographical stories are part of a selective retelling of events. Where photographs are incorporated in rural Australian memoirs, dogs—typically working dogs—also reliably appear in these. The photographs of dogs in the memoirs, as well as narrative about dogs, reinforces the integral parts that dogs play—as workers, companions and family members—in the lives of rural Australians.

Just as dogs may make the narrator seem more human—more real and relatable—they also help to make a memoir rural Australian. Beyond the defining features of the rural Australian memoir subgenre, narrative involving dogs helps to engender qualities that further distinguish the subgenre, both within the overarching memoir genre and from the more general Australian memoir. A significant trait of the contemporary rural Australian memoir involves a seeming inevitability by which dogs are included in the narratives, with the narrators' dogs invariably featuring among the secondary characters. This relational aspect, involving dogs as relational others, is a key element of rural Australian memoirs that is explored in depth in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

## 2.7 Conclusion

The rural Australian memoir subgenre is defined by its adherence to autobiographical writing conventions as well as by the rural Australian settings and occupations depicted in the narratives. Yet, as products of the publishing industry, rural Australian memoirs have other common features, such as the use of certain types of cover images to affirm a memoir's rural setting and its author's rural credentials. Dogs are also found in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs, such that narrative about working dogs may arguably be among the defining criteria for the rural Australian memoir subgenre. Stories about dogs in rural Australian settings nurture and respond to ideas about Australian identity and its association with the bush. Through narrative involving dogs, the rural Australian memoir subgenre is further distinguished from Australian memoir more generally.



As the rural way of life becomes more elusive in an increasingly urbanised society, stories set in rural Australia help to perpetuate and foster a national identity associated with the bush. Rural Australian memoirs appeal to reader's interest in, and their identification with, this way of life that is becoming increasingly inaccessible. As the Australian population becomes more urbanised, stories about the lives of rural Australians appear to be gaining in popularity. These stories perpetuate a cultural identity that is relatable and attractive to many readers, and they recognise the importance and prevalence of dogs in people's lives and in the rural Australian way of life.

## Chapter 3 The dog other

### 3.1 Introduction

The notion of species is relevant to the ways that different beings exist in the world and in relation to each other. Classifying different animals according to species definitions can help people to understand how other animals live and, in effect, how people live with them. However, anthropocentric ideas that place humans above all other animal species also encourage the treatment of non-human animals according to the perceived worth of their species. In Western culture, customs, laws and institutions that objectify, subordinate or subjugate non-human animals—for example, zoos, because they include only non-humans among their exhibits (Tuan 1984, pp. 79–80)—can reinforce humans’ feelings of superiority over other animals. Other mediums such as literary works, whether or not they include references to non-human animals, may offer further reinforcement. The term ‘speciesism’ was introduced in 1970 by Ryder (2010) to question the discrimination against non-human animals based on their species and to protest against experimenting on animals. Yet, as Singer (1991) observes, speciesist practices and attitudes had permeated a range of human activities for centuries, and such practices and attitudes were still being maintained towards the end of the 20th century. Narratives about non-human animals in contemporary rural Australian memoirs display elements of speciesism that have persisted into the 21st century. Farming practices that use different animal species’ attributes for human ends ultimately depend on maintaining divisions between human and non-human species.

The anthropocentric view of ‘animals-as-other’—including the notion that all non-human animals are inferior to humans—is, according to Taylor (2013, p. 10), ‘pervasive’ in Western culture. Life writing scholarship offers scope to explore and challenge perceptions of human superiority in a multispecies world by considering memoir writers’ portrayed relationships with and views of non-human animals. Among the secondary characters—the relational others—in the rural Australian memoirs selected for this study are various non-human animals, including dogs. The domestic dog belongs to a separate species—*Canis familiaris*—but lives closely and interdependently with members of the human species—*Homo sapiens*. Given the proximity with which people and dogs live, it is fitting that the dog—this non-human other—would appear as a character in people’s autobiographical narratives, as they do in McGinnis’s (2001) *Heart country*, McIntosh’s (2008) *Beaten by a blow*, Woodford’s (2008) *Real dirt*, Parkes’s (2012) *A youth not wasted*, Goode’s (2013) *Through the farm gate*, and MacKellar’s (2014) *How to get there*.

While dog characters may feature in these memoirs, they are far from being the only non-human others in the narratives of rural Australians. The rural locations in which the selected memoirs are set are largely defined by their landscapes and vast spaces, and the rural way of life involves coexisting with a range of animal species that inhabit those spaces. Yet, given that these memoirs are focused on the human narrator’s own life experiences, anthropocentrism prevails in the ways that the rural settings are depicted. The memoirs serve as case studies by which an ethnocentric, anthropocentric hierarchy of species can be observed in the portrayals of different animals, including people and dogs, in rural Australian contexts. They provide accounts of the dog’s status in rural Australian society, conveyed within the

framework of the personal life narrative and therefore from a necessarily human-centred perspective. It is, arguably, unavoidable that the various animals are portrayed from the human's perspective, within the human's view of the world. From this human view, it would seem that the dog is commonly situated towards the top of the species hierarchy, just below humans. These narratives offer opportunities to study human portrayals of dogs and how those portrayals reflect perceptions of dogs, generally, and the dog's place within the lives of rural Australians.

### 3.2 Family and friends

Dogs and people have lived together for thousands of years. An 'obligatory symbiotic relationship' (Coppinger & Coppinger 2002, p. 281) between humans and dogs, which is reflected in the proximity with which the two species live and the interdependence between them, distinguishes *Canis familiaris*—the domestic dog—from other canid species. The dog is the preferred pet of many people across a range of circumstances and for different reasons. In Australia, various state and territory laws are designed to ensure the harmonious coexistence of people and pets. The evolution of such laws increasingly recognises dogs' and other non-human animals' sentience and their individual needs as well as Australian society's growing appreciation for and understanding of these non-human others. The Australian Capital Territory's *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, for example, was amended in 2019 to explicitly acknowledge non-human animals as 'sentient beings' with 'intrinsic value', who are deserving of 'compassion' and 'quality of life'. The amended law, which promotes dogs and other non-human animals as being important members of society and as belonging in a multi-species society, reflects a cognisance of a

growing body of knowledge in the field of human–animal studies, including understandings of animal sentience. It recognises the closeness with which people and other animals live, and it implies a positive shift in societal attitudes regarding the treatment of non-human animals, specifically around pet-keeping practices.

A pet, as defined in the *Macquarie dictionary* (2017), is ‘any domesticated or tamed animal that is cared for affectionately’. Three recent studies of pet ownership in Australia, conducted in 2013 by the Animal Health Alliance (AHA) and in 2016 and 2019 by Animal Medicines Australia (AMA), consistently found the dog to be the nation’s most popular pet. According to the most recent of those studies, 70 per cent of rural households, compared with 46 per cent of urban households, keep pets (AMA 2019, p. 11). Across all Australian households, around 40 per cent have a pet dog; this figure is considerably more than for the next most popular pet—the cat—which 27 per cent of Australian households are reported to have (AMA 2019, p. 6). The studies found that significantly fewer Australian households keep fish, birds, small mammals such as rodents or rabbits, reptiles such as snakes, lizards or turtles<sup>13</sup>, or animals of other genera such as horses, goats, sheep or crabs as pets. According to the studies’ findings, the dog’s main role in most Australian households is as a family member (AHA 2013, pp. 27–9; AMA 2016, pp. 49–50; 2019, p. 20). And yet, various Australian companion animal laws treat a pet dog as a person’s property, typically referring to the person as the pet animal’s ‘owner’. For example, the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW), s. 7, refers to a person who is the ‘owner’ of an animal such as a dog as ‘being the owner of the animal as personal property’. Even the Australian Capital Territory’s relatively progressive *Animal*

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<sup>13</sup> The reports on these studies also indicate that frogs and salamanders, which are amphibians, were included in the findings for reptiles (AMA 2016, p. 9; 2019, p. 10).

*Welfare Act 1992*, which consistently refers to the ‘person in charge’ of an animal, includes ‘the owner of the animal’ under the definition for ‘person in charge’—with the notion of ‘person in charge’ also reflecting people’s subordination of non-human animals. This disparity between the legal view of pet dogs as property and many people’s own views of their dogs as family is indicative of more extensive inconsistencies relating to the perceptions and treatment of dogs and other non-human animals in contemporary Australian society.

As the most popular pet in Australia, dogs are considered to perform a variety of roles. The combined results of the Australia-wide pet ownership studies indicate that, while most participant households considered dogs to be family members, many regarded their dogs as companions, and some as workers, security, support, ornamental, or ‘fun for the children’ (AHA 2013, pp. 27–9; AMA 2016, p. 50; 2019, p. 20). The most recent of the AMA reports (2019, p. 8) also presents some broad observations regarding different dog breed types, including that the ‘mixed breed’, rather than any individual pure breeds or designer breeds, is the most common type in Australia and that a greater proportion of all mixed-breed dogs live in rural, rather than urban, areas. The report provides some limited insight into the different treatments of these breed groupings, such as that ‘[p]urebred dogs appear to enjoy a pampered life’ and are more likely to venture outside the home with their human companions—for example, to go to parks, to visit friends, or to go on holidays (AMA 2019, pp. 7–8). It also acknowledges the abundance (‘more than 270,000’) of working dogs in rural Australia and the value of these dogs to farmers, evidenced in part by the large monetary amounts for which the dogs sometimes sell (AMA 2019, p. 49). The report otherwise reveals little regarding any differences in attitudes

towards or interactions with dogs across the different rural and urban living environments. Given the frequent inclusion of dog characters in rural Australians' memoirs, however, these personal narratives offer meaningful insights into people's perceptions of dogs in contemporary rural Australian contexts.

Consistent with the Australian pet ownership study findings, the narrators' dogs in the case study memoirs are presented as members of their humans' families. These dogs invariably travel, sleep and eat with their people and are included in many of their activities. In Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate*, the various experiences that Lucy and Goode share include travelling together to visit friends and other family members, then moving together to live on Goode's new partner's farm. Similarly, Duke and Dusty in *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014) move with the author to her new partner's farm, along with MacKellar's children and other pets. In McGinnis's (2001) *Heart country*, Larry and Red are included in the family's droving activities—the two dogs travel on the McGinnis's vehicles, live in camps with them, and share their food. This is similar to Smokey's portrayed experiences in McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow* and those of Jiff and Smokey in Parkes's (2012) *A youth not wasted*. In Woodford's (2008) *Real dirt*, Casuarina is his running partner and companion while he works from home, as well as 'best friend' to his daughter. Later in Woodford's story, Solly provides companionship for human family members as they build their new home. These dogs are more than mere property—that which is owned by someone—yet they are other than human; in various ways, these non-human beings are integrated into their respective human families. The pet dog, as portrayed in the memoirs, holds an elevated status within the human-centred, human-imposed hierarchy of living beings.

While, in the narratives of the selected memoirs, the dogs are never explicitly called ‘pets’, their pet status is implied from the outset through the authors’ references to them by individual names. Naming an animal changes the way that people view that other being. Even the labelling of a species gives it significance to humans, as Kirksey (2015, p. 764) observes in his study of the concept of species: ‘Once Joyce gave *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* [a fungus causing frog deaths and ecological harm] a name, her act of classification produced a sudden shift in conservation practices’. At an individual level, the naming of another is an important reflection of a person’s relationship with that other, signalling the welcoming of the other being into a person’s life. In the case of a non-human animal other, the act of naming indicates the human’s view of that other as a singly important being rather than simply a member of another species—it removes the animal’s anonymity and identifies that animal as belonging within the person’s inner circle. Bekoff (2002, p. 45) explains that ‘[o]nce an individual animal has been identified and named, there is an immediate change in the way he or she is perceived’. McIntosh (2008, p. 42), for example, on first seeing Smokey among a litter of pups refers to him as ‘it’: ‘One smoke-brown-coloured pup sat and stared at me. It was bold and courageous’. Immediately upon naming this pup, though, McIntosh (2008, p. 42) uses ‘him’—‘I called him Smokey and took him with me’. The change from ‘it’ to ‘him’, which coincides with McIntosh’s naming of Smokey, marks the moment of Smokey’s adoption by McIntosh and confirms Smokey’s pet status. Herzog (2010, p. 46), in explaining how the ways that people refer to animals are linked to the ways that people perceive and categorise them, gives the example that ‘animals in the category “pet” are named; animals in the category “research



subject” are usually not’. In rural settings, animals categorised as livestock are usually anonymised, which helps to reaffirm their subordinate status in the human-imposed hierarchy of species. Conversely, dog characters in the narratives of rural Australians are almost always referred to by their individual names, given to them by their people. The naming of a dog in this way can indicate not only pet status but also family member status. As Taylor (2013, p. 18) asserts, giving an animal a name is one of the ‘mechanisms by which humans elevate companion animals to family member status’. The seemingly simple and commonplace act of naming a non-human animal effectively brings that being closer into the human social circle.

This naming effect also functions at a narrative level in the selected memoirs. In writing a life, the act of remembering is contextual (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 24), and the narrator’s relationship with the dog is remembered—at least in part—through the context of the naming process. The incorporation of this process within a memoir helps to relay the dog’s story and to position the dog’s and author’s narrated lives in relation to each other. The names chosen for dogs sometimes hold symbolic or sentimental meaning that indicate how the dogs are perceived or valued by their people. In *Real dirt* (2008, p. 171), Woodford’s family adopts their border collie on the winter solstice and names him Solly; the link between the dog’s name and the family’s regard for the natural environment can be read as signifying a welcoming of the dog into their world. In *A youth not wasted* (2012, p. 132), Parkes’s naming of Jiff—which becomes shortened from Jiffy—is linked to Parkes’s experience as a station worker; he recalls how the name resulted from his repeated calls to his workmates to ‘Hang on a jiffy’ while he waited for his dog to join them before they headed off to work. In *Pieces of blue* (2000, p. 77), McGinnis’s prequel

memoir to *Heart country*, McGinnis explains how her father chose Larry's name because it 'had a good Irish ring to it', which suggests that the dog's name is a projection, and ongoing reminder of, the family's own Irish roots. The choice of name—and the use of that name—can be interpreted as a product of the narrator's character, experiences and relationships, and of the dog's place in that person's life. Where the story behind the dog's name is articulated, it becomes part of the autobiographer's own story—similar to a dog being regarded as a person's possession, the autobiographer essentially takes ownership of the dog's story.

While the naming of an other usually signifies a close relationship between the namer and the named, to determine a name for another being can be an act of dominance, ownership or endearment. The naming of another animal also emphasises a separation between human and non-human animals in that the human has the capacity of language with which to label others. It is, according to Borkfelt (2011, p. 118), 'symbolic of the unequal power relations inherent to our relationship with other species'. Dog naming can be likened to the way that parents name their children, which is typically associated with a sense of responsibility along with feelings of affection for the other. The name identifies that dog as being cared for and included among a person's closest relations. As Tuan (1984, p. 111) suggests, the naming of a dog indicates the person's affection for that individual dog. Furthermore, the particular choice of name can take on special significance. For example, the significance of the name Casuarina for the cattle dog in *Real dirt* deepens when considered in relation to Woodford's (2008, pp. 103–4) apparent attachment to a casuarina tree on the first rural block that he owned:

That tree had given me shelter from many storms and privacy when I wanted the world shut out. On the hottest days it had cast cool shade. ... It was on that block, under that tree, that I had first felt I was home, and realised that this is the fundamental love a person needs in order to be happy: a place, a home.

While Woodford offers no direct explanation for the dog's name, naming her Casuarina suggests that Woodford's deep affection for the casuarina tree, and the comfort and protection he feels from this tree, is also extended to his feelings for the dog. A dog's name can be interpreted as a declaration of the centrality of that dog in the person's life, and much is bound up in the choice of name.

The name that a person chooses to call a dog offers insight into the person's perceptions and expectations of that particular dog. Calling a dog a name that might commonly be a person's name—such as Lucy the border collie in *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013)—implies an affectionate and familial relationship. Borkfelt (2011, p. 122) observes how it has become common for people to give their pets human names, and that this is 'a way of showing that an animal is somehow especially dear to us or of acknowledging its closeness to us'. Some dogs in the rural Australian memoirs have obviously human names—another example being Larry the Smithfield collie in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001). Other more ambiguous name choices—such as Smokey (McIntosh 2008; Parkes 2012), Jiff (Parkes 2012), Red (McGinnis 2001), and Dusty (MacKellar 2014)—could, however, be more readily likened to nicknames that people give to close friends, family members or colleagues. This particularly Australian 'habit' (Luu 2018), the nicknaming of others, is loaded with complexities, not least of which is that a nickname signals a power relationship between the namer and the named, as Michael Adams (2009,

p. 87) also observes. While nicknames can denote a familiar and friendly relationship, they are sometimes used to denigrate or humiliate the named one (Kennedy 2014, pp. 662–3). However, considering the fondness with which the dogs are referred to in the case study texts, resemblances between their names and human nicknames are indicative of the named one being part of the namer’s family or social group—the nickname acts as ‘an in-group marker’ (Adams 2009, p. 88). At the same time, it is a marker of the hierarchical relationship between namer—the person—and the named—the dog. The seemingly simple act of naming a dog may imply pet status, but the specific choice of name reveals further clues about the dog’s more extensive roles and acceptance within human-centred domains. Perhaps the most significant consequence of the naming of a non-human animal is that it marks the animal for special treatment within the species hierarchy—for inclusion as ‘one of us’ rather than exclusion as ‘one of them’.

Just as a name will raise an animal’s status, the common practice of not naming animals—such as livestock—to which people do not wish to form a personal attachment effectively subordinates those animals. Woodford’s (2008) occasional deviation from this norm, as depicted in *Real dirt*, might be seen as evidence of his inexperience as a farmer or of his unconventional farming methods. For example, Woodford names a chicken with a deformed beak Manky Beak, or Manky for short. Even though this naming does not alter the chicken’s fate, it helps to provide this chicken with an individual identity and, consequently, facilitates Woodford’s (2008, p. 169) sense of a connection with Manky among the other nameless chickens:

When harvesting time came Manky was the last bird in the last batch. I put his head on the chopping block and he turned his face to me as if to say, What are you doing, grain guy?

When Woodford (2008, p. 175) buys his first mob of cattle, his daughter names one of the steers Fluffy in recognition of this particular steer's distinctive 'hairstyle'. Woodford (2008, pp. 175–6) also identifies Fluffy as 'the friendliest of our cattle', and his affection for this steer leads Woodford to question his suitability for farming cattle:

Everyone had warned me not to sell my cattle at the Moruya Yards, to send them further afield. I didn't listen. After Fluffy and the other seventeen steers were trucked out I drove to the yards and went over to the stall where Fluffy was. I caught his eye. He looked at me with the look of a beast betrayed. ... I wondered whether I was made for raising beef.

While the names given to Woodford's chicken and steer simply refer to physical characteristics of these animals, Woodford's (2008) story attests to how the individual naming of an animal—including the use of nickname-like names—might contribute to a shift in a person's thinking about and treatment of that other animal. In the case of Manky the chicken and Fluffy the steer, these non-human animals are apparently singled out and named because they appear to humans to be different from others in their respective species groups. That it is commonplace for people to undertake careful and considered naming of their dogs, while many other non-human animals in their care often remain nameless, is testament to the closeness with which people view dogs compared to animals of many other species. This

naming process also reflects the person's expectation of a close and lasting relationship with the dog.

### 3.3 Different animals

Dogs and people coexist within a vast network of animal species. Recent estimates suggest that there may be more than 160 million different animal species on earth (Larsen et al. 2017, p. 232). This immense quantity signifies the multitude of differences between the many kinds of animals that live in the world. Animal welfare laws in Australia, while different for each state, generally treat the definition of an animal as applying to a non-human vertebrate or a cephalopod—those non-human animals considered to have high degrees of sentience (Ryder 2000, p. 246)—or as applying to a crustacean when being kept for possible human consumption. Such laws formalise ideas around which animals are supposed to matter to people in modern Australian society; they also reinforce a tendency to view only non-human animal species as animals and to minimise or overlook the fact that people, too, are animals. Queensland's *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*, s. 11 (2), for example, even specifies that 'a human being or human foetus is not an animal'. In regular discourse, describing another person as an animal can take on various meanings, such as to dehumanise or sexualise someone. For instance, *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) definitions for 'animal' include 'an inhuman person; brutish or beast-like person' and 'someone who is a passionate sexual partner'. While the *Macquarie dictionary's* (2017) primary definition for 'animal' is 'any living organism characterised by the capacity for voluntary motion, sensation, and the ingestion of food such as plants and other animals, and which has a non-cellulose cell wall', this

is followed by a second definition: ‘any animal other than a human’. Referring to the broad labelling of all non-human animal species as ‘animals’, Taylor (2013, pp. 3–4) describes how human-centred attitudes towards non-human animals—by which ‘[h]umanity is held as the yardstick against which all other animals are considered’—feed into perceptions of ‘a hierarchy of animal importance’ with ‘pets at the top; meat and farm animals somewhere in the middle; and fish, reptiles, and amphibians somewhere near the bottom’. A species’ standing within the hierarchy will likely be influenced by its ‘disgust-producing capacity’, as William Miller (1998, p. 43) explains, which may further vary across individuals, groups and cultures. Rats, for example, may be regarded by some people as dirty and repulsive, and therefore low on the species hierarchy, while others see rats as cute and friendly, and therefore deserving of an elevated ‘pet’ status. The same could apply for dogs in different contexts. Danta (2018, p. 13) refers to philosopher Villem Flusser’s idea of ‘a hierarchy of disgust’—by which species furthest from humans on the evolutionary tree, such as worms, are considered the most disgusting—in examining how post-Darwinian animal fables draw on this concept to challenge ‘human verticality and rectitude’. The depictions of non-human others in rural Australian memoirs also show that relationships between people and other animals are complex and do not necessarily align to a linear hierarchy. Simply dividing animal species into human and non-human categories can reinforce an anthropocentric mindset that oversimplifies people’s relationships with other animals.

The ‘non-human animal’ label implies that, from the human’s perspective, any living being that is not human is an other. Furthermore, the grouping of all other animal species under this one label suggests that the non-human is a less important

other to the human. While the identification of an animal as ‘non-human’ makes an explicit distinction between human and non-human animals, it is also an implicit acknowledgement that humans are animals too, defined by species attributes. The use of the ‘non-human’ label may, as Ryder (2000, p. 2) suggests, serve as a reminder to people of the ‘kinship’ between themselves and other animal species. Taylor (2013, p. 7), in questioning the outsider status of non-human animals in a human-dominated world, points out that non-human animals have long played ‘inextricable’ and ‘integral’ roles in humans’ lives and in society more broadly. In exploring the ways that people selectively ‘love’, ‘hate’ and ‘eat’ different animal species, Herzog (2010, p. 279) also acknowledges the interwoven lives of people and other animals, but ultimately finds that the inconsistent and contradictory ways in which people perceive and treat different animals are ‘inevitable’ and ‘show that we are human’. The complicated relationships that people have with other animals, and the human’s assumed position of superiority in the species hierarchy, is further evidenced by literary representations of non-human animals and of people’s interactions with them.

The ways in which certain non-human animals, or even whole species, are ‘humanised’ or ‘animalised’ in people’s representations of them speaks to ingrained attitudes about human–animal relations and the species hierarchy. Wolfe (2003, p. 101) envisages a ‘species grid’ by which cultural law categorises human and non-human animals as ‘animalised animals’, ‘humanised animals’, ‘animalised humans’ or ‘humanised humans’. The concept of ‘animalised animals’ perpetuates and permits the control and abuse of non-human others for human ends—the killing of livestock, for example, for human food. The ‘humanised human’ is, according to



Wolfe (2004, p. 101), a ‘wishful category’, with both animalised animals and humanised humans being ‘ideological fictions’. Still, the association of human qualities with non-human animals and vice versa, as with humanised animals and animalised humans, is based on an anthropocentric species hierarchy. Such associations rely on and reinforce ideas about non-human animals being, in general, lesser than humans. The use of animal descriptors or comparisons to denigrate a person, for example, is premised on an understanding that the human species is less ‘animal’ than—is superior to—other animal species.

In Australian culture, dog-related comparisons are commonly used to insult someone. Colloquial definitions for ‘dog’ include ‘an unattractive woman or man’, while ‘a dog act’ is ‘an instance of despicable behaviour’ (*Macquarie dictionary* 2017). The negative connotations associated with this kind of analogical use of the ‘dog’ label strangely recognise the closeness, and yet the distance, between people and dogs. The proximity with which people and dogs live allows for ready comparisons between the two, for the differences and similarities between the species to be scrutinised and exploited. To liken someone to a dog or to treat someone ‘like a dog’ has the double effect of animalising the animal (in this case, the dog) and dehumanising (animalising) the human. It is a recognition of species differences and a reinforcement of the species hierarchy, serving as a reminder of the dog’s lower ‘animal, not human’ status—the dog as animalised animal—and of the human’s sense of superiority.

Examples of people speaking to someone as if to a dog, likening someone’s cooking to dog food, or referring to someone’s dog-like qualities can usually be presumed to have a denigratory effect. In *Through the farm gate*, Goode (2013,

p. 126) relates another farming woman's anecdote about falling off a motorcycle while helping her husband to herd sheep: 'Mick was yelling at me to get out of the gateway and stop blocking the sheep. He wouldn't talk to the bloody dogs like that'. The inference that this woman's husband spoke to her with less courtesy than he would to the dogs is intended to emphasise his supposedly rude and unkind manner towards her. Goode (2013, p. 25) also recalls the early times in her relationship with the man who would become her husband, and her impression of him when he compares an exotic dish that she had prepared to dog food:

There are pleasant meals in restaurants and a dinner party at my place where I cook Moroccan-spiced lamb shanks. He says shanks are just dog food, and I think he is rude and ungrateful.

In *Heart country* (2001, p. 88), McGinnis's sister describes a young man who is infatuated with her as being 'like a big, good-natured puppy, galloping around behind you begging for a pat'. And an immature, irritating young woman who joins McGinnis on a droving run is depicted as being 'as friendly as a puppy, wanting to play with everyone' (2001, p. 257). McGinnis's use of the puppy analogy for these characters portrays them as being naive, foolish and desperate for affection. In the prologue to *Beaten by a blow*, McIntosh (2008, p. 2) conveys his feelings of shame and self-disgust by likening himself to a 'mongrel dog' as, with 'bloodstained hair, unshaven face, dirty clothes, alcoholic breath and rotting body', he sits with his head down to avoid making eye contact with the young, 'fresh-faced' women in a station kitchen. The likening of a person to dog has a deliberately degrading effect that acknowledges how labels reflect, and play on, the hierarchical ranking of humans and non-humans. Borkfelt (2011, p. 122) makes the observation that, while people

often give non-human animals human names, they rarely do the reverse—call a human child ‘Rover’, for example—since to do so would be “lowering” ourselves to an “animal” level’. Animalised labels for people, or the aversion to these, reflect societal expectations around what is human and what is animal—they work to maintain the anthropocentric hierarchical order of species. However, the ‘animalised human’ disrupts and further complicates that hierarchy, as does the ‘humanised animal’.

The humanised animal, as Wolfe (2003, p. 101) observes, is mainly found in the form of the pet. Sharing living spaces with pets and giving them individual names—often names that could double for human names—are perhaps the most obvious and widespread signs of humanisation of non-human animals. The more visible an individual non-human animal is to people, the more likely it seemingly is for that animal to be humanised to some level. The relative visibility of other animal species in the social lives of people may be culturally or geographically guided. For example, as Chapter 2 of this thesis notes with reference to O’Sullivan (2011, p. 2), Australian cities are human-centred spaces in which the only non-human animals usually seen are some pet species. Wilkie and Inglis (2007, p. 6) also highlight the increased social visibility and invisibility of different animal species to people who live in urban areas, with the pet, such as a dog or cat, being ‘an increasingly visible part of many people’s intimate domestic arrangements’, while many other non-human animals’ ‘lives and deaths in the food production process [are] thrust behind the scenes of highly-bureaucratized specialist spheres and spaces’. The autobiographical narratives of rural Australians, however, typically contain references to a range of animal species, extending beyond pets to include livestock

and wild animals as well as some animal species that straddle these categories. Even though cats may be among those animal species that are apparently more visible to urban dwellers, they are practically invisible in the narrated lives of rural Australians. While early in *Through the farm gate*, Goode (2013, p. 14) makes a droll reference to her pet cat—‘I don’t need a man. ... I have a dog who loves me and a cat that doesn’t ...’—this appears in a part of the narrative that relates to her life in the city. Representing dogs and cats in this way—the dog is loving and the cat is aloof—plays on and reinforces a popular stereotype in Western culture of ‘dog people’ versus ‘cat people’. Much later in the narrative, when Goode is firmly entrenched in farm life, she also briefly refers to ‘a grumpy cat rescued from a feral litter’ among her family’s human and non-human animals (2013, pp. 231, 234). In *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014, pp. 38–43), a cockatiel named Poppy and a guinea pig named Rodney travel with MacKellar and her two dogs when she moves to her partner’s farm in Tasmania. As with Goode’s cats, though, the brevity with which MacKellar’s cockatiel and guinea pig are mentioned in her story reflects a relative lack of attention afforded to these other animals. In contrast, the dog is often highly visible in stories of rural Australian life. The more obvious presence of dogs in these published stories—rather than other popular pets, such as cats, guinea pigs and birds—reaffirms cultural stereotypes and places rural Australians in the category of ‘dog people’.

After dogs, and compared with most other non-human animals, horses also receive a significant share of individual attention in rural Australian memoirs. Goode (2013), MacKellar (2014), McGinnis (2001), McIntosh (2008) and Parkes (2012) each incorporate narrative involving horses in the opening chapters of their

respective memoirs. In doing so, the authors establish the importance of horses to them personally and to their rural way of life. *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013, pp. 1–5) opens with the author having fallen from a horse while mustering buffalo; notwithstanding a bush nurse’s subsequent rough treatment of her, and an intense work schedule that includes mustering on horseback for hours each morning and training horses in the late afternoon heat, Goode declares: ‘I am paid \$300 a week, but I probably would do it for nothing’. In the opening chapter of *How to get there*, MacKellar (2014, pp. 1–26) drives through a storm to her home in central New South Wales, and one of her priorities upon arriving home is to take care of her horses by moving them under cover. An innate concern for horses is also evident in the opening chapter of *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, pp. 1–14), when McGinnis’s sister, Judith, finds one of their horses, Pom-Pom, struggling in the river, and Judith desperately but unsuccessfully tries to help the horse. Pom-Pom, who the McGinnises believed had drowned, is later found alive, much to the family’s surprise and joy (McGinnis 2001, pp. 55, 61–2). *Beaten by a blow* opens with McIntosh (2008, pp. 4–15) recalling how, as a boy, he dreamt of riding the pony that he saw each day on his school bus journey. His desire to buy that pony led him to take his first farming job, which was as an onion picker and was a formative experience involving several weeks of gruelling work for an abusive boss. In the first chapter of *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, pp. 9–20) describes his inspiration to work on the land as stemming from his boyhood dreams to be a sheep station man like his grandfather and a horseman like his uncle. These authors each make further references to horses in their memoirs, often in relation to farming or droving work and with the horses seemingly straddling the categories of pet and livestock.

Other livestock animals, such as cattle and sheep, are generally represented more as background props than as individual beings in people's stories of life on the land. These animals' herd instincts and their significance as economic resources for the benefit of humans are reflected in the collective references to them in the narratives. Sheep are herded, penned up and shorn by the masses (Goode 2013; MacKellar 2014; McIntosh 2008; Parkes 2012); buffalo and sheep are driven vast distances in large packs (McGinnis 2001; Parkes 2012); and cattle are inseminated, castrated, vaccinated, fed, and loaded onto trucks to be sold or slaughtered (Goode 2013; Woodford 2008). Sometimes, an animal is singled out by people for killing and eating—the chosen animal referred to generically as a 'killer' in the rural Australian vernacular (McGinnis 2001; McIntosh 2008; Parkes 2012). Others are given individual names, marking them as having some kind of exceptional value—either financial or sentimental. Goode (2013, pp. 176–7) recalls how, at an auction targeting rich, city-dwelling investors, she and her husband receive a large sum for a calf they call Figaro. The bestowal of this name on the calf seems to be part of a greater pantomime, as Goode (2013, p. 176) alludes to the reality that belies the investors' fantasies: 'Each professional breeder in the room knows that of the hundreds of bulls they produce each year, a star comes along perhaps once every two or three years'. While presenting cattle as 'stars' with individual names may appeal to some people, the use of words like 'breeder' and 'produce' in relation to these cattle highlights not only the commoditising of animals regarded as livestock but also the apparent unusualness of treating them as individuals.

An emotional detachment from 'stock' animals is reflected in the mostly anonymous and collective representations of them in the memoirs of rural

Australians. Since the early settlers' pastoral activities, the sheep has been considered synonymous with life on the land in Australia, with the cultural and economic significance of sheep and the Australian wool industry encapsulated in the image of a nation that 'rode [on] the sheep's back to prosperity' ('Sheep's back' 1994). Even given their cultural significance, though, sheep are commonly only viewed in terms of their productive value, either as a source of food or wool. In rural Australian memoirs, sheep are generally referred to generically and in economic or quantitative terms rather than as individual sentient beings. Narratives about shearing sheep in *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014) and *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008) offer relevant examples, but from different perspectives—MacKellar as the station owner's partner, and McIntosh as the shearer. MacKellar (2014, p. 111) describes gathering the shorn fleeces and collecting all of the remaining wool scraps from the floor, explaining that '[e]very bit of wool is worth something'. MacKellar (2014, p. 112) also recognises that the condition of a sheep's wool provides information about that particular sheep's lived experiences—for example, by indicating if a sheep has suffered from poor nutrition. Yet, MacKellar's (2014, p. 112) narrative suggests that, once shorn, the sheep is again anonymous:

The history of the sheep is carried on its back, until you peel it off and push it down the chute, leaving a confused skinny creature, unrecognisable from its woolly self.

McIntosh's (2008) story of shearing life includes details of the quantities of sheep, as relevant to their shearing value and each shearer's status, at the various stations where he works. In this example, which is one of many like this in *Beaten by a blow*, McIntosh (2008, p. 135) refers to the sheep in terms of different shearers' capacities:

Havechat in two was getting his forty-three, forty-four a run and cruising. Viking had the third pen. He was shearing around forty-eight, forty-nine a run. Captain Ahab drew the fourth. He was shearing about forty-three.

In the fifth pen was a bloke from Ballarat who could only manage twenty-five a run.

The numbers represent shearing quantities by number of sheep, although the sheep themselves are not explicitly acknowledged. In a similar vein, the shearer ‘who could only manage twenty-five a run’ is not identified by name, but more impersonally as ‘a bloke from Ballarat’. The sheep are not dignified with names, and are usually only singled out in the narratives when they diverge from the norm—when they look or behave in ways that unsettle the human characters.

The established hierarchy is challenged when the power dynamic between humans and non-humans is somehow altered. Among the many sheep that McIntosh shears in *Beaten by a blow*—most of whom he refers to only as numbers—he singles out one with an unsightly tumour on her nose for more detailed narrative treatment, as he describes touching ‘a big ugly sore’ and then how the sheep’s ‘cancerous nose had ... nuzzled into [his] armpit’ while he sheared her (2008, p. 139). At the end of that day’s work, when McIntosh (2008, p. 140) is tasked with killing a sheep for the cook, he chooses that same sheep: ‘I went to the yard and there was the cancerous sheep I’d thrown out earlier’. The sheep’s distinguishing feature—the sore on her nose—marks her as inferior to the other sheep and, therefore, more readily expendable; due to her disfigurement, she becomes further subordinated below her already low ranking. McIntosh’s narrative also occasionally alludes to the subordination of people who compromise their default position of superiority in the



hierarchy, becoming the animalised human. The earlier reference to McIntosh feeling like ‘a mongrel dog’ is one such example; in another example, McIntosh (2008, p. 42) refers to a shearer who loses his composure and behaves violently towards a sheep:

... Jimmy started to struggle. Once, when he pulled a sheep out that wouldn’t stop kicking, he hit it a couple of times with the tension nut of the handpiece and started swearing.

When McIntosh (2008, p. 103), himself, is learning to shear, his supervisor advises him to remain calm and in control:

‘... If you can’t control yourself you’ll never be able to control a sheep. Don’t start hitting them, it’s a bad habit to get into. Cockies hate it, and other shearers don’t like sheep bashers.’<sup>14</sup>

The implied concern here hinges on the importance of gaining the respect of the other workers and the sheep’s owners—the humans—rather than being about the sheep’s welfare. Narratives like this support a view that a sheep’s individuality is of little, if any, concern to the people who work with them.

Wildlife such as kangaroos, possums and dingoes are pushed to the periphery of many Australian farming stories, much as they have been in actuality. With farmers’ needs not always being compatible with those of wildlife, farming practices in Australia have seen native animals’ natural habitats destroyed to make way for livestock or food crops. In his detailed account of life in the Australian bush, writer

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<sup>14</sup> In this context, the term ‘Cockies’ relates to the colloquial use of ‘cocky’ to refer to ‘a farmer, especially one who farms in a small way’ (*Macquarie dictionary* 2017).

Don Watson (2014) describes the mass clearing of native vegetation by European settlers and the consequent expulsion of native animals. With specific reference to the farming region of Victoria where he grew up, Watson (2014, p. 40) writes:

Birds aside, there was little else in the way of original animal inhabitants. No bandicoots, goannas or wombats had survived the early settlers. They hated wombats almost as much as they hated snakes.

These native animals, having been evicted from their homes, are usually expected to respect the boundaries imposed on them by humans or risk being killed in the name of ‘wildlife management’ (Bekoff 2010, p. 40). In examining this anthropocentric practice of killing other animals who infringe human-imposed boundaries, Bekoff (2010, p. 33) explains that ‘whatever is wild is meant to remain outside, at the border [of cities, towns, suburbs and farms]’, that ‘once they enter our domestic arena, wild animals are often considered dangerous “problems” or “pests” for whom the only solution is death’. This kind of attitude and practice is seen, for example, in depictions of dingoes and of ‘doggers’—people who are paid to kill dingoes or wild dogs—in rural Australian memoirs.

In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, p. 128) introduces Clarrie the dogger by first explaining that the local authorities pay ‘scalp money’ for dingoes in an effort to reduce the dingo population in their area. However, he qualifies this by explaining: ‘No-one was optimistic enough to imagine that the dingoes could be wiped out’. The dingoes in Parkes’s (2012, p. 128) story live in rocky, hilly countryside that is inaccessible and inhospitable to humans but is ‘a haven for dingoes’; when their usual diet of small native animals becomes scarce, they ‘drift into the pastoral country, where they can get easier pickings, such as lambs or

calves'. While the dingoes themselves remain elusive, Parkes (2012, p. 163) notices their pawprints and signs of them having killed sheep. With Clarrie's efforts apparently being insufficient, Parkes (2012, p. 163) is tasked with traversing vast areas on horseback to leave strychnine baits for the dingoes. He places the strychnine inside small chunks of raw meat, which he leaves near paths used by sheep. He also shoots kangaroos when the opportunity arises and baits their dead bodies with strychnine. The normality of poisoning dingoes in this way is also alluded to in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, p. 184) when, during a conversation about dingoes, McGinnis's father propounds, 'Nothing a bit o' strychnine won't fix'. The dingoes in these memoirs are represented as precisely the kinds of 'pests' or 'problems' that Bekoff (2010, p. 33) describes—they are apparently reviled and killed for crossing into, or for their mere ability to cross into, spaces that have been claimed by humans and for threatening those humans' livelihoods: their livestock.

Meanwhile, portrayals of kangaroos demonstrate how they are also often regarded as dispensable objects and as problems requiring human intervention. In *Real dirt*, Woodford (2008, p. 170) notes the abundance of kangaroos on his property and points out that some of his neighbours—'good farming people'—are licensed to kill these native animals. The kangaroos referred to in Woodford's story are killed supposedly as a culling measure, with their carcasses simply tagged and left to rot, as was the state-sanctioned practice at the time (Blair 2018). Woodford's family's alternative approach to living on the land is reflected in how they choose to coexist with the kangaroos rather than kill them. Woodford's partner sees kangaroos as 'the yardstick of the wildness of the property' (2008, p. 170), and her insistence on retaining and fostering the 'wildness' on their farm highlights how their chosen

way of living may vary from traditional agricultural practices. For example, Woodford (2008, p. 162) writes: ‘Even within the orchard Prue has made sure there are a few spots that remain wild – habitat for blue tongue lizards, dragons and insects’. The qualification that ‘a few spots ... remain wild’, though, still suggests that the wildlife habitat had to be compromised to make way for the cultivation of a food crop for humans. The incompatibility of human farming practices with wilderness and its native inhabitants is ever-present.

While livestock such as sheep may be deemed worth protecting, other introduced species that inhabit rural Australian spaces are, like some native animals, often treated as vermin. Vermin, like dirt, disrupts order, and human interventions made in response to ‘matter out of place’ can be unifying for members of cultural groups (Douglas 1966, pp. 1–6, 40). According to Douglas (1966, p. 2), ‘rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience’; responses to ‘pest’ animals in rural contexts, as depicted in the memoirs, offer evidence of such unity. References to animals like foxes and rabbits, for example, in the autobiographical narratives of rural Australians are rarely favourable, whereas such animals may be considered ‘cute’ in other settings. In *Through the farm gate*, Goode (2013, p. 300–2) draws the ire of animal welfare advocates when she writes a newspaper column about killing a fox on her property; Goode justifies her killing of the fox on the basis that foxes are pests which attack sheep and kill wildlife such as small marsupials, lizards, frogs and birds. Such concern for wildlife, though, seems at odds with Goode’s (2013, p. 224) relatively casual request, in an earlier part of the narrative, that her husband get some meat for their dogs. In effect, this activity involves Goode’s husband shooting, then dismembering, the buck from among a mob of kangaroos grazing on

their property—an act that he refers to as ‘wildlife management’ and ‘the sustainable thing to do’ (Goode 2013, p. 225). Goode (2013, p. 225) further justifies her husband’s actions by explaining: ‘Farmers have always shot roos for their dogs, especially when numbers build to plague levels’. Attitudes that determine which animals get to live and which must die, and how, are consistent with human-centred, socially cultivated and culturally specific attitudes towards different animal species. The representations of such attitudes in rural Australian memoirs—which include dog characters as well as references to other pet animals such as cats and guinea pigs; livestock such as cattle, sheep and horses; wild animals such as kangaroos, possums, dingoes, goannas and native birds; insects such as ants and mosquitoes; and introduced feral species such as foxes and hares—are indicative of speciesist practices that persist in farming culture.

Speciesism aside, acknowledging that there are fundamental differences between animal species provides a starting point for appreciating human–animal relationships, including people’s attitudes towards dogs. As Haraway states (2003, p. 52): ‘Not all animals are alike; their specificity—of kind and of individual—matter’. Different species’ ways of living in the world—their needs, values and perceptions—vary, and sometimes clash, due to fundamental differences in their biological, physiological and anatomical constitutions. While differences between species may seem obvious in most cases, the proximity with which people live with other animals, especially dogs, tends to blur some species boundaries. Appreciating that different species experience the world in different ways offers a basis for understanding how animals relate to and rely on each other across species boundaries. The concept of species can be, as Kirksey (2015, p. 758) asserts, ‘a

valuable sense-making tool'. Acknowledging species differences is not necessarily speciesist; however, it can provide a foundation for speciesist and anthropocentric attitudes that see humans imposing culturally influenced statuses on different animal species and, accordingly, assuming a superior status for themselves.

Across and within cultures, remarkable inconsistencies occur in the ways that people relate to and treat different animal species. What constitutes a pet, a pest, a food source or otherwise may vary across cultures, and even across groups within cultures. As Taylor (2013, p. 3) explains, 'animals are socially constructed and are repositories of culturally mediated meanings'. Traces of the nation's colonial and farming history remain in contemporary Australian customs, attitudes and rules that see different animal species pigeonholed into certain roles and functions—for example, sheep might belong on farms and be seen simply as sources of wool, food or fertiliser; possums belong in the wild and might be regarded either as pests or amusements, or as merely invisible and irrelevant; dogs live with people and are pets or workers, but might also be viewed as problems. Australian novelist Charlotte Wood (2011, p. 31) observes that 'our culture's grossly sentimental failure to embrace the "otherness" of animals' leads to 'a dichotomy in which animals are either so like us that we cannot separate their needs from our own, or so unlike us as to be aliens, undeserving of any rights at all'. Such a dichotomy is present to varying extents in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs, in that different animals are certainly treated differently—some are family, some are stock, some are food, some are pests, while many others remain unseen. In considering the ways that people treat animals, Garner (2005, p. 4) observes:

As a species we don't seem to be clear at all how we should treat nonhuman animals. What we do to them would appear to encompass the extremes of cruelty, indifference and sentimentality.

The incorporation of various non-human animal species in the narratives of rural Australians presents a culturally specific view of the cruel, indifferent or sentimental treatment of different species in contemporary rural Australian settings.

The narratives offer some insight into different ways that animals are treated and perceived in rural Australian contexts where many non-human animals are considered mainly in terms of their economic value or usefulness. Even though the rural Australian environment is inhabited by an abundance of animal species, the dog is frequently singled out and given an elevated level of attention in the recollections of the land's human inhabitants. In the memoirs of rural Australians, many depicted interactions between people and dogs—such as travelling with or talking to them—are similar to those that might typically occur between people. In *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013), for example, Lucy the border collie accompanies Goode in her travels to various places by train, car and truck, all the while sharing the same spaces as human travellers. Goode also talks to Lucy like she might to another person; such as when they arrive in Kalgoorlie by train and Goode (2013, p. 9) decides to hitchhike to Esperance: “‘Okay, Luce, let's go. We'll hitch,'” I say'. Other rural Australian memoirs include similar portrayals of the protagonists travelling with and talking to dogs, with some also including photographs of the respective dog characters among images of the authors' various, mainly human, family members and friends, such as in *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012) and *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008). Some photographs from these memoirs are included in

Chapter 2 of this thesis (see Figure 24 and Figure 25), and another example from Parkes's memoir is provided below (Figure 32).

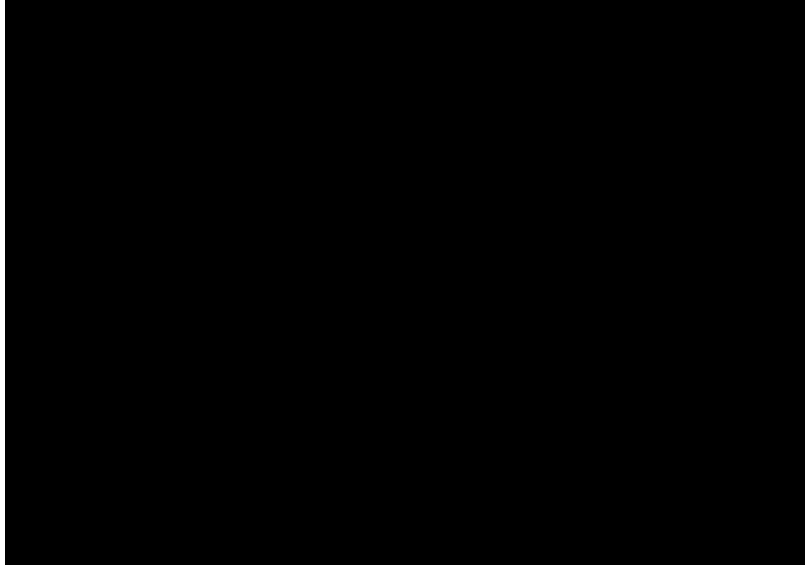


Figure 32: Photograph of Smokey and Parkes's father (Parkes 2012)

The dog is typically the most visible of the non-human animals in the narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs, and portrayals of dog characters in those memoirs often suggest that the dogs are as important, or more important, than some human characters are to the narrators. The ways that humans and dogs engage with each other, and the closeness with which they live, also suggest that the boundaries between the two species are somewhat fluid. Still, some specific ways that dogs are depicted in autobiographical narratives serve to illuminate their membership of another—distinctively non-human—species.



### 3.4 Being dog

Detailed depictions of dog-specific behaviours within the narratives of rural Australian memoirs help to distinguish dog characters from members of other species, including humans. The attention that narrators give to dogs' behaviours, often at the exclusion of similar portrayals of other non-human animals' behaviours, reinforces the elevated status of dogs among humans. In the selected autobiographical texts, the portrayed dog-specific behaviours—relating largely to the ways that dogs communicate with each other—also highlight the species differences between the narrating human subject and the dog subject, reminding the reader that the character is a non-human other. The narrators are able to show, sometimes indirectly, that certain characters are dogs. Also, these written accounts of the dog's various communication methods confirm the narrator's connection with the dog—that the human is hearing, or at least trying to hear, the dog. Whether a dog's intended message is properly understood and accurately translated by the human is a matter of conjecture—even biographical representations of human characters can be subject to narrators' interpretations, as Tridgell (2006) discusses in a study of representations of other subjects' communications styles in Australian autobiography. Representations of the significant dog others in the memoirs selected for this study do, at the very least, demonstrate that certain characters belong to the dog species, and they indicate an appreciation for the dog's way of being in the world.

Detailed depictions of dogs' behaviours in autobiographical narrative also reflect a closeness between people and dogs and a recognition—even a celebration—of the dog's otherness. Many such depictions in contemporary rural Australian memoirs

also happen to be consistent with existing ideas and scientific knowledge about dog behaviour. The dog is known for having a keen sense of smell, and Horowitz (2016) devotes a whole book—*Being a dog: following the dog into the world of smell*—to exploring and trying to understand how dogs experience the world through their noses. According to Horowitz (2016, p. 10), dogs’ behaviours are mostly ‘about their noses, smelling the world’. The sense of smell is critical in the giving and receiving of messages between dogs, and urine—because it contains and exudes the dog’s pheromones—is an important vehicle for these scent messages (Coren 2003, pp. 185–6; Horowitz 2012, pp. 73–5, 83–4; McGreevy 2009, pp. 13–14). Urination also serves a marking function for dogs (Coren 2003, pp. 187–8; Horowitz 2012, pp. 82–5; McGreevy 2009, pp. 13–14). As McGreevy (2009, p. 76) explains: ‘Because they have evolved to occupy a defined area, dogs routinely patrol the tracks and significant landmarks within their domain and anoint them with their scent’. The concept of scent marking is also represented in the case study memoirs, where it serves as a narrative marker for identifying and developing dog characters. It is, for example, alluded to in *Through the farm gate* when Goode’s family must leave the farm and move temporarily to her mother’s place near the city; Goode (2013, p. 87) describes the working dogs’ behaviour on arrival at their temporary home:

Roy and Gus, the kelpies, mark their new territory enthusiastically before being chained to the front of the van. We wish that a re-establishment of identity and feelings of belonging were as simple for humans.

In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, p. 24) describes dogs urinating on the trouser leg of a station worker:

Gil's brother, Derek, always had a couple of sheepdogs with him, messing around, playing. It was quite common for one of the dogs to cock his leg behind Derek's leg, and when that happened someone would yell, 'Hey, Derek. One of yer bloody dogs is pissing on yer trousers.'

Derek would just stand – and he'd say, 'Yeah, bloody mongrel bastard does that all the time.'

Derek's dog's depicted action seems consistent with Horowitz's (2012, p. 116) explanation of urine marking behaviour involving a raised—or 'cocked', as Parkes (2012) describes it—leg to provide a conspicuous display to other dogs. That it was 'quite common' for Derek's dogs to urinate on his trouser leg also suggests that these dogs may be engaging in 'countermarking' behaviour—that is, urinating over the place where another dog has previously urinated, as a way of declaring dominance (Horowitz 2012, p. 117). Parkes's depiction of this behaviour and Derek's laconic response to it imply the humans' amused acceptance of the dog's actions.

Later in his story, Parkes (2012, p. 132) also recounts his own dog's urinating behaviour before heading off for the day's mustering work:

... I had to stop and wait for him while he cocked his leg. He must have had a very full bladder because it took two goes. Each occasion was followed by the ritual scratching in the dirt and the kicking of dust over his waste.

Parkes apparently shares these details to explain how his dog came to be named Jiff (as noted earlier in this chapter, under 3.2 Family and friends), since it was while he waited for his as-yet-unnamed dog to finish this urinating ‘ritual’ that Parkes would call to his mustering colleagues to ‘Hang on a jiffy’ (2012, p. 132). The depiction of Jiff’s repeated urination and scratching in the dirt also serves to highlight his canine nature, since foot scraping after defecation or urination is considered to be another marking method used by dogs (Coren 2003, p. 188; Horowitz 2012, p. 85; McGreevy 2009, p. 24). McGreevy (2009, p. 24) explains how the resulting scratch marks appeal to a dog’s sense of sight as well as that of smell:

The visual signal comes from the scrape marks in the ground while the olfactory components take the form of freshly turned soil that must ooze odours that alert passing dogs to the possibility of recent activity in general and to the musky scent of dog foot in particular.

In Jiff’s case, it would appear that he is using a combination of methods to reinforce his message for any other dogs who might visit the area while he is away working. While Parkes’ account of this behaviour explains how Jiff’s name was chosen, it also reinforces Jiff’s otherness as a dog among the mostly human characters in the narrative.

If the urinating dog is written of with fondness and humour, then it is curious that the defecating dog is not also similarly depicted, especially as dogs are also believed to use their faeces to transfer information about themselves (McGreevy 2009, p. 14). The lack of narrative about dogs defecating is likely to be indicative of widely held attitudes towards animal excrement. The common perception of dog faeces as being particularly disgusting and unsanitary is reinforced in Australian

laws—for example, the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW), s. 20—that require people to collect and appropriately dispose of any faeces left by their dogs in public places. In *Real dirt*, Woodford (2008, p. 61) draws on attitudes of disgust towards dog faeces when he uses a ‘dog turd’ metaphor to illustrate the reception he receives when, as a newspaper journalist, he pays his editor-in-chief an unannounced, and apparently unwelcome, visit: ‘JA looked at me as if his secretary had lobbed in a dog turd with a shovel’. This reference to ‘a dog turd’, rather than the ‘turd’ of any other species, to convey a sense of disgust also alludes to the physically close relationship between people and dogs—one that sees dog faeces as commonplace, but still out of place, in human-inhabited spaces.

Further to the depictions of dogs’ scent-leaving—or marking—behaviours, their scent-detecting behaviours are also often acknowledged in autobiographers’ portrayals of dog characters. In the opening paragraph of *Heart country*, McGinnis’s (2001, p. 1) description of her family’s dogs’ behaviour when they arrive at a new place recognises the dog species’ characteristic sniffing: ‘Dad parked the Bedford under some scraggy whitewoods, and Red and Larry, the two dogs, jumped off the load and began to nose around’. In *How to get there*, MacKellar (2014, p. 60) describes going running with her dogs to get to know her new home: ‘... I can cross the creek and run up through the paddocks, learning my way into the country as the dogs scout ahead on the scent of kangaroo and possum’. Like with McGinnis’s opening reference to Red and Larry in *Heart country*, MacKellar portrays her dogs as using their sense of smell to learn about their new surroundings. In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, p. 313) observes how the dogs at one particular station would greet visitors:

As you got out of your vehicle, the dogs that greeted you wanted to sniff your trouser legs and boots. And then they wagged their tails and cocked their legs against the wheels of your vehicle.

Parkes's depiction of these station dogs' behaviours is consistent with canine communication behaviours described by Coren (2003, pp. 115–33, 186–7), Horowitz (2012, pp. 83, 108–14) and McGreevy (2009, pp. 20–8). First, the dogs use their noses to detect and interpret any messages that the visitor has brought, then they respond with a visual signal by wagging their tails; they conclude their part of the exchange by leaving their own scent messages where other dogs can retrieve them.

Detailed depictions of dogs' behaviours ensure the visibility of the dog species in these memoirs. The implied acceptance of dogs' instinctive behaviours, as different to those conditioned behaviours that might result from human-imposed training, challenges ideas of human superiority and dominance over members of this other species. The noticeable absence of the dog's defecatory functions in the narratives, even though defecation is an important marking behaviour for dogs, might further suggest that dog faeces are relatively irrelevant or unnoticeable to people in rural settings. McHugh (2004, p. 179), in discussing the cultural significance of dog faeces, or 'dog shit', points out that requirements for people to remove their dogs' faeces from public places 'not only promote hygiene but also measure a dramatic alteration in the relationships among dogs and humans'. The additional responsibility imposed on the person who keeps a dog is one aspect of this; another is that such legal requirements formalise a repulsion to dog excrement and its unacceptability in modern society, which must in turn affect people's attitudes towards keeping dogs as pets. The absence of dog excrement in the narratives of

rural Australian memoirs may be an extension of this. Another possibility, though, is that it is indicative of the rural setting, where there is likely to be an abundance of animal faeces from wildlife and stock. In considering the notion of ‘matter out of place’, Douglas (1966, p. 40) suggests that ‘[u]ncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained’. In this vein, the ‘pattern’ in the rural Australian setting is likely to include non-human animal excrement as part of the normal order and, therefore, not necessarily as something needing to be removed.

Many rural dwellers may simply accept, or feel ambivalent towards, the presence of animal excrement due to its inevitability in their surrounding areas. Animal farming, in particular, can be a messy affair, as Watson’s (2014, p. 30) candid depiction of dairy cow breeding on his family’s farm attests:

... the business involved a lot of bovine copulation, a lot of placenta and blood in the paddocks, a lot of bellowing and kicking and shitting in the cowshed, and on the way to the shed through the mud ...

Further to the abundance of animal excrement, bodily fluids, and other organic matter in rural areas, dogs are likely to have more freedom and space to defecate on privately owned land, resulting in their faeces being relatively inconspicuous to rural people. Rural and urban dwellers’ contrasting attitudes to excrement are reflected, for example, in *Through the farm gate* when Goode (2013, p. 49) describes with apparent amusement her dog, Lucy, rolling in manure, followed by some visiting city people’s horrified reactions to Lucy’s dung-covered coat. The vast spaces that are characteristic of rural Australia and the prevalence of a variety of animals’ excrement in those spaces would suggest that rural dwellers are less likely to be

concerned with picking up dog faeces. Evidently, the defecating dog does not feature as highly relevant to them or their narrated experiences. If a requirement to pick up dog faeces affects the relationship between people and dogs, as McHugh (2004, p. 179) suggests, then this may present a key point of difference in the relationships between people and dogs who live in rural areas compared with those who live in urban areas.

Despite the species' different communication methods, people and dogs do manage to communicate with each other—perhaps even more effectively than humans sometimes communicate with other humans. In comparing human–human communication to human–dog communication, Horowitz (2012, pp. 26–7) declares that dogs ‘never answer in the way we’d hope: by replying in sentences, well punctuated and with italicized emphases’ but that ‘if we look, they have plainly answered’. A dog’s honesty—the transparency and simplicity with which dogs respond to different situations—has long been recognised as part of dogs’ appeal to people. Charles Darwin (1904, p. 12), for example, in discussing human and non-human animals’ emotional expression, declares that the human ‘cannot express love and humility by external signs, so plainly as does a dog, when with drooping ears, hanging lips, flexuous body, and wagging tail, he meets his beloved master’. Further to this, Darwin (1904, p. 12) alludes to a common, human-centred view of the dog as having ‘been created with special instincts, adapting him for association with man’. The differences between humans and dogs do, however, seem to reinforce the ties between the two species. As Fudge (2008, p. 68) observes in a discussion on pet ownership and humans’ compassion for other animals:



To bring an animal into one's home, to live with it as a member of the family, is not simply to ignore difference; it is to engage in an ongoing process of translation.

McGreevy (2009, p. 295) also notes that people who regard themselves as animal lovers 'in general don't treat their dogs as fur-coated humans, but are fascinated by all that is quintessentially canine about dogs'. Extending from this, the dog's inherent canid qualities are often celebrated in the ways that people write about them, even if those qualities are viewed through a human lens.

The wagging tail—this defining physical characteristic of the dog species—is widely used in depictions of dog characters and their interactions with people. In *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2009, p. 9), the border collie, Lucy, 'wags her tail in response' to Goode announcing that they would hitchhike from Kalgoorlie to Esperance. In *How to get there*, MacKellar (2014, p. 217) notes the pleasure that she gains from her black labrador, Dusty, including 'the way she wags her tail so her whole body shakes just because I've walked in the room'. In *Heart country*, McGinnis's (2001, p. 63) description of Larry killing and eating a quail includes him lowering his ears and 'giving a deprecatory wag of his tail'; also, McGinnis (2001, p. 298) later describes the other dog, Red, with his 'ears up and tail wagging' as he enthusiastically chases fish in the river. In *Beaten by a blow*, McIntosh (2008, p. 232) describes Smokey as 'frantic, wagging his tail and jumping all over me' when they reunite after McIntosh had left Smokey behind at a station. The wagging tail, in its various forms, is a means through which the dog communicates with others (Coren 2003, pp. 115–33; Horowitz 2012, pp. 108–14). It frequently takes the place of human speech or gestures in dog–human, rather than human–human,

communications. Wagging tails, as depicted in these narratives, clearly signal to the reader that the related characters belong to the dog species and also that the human characters are attributing meaning to the dogs' mute behaviours.

The wagging tails also indicate that the depicted dogs do actually have tails, which is an implicit reference to the dogs' breeds and their associated abilities to communicate with others. Breed is relevant to how people perceive individual dogs; Worboys, Strange and Pemberton (2018, p. 2) claim that 'breed' has become 'the principal way of thinking about and categorizing dogs'. Human intervention has led to some dog breeds, such as the pug or the French bulldog, having a very small tail or no tail at all, which reduces their ability to use their tails for communication (Coren 2003, pp. 130–3; Horowitz 2012, pp. 113–4; McGreevy 2009, p. 26). As Horowitz (2012, pp. 113–4) explains:

In breeding dogs to have particular looks that we find agreeable, we are limiting their possibilities for communicating. Just as we might expect, but would rather not confront, a dog with a docked tail has, thereby, a docked repertoire of things he can say.

In rural Australian memoirs, the depictions of dogs as having the capacity to communicate through their tails confirm that these narrated characters belong to the dog species and, furthermore, provide readers with information about the dogs' particular breeds—or at least about which breeds they are not. Their wagging tails signal that their capacities extend beyond those of certain 'designer breed' pets.

Like the archetypal wagging tail depictions, the dog's vocalisation behaviours such as barking, growling, howling or yelping are also used to effectively signal the presence of dog characters in the autobiographical narratives of rural Australians.

McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow* contains frequent references to barking dogs—his own dog, Smokey, and other dogs—and draws particular attention to the annoyance that barking can cause for some people. A recurring event in McIntosh's story involves his shearing colleagues complaining about Smokey's barking. Woodford (2008, p. 192), in *Real dirt*, also acknowledges the potential for barking to upset people when he describes one of the common causes of interpersonal disputes in his rural community as being 'a barking dog that never shuts up'. Scholars of dog behaviour, such as Coren and Horowitz, offer some general interpretations of the various sounds that dogs produce. Coren (2003, pp. 54–81) provides detailed explanations of the meanings behind dog sounds and suggests that the modern-day dog was selectively bred to bark, making this a distinctive characteristic of domestic dogs. Horowitz (2012, pp. 105–8) claims that, of the various vocal sounds that dogs make, 'barks come closest to speech sounds' and that dogs vary the pitch and frequency of their barks in response to different situations, such as isolation, play, or an approaching stranger. In *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001), Larry and Red are variously depicted growling to warn of, or off, potential intruders. For example, McGinnis (2001, p. 2) writes that 'Red stalked into the open, growling softly' on sensing the arrival of another droving team; and, in a scene where Larry threatens a station worker who wanders into the cooking area of the McGinnises' camp, McGinnis (2001, p. 63) describes the dog's growl as 'a snarl to freeze blood'. The attention given to dogs' vocalisations in the narratives effectively brings dogs into the foregrounds of people's stories.

The case study memoirs include depictions of other dog-specific behaviours, such as licking or biting people (for example, McIntosh 2008, pp. 149, 190, 194,

229), or chasing and sometimes killing other animals (for example, Goode 2013, p. 298; MacKellar 2014, p. 116; McGinnis 2001, pp. 58, 299; Parkes 2012, p. 132; Woodford 2008, pp.125–9). The depicted behaviours serve to differentiate the dog character as a non-human other while also giving that character voice and individual identity. In many cases, the narrator provides translations of the dog's behaviours, often couched in anthropomorphic terms. McGinnis's (2001, p. 58) description of Larry killing a quail is one such example:

... his jaws snapped together and crunched. We stared in horror, and he dropped the limp bundle of feathers as if wondering how it had got into his mouth in the first place.

'Murderer!' I cried, and Judith caught him on the jaw with the tip of the stick she threw. Larry yelped and lowered his ears, giving a deprecatory wag of his tail, but it didn't stop him wolfing his kill on the spot.

Larry's action in killing the bird is interpreted by McGinnis as 'murder'—a crime that, by definition, is committed by and of humans. His 'deprecatory' tail wag suggests that the narrator is sensing an acknowledgement of guilt for this 'crime'. Such an interpretation of a dog's behaviour as reflecting guilt fits Horowitz and Hecht's (2014, p. 206) description of 'a pure anthropomorphism', since it is not known whether dogs actually feel guilt in the way that people sometimes assume that they do. The anthropomorphic treatment of non-human animals might be considered a failure to respectfully acknowledge differences between species (Weil 2012, p. 19), including different species' needs and wants. Alternatively, it may be regarded as a person's attempt to understand the other species' feelings—a demonstration of empathy (Midgley 1983, pp. 125–33; Weil 2012, p. 19). In the life narratives of rural Australians, anthropomorphic references to non-human animals

help to demonstrate the closeness of a narrator's relationship with those animals, albeit from the person's perspective. The extensive use of anthropomorphic language in narrative about dogs is consistent with the idea that the dog is the human's closest non-human other.

### 3.5 Subjective affection

Historically, non-human animals were considered mainly in terms of their economic or practical value, while pet keeping was regarded as indulgent and frivolous. Menely (2007) contends that sentimental feelings towards non-human animals, as associated with pet keeping, are linked to the devaluing of the notion of sentimentality more widely. This attitude towards pet keeping is evident in Australian farming culture, since keeping animals as pets can be a costly exercise with no apparent economic returns. Rather than identifying dogs as pets in rural Australian contexts, they are often regarded foremost as 'workers', or at least in terms of their working capacities. The dog's usefulness is frequently acknowledged in the life stories of rural Australian memoirs, with the dog's energy, instinct and responsiveness being good fits for the relentless, demanding and sometimes unpredictable nature of farm work. Serpell (1996, p. 71) notes that 'it is difficult to find any evidence at all that [people] love [dogs] in proportion to their usefulness'. But even though dogs may not need to be useful to be loved by people, their usefulness might help to secure their place in the everyday lives of rural Australians. In rural Australian memoirs, which are intrinsically about work and relationships associated with a life on the land, it seems that dogs' usefulness plays an important part in ensuring their inclusion in the narratives. This usefulness provides cultural

licence to love dogs and to write about them in ways that rural Australians tend not to do for most other animals—that is, to treat them as pets and family members.

Different cultures have different preferences for pets and pet-keeping practices. People find ways to rationalise what might otherwise be seen as selfish, pointless or cruel. For example, according to Serpell (1996, p. 71), ‘Amazon hunters may occasionally justify the pet-keeping habits of their women and children as a means of keeping the spirit world happy’. Rural Australia, with its focus on agricultural pursuits, has roots in British colonisation dating back to the 18th century—a time when people who kept animals as pets may have been viewed with suspicion, since ‘the ordinary working people of Britain were encouraged by religious and secular authorities to regard domestic animals simply as useful objects placed on earth for the economic benefit of mankind’ (Serpell 1996, p. 47). Rural Australian autobiographers seemingly justify their pet-keeping practices by incorporating dogs’ acts of usefulness in their stories. The sentimentality associated with pet keeping is balanced by the dogs’ usefulness.

The sentimental treatment of dog characters actually further differentiates them from other non-human animals in the narratives of rural Australians. The portrayals of non-human animal deaths, in particular, illuminate biases in the ways that some people—for example, the ‘good farming people’, as Woodford (2008, p. 170) describes his kangaroo-killing neighbours—may regard different species. Menely (2007, p. 249) explains that ‘[s]entimental texts rhetorically position animals as sympathetic victims, communicative agents who manifestly possess interests, express a point of view ..., and evoke empathetic identification’. The emotions expressed in the depictions of dogs’ deaths in rural Australian memoirs, compared

with the ways that other non-human animals' deaths are depicted, illustrate more keenly the narrators' 'empathetic identification' with their dogs. McIntosh (2008, pp. 140–1), for example, describes the no-nonsense manner with which he kills a sheep for a station cook:

I plunged the knife into her throat and cut furiously so I could break her neck simultaneously, making it as painless as possible. The hot blood and frantic kicking of a dying sheep didn't bother me as much as it used to. I gutted her easy enough ...  
Eventually I got her hide off and lumped her into the meat shed before dark.

In contrast, McIntosh (2008, pp. 244–5) later reveals the difficulties and inner torment that he experiences when killing his dog Smokey:

I pulled the trigger. The shot broke the evening silence. Smokey convulsed on the ground yelping, saliva running from his mouth. The bullet hadn't killed him. I panicked. I didn't want him to die. I was confused. Fumbling with another bullet, I reloaded, put the rifle to the back of his head and pulled the trigger once more. A trickle of blood came out the side of his mouth and with a few small sighs Smokey died. My knees buckled from under me and I sank into the mud, leaned over and burst into tears. I hated myself. I kept crying until my ribs hurt, until I couldn't cry any more.  
When the night air set in I got up. Smokey was already getting stiff. I pushed him into the grave, buried him and said goodbye.

In *Real dirt*, Woodford (2008) describes his reaction to the accidental death of his family's cattle dog, Casuarina (or 'Cas'). After driving home from a nearby town with the dog travelling in the back of his ute, he finds that she has died, having

fallen from the ute because he had forgotten to tighten her lead. Woodford (2008, pp. 127–8) writes:

I got to the back of the car and saw Cas hanging limp over the tailgate. Oh christ. My brain was racing, was she dead? She couldn't be, but she was hanging there so still ...  
In the coming days and weeks no matter how hard it rained that trail of blood on the Mongarlowe Road would not go away; sometimes we even had to take an alternative, longer route so we would not have to see the stain. Whenever I saw it I was ashamed.  
We buried Cas that night and the next morning I had to stop Prue trying to dig her up again so she could hold her dog one last time. We cried for days afterwards.

While the trauma of Casuarina's death catalyses Woodford's plans to create a sustainable farm for his family, life on the new farm involves killing many other animals. Woodford's discomfort with this is evident, but so too is a certain pragmatic acceptance of the task of killing animals for food. Here, Woodford (2008, p. 174) describes killing a rabbit:

... I managed to grab it behind its neck. It let out a piercing scream ...  
As the screaming went on, I looked around the orchard. All the creatures were frozen, looking at me in horror. ... This was no time for a weak will and besides I wanted this awful business done with quickly. I held it by the neck, stretched it out and pulled and twisted as hard as I could. The bunny went limp in my hands.

Woodford's and McIntosh's depictions of killing animals for food reflect a certain pragmatism behind their actions, in contrast with their intensely emotional responses to the killing of the dogs. Woodford's description of the rabbit's 'limp' body



signifies the completion of a necessary, if deeply unpleasant, task; his dog's 'limp' body, however, triggers confusion, denial and sadness. McIntosh is relatively unfazed by the 'frantic kicking of a dying sheep', but he is 'panicked' and 'confused' when his dog 'convulsed on the ground yelping'.

In a scene from *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, 78–9), the family is on a droving run when McGinnis's father shoots a 'cleanskin' for the family to eat.<sup>15</sup> McGinnis (2001, p. 79) writes: 'We had the liver and rib bones grilled for tea and enjoyed the joke as much as the taste of fresh meat'. The 'joke' relates to an earlier altercation between McGinnis's father and the manager of the station at which they had chosen to set up camp. The station manager had warned them off the property, also telling them not to use the nearby yards; so, the act of killing and eating a livestock animal from that property, then leaving the animal's remains behind for the station manager to find, is apparently a signal of their defiance. McGinnis's (2001, p. 79) depiction of this event includes her sister's comment, 'I'd like to be there when he finds the carcass', with the use of the term 'carcass' also alluding to perceptions of certain animal species. In discussing the 'killability' of different species, Despret (2016, p. 83) points out that dead people are usually regarded as 'bodies', while other dead animals—at least those who serve no further purpose as food—are typically 'carcasses'. In contrast to the scene involving the 'cleanskin', McGinnis (2001, pp. 305–6) portrays her family's regard for and treatment of Larry, the Smithfield collie, when he dies a natural death:

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<sup>15</sup> In this context, the term 'cleanskin' relates to cattle who have not been branded to indicate ownership.

I sank down beside him, feeling as if my legs had been kicked from under me. Death's blue film had already covered the warm intelligence of his eyes. I touched the broad ridge above them and looked at Dad.

'Just like that?'

'He had a fair crack o' the whip.' Dad was gruff. He stroked the limp body, then pulled the collar from round Larry's neck and hung it in the shed. We took the old dog out behind the yards and left him there in the grass for the birds to find.

... I put the kettle on for tea and we sat on the verandah to drink it, talking of inconsequential things but feeling the emptiness a dog's death leaves.

A level of solemnity—along with a respect for the workings of nature more broadly—is portrayed in the representation of the 'old dog' and his 'limp body', whereas the cleanskin's 'carcass' had been represented as a remnant of a meal and as a source of mirth. The reference to Larry's 'body', along with his apparent freedom to live and die naturally, further reflects the elevated status of dogs in the human-centred species hierarchy.

Lucy in *Through the farm gate* also dies naturally in her old age, as Goode (2013, pp. 182–3) recounts:

Charlie and I talk about taking her to the vet so she can end her days with dignity. Then she disappears and her body is found under a cattle-grid. She had wandered off to die in peace, somewhere dark and quiet. Dogs do that. But I wish she hadn't had such a lonely end. She deserved better.

Goode expresses compassion towards Lucy by contemplating having her professionally euthanased so that ‘she can end her days with dignity’; in comparison, the later depiction of Goode (2013, pp. 299–300) killing a fox is particularly brutal:

It snaps at my feet and knees. I tread on its head. Let the animal freedom fighters be outraged. Pretty fox be damned. My curlews who should be nesting have disappeared. I fear for them. No fox has rights when native creatures are dying out. I have no choice but to kill this animal. It is illegal to release a pest animal back into the wild. ... Its skull is too tough to squash so while it snaps at my hand I drag the fox and attached terrier back to the ute to get binder twine. After I have tied off the fox’s jaws and legs, I find a knife and cut its throat.

The sentiments behind the ideas that a pet dog deserves a dignified death and that native animals should be protected are apparently not extended to all other animals in Goode’s narrative, including the livestock animals. In the early 1990s, the Australian Government’s removal of the Wool Reserve Price Scheme meant that Australian sheep farmers (or ‘wool producers’) could no longer rely on a guaranteed minimum price for wool (Bardsley 1994); Goode (2013, p. 207) describes the mass killings of ‘worthless’ sheep that followed from this change:

We send our ewes to the council pit. All the people in the district are doing the same, loading up trucks and pushing their former breeders into a race where, one by one, they are shot and rolled into the freshly bulldozed hole. ...

By March 1991, 10 million sheep have been shot.

More routinely, it seems, cattle on Goode's farm who are deemed unsuitable for breeding are instead destined to be killed and sold as meat. Goode (2013, pp. 203–4) recounts a conversation in which her husband explains to an investor the realities of the stud bull business:

‘Only a few are ever good enough to go into stud herds. Most go into commercial herds and we cut the rest.’

This man looks at us as though we are simpletons. ...

‘Charlie,’ I say quietly, ‘perhaps you should explain what you mean by “cut the rest”.’

...

‘Yes, we castrate them,’ Charlie says. ‘We grow them out for meat. Send them to market. ...’

The pet dog may be able to live to old age and die a natural death, even if it happens to be ‘a lonely end’; meanwhile, the commodification or vilification of certain species apparently justifies the premature and unceremonious deaths of many other animals.

An aversion to the sentimental treatment of many non-human animals in rural Australian autobiographical texts is generally consistent with a rejection of sentimentality more widely. Parry (2011, p. 117) posits that sentimentality has ‘become a word of contempt’ and suggests that its association with people’s feelings for non-human animals is also used to devalue human–animal relationships. Sentimental attachments to some animals—such as livestock—would interfere with some of the ways that people treat them, including the commodification of certain species. A rejection of sentimentality towards non-human animals is further evidenced by the depictions or suggestions of leaving poison baits for dingoes, such

as in McGinnis's (2001) and Parkes's (2012) memoirs. Goode (2013, p. 160) regards some vegetarian guests' compassionate attitudes towards the cows on her farm as 'ignorance and arrogance and simplistic reductionism'. In response to these people admiring the cows' beauty, Goode (2013, p. 160) matter-of-factly explains: 'They [the cows] all have planned births and deaths ... They wouldn't be leading their happy and contented existences unless there was a use for them'. Likewise, when Goode's husband kills the kangaroo to provide meat for the dogs, he is unimpressed by their new neighbours' 'sentimental drivel about breaking up the family unit' when he tries to explain to them that 'picking off the buck is the sustainable thing to do' (Goode 2013, p. 225). MacKellar's (2014, pp. 138–9) decision to place Dusty the labrador 'on duty' to deter possums from her garden also suggests a less-than-sympathetic view of this smaller marsupial species—at least when they cross into human-colonised spaces. Parkes's (2012, pp. 227–9) chance encounter with a bungarra—a large goanna—at a water trough results in him throwing a large stone at the goanna's head then carrying the still-living reptile back to camp by the tail; once back at the camp, another stockman 'swung the bungarra around and cracked its head against the trunk of a tree' before they cooked and ate the dead animal. The occasionally unsympathetic treatment of non-human animals in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs reflects the real risk of persecution and death to some animals based on human attitudes towards different species.

The narrated events in the various memoirs represent the confusing and conflicting ways that humans sometimes treat non-human animals. Menely (2007, p. 249) asserts that the diminishment of sentimentality functions by 'guarding the border of human community', and that sympathy between species interferes with

this. Sentimental expression, through its long association with emotional weakness and with feminine writing (Solomon 2004, p. 6), is seemingly at odds with the pragmatism and toughness by which the narrators—both male and female—overwhelmingly portray themselves, often in relation to their handling of other animals. Representations of non-human animals in rural Australian memoirs do much to perpetuate anti-sentimentality and to protect the boundary between humans and other species. Most non-human animals are regarded as either commodities or pests, with notable exceptions being the narrators' dogs. A resistance to sentimentality is sometimes evidenced in the narrators' references to their dogs, even in the outwardly innocuous and relatively common use of shortened names for them—such as 'Cas' for Casuarina (Woodford 2008), 'Duke' (and sometimes 'Dukey') for Marmaduke (MacKellar 2010, 2014), 'Jiff' for Jiffy (Parkes 2012), and 'Luce' for Lucy (Goode 2013). Beyond the usual familiarity associated with nicknames, shortened forms of names such as these are thought to denote 'a combination of friendliness and antisentimentality' (Wierzbicka 1986, p. 356). Wierzbicka (1986, pp. 356, 362) observes that the showing of affection while still appearing to be 'tough' is characteristic of Anglo-Australians and that this archetypal 'toughness' derives in part from the nation's settler history, its 'pioneer traditions'. A combination of affection and toughness is reflected in the hypocoristic variations applied to dogs' names in representations of rural Australian life. In many of the narratives of rural Australians, it is seemingly not enough for dogs to be people's objects of affection; dogs achieve elevated status by also serving practical purposes relevant to their people's personal or economic pursuits.

### 3.6 An exceptional other

As Watson (2014, pp. 24–64) highlights, ‘the bush means work’. Work involved in living on the land, and the relentlessness of that work, pervades the narratives of rural Australian memoirs. The objectification and commodification of non-human animals associated with that work is also evident. The practice of keeping a select few animals as pets does not easily reconcile with the practice of keeping herds of animals as commodities. While this may account for the overall lack of pet animals in the narratives of rural Australians, it may also account for the prevalence of dogs in those narratives, since the dogs are frequently portrayed as participating in humans’ work activities. Larry and Red, for example, help the McGinnises in their droving work, such as when ‘they [the dogs] saved the horses miles a day by driving the straggling tail of the mob’ (McGinnis 2001, p. 74). At the sheep stations where McIntosh works, Smokey is also sometimes put to work; McIntosh (2008, p. 190) explains: ‘He was worth a man’s wages to a cocky. He could get away back and bring the sheep in through a gate since he was a pup’. For MacKellar (2014, p. 116), Duke the corgi emerges as her ‘secret weapon’ when she has to help with herding sheep on her new partner’s farm. Parkes includes several depictions of Jiff’s and Smokey’s sheep herding abilities in his story, and he describes with apparent admiration the relentless drive of the working dog: ‘They will work from sunup to sundown, even until the pads on their paws are worn and bleeding and they can’t take another step because of the pain’ (2012, p. 133). Dogs do not apparently need to be employed in specific tasks, though, to serve a useful purpose in their humans’ pursuits. In *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008, p. 172), for example, Solly the border collie

supports the family's sustainable farming practices and rural lifestyle by helping to maintain a safe space for the local wildlife:

He [Solly] looks out over his kingdom with a benevolence that only a complete fool would fail to envy, perpetually untroubled, unfailingly calm and happy to share his space with any wildlife that comes near.

The usefulness and versatility of dogs in the work of rural Australians are frequently lauded in the pages of these people's life stories.

Conversely, dogs who do not perform a practical function in the rural environment may be treated with suspicion or disdain. Goode (2013, pp. 180–1) relays a story that a farming couple told her about an encounter with 'a woman who was obviously from the city' driving a luxury car on a track where they were moving a mob of sheep:

'She said, *What a lovely day to take your sheep out walking*. Then she added, *Do you have to exercise them often? ...*'

'We just looked at her,' says Jim. 'How do you answer a dumb question like that? What does she think sheep are, some sort of house pet or something, like the stupid white dog she had on her lap yapping at us?'

For those people who live on the land, the keeping of non-human animals who serve no obvious practical function—'some sort of house pet', for example—may be seen as an indulgence. The importance of a dog's usefulness is also referenced in McGinnis's (2001) memoir when she is temporarily working as a station cook and minding the regular cook's overweight cattle dog, Boof. McGinnis's father refers to Boof as a 'useless-looking sooner', of which McGinnis (2001, p. 169) explains to



the reader: ‘There was no worse insult, its meaning hidden in the abbreviation “sooner eat than work”’. A higher regard for working dogs is also evident in a scene where a visiting padre suggests that the McGinnises build a tennis court and, rather than go to the expense of putting a fence around it, that they use the dogs to fetch the balls. McGinnis (2001, p. 101) recalls her sister’s response to this: “‘Larry and Red chase balls?’” Judith looked at him pityingly. “‘Working dogs have too much self-respect for that. ...’” In rural Australian contexts, ‘useful’ dogs are granted higher status, as is also evident in and perpetuated by wider perceptions of the working dog as a cultural icon.

The rural Australian working dog is so revered that stories about them can become bestselling books, as Goode’s experiences attest. Goode and Hayes’s (1990) compilation, *Great working dog stories*, and its sequel anthologies pay homage to the importance of working dogs to rural Australian people. The personal stories in these compilations are also testament to the multiple roles—such as family member, companion and worker—that dogs perform in people’s lives, while Goode’s own memoir contains several references to the importance of working dogs. Dogs’ roles in humans’ lives may be expanded in rural settings because of the nature of the lifestyle—alternatively, rural Australians may feel a need to justify their pet-keeping practices by highlighting their dogs’ utility. While simply providing people with companionship can be deemed useful, the dog who also performs a practical function for the person is highly regarded, even sought after, among rural Australians. For example, in McIntosh’s (2008) story, Smokey’s herding abilities earn both him and McIntosh respect from other station workers. The rural Australian memoirs reflect a lifestyle in which home and work merge—in which family

members work together, including the dogs. It is this—the working functions of farm dogs—that most distinguishes them as belonging in rural settings. Dogs who are productive and useful in the human-dominated rural environment are shown to thrive, while those who are unable to fill working roles risk being deemed redundant.

The useful dog is adept at responding to people's demands and at adjusting to different human-dominated environments. In *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014, pp. 41, 121), Duke is castigated as 'Bastard dog!' when, on the journey from New South Wales to Tasmania, he refuses to get into the car after a roadside break; but he then goes on to be celebrated as 'SUPER CORGI' when, at the farm in Tasmania, he deftly herds a mob of sheep for MacKellar. In *Beaten by a blow*, Smokey earns the respect of McIntosh's shearing colleagues because of his ability to work with sheep, with McIntosh (2008, p. 92) noting that 'even though the blokes hated Smokey's barking, they respected his skill as a working dog'. As long as he remains a useful worker, Smokey's occasional aggression is, it seems, also tolerated by some. For example, following an occasion when Smokey is put to work in a shearing shed, McIntosh (2008, p. 190) explains, 'The cocky did say he was frisky, reckoned he had a go at him, but he liked that spirit in a dog'. Yet, when McIntosh moves back to town to live with his wife and young daughter, Smokey's aggressive tendencies are considered incompatible with the more urban, domestic environment, leading McIntosh to kill him. The categories in which people place other animals can shift—pets can become pests, for example—depending on the situation. The working breed dog, like Smokey, is perceived as belonging on a farm where he or she can work; the more ornamental breed, like 'the stupid white dog' mentioned in Goode's (2013,

p. 181) story, apparently belongs in the city. When Parkes (2012, p. 328) accepts a job in Perth, he leaves Jiff at a station with his parents, explaining that his new home in the city ‘was no place for a dog, especially a big dog’. The working dog’s traits that are useful in the bush may not transfer easily or well to an urban setting where the dog is expected to conform to people’s expectations of a household pet.

Being limited to pet status can be a precarious position for a dog. According to Haraway (2003, p. 38):

the status of pet puts a dog at special risk ... the risk of abandonment when human affection wanes, when people’s convenience takes precedence, or when the dog fails to deliver on the fantasy of unconditional love.

As Haraway (2003, p. 38) also suggests, dogs with jobs are less susceptible to humans’ fickleness in this regard, since they serve practical purposes that go beyond just being pets. Coppinger and Coppinger (2002, p. 228), while recognising that relationships between working dogs and people can be mutually beneficial, suggest that people’s relationships with ‘household dogs’ (those kept simply as pets) are often characterised by ‘amensalism’ – that is, where ‘one species is not affected by the association, but the other species, by accident, is hurt by it’. Highlighting the precarity of the pet dog’s situation, Coppinger and Coppinger (2002, p. 229) posit:

The relationship should not be a one-way street, where I’ll get a dog that pleases me, and if it continues to please me, I won’t turn it in to the local shelter.

Tuan (1984, p. 114) relates zoologist Konrad Lorenz's observations of how people tend 'to treat even a valued pet as a convenience', giving the example of a person who may 'get rid of' a dog because they moved house. Tuan (1984, p. 114) notes: 'Household dogs are well looked after and yet they rarely grow old in the human family: they are disposed of long before they reach a ripe old age'. The dogs in the rural Australian memoirs are, for the most part, spared from being 'disposed of' in this way. A notable exception to this is Smokey in McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow*, who is killed because he does not conform to the role of 'household dog' once McIntosh moves back to town. The expectations that people place on dogs—to fit in with and to add value to their people's lives—evidently determine how individual dogs live and die.

By serving dual functions of companion and worker, the dog is an exceptional non-human other who is able to cross species boundaries in human-dominated environments. As a person's companion, the dog becomes an object of human affection; as a farm worker, the dog gains status among rural Australian people more broadly. The dog's usefulness as a worker, and how this translates to economic value, is central to the 'Farm dog project'—one of the University of Sydney's (n.d.) 'Dogmanship projects'—which aims 'to save producers time and money by allowing them to select for [dog] traits of value in their working environments' (McGreevy 2015). Such studies about farm dogs are interested mainly in practical matters that will enable the farmer to gain the most productivity from their dogs; there is little cross-over into the importance of dogs' companionship roles in Australian rural settings. Literature on dealing with working dogs, such as Williams's (2007) *Working sheep dogs: a practical guide to breeding, training and handling*, also

tends to focus on instructional and practical matters rather than on nurturing or appreciating the mateship of the dog. Many books that deal with keeping dogs as pets, like Starling and McGreevy's (2018) *Making dogs happy*, also address practical matters—such as training and health—while often being centred around more sentimental ideas of the dog and person as being 'best friends'. The narratives about dogs in rural Australians' autobiographical stories bring together views of dogs as workers and as companions.

Unlike most other animal species represented in the narratives, dogs are often referred to in terms of their utility as well as their individuality. Anthropomorphic references to the narrators' dogs' working abilities—innate abilities that stem from each dog's original breeding—suggest a partiality that is commonly associated with people's feelings for their pets. MacKellar (2014, pp. 110, 138) describes Duke the corgi as 'an enthusiastic helper' in the shearing sheds, and she admires labrador Dusty's 'prowess as a hunter' for keeping possums away from the garden. Parkes (2012, p. 185) refers to Jiff, the kelpie–border collie, as his 'workmate' when herding sheep. In McIntosh's (2008, pp. 105–6) story, Smokey is praised as 'a natural' for his ability to round up sheep. Goode (2013, p. 50) pays tribute to the 'professionalism' of farm dogs when describing her border collie Lucy's transition from the city to the farm, such as how 'she leans out the back of the ute like the professionals'. McGinnis's (2001, p. 101) narrative about Larry and Red suggests that the dogs possess self-respect, such as in the example given earlier in this chapter where McGinnis's sister declares that the dogs would not lower themselves to chase tennis balls. And Woodford's (2008) border collie, Solly, 'harbours no ill intent' towards the chickens who he is 'perpetually fascinated with' (see photograph

at Figure 24). Solly is also nicknamed 'the Professor', apparently because of his intelligence (Woodford 2008, p. 172). These anthropomorphic descriptions can be interpreted as manifestations of human sentimentality in that they imply a sympathy or empathy for the dogs.

At other times, the narrators use more overtly sentimental terms in relation to their dogs. For example, Goode (2013, p. 182) refers to Lucy as 'my dear old dog' and 'my old friend', MacKellar (2014, p. 9) describes Dusty as 'black perfection', McIntosh (2008, p. 202) proclaims that Smokey 'was the best friend [he had] ever had', Parkes (2012, p. 300) declares Jiff to be 'a black-haired tower of strength', and Woodford (2008, p. 125) describes Casuarina as having 'more love in her than anyone in [his] family had ever known, or ever could know'. In McGinnis's story, her father sympathetically addresses a dying Larry as 'Poor old fella' (2001, p. 305) and her brother's disparaging calls of 'yer great drongo' and 'you great galoot' (2001, pp. 193, 285) to Red have an affectionate edge to them. Praise and affection such as that directed towards the narrators' dogs is largely reserved for dogs and is not extended to other working animals—non-human or human. The sentimental treatment of dog characters in the memoirs provides opportunities for the narrators to demonstrate their compassion in situations where other animals may not be so well treated in comparison. The lack of similar treatment for many other animals highlights the disparities between the experiences of different species in rural environments and also emphasises the narrator's personal qualities. While people's desensitisation towards the discomfort or suffering of some non-humans is apparent in the commoditisation or vilification of certain species, the narratives suggest that they will still tend to show compassion towards their dogs.

Views among some rural Australians that working farm dogs should not be treated as pets are occasionally acknowledged in the memoirs of rural Australians. For example, in *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008, p. 106), a station hand tells McIntosh, ‘Those working dogs need their guts worked out, know what I mean? No good as pets or nothing’. In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, p. 133), too, recalls some advice he was given about working dogs:

When I worked in South Australia, I was told that a sheepdog is a sheepdog – and not a pet. On Winnininnie, the dogs were kept chained to their kennels when not working. I was discouraged from being too friendly with them. Make a pet of a sheepdog, they said, and it’ll be no good as a working dog.

Yet, Parkes (2012, p. 133) also explains how he and his father thought differently, how they believed that each role—pet and worker—‘enhanced the other’ and ‘were inseparable’. In doing so, Parkes acknowledges what other rural Australian memoirs demonstrate less explicitly. Dogs’ useful contributions to farm work combined with their appeal to people’s affections raise their status in rural Australian contexts, highlighting their exceptionality in the narrated lives of rural Australians. Sentimentality and practicality, combined, make the dog an exceptional other.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The concept of species is relevant to the ways that people perceive and treat other animals. Perceptions of non-human animals as pets, stock, pests or food are reflections of speciesist attitudes that see people placing themselves uppermost in a human-centred hierarchy of species importance. Rural Australian environments are

home to many different animal species, and the memoirs of rural Australians provide insight into how people perceive various non-human animals. Herd animals, like sheep and cattle, are generally referred to collectively, similarly to how they might be viewed in day-to-day farming situations. Most of the dogs, meanwhile, are individual characters with distinctive personalities and referred to by their given names—much in the same way that other human characters are portrayed in the narratives.

While the narratives reflect environments where non-human animals are largely considered in terms of their utility and economic value, and sentimentality towards non-human animals may invite contempt, dogs are shown to endear themselves to people through both their working abilities and the companionship that they offer. The dogs often live in their people's homes and travel or work alongside them. Despite their distinctly non-human behaviours, dogs breach the borders that divide human and non-human animals. Sentimental displays towards dogs in rural Australian memoirs, and the relative lack of similar expressions of sentiment towards other animal species, signify the close relationships between people and dogs. Names given to dogs, anthropomorphic depictions of dogs' working abilities, and anguish expressed over dogs' deaths are some of the means by which rural Australians distinguish the dog characters among the various non-human others in their own life stories.



## Chapter 4 The relational self

### 4.1 Introduction

Tim Winton's (2015) *Island home: a landscape memoir* opens with Winton reflecting on a period when he and his family were living in Ireland. His young son is looking at some photographs from Australia and asks, 'Is it real?', to which Winton responds, 'It's home. ... Remember? That's Australia' (Winton 2015, pp. 4–5). This is followed by a further exchange (Winton 2015, pp. 6–7), also involving Winton's wife:

'When we get home,' the boy declared, 'we're getting a dog. In a ute.'  
Later that night, as he slept in his loft, we spoke at length about his little declaration. We knew what he hankered for wasn't really a pet, or the car it came in, but what they stood for – his Australian life. And the wild spaces that made it possible.

While this exchange indicates feelings of displacement, it also encapsulates the dog's relevance to a sense of identity and belonging in the 'wild spaces' of Australia. The dog (and the ute) represent an Australian way of life that is rooted in the land.

An enduring image of the Australian character stems from ideas of the bush—of remote or rural Australia—and of people's relationship with it (Brett 2011, pp. 57–8; Phillips & Smith 2000, p. 214; Watson 2014, p. 66). A popular view in the social imaginary is that the bush has a defining influence on Australian identity—that Australians are 'individualistic, resilient and resourceful' as a result of the land being 'isolated, expansive, capricious and unique' (Woinarski 2017). In *The road*

*from Coorain*, Australian historian Jill Ker Conway's memoir about her rural upbringing in the western plains district of New South Wales and her continued attachment to that place, Conway (1989, p. 218) briefly considers the Australian preoccupation with the toughness of the land and its people, suggesting that this might be due to:

... the way in which the first settlers' encounters with this environment had formed the inner landscape of the mind, the unspoken, unanalyzed relationship to the order of creation which governs our psyches at the deepest level.

Even as Australia becomes more urbanised and multicultural, and ideas of 'Australianness' become more diverse, a traditional view of the national identity—including its associations with the land—prevails in Australian culture (Austin & Fozdar 2018, p. 282). The bush's relationship with the Australian character has long dominated the social imaginary and continues to do so into the current century.

The Australian bush is more than a physical place. In seeking to define what Australians perceive as the bush, Watson (2014, p. 66) proclaims: 'The Australian bush is both real and imaginary. ... It is, by many accounts, the source of the nation's idea of itself'. This idea is perhaps no more evident than in dog behaviourist Guy Hull's (2018) *The dogs that made Australia*. Hull's book, which targets a general audience, is largely premised on the idea of Australia—an Australia that dogs 'made' by enabling settlers' agricultural pursuits—as the bush. Watson (2014, p. 54), too, recognises the dog's longstanding importance to rural Australians, including his own ancestral family, when he notes that '[t]here is scarcely a family photo that does not have a dog in it' and that dogs 'were essential

to both productivity and convenience'. Acknowledging the dog's role in times of extreme hardship for some rural Australians, Watson (2014, p. 56) also states: 'Dogs were more than a material help: they helped faith survive in men and women'. The Australian working dog is, in effect, central to ideas of the bush as a place of connection and belonging for Australian people despite the land's resistance to human habitation.

Even though 21st-century Australian society is predominantly urban and increasingly cosmopolitan, contemporary rural Australian memoirs—which typically include narrative about dogs—help to perpetuate the rural Australian identity in the national imaginary. McCooey (1996, p. 151) observes a 'rejection of the land' as characteristic of some 20th-century Australian autobiographies; however, the narratives that appear in more recently published works would suggest that a shift has taken place in this regard. Hickey (2015, p. 2), referring to Australian writing more generally, finds that contemporary works of fiction (such as those by Tim Winton and Cate Kennedy), in contrast with more canonical Australian literature (such as the works of Henry Lawson and Barbara Baynton), signal 'a more accepting and appreciative attitude toward the Australian landscape'. Hickey's (2015) analysis reveals an emerging appreciation of the bush as a place that offers redemption or refuge rather than as a site that evokes despair, anxiety or distrust. In a subsequent article in *The Conversation*, Hickey (2017) writes that the 21st century has seen 'a change in how Australians read and write about the bush'—that, while earlier writing reflected the Australian bush as 'a place from which to flee', contemporary literature is more likely to reflect it as 'a destination for escape'. The publication of Hickey's 2017 article in *The Conversation*, an online medium that has public

interest at the core of its charter (The Conversation 2019), implies that there is ongoing public interest in literary representations of the Australian bush. The narratives of many 21st-century rural Australian memoirs suggest that the Australian bush has a magnetic effect on the writers of these memoirs. Their publication for a general audience also infers wider interest in stories about life on the land.

Rural Australia—or the bush, either physical or imagined—is distinguished largely by its natural and built environments, its remoteness, and its human and non-human inhabitants. Smith and Watson (2010, pp. 70–1) point out how profoundly the location in which an autobiographical narrative is set can influence the writer’s story, noting in particular the intersecting ‘layers’ of social, cultural and physical elements that infuse narratives set in rural locations. In the rural Australian memoir, the writer’s relationship with the dog can frequently be found among those layers. The dog’s belonging on the land, with people, is reflected in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs, such that the dog is shown to support the person’s ability to navigate through and live on the land. Narrative about the dog helps to affirm the narrator’s sense of identity and belonging in rural Australia—specifically, the narrator’s connection to the land and the lifestyle that it represents. This concept can be explored further, and from the contemporary perspective, through narrative about dogs in personal memoirs set in rural Australia and published in the 21st century.

In autobiographical works, such as the six personal memoirs selected for this study, stories about others manifest as relational narrative. The relational others in autobiographical narratives are typically people—often parents, siblings, children, friends, partners or lovers—with whom the writer shares an intimate relationship (Couser 2012a, p. 20; Eakin 1999, p. 86). Notably, Nancy K. Miller’s (2007, p. 544)

description of autobiographical writing as being ‘about the web of entanglement in which we find ourselves’ emphasises the inevitability of relational narrative in the personal memoir. In this sense, autobiography can also perform a biographical function, by which relational narrative melds both autobiographical and biographical elements within the personal memoir. The dog memoir, as a biographical account of a dog’s life, is recognised by some (for example, Caesar 2009, pp. 55–70; Couser 2012b, p. 192) as a form of relational narrative through which the author, in effect, relates his or her own story. This kind of life writing—the dog memoir—demonstrates that relational narrative can be, and often is, extended to involve non-human as well as human subjects, including dogs, as the writer’s significant others.

Literature, from the classics to more contemporary works, abounds with stories involving dogs. Acknowledging this phenomenon, and recognising the significance of dogs to people’s lives, Garber (1997, p. 34) proposes that ‘it is somehow easier for many people to “identify with” a dog than with a specific person ... in literature or history’. Relational narrative about dogs takes this notion further, though, in showing that a person might also form and project an identity *through*, rather than simply identify *with*, a dog. Dogs’ stories are often found within personal memoirs set in rural Australia, and this convergence of the dog memoir and the personal memoir add a further level of complexity and meaning to a narrative. The application of relational narrative theory in an analysis of representations of dogs and human–dog relations in rural Australian memoir supports a view that non-human others can be among human narrators’ important relational others. Considering the enduring relevance of the bush to the national character and the dog’s belonging in that space, the rural Australian personal memoir becomes an

especially meaningful site where autobiographical identity formation through the dog as relational other can be explored.

## 4.2 Relational identity

The personal memoir is an autobiographical account of the writer's own lived experiences. Yet, personal memoirs typically also contain biographical elements since relationships with others inevitably feed into autobiographical writers' experiences. As Couser (2012a, p. 20) explains, 'autobiography is ... always somewhat biographical because we are formed as individuals in and by relationships, and we exist within social networks'. Furthermore, this combination of autobiography and biography can produce a memoir in which the subject is not definitively the writer or the related other but in which the focus is more on the relationship between these parties (Couser 2012a, p. 21). In this way, the memoir writer interprets his or her lived experiences within a framework of others' related experiences and in terms of the writer's view of his or her relationships with those others. Importantly, it is the writer's memories and interpretations of those experiences and relationships, transmuted through the writing process, that find their way onto the pages of a memoir.

What and how events are remembered and portrayed in autobiographical texts can be culturally and socially influenced as well. In considering remembering as a collective activity rather than as a completely private one, Smith and Watson (2010, pp. 25–6) point out that remembering takes place within and is influenced by communities and cultures. Collective memory both stems from and forms ideas around national identity. The relationality of memory and life, when exhibited in

autobiographical writing through the interweaving of the writer's own story with others' stories, contributes to the formation of autobiographical identity. This autobiographical identity is likely to consist of multiple identities that might be based on the narrator's family or work roles, cultural influences, or relationships with others. Within such a framework, and through selective representations and interpretations of remembered experiences, the memoir writer constructs an identity. Contemporary rural Australian memoirs present opportunities to explore autobiographical self-representations through dogs as relational others, and to consider how those self-representations might help to sustain a distinctly rural Australian identity.

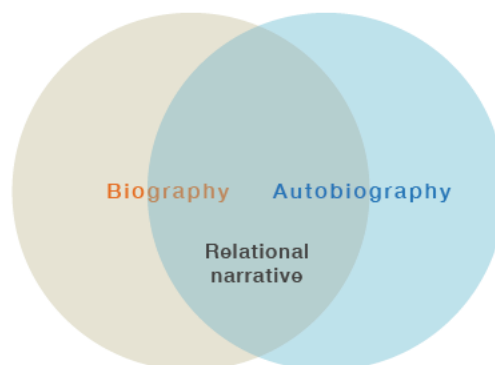
While the personal memoir is generally understood to be an autobiographical text, it also provides scope to venture beyond the conventions or expectations of autobiography. Memoir, as Brien (2004, p. 84) points out, 'usually explores one theme, period or aspect of a life under consideration', while autobiography 'tends to represent the whole of the life being written about'. However, close likenesses between autobiography and memoir (Brien 2004, pp. 88–9), and a continuing tendency to apply the labels of autobiography and memoir interchangeably, as noted in Chapter 2 of this thesis, perpetuate a broader lack of clarity or consensus over what constitutes a memoir. This substitutive labelling of autobiography and memoir is evident in Australian book publishers' listings for autobiographical works, and Colmer and Colmer (1987a, p. 4) also acknowledge that 'the two modes are often inseparable in Australia'. Clearer distinctions are often made between autobiography and biography, though, with autobiography generally understood to be a text in which the main subject and the writer are the same person, while biography is the

life story of a subject who is someone other than the writer. Yet, the fluidity of the genres results in frequent crossover between the two, such that memoir is often both autobiographical and biographical.

Relational narrative in a memoir is the blending of the autobiographical with the biographical. Couser (2012a, p. 20) proposes viewing memoir as a continuum on which autobiography and biography are found at opposite ends, with relational narrative situated midway between the two. Another way of envisaging memoir may be as a multimodal form of life writing, in which memoir contains varying degrees of autobiographical and biographical elements, and relational narrative exists in the space where the two forms of life writing converge. To varying degrees, all autobiography is biographical and all biography is autobiographical. Each form is integral to the other, as Couser (2012a, p. 20) also acknowledges:

... although there is an important conceptual distinction between writing about yourself and writing about another person, memoirs do not always do just one *or* the other. Indeed, in practice, it is difficult to do one *without* doing the other.

In diagrammatical form, therefore, memoir might look something like this:





The extent to which relational narrative is incorporated in a memoir would result in more or less overlap between autobiography and biography. Likewise, a text published as a biographical work—written supposedly, entirely about someone other than the author—is overlaid by autobiographical elements due to the narrator’s influence on the content (Couser 2012a, p. 19). In effect, biographical representations of others in a personal memoir can also be read as autobiographical representations of the narrator’s experiences in relation to those others.

The pervasiveness of the relational—the other—in contemporary memoir is such that autobiographical and biographical elements in contemporary memoir are virtually inseparable. As Smith and Watson (2010, p. 7) point out, ‘life narrators have blurred the boundary separating autobiographical and biographical modes by embedding their versions of the life of a family member in their own personal narratives’. Eakin’s (1999, pp. 43–98) analysis of several autobiographical works draws attention to the prevalence of relational narrative in autobiographical storytelling and suggests that the relational is crucial to autobiographical self-representation. Some life writing scholars’ stylistic preference for ‘auto/biography’ recognises the interplay of biography and autobiography, further emphasising that contemporary autobiography frequently involves telling the story of someone other than the writer (Rüggemeier 2011). Conceptualising life narrative in this way—as ‘auto/biography’—encourages memoir writers and readers to acknowledge and appreciate the biographical within the autobiographical.

Autobiographical writing exposes aspects of the self in ways that contribute to autobiographical identity, and narrative about others feeds into that process. Eakin (1999, pp. 43, 57) asserts that ‘*all* identity is relational’ and uses the term ‘relational

life' to describe 'the story of a relational model of identity, developed collaboratively with others'. In stressing how the self may be represented through others, Eakin (1999, p. 61) further explains that 'the other's story, the other's life, is possessed—indeed created—by the recording self'. The 'relational life', according to Eakin (1999, p. 86), is the writer's story of the self, but considered in terms of his or her intimate relations with other 'key' people. Colmer and Colmer (1987a, pp. 9–10) also note that many autobiographical writers attempt to discover and define themselves through writing about their relationships. Relational narratives are manifestations of other subjects' influences on the autobiographical subject—they represent the intersubjective nature of autobiography and autobiographical identity.

Writing about others might also be seen as a narrative strategy that allows the autobiographer to more comfortably interrogate and expose the self. Preliminary theory on relational narrative—such as that put forward by Mason (1980)—suggested that early women autobiographers, who may not have felt empowered to write about themselves, were able to better relay their stories and explore their own identities by writing about others and their relationships with those others. Mason (1980, p. 231), in examining the autobiographical writing of four women who lived between the 14th and 17th centuries, explains how relational life writing 'allowed these women ... to discover and delineate a self and to tell the story of that self'. Those who feel marginalised or oppressed in some way—like the women autobiographers in Mason's study—may still be able to more freely express their thoughts, feelings and experiences through an intermediary such as a relational other.

The relational self, while initially presented as a distinguishing feature of female life writing, has come to be appreciated as applicable to life writing more generally. Eakin (1999, pp. 47–9) suggests that the relational identity model, as conceived by Mason, supersedes earlier identity models, such as those advocated by Georges Gusdorf, Philippe Lejeune and Karl J. Wintraub, that espoused autonomy and self-determination as bases for autobiographical self-exploration and self-portrayal. More recent scholarship and commentary, such as that by Couser (2012a) and Smith and Watson (2010), reaffirm the validity of relational narrative as a means of constructing autobiographical identity. Recognising that identity arises from relationships and the portrayals of those relationships, narrative about others in autobiography may be used to deflect attention away from the self, or to avoid the reader's, and the writer's own, direct gaze as a subtler or more culturally acceptable means of self-expression. In this way, relational narrative allows the personal memoir writer to scrutinise and contemplate his or her own lived experiences through others' experiences, and to formulate and project autobiographical identity through those others.

Much of the scholarly commentary on relational narrative, however, focuses on human others with whom the writer shares an intimate relationship—those people referred to by Eakin (1999, p. 86) as 'proximate others' and by Smith and Watson (2010, p. 86) as 'significant others'. Smith and Watson (2010, pp. 86–8) build on this concept by recognising 'historical', 'contingent', 'idealised absent' (as in a deity) and 'subject' (the inner self) others, while other scholars have further extended this idea to consider non-human animals as relational others. Of particular note, and as Chapter 1 of this thesis identifies (specifically, 1.2 Literature review),

Caesar (2009, p. 67), Couser (2012b, p. 192), and Huff and Haefner (2012, p. 155) regard memoirs with dogs as subjects as being among those narratives that fit within the relational form of life writing. This recognition of dogs as relational others in life writing is an acknowledgement of the dog's place among a person's significant or proximate others, an idea that is reinforced by Haraway's (2008, pp. 27, 63) concept of interspecies entanglement—in particular, the 'co-constitutive' or 'coshaping' nature of human–dog interactions. Chapter 3 of this thesis proposes that dogs are exceptional others in the lives of contemporary rural Australian people, mainly on the basis of the combination of sentimentality and pragmatism inherent in the portrayals of dog characters, among other human and non-human characters, in rural Australian memoirs. Within the framework of relational narrative theory, as this chapter further explores, the dog would again appear to be exceptional. As an other in rural Australian memoir, the dog is proximate and significant, but also an exceptional being: a non-human that fits into a category that is typically reserved for human others in autobiographical narrative. Dogs, and not just other people, can feature among a person's closest relational others, as these memoirs attest.

Given the close and interdependent relationships between rural Australian people and their dogs, and the relational nature of contemporary autobiographical writing, it is somehow inevitable that dogs will be among the characters in rural Australian memoir. Kirksey (2015, p. 758), with reference to and extending on Mol's (2002) idea that a disease cannot exist on its own, asks: 'Can a species ever be alone; can it stand by itself?' In terms of autobiographical writing, an alternative question might be: Can a personal memoir ever be just one person's story; does it need others' stories to complete it? Or further still, in relation to the rural Australian context and

interspecies relationships: Is the rural Australian memoir complete without the dog's story within it? Considering that all life writing is relational, and knowing that dogs and people live closely together and frequently participate in shared experiences, it might seem a foregone conclusion that dogs' lives will be among those related others' stories in a personal memoir. Dogs are so prevalent in rural Australian life that it may be more remarkable for the author of a rural Australian memoir to choose to exclude dogs from the narrative. Living beings all exist in a state of interconnectedness to varying degrees, and the inclusion of dogs as relational others in autobiographical writing is a consequence and acknowledgement of the particularly closely intertwined lives of people and dogs. Furthermore, relational narrative about a dog may be as much about the dog—the biographical subject—as it is about the person who is narrating—the autobiographical self. As Caesar (2009, p. 84) proposes, 'any representation of an animal ultimately still serves our own representation of ourselves'. Due to the interdependent nature of human–dog relationships, writers will inevitably inject aspects of themselves into narratives involving dogs. Through writing about dog others, the biographical becomes autobiographical, and vice versa.

### 4.3 Dogs' related stories

Some memoirs even present dogs as the main characters. The 21st century has seen the dog memoir emerge as a particularly popular and marketable form of life writing (Caesar 2009, p. 55). Aptly referred to by Sanders (2011, p. 109) as “‘me and my dog’ memoirs”, these life stories exemplify the relational life and the overlapping nature of autobiography and biography. However, while purporting to

be about a dog's life, this kind of memoir tends to be more about the person's own experiences in relation to the dog subject. Grogan's (2005) bestselling *Marley & me: life and love with the world's worst dog*, which was adapted into a popular film, is one of many such books originating from North America in recent years. One of the rare examples of dog memoirs that have been published in Australia is Ying Ying's (2013) *Starting with Max: how a wise stray dog gave me strength and inspiration*, which is about the author's experiences with a cross-breed rescue dog. Ying's family, shortly after moving from Hong Kong to Sydney, adopts Max from a shelter, and, as the memoir title indicates, Ying (2013) credits Max with helping her to re-establish her sense of self as she adjusts to life in her new home. There are also compilations of short stories about Australians and their dogs, such as Angela Goode and Mike Hayes's (2009) *Great Australian working dog stories*. A popular form of Australian dog memoir that has the double appeal of the dog story and the war story is that of the 'war dog'—works such as Sandra Lee's (2011) *Saving Private Sarbi* or Roland Perry's (2013) *Horrie the war dog: the story of Australia's most famous dog*. There have otherwise been relatively few published Australian memoirs dedicated to telling dogs' life stories.

Dogs' stories are, however, often found within the narratives of Australians' personal memoirs, including those set in rural Australia. These memoirs therefore provide opportunities for examining how the writers might employ relational narrative about their dogs and their relationships with those dogs when recounting their own experiences—including how aspects of the writer's character or autobiographical identity are developed through the dog character. The following examination of relational stories about dogs focuses on six dog characters in the

selected contemporary rural Australian memoirs: Lucy the border collie in Goode's (2013) *Through the farm gate: a memoir*; Duke the corgi in MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there*; Larry the Smithfield collie in McGinnis's (2001) *Heart country*; Smokey the working dog of unspecified breed in McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story*; Jiff the kelpie–border collie cross in Parkes's (2012) *A youth not wasted*; and Casuarina the cattle dog in Woodford's (2008) *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis*. Since the main character and the writer of each text is the same person, these memoirs are considered to be autobiographical texts. Even though the extent to which relational narrative about a dog is embedded within each of these memoirs varies, the dogs' stories perform significant functions in the telling of the autobiographers' own stories, with some commonalities emerging across the narratives. While telling their own stories, the narrators tell their versions of the dogs' stories, effectively memorialising the dogs' lives. The rural Australian identity that is relayed through these memoirs is in part conveyed by the related dogs' stories. Relational narrative involving dogs somehow helps to reaffirm the narrator's sense of belonging and home in the depicted bush settings.

#### **Lucy in Goode's *Through the farm gate: a memoir***

Lucy, 'a border collie of profound intelligence' (Goode 2013, p. 7), appears early in Angela Goode's *Through the farm gate: a memoir*, in a scene where Goode, who has just quit her government job, travels to Esperance to visit her brothers. Goode (2013, p. 7) describes herself and Lucy as 'refugees from city life, both responding to the call of our genes to the country'. By claiming this shared quality with a dog whose breeding is for farm work—a sheepdog breed whose 'instincts have her

rounding up everything from children to tennis balls' (2013, p. 7)—Goode implies a familial connection between the two of them and illustrates her own supposedly genetic predisposition for rural life. This notion of seeking refuge in the country also resonates with Hickey's (2017) claim about portrayals of the Australian bush in 21st-century literature as 'a destination for escape'. Goode's inclusion of her dog in her travels supports her self-portrayal as not belonging in the city, with the dog acting as an accomplice to or facilitator of Goode's response to her own rural yearnings.

Goode and Lucy's journey to Esperance involves travelling by train from Adelaide to Kalgoorlie then, because dogs are not allowed at the hotel in Kalgoorlie and the bus to Esperance does not leave until the next day, hitchhiking for the remaining leg. On the train, Lucy 'travelled in the guards' van across the Nullarbor, eating their sandwiches and leftover pies' (Goode 2013, p. 9). But when Goode (2013, p. 9) subsequently accepts a lift from Kalgoorlie to Esperance in a truck with three men, comprising the driver and 'two uncouth-looking blokes in navy singlets', Lucy sits protectively on her lap throughout the road journey. Further demonstrating her dog's protectiveness, Goode (2013, pp. 10–11) describes how she instructs Lucy to perform a growling and snarling demonstration—a performance that apparently helps to achieve 'a sort of mutual respect' between Goode and the men. Goode's narration of Lucy's experiences and behaviours on the different phases of this journey—that she happily rode in the guards' van on the train but then sits protectively on Goode's lap during the truck ride—highlights the differences in atmosphere and comfort between the train trip and the truck ride as experienced by both Goode and Lucy.



Further into Goode's story, she recounts her move from Adelaide to the farm in south-east South Australia that her partner manages and how this move also involves Lucy's transition from city to rural life. Goode (2013, p. 49) writes that 'Lucy celebrates being away from asphalt and fenced backyards by rolling in every pat of fresh green manure' then 'struts like a supermodel through barbecue gatherings on the back lawn wearing her new perfume and looks hurt when mothers shriek and gather their children into their arms to stop them patting her'. The move to the farm also sees Lucy having to sleep outside in a kennel instead of being allowed indoors and 'sleeping in a soft chair on [Goode's] verandah', as she had been accustomed to doing (Goode 2013, pp. 49–50). Goode (2013, p. 50) notes some of the positive effects on Lucy—that 'she loses her city flab acquired from sneaking to the butcher shop ... for a treat of fritz'<sup>16</sup> and how '[h]er coat now gleams with health and she leans out of the back of the ute like the professionals, barking at sheep and shadows'. Goode (2013, p. 73) also recounts their shared experience when bushfires threaten the farm; emphasising the duress of the situation, she explains: 'Lucy in her thick black and white coat lies flat on the concrete of the enclosed verandah, panting. I pour water over her and fill her drinking bowl'. Through these different scenes involving Lucy, Goode draws attention to both the appeal and the challenges of the bush, and to the adaptability and resilience of those who live there, herself included.

There is little further mention of Lucy until around halfway through the memoir when she is 17 years old and dying. At this point, Goode (2013, p. 182) conveys

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<sup>16</sup> Fritz is a processed meat that is particular to South Australia. The *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) includes this entry for 'fritz': '*n. Esp. SA* a large, mild-flavoured, pre-cooked sausage, usually sliced thinly and eaten cold'.

feelings of guilt for not having given Lucy much attention while she looked after the children and farm. Goode's (2013, p. 183) reminiscences about Lucy's earlier life reveal that Goode adopted Lucy as 'a bouncy pup from a country pound' and how, when Goode worked for a university radio station in Adelaide, Lucy would surprise her by making her own way through the city streets to Goode's workplace:

... despite being tied up when I leave for work, she appears at the studios, so a formal motion is passed that she be appointed to the staff. For my remaining six months at the station, she gallops along footpaths as I pedal to and from work and sits in on most interviews and meetings.

Reflecting on these earlier experiences, and acknowledging the intimacy and history of their relationship as well as Goode's competing demands since moving to the farm, Goode (2013, pp. 182–3) expresses her pride at being 'so loved' by Lucy and states regretfully: 'I feel guilty that we don't talk like we used to'. Lucy's relatively lengthy absence from the narrative also serves as evidence of the other demands on Goode following their move from the city. Goode (2013, p. 182) suggests, though, that their shared lives on the farm have satisfied Lucy's needs in other ways, as she consoles herself with the knowledge that at least the 'last six years of [Lucy's] life have been among the bush sights, smells and sounds that her genes equipped her for'. Considering Goode's (2013, p. 7) earlier comment about 'the call of our genes to the country', this statement would seem to be as much about Goode's own sense of belonging in the bush and the comfort that she gains from the country surroundings. A subsequent statement—'She, like me, came back to the country, where we feel complete and content' (Goode 2013, p. 182)—which starts with Lucy

as the subject then shifts to being about both Goode and Lucy, further reinforces Goode's identification with and through Lucy.

While Goode (2013, p. 182) contemplates taking Lucy to a veterinarian for euthanising, 'so she can end her days with dignity', Lucy apparently takes herself away to die in private: '... she disappears and her body is found under a cattle-grid'. Goode (2013, pp. 182–3) expresses conflicted feelings about the dog's predisposition to go away to die alone, and specifically about Lucy doing this, when she states: 'Dogs do that. But I wish she hadn't had such a lonely end'. However, the depiction of Lucy choosing to die beneath a cattle grid—this common fixture within the rural Australian landscape—further characterises her as a country dog. That Lucy ultimately dies there, rather than being euthanised in the sterile surrounds of a veterinary clinic, resonates with Goode's own story of finding a sense of belonging on the farm.

#### **Duke in MacKellar's *How to get there***

Among the various characters in Maggie MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there* is Duke, a corgi, who was introduced to readers in MacKellar's previous memoir *When it rains* (2010). In that earlier memoir, MacKellar tells of her retreat from the city to the family farm following the deaths of her husband and mother. When a family friend offers one of her corgi's pups to MacKellar's children, the children choose one from the litter and call him Marmaduke, which is shortened to Duke (MacKellar 2010, p. 167). Near the end of *How to get there*, MacKellar (2014, p. 228) reflects back on the arrival of Duke and other pets in her life:

When grief came along and made the world unsafe, I retreated and in my retreat I accepted a corgi puppy, then a labrador puppy, bought a pony, then a horse, then another horse. A bird, some guinea pigs, too many chickens. And the more animals I had, the safer the world became.

As part of MacKellar's extended family, Duke and the other pets seem to offer her the safety and security of home. In keeping with this notion, when MacKellar moves to a farm in Tasmania to live with her new partner, she takes all of these pet animals, as well as her children, with her.

An air of anxiety and uncertainty associated with MacKellar's move from her old home in New South Wales to Tasmania is heightened by her depiction of the journey by car and ferry with Duke and some of the other pets. Duke is, according to MacKellar (2014, p. 39), a 'beautiful dog', and MacKellar finds comfort in his loyalty to her children, especially to her daughter, and in the knowledge that he would always accompany her children wherever they went on the farm. Duke is, however, an anxious traveller, and his overall nervousness leads MacKellar to question her decision to have him neutered: 'If I had known, I never would have had him desexed. He would be a braver dog with testosterone' (2014, p. 39). When Duke—along with Dusty the black labrador, Poppy the cockatiel and Rodney the guinea pig—accompanies MacKellar on the car journey to their new home, he 'is a nervous wreck on the floor' while, in contrast, Dusty calmly sits or sleeps on the front seat (2014, pp. 38–9). Then, en route, when MacKellar lets the dogs out for a break at a highway rest stop, Duke refuses to get back in the car. He dodges MacKellar's attempts to catch him by the collar, and, after chasing him around the car, she loses her temper, throws a stone at him and yells, 'Bastard dog!' (2014,

p. 41); MacKellar goes on to explain that, at that point, Duke ‘recognised real rage, threw me one more dirty look and hopped straight into the car’. For the overnight ferry journey from Melbourne to Tasmania, Duke and the other pets stay in cages in the ship’s hold while MacKellar travels in a cabin upstairs. When MacKellar is reunited with them the next morning on arrival at the ferry terminal, the dogs are apparently ‘beside themselves’ with happiness (2014, p. 43). MacKellar (2014, p. 43) writes that, during the subsequent drive, she ‘felt like a tour guide as the two dogs peered out the window’, suggesting Duke’s more relaxed demeanour, as well as her own, on this last stage of the journey. MacKellar’s own contentedness in different situations would appear to be reflected in her various portrayals of her dogs’ contentedness; in particular, the descriptions of Duke being happy or relaxed have a transfer effect in that they could also be interpreted as mutual feelings between MacKellar and Duke. Just before arriving at the farm, MacKellar (2014, p. 44) stops to take a photograph and to look at the scenery; she describes looking for an indication that ‘this landscape of sea and sky, pale paddocks and fine sand would become home’, then explains:

There was only relief to have made it this far, and an exhausted numbness rising from a new bruise of homesickness. The dogs welcomed me back into the car and as we kept driving I trusted myself to time, to love and to new beginnings.

MacKellar’s references to the dogs on this final stage of the journey reflect the sense of comfort that they offer—suggesting that they provide some reassurance that she is on the right path ‘to get there’.

Further along in the narrative, MacKellar (2014, p. 116) makes the observation that ‘Duke has come into his own’ since the move to Tasmania. The change in Duke is especially apparent in MacKellar’s portrayals of his newfound talents as a sheepdog. However, MacKellar (2014, pp. 105–6) alludes to her own sense of self being somewhat undermined by her partner’s expectation that she will cook for the shearers:

Each time I do the shearing cooking I’m a little incredulous that somehow this is my life. ...

I shake my head at all my years of university study, which do me absolutely no good when faced with the task of feeding a shearing team.

When asked to help pen up sheep for shearing, though, her ability to do this task with Duke’s assistance seems to restore her sense of self-confidence. MacKellar’s partner tasks her with keeping the shearers’ pens full of sheep, which becomes for MacKellar (2014, p. 110) an opportunity to put Duke’s herding skills to the test:

Luckily I have an enthusiastic helper in the form of Duke, and the sight of a dog with very short legs and a fierce bark sends them flying into the pens.

MacKellar (2014, p. 110) points out that her partner’s dogs will not work for her and, if not for Duke, she ‘would not have a hope of getting sheep into the pen’; she proudly describes how Duke’s ‘level of passion’ for working with sheep make him such an effective helper. MacKellar (2014, pp. 116–21) refers to Duke as her ‘secret weapon’ when his usefulness as a sheepdog is portrayed again in detail in a scene where he helps MacKellar to herd a mob of stray ewes across a creek. Beneath

MacKellar's narration of Duke's herding achievements, there is a sense of her own satisfaction and a growing feeling of belonging in her new home—that, like Duke, she has 'come into her own'. And towards the end of the memoir, when MacKellar (2014, p. 217) reflects on whether she is happy, she includes 'the swagger on that corgi after he's packed eighty-nine sheep into a race' among the various things in her life which bring her joy.

### **Larry in McGinnis's *Heart country***

Kerry McGinnis's (2001) *Heart country* includes Larry, the family's Smithfield collie, whose adoption by the McGinnis family is recounted in McGinnis's (2000) *Pieces of blue*. In that earlier memoir, McGinnis (2000, p. 76) explains: 'No camp, according to Dad, was complete without a dog—we'd have to see about getting one'. Her father, though, dismisses a suggestion to buy one, since, in the past, his best dogs had apparently always been given to him for free: 'We'd wait a bit, he said. One will turn up' (McGinnis 2000, p. 76). When the author's younger brother, Patrick, brings home a malnourished, mange-ridden dog that he had traded three marbles for, their father tells him to return the dog. On seeing the boy's disappointment, the manager of the station where the McGinnises are camping offers to give them the last remaining pup from a litter of Smithfield collies. As if this were 'the sign he'd been waiting for', McGinnis's father agrees to take the pup, who comes to be known as Larry (McGinnis 2000, p. 77). Glimpses of Larry's early life with the McGinnises are provided in *Pieces of blue* (2000), and his story resumes in the first paragraph of *Heart country* (2001) where he is portrayed accompanying the family while out droving. Narrative involving Larry initially

seems peripheral to the main storyline, with brief depictions of him alerting the family to arriving vehicles, helping to stop the horses from wandering off, and riding on the back of the truck with the younger dog, Red. As the story progresses, though, a greater sense of Larry's character and his shared experiences with the author develops.

On one occasion, McGinnis stops at a homestead to refill her water containers, forgetting that Larry is unrestrained on the back of her truck. A fight ensues between Larry and the dog who lives there, and McGinnis struggles to get him back under control. She explains: 'Fighting was Larry's great pleasure and besetting sin. He cleaned up the station dogs as he met them, and stopping him was like trying to wrestle a bear' (McGinnis 2001, p. 35). In a subsequent scene where the family arrives at a station to collect some cattle, and McGinnis has to cook a meal for a group of stockmen, Larry's threatening behaviour towards a stockman who walks into the cooking area prompts McGinnis's father to warn the men that he keeps Larry to look out for his daughters (McGinnis 2001, p. 63). Larry's role within the family, though, clearly extends beyond his protective abilities, as he is also portrayed as a dependable worker and valued member of the family. For example, while on droving runs, Larry 'could be left to bring along the weaker calves, and would plod behind them, nudging their hocks with his nose to keep them moving' (McGinnis 2001, p. 74). And after the McGinnises have established their own station and go droving without Larry, he warmly welcomes them home: 'Larry came rushing to meet us, whiskery jaws barking a welcome' (McGinnis 2001, p. 156). Larry, in a way, represents McGinnis's home and her attachment to the bush. This is made even more apparent when McGinnis meets and falls in love with a geologist



from the city; her observation that this young man was uncomfortable around animals, ‘even old Larry’ (2001, p. 208), highlights their disparate lifestyles and is an early sign that the relationship between McGinnis and this man will not last.

Towards the end of *Heart country*, as Larry moves into his older years, McGinnis is spending more time at the family homestead with Larry for company while the others go droving. In a scene where she goes fishing with the two dogs, McGinnis (2001, pp. 298–9) describes a relaxing and peaceful setting by the river. When Red bites on a catfish and runs off ‘yelping, heading for home’, Larry simply looks on ‘like an old grey judge’ then yawns and rests his head on his paws—actions which McGinnis (2001, p. 299) interprets as Larry’s acceptance of his new place in the dog hierarchy. As McGinnis (2001, p. 299) explains: ‘Red was top dog these days, and Larry had had to get used to it’. This assertion could also be interpreted as a projection of McGinnis’s own changing role within the family, as her younger siblings take a more active role in droving while she stays behind and looks after their home.

In a closing scene of *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, p. 305), the family has just returned to the homestead after working with the cattle when Larry comes out to meet them and dies at McGinnis’s father’s feet:

... Larry came halting out from under the pack rail to join us. ‘Poor old fella.’ Dad squatted, something that was no longer easy for him to do, and the dog came slowly to him. He gently pulled the tattered ears through his big fingers and when he had done Larry licked his hand. The dog gave a little shiver and a great sigh and flopped forward and died with his head across Dad’s boot, his whiskery muzzle just brushing the ground.

Beyond offering insights into perceptions of different species, as Chapter 3 of this thesis considers (specifically, 3.5 Subjective affection), McGinnis's account of Larry's death reveals aspects of her character and that of other human family members, especially her father. McGinnis's (2001, p. 305) emotional reaction to Larry's death—how she 'sank down beside him, feeling as if [her] legs had been kicked from under [her]'—contrasts with her father's supposedly 'gruff' response and the practical way in which he removes Larry's collar and '[hangs] it in the shed'. Larry's death prompts McGinnis's (2001, p. 306) reflection on the time from her childhood when she and her siblings had wanted to bury their dead horse:

'Remember when Bora died? And we actually wanted to bury him? Sian had the shovel all ready.'

'I do.' Dad slanted a look at me. 'Proper newchums you were back then. You've learned a bit since.'<sup>17</sup>

Yes. Animals died, that's what we learned. The best, the worst, the ones you loved the most—and today it was Larry's turn. I put the kettle on for tea and we sat on the verandah to drink it, talking of inconsequential things but feeling the emptiness a dog's death leaves.

The decision not to bury Larry and to leave his corpse out 'for the birds to find' (McGinnis 2001, p. 305) is indicative of the author's experiences of life on the land, with Larry's death apparently serving as a reminder of what she has learned about the mortality of animals and the need to be pragmatic. The mundaneness of drinking tea and 'talking of inconsequential things' contrasts with and emphasises the significance of Larry's death and its effect on McGinnis. This event is perhaps even

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<sup>17</sup> Usually written as two words, a 'new chum' in the Australian vernacular is someone who lacks relevant experience. According to the *Macquarie dictionary* (2017), the term was formerly used to describe 'a newly transported convict' or 'a newly arrived British immigrant'.

a reminder of the author's own mortality and her desire to fulfil her ambition, as she concludes her story with the proclamation that she is going to realise her dream to become a writer (McGinnis 2001, p. 311).

### **Smokey in McIntosh's *Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story***

Dennis McIntosh's (2008) *Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story* incorporates the life story of Smokey, a working dog. As well as being McIntosh's story of his own early life and his work as a shearer, the memoir covers Smokey's life from when McIntosh adopts him as a pup to when McIntosh kills him. McIntosh and Smokey's first meeting is portrayed as an unplanned encounter early in McIntosh's story when, having only recently started working as a roustabout in the shearing sheds in Victoria, he goes home to Melbourne for the weekend. While visiting a farm where he had previously worked as a farmhand, he finds that one of the farmer's working dogs has given birth. The pups are busy feeding and playing, but one—a 'smoke-brown-coloured pup'—catches McIntosh's attention by sitting and staring at him. Seeing this pup as 'bold and courageous', McIntosh immediately adopts him and calls him Smokey (2008, pp. 41–2). The way that Smokey and McIntosh are portrayed as having chosen each other implies that their pairing was fateful.

Apart from various references to Smokey as a 'working dog'—for example, 'they respected his skill as a working dog' (McIntosh 2008, p. 92)—his breed is not explicitly stated. The farmer's dogs, which include the one with the litter from which Smokey was adopted, are previously referred to as a cattle dog (or 'heeler') and a kelpie (McIntosh 2008, p. 16); this might lead the reader to assume that Smokey is a combination of at least one, and probably both, of those Australian

working dog breeds. However, the absence of any particular breed label for Smokey suggests that this is not important to McIntosh. The use of the broader ‘working dog’ label instead offers some insight into McIntosh’s values and his own work ethic. Throughout the memoir, McIntosh expresses pride in Smokey’s loyalty as well as his sheepdog skills, such that even when on separate occasions a station hand and a farmer offer to buy Smokey, McIntosh refuses to sell him (2008, pp. 106, 190). McIntosh also places considerable emphasis on his own ability to work hard and to gain respect from others for his capacities and abilities as a worker. These traits are evidently shared by Smokey and become a key aspect of the narrative around this dog.

McIntosh’s attachment to Smokey, despite pressures from those around him who do not appreciate the dog’s presence, is evident in scenes where they travel together to various sheep stations for McIntosh’s work. For example, at a relatively early point in the memoir, McIntosh (2008, p. 74) writes:

Smokey went wherever I did. Havechat bombed me a few times for his barking at night and Lewis complained that I had him in the hut with me, which was against the rules. I had to put him two hundred metres away from the huts.

...

At night I tied Smokey up, then went and got him and put him in my bed. Everyone got off my back after that.

As McIntosh’s story progresses, he continues to note his colleagues’ dissatisfaction with Smokey’s presence and, in particular, the dog’s barking. However, recognising Smokey’s aptitude as a worker, McIntosh’s supervisor starts using him to work with the sheep; soon after, the supervisor tells McIntosh that he can progress from doing

roustabout work to actual shearing work (2008, p. 94–5). On the morning of McIntosh's first day of shearing, the station cook offers Smokey a bone, after which 'Smokey jumped around barking, just going mad with the other dogs in the camp' (2008, p. 98). McIntosh (2008, p. 98) states, 'He was as excited as I felt', suggesting that his more explicit portrayal of Smokey's excitement serves as a substitute for his own feelings on this momentous occasion as he realises his dream to become a shearer.

Smokey is portrayed as a witness to, and a participant in, many of the events in McIntosh's story. For example, he is there in the shearers' accommodation when McIntosh brings a woman back from town for sex: 'I busted my shirt sleeves to get them off and Smokey started jumping and barking. I kicked him' (2008, p. 111). He is also there when McIntosh kills the 'cancerous' sheep for the station cook: 'Smokey had helped me round the sheep up and now sat quietly in the corner of the yard, as if he knew what was about to happen' (2008, p. 140). On an occasion when McIntosh burns his hands on his shearing handpiece, Smokey licks the blisters: 'I was about to push him away but Robert reckoned dog's saliva had healing properties in it, so I let him lick them' (2008, p. 149). And when McIntosh is involved in a drunken brawl in town and the police lock him in a cell for the night, Smokey waits outside for him all night; McIntosh (2008, p. 240) recounts the police officer's advice to him when he is released:

A big cop said, 'Go home, son. We got enough problems up here without putting up with little cunts like you. And that's some loyal dog you got there. He wouldn't leave and we couldn't get near him. Ya lucky we didn't shoot him, he's mad.'

These depictions of Smokey as being variously excited, apprehensive, sensitive and ‘mad’ might reasonably be transferred to McIntosh, as reflections of his own feelings and behaviours in the different circumstances.

Smokey’s presence and his barking—as well as his occasional aggression—are ongoing sources of friction between McIntosh and his colleagues. Towards the end of the memoir, McIntosh (2008, p. 243) depicts his move back to town to help look after his sick child, and his dilemma regarding Smokey:

I spent a couple of days looking for work. I knew I couldn’t take Smokey with me to the sheds any more and I couldn’t leave him at home when I was job hunting and risk him biting Lonnie. I didn’t think he would, but I couldn’t risk it.

McIntosh’s father-in-law offers to shoot Smokey and his wife suggests taking him to the pound. McIntosh states that he ‘didn’t want anybody else shooting Smokey’ and nor would he take Smokey to the pound. Instead, McIntosh (2008, p. 244) takes Smokey to a nearby swamp to shoot him himself:

I put a rope through his collar and tied a knot. He looked up at me; he knew his fate. His tail was down, his ears back. He crawled and whimpered along the road to the swamp.

McIntosh details how Smokey anxiously watches him dig a hole, how he raises his front paws as if to beg McIntosh to let him live, and then how it takes two shots to kill him. McIntosh (2008, p. 245) stays a while with the dog’s dead body before burying him in the pre-dug grave and—as Chapter 3 of this thesis notes in relation to perceptions and treatment of different species (see 3.5 Subjective affection)—he

expresses his distress and self-hatred over having killed Smokey. McIntosh's narration of this devastating scene conveys a range of feelings—self-loathing, confusion, desperation and distress, as well as his conflicting loyalties to his dog, wife and daughter.

In the narrative following Smokey's death, McIntosh (2008, pp. 246–52) describes finding a job in a factory before returning briefly to shearing work. His return to the shearing scene, even after killing Smokey so that he could live and work in town, emphasises the futility of Smokey's death and the apparent hopelessness of McIntosh's situation. At the shearing shed, his supervisor asks if he can use Smokey; when McIntosh tells him that Smokey is 'gone', the supervisor replies, 'Sorry, boy, really am. I know ya loved that dog, son' (McIntosh 2008, p. 250). This moment of kindness towards McIntosh, underpinned by the supervisor's appreciation of Smokey, reinforces the tragic circumstances around Smokey's death and accentuates McIntosh's struggles as he tries to fulfil his competing responsibilities.

#### **Jiff in Parkes's *A youth not wasted***

Early parts of Ian Parkes's (2012) memoir, *A youth not wasted*, feature Parkes's father's kelpie, Smokey, who is portrayed mostly as the author's travelling companion as he moves around and works in remote locations. Then, urged by his father, Parkes adopts his own dog, Jiff, who features in the latter part of the memoir. Jiff is the last one left from a litter of five kelpie–border collie pups at a Mount Augustus station where Parkes and his father are working. Parkes (2012, p. 132) explains that his new pup first played with Smokey and his mother's cocker spaniel,

then: ‘As I trained him, he accepted that he was my dog’. Parkes (2012, p. 132) initially just calls the pup ‘boy’ or ‘dog’ before eventually naming him Jiffy—shortened to Jiff. This name is a frequent reminder of his and Parkes’s shared experiences living and working on sheep stations, given that it arose from their related routines at the start of the working day, as outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis (specifically, 3.2 Family and friends; 3.4 Being dog).

Jiff’s working ability and his loyalty to Parkes are lauded in various parts of the narrative. As a worker, Jiff would apparently know what to do and be keen to do it, usually with minimal direction, as Parkes (2012, p. 260) portrays in this scene involving moving sheep between yards during shearing time:

More often than not, the communication was a point with my chin or a tilt of my head. Jiff knew that meant go around there, or over here, or wherever. He knew exactly what was expected of him. He loved his work. If there was work to be done, Jiff was on his feet in an instant, eager to get moving.

Jiff’s work ethic is also portrayed by Parkes in a scene involving the two of them moving a large and reluctant mob of sheep across a river. Parkes (2012, p. 300) describes how Jiff worked with him to chase and herd the mob, and he proclaims, ‘I could never have done it without Jiff. He was a black-haired tower of strength’. As a mate, Jiff’s loyalty and commitment to Parkes, and their special bond, is depicted in various scenes, such as one where Jiff accompanies Parkes to search for his mustering team’s horses that had wandered off (Parkes 2012, pp. 221–4). The exhausting nature of this work, and Jiff’s dedication to his and Parkes’s shared work demands, is portrayed in Parkes’s (2012, p. 224) account of their eventual return to



camp after having retrieved the horses: ‘Jiff finally arrived and went straight to the water trough, stepped in, lay down and drank’. As a further example of Jiff’s loyalty, Parkes (2012, p. 295) recalls a time when he was working as an overseer and Jiff refuses to respond to the other station workers’ commands:

‘Well, while you were out on the motorbike, the mob started to break up, and we called Jiff. “Git away back, Jiff,” we called. We whistled the way you do, and you know what? He dropped his head and wouldn’t look at us. He went over and lay under Pitch [Parkes’s horse]. And we couldn’t get the bugger to move, no matter how hard we tried.’

All three of them were grinning. Tony said, ‘Yeah, a bloody one-man dog. And that’s bloody good, isn’t it?’

...

Good on yer, Jiff, I thought.

Earlier in the memoir, Parkes (2012, p. 133) explains, ‘Like Smokey, [Jiff] became a one-and-a-half-man dog. By that I mean he worked wholeheartedly for me, a bit grudgingly for my father and not at all for anyone else’. Jiff’s refusal to work for others is an obvious source of pride for Parkes; Jiff’s willingness to make an exception only for Parkes’s father can be interpreted as an affirmation of Parkes’s familial bonds along with Jiff’s acceptance by and of the Parkes family.

Narrative reflecting Jiff’s relationship with Parkes’s father’s dog, Smokey, also reinforces this idea of family ties. For example, Parkes (2012, p. 202) describes a time when he and Jiff were mustering sheep after nightfall and, while still some distance from the camp where Parkes’s father was waiting for them, Smokey appears: ‘Once I spoke to him [Smokey], he was satisfied it was me and disappeared around the mob and made contact with Jiff’. Portrayals of the dogs’ relationships

with each other and with Parkes and his father create the impression that Smokey is an extension of Parkes's father, and Jiff an extension of Parkes himself.

Jiff also provides Parkes with important companionship when he is living and working in isolated places. At one point Parkes (2012, p. 180) writes: '... I discovered that I liked being alone for days on end. Let me rephrase that. I enjoyed being alone with Jiff. A good dog can be good company'. Not only does Jiff make Parkes's work and lifestyle more enjoyable, and prevent him from feeling lonely, but he also provides Parkes with an important sense of duty: 'To have a good dog at your beck and call, day and night, imposes on you a responsibility, and that includes giving it the reassurance that you belong to each other' (Parkes 2012, p. 133). The dog apparently facilitates Parkes's independence in this rural environment and, at the same time, reinforces Parkes's sense of belonging there.

In the final chapter of his memoir, Parkes (2012, pp. 320–30) recounts how he became seriously ill with pericarditis and nearly died. After a prolonged stay in a Perth hospital where he falls in love with a nurse who works there, he decides to take a job as a copywriter at a radio station in the city. In leaving Jiff with his parents, Parkes (2012, p. 328) again acknowledges Jiff and Smokey's relationship, explaining that this arrangement also 'reunited him [Jiff] with Smokey'. A year later, and after his relationship with the nurse ends, Parkes returns to work on a station with his father, but he struggles to choose between the 'pull of the bush' and the 'lure of life in or close to the city' (2012, p. 329). Parkes (2012, pp. 329–30) eventually decides to return to the city where he could put his copywriting skills to further use. Yet, he concludes in the memoir's epilogue: 'Part of me belongs out there [in the bush] and always will' (Parkes 2012, p. 331). There is no further

mention of Jiff in the narrative, although Parkes (2012, p. 180)—while earlier reflecting on their special bond—indicates his enduring sentiment for his dog when he writes: ‘Fifty years later, I still miss him’.

### **Casuarina in Woodford’s *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis***

Within the narrative of James Woodford’s (2008) *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis*, the story of the family’s cattle dog, Casuarina, occupies a relatively small but significant space. Woodford (2008, pp. 125–6) describes Casuarina as ‘insane’ and ‘hyperactive’ and as having ‘a death wish’, but also as full of love for him and his partner and daughter. Casuarina lives with Woodford and his family in their isolated, rented home in Mongarlowe in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales while they plan to build their sustainable home near the coast. Woodford (2008, p. 125) explains that his family bought Casuarina from friends soon after moving to Mongarlowe and that she is his ‘constant companion’ as he works alone from home as a writer and journalist. With few other children living nearby, Casuarina is also his daughter’s close friend and playmate (Woodford 2008, p. 126). Woodford (2008, pp. 125–6) describes how he would run each day with Casuarina, and that he and his wife would also take her for runs behind their ute ‘to keep her sane’. Casuarina’s life and death—also addressed earlier in this thesis (see 2.6 Setting the scene; 3.5 Subjective affection)—are covered in less than four pages in Woodford’s memoir, with the focus being on her death and its impact on Woodford.

Woodford (2008, pp. 126–9) describes how, on the night that Casuarina dies, he drives to town to meet his wife and daughter for dinner. Casuarina accompanies him on the journey, tied by a short leash on the back of Woodford’s ute to prevent her

from falling off. Woodford explains that, on arriving in town, he loosens her leash and leaves her while he goes to eat. Then, apparently distracted by his own worries, he forgets to tighten Casuarina's leash for the return journey and arrives home to find her dead body hanging over the ute's tailgate. He recalls that, at one point of the journey home, he had swerved to miss a wombat on the road, and he questions if that was when Casuarina either jumped or fell from the ute. A trail of blood that stays on the road for weeks afterwards continues to remind Woodford of his dog's death and his own shame at having contributed to it. Woodford's confronting account of Casuarina's death deromanticises the image of the rural Australian man and his ute with the dog on the back and, instead, draws attention to the potential danger and cruelty of this practice.

Woodford, while coping with his own grief and guilt over Casuarina's death, also has to face his wife's and daughter's devastation. Through his grief, though, Woodford (2008, p. 129) finds a certain clarity for which he credits Casuarina: 'She left me a gift, that girl: a cruel lesson in the dangers of self indulgence and anger'. After moving to their new farm, and although losing Casuarina 'was so painful it had seemed unlikely she would ever be replaced', Woodford's family adopts Solly the border collie (Woodford 2008, p. 171). The author's description of Solly having, in contrast to Casuarina, 'a life wish' hints at Woodford's own increasing contentedness and self-sufficiency as his new, sustainable home becomes a reality.

#### 4.4 The dog memoir within the personal memoir

The memoirs selected for this study—Angela Goode’s (2013) *Through the farm gate: a memoir*, Maggie MacKellar’s (2014) *How to get there*, Kerry McGinnis’s (2001) *Heart country*, Dennis McIntosh’s (2008) *Beaten by a blow: a shearer’s story*, Ian Parkes’ (2012) *A youth not wasted*, and James Woodford’s (2008) *Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis*—reflect different rural Australian settings and occupations, with a common link between them being that the writers’ dogs are significant players in each of their stories. These memoirs do not, however, purport to be relational life stories or posthuman narratives. They are also not presented as being the kind of dog memoir that Caesar (2009, pp. 55–70), Huff (2014) and Sanders (2011) discuss, nor as being ‘animalography’—those memoirs ‘in which the human author ventriloquizes the animal’s voice allegedly to tell his story’ (Huff 2017, p. 279). They are each outwardly presented as the writer’s own story told through his or her own voice, and—as noted in Chapter 2 of this thesis (see 2.5 Case studies)—the books’ blurbs each reflect this autobiographical classification. Of further note, none of the books selected for this study mention dogs in their blurbs, although the blurb for *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014) does include a more general reference to both the human and non-human members of her family:

In 2011 Maggie left her family’s farm in Central West New South Wales for the East Coast of Tasmania with her children and assorted menagerie to live with a farmer.

MacKellar’s (2014) memoir also includes a dog in the cover photograph, as does Woodford’s (2008) (see Figure 16 and Figure 20 in Chapter 2 of this thesis).

Even though the selected works are not presented as dog memoirs, the intertwining of biography and autobiography in these rural Australian memoirs effectively produces the dog memoir from within the personal memoir. While the extents to which dogs' stories are included in the case study memoirs vary, similarities across the narratives are evident. These include clear commonalities between the representations of dogs' stories in contemporary rural Australian memoirs and those in conventional dog memoirs. Caesar's (2009, p. 55) examination of several contemporary dog memoirs identifies certain conventions that they tend to follow, including that the relationship between the writer and dog is generally depicted as being 'one of great positive meaning'. Caesar (2009, p. 56) points out the apparent optimism that permeates these stories: 'No matter the breed of dog or its behavior, the animal always teaches the owner something, which is profoundly valuable and life-enhancing'. Also according to Caesar's (2009, pp. 57–8) assessment, dog memoirs tend to follow a common narrative: the dog arrives in the person's life apparently by chance, the dog somehow aids the person's spiritual growth (or 'rebirth'), and the dog—usually but not always—dies. McHugh (2011, p. 119), while referring more generally to the contemporary pet memoir, also claims that '[t]his kind of story outlines ways of dealing with death in the modern world'. As such, pleasure and pain tend to be juxtapositioned in many of the depicted human–dog relationships.

The close association of these opposing feelings—pleasure and pain—is also often revealed through the narration of events in which the dogs cause problems or embarrassment for people, usually involving some sort of perceived recalcitrance or lack of social graces according to human standards. Such events almost certainly

lead to the writer's portrayal of a deeper connection with or sentiment towards the dog, which is also consistent with Couser's (2012b, p. 192) observation that, in memoirs about pets, the non-human animals are depicted in 'often highly anthropomorphic and sentimental' ways. In the selected rural Australian memoirs, the anthropomorphic and sentimental treatment of non-human animals is largely reserved for the narrators' dogs. In this way, representations of the dog characters in these memoirs also resonate with the conventional dog memoir.

Beyond their similarities with dog memoirs, these relational narratives about dogs also help to establish or reinforce a rural Australian identity associated with the narrator's apparent belonging and sense of home in the depicted bush settings. Colmer (1989, p. 154) finds that 'most Australian autobiographers ... are as concerned with creating and redefining images of national identity as with discovering truths about the self'. The linking of national identity and self-discovery to autobiographical storytelling would, by extension, indicate that the portrayal of a dog and the person's relationship with the dog in rural Australian memoir is relevant to the formation of autobiographical identity. Colmer (1989, p. 159) refers to a 'process by which the [autobiographical] writer constructs a succession of selves'—a process which the genre accommodates through its 'open-ended' nature that facilitates the ongoing exploration of the self (or 'selves') through multi-volume works. Of the selected memoirs for this study, MacKellar's (2014) *How to get there* and McGinnis's (2001) *Heart country* are both sequels to earlier memoirs, and the respective stories of Duke and Larry continue from those earlier works. In each case, the ongoing relevance of the dog to the writer's self-portrayal also suggests that the dog is integral to the writer's active and ongoing process of self-realisation.

While a writer is likely to have multiple identities bundled up within their autobiographical self, an examination of contemporary rural Australian memoirs finds that relational narrative about dogs in those memoirs contributes to a particularly rural Australian identity. The notion that the Australian national character and sense of identity remains associated with a rural way of life, even when most Australians now live in cities, is supported and preserved by the narratives within these memoirs. The choices that writers make regarding the inclusion of certain events in their memoirs also sometimes appear to be influenced by the dog's involvement. In some instances, events that might otherwise be omitted from a personal narrative are given meaning and contribute to the autobiographer's identity through the related experiences of the dogs. For example, in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001), the apparently routine event of collecting water from a station is only noteworthy due to the inclusion of Larry's altercation with another dog. McGinnis's (2001, pp. 35–6) portrayal of Larry's behaviour and of her handling of it serves to remind the reader of the toughness of life in the bush and gives insight into the author's character in relation to the rural environment. The depictions of the dogs' deaths—the manners in which they die—also feed into the authors' self-portrayals. Casuarina falls from the back of a ute (Woodford 2008), Smokey is shot (McIntosh 2008), and Lucy and Larry die of old age without veterinary intervention (Goode 2013; McGinnis 2001)—these events and the narration of them help to build an image of each author within the respective rural Australian contexts.

These life stories might ride on an idealised national identity associated with the bush, but they also promote an evolving rural Australian identity. Given the centrality of dogs to these stories, relational narrative about dogs contribute to this



evolving identity and its relevance to contemporary ideas about rural Australia. Drawing mainly on examples of Australian life writing published in the 20th century, Bowers (2018) observes a national identity characterised by masculinity and mateship, and which relies on the ‘Anzac myth’ and the ‘bushman legend’—paradigms that are constructed from a domestic, largely urban viewpoint. Many of the qualities associated with this idealised identity, such as stoicism and pragmatism, are reflected in the character portrayals in contemporary rural Australian memoirs. Relational narrative involving dogs frequently demonstrates the stoic or pragmatic manner in which the narrators approach challenging situations. For example, MacKellar (2014) and Parkes (2012) both write of being faced with, and subsequently accomplishing, difficult tasks that involve herding sheep with the help of their dogs. In MacKellar’s (2014, pp. 116–21) case, the scene in which Duke helps her to herd a mob of sheep across a creek is significant because it tests and ultimately demonstrates MacKellar’s and Duke’s aptitude for farming work, while also helping to dispel MacKellar’s doubts about her usefulness on the farm and to repudiate her partner’s implied doubts about Duke’s herding abilities. In Parkes’s (2012, p. 300) case, the scene where he and Jiff herd a large mob of sheep across a river also reflect a dogged determination to complete the task at hand, even under trying circumstances. The scene in McGinnis’s (2001, p. 35–6) memoir involving Larry’s fight with another dog also offers an example of stoicism and pragmatism in the way that McGinnis intervenes and, ‘[a]mid the flying foam and blood’, regains control of Larry. The examples involving MacKellar and McGinnis also show that mythologised ‘bushman’ qualities can extend to contemporary representations of rural Australian women.

The relational narratives about dogs challenge the traditional view of national identity by portraying mateship as not necessarily an all-male and an exclusively human domain. In the context of the traditional Australian identity, a commonly accepted understanding of mateship is consistent with *Macquarie dictionary* (2017) definitions, which include: ‘a code of conduct among men stressing equality and fellowship’. The relative absence of relational narrative in the memoirs to support this idea of mateship, compared with the prevalence of relational narrative about dogs, presents an opportunity to redefine mateship in the contemporary setting. The portrayed relationships between people and dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoirs reflect a mateship that might be better defined as: a bond based on mutuality, trust and companionship. This reconceptualising of the Australian ideal of mateship reflects a relationship that can be shared between humans and non-humans, and in which gender or masculinity is not a key factor.

Through narrative involving dogs, the contemporary rural Australian memoir also challenges the shamefulness that is typical of many Australian memoirs. Shame, according to Dalziell (1999), is a core element of Australian culture and identity found in Australian autobiographical writing. Dalziell (1999, p. 253) claims that ‘the emotion of shame constitutes a driving force in many Australian autobiographies published since 1960’. Shame can take many forms in the autobiographical text, such as through portrayed feelings of inadequacy or difference due to cultural background, sociocultural status, sexual experiences or personal failures, and Dalziell (1999, p. 9) observes that ‘literary representation of shame appears to be fundamental to the autobiographical process’. If, as Dalziell (1999) finds, shame infuses and inspires much of Australian autobiographical writing, the rural

Australian memoir to some extent defies this paradigm through narrative about dog characters. While some accounts of events involving dogs—usually those around the dogs' deaths—are deeply shame-filled, in other important instances, events involving dogs are portrayed with pride.

An underlying sense of pride in the depictions of dog characters in rural Australian memoirs can have a counteracting effect on the shame that permeates much Australian autobiographical writing. In many instances, the narrators of contemporary rural Australian memoirs openly express admiration and affection for their dogs in ways that they rarely do for other characters, human or non-human. Sentiments that might typically be applied to other people are, in the context of the rural Australian memoir, more commonly and fittingly applied to dogs—such as when Parkes (2012) refers to Jiff as 'my soul mate' (see photograph caption at Figure 25), when McIntosh (2008, p. 202) refers to Smokey as 'the best friend I'd ever had', or when Woodford (2008, p. 128) refers to Casuarina as 'this creature who had loved me, would love me, more than anything else'. Admiration for the working dog's abilities, sometimes compared to a person's abilities, is also expressed in the relational narrative about dogs, such as when McIntosh (2008, p. 190), referring to Smokey as being 'worth a man's wages', states: 'I wouldn't sell him for any amount of money'. Parkes (2012, p. 260) praises his dog's abilities in the sheep yard by describing Jiff as 'the master' in the way that he helps move sheep through a narrow gate for counting, with Parkes also explaining: 'When it came to counting sheep, I preferred to have just Jiff work with me than any combination of blokes'. Depictions of other people's admiration for a dog further emphasise the narrator's pride in that dog, such as when McIntosh (2008, p. 243), referring to

Smokey, states, ‘People envied me for having such a loyal dog’. Sometimes the pride is disguised under a veneer of criticism or disapproval, such as when McGinnis (2001, pp. 35–6) refers to Larry as ‘our killing machine’ in the way that he ‘cleaned up the station dogs as he met them’. In the context of the Australian bush character, this depiction of Larry takes on the effect of a humblebrag—perhaps most aptly defined as ‘something you say which appears as if you are complaining or embarrassed, but is really a way of telling people about something that you are very proud of’ (*Cambridge dictionary*)<sup>18</sup>—by conveying the idea of Larry’s loyalty, protectiveness and toughness. Compliments or brags about characters in rural Australian memoirs seem to be more likely to occur if the object of affection is a dog rather than a person.

The ‘tall poppy syndrome’—a tendency to diminish someone else’s positive attributes or their achievements—is a commonly understood and entrenched aspect of the Australian character. Given this Australian aversion to ‘tall poppies’, along with a general reservedness within Australian culture, excessive admiration for other people, even for close family members or intimate others, might be viewed by readers of Australian memoir with suspicion. Dalziell (1999, p. 13) suggests that the shaming of those who display superior abilities recurs so often and reliably in Australian autobiography as to be indicative of the pervasiveness of the tall poppy syndrome in the national culture. The depictions of dogs in rural Australian memoirs, however, would suggest that dogs offer exceptional opportunities for people to express pride and admiration without raising others’ ire or suspicion.

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<sup>18</sup> As specified in the online version of the *Cambridge dictionary* (viewed 12 November 2019, <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humblebrag>>).

These memoirs show that autobiographical narrative about dogs can act as an antidote to the shameful narrative. The widespread appreciation for dogs in Australian society provides a point of connection between people, and, whether deliberately or otherwise, narrative about dogs in rural Australian memoirs taps into this sentiment.

Expressions of pride in narrative about dogs might present a point of difference between the contemporary rural Australian memoir and other Australian autobiographical writing. These are, however, offset by expressions of shame in the retelling of some events involving dogs, which may present a point of difference between relational narrative about dogs in rural Australian memoirs and that found in more conventional dog memoirs. Where the dog memoir within the rural Australian memoir starts to diverge from recognised dog memoir conventions tends to be in the narrator's expression of his or her own shame in relation to the dog. In the sample rural Australian memoirs, the narrators' feelings of shame are perhaps most evident in the ways that the dogs' deaths are portrayed—particularly the deaths of Smokey in *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008) and Casuarina in *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008). In these, and in the portrayals of other dogs' deaths, there also seems to be a tension between human sentimentality (including feelings of guilt) and the pragmatic attitudes of rural Australians (towards animals and more generally). The narration of Lucy's death (Goode 2013, pp. 182–3), for example, reflects this conflict, as does that of Larry's (McGinnis 2001, pp. 305–6). MacKellar's (2014, p. 39) explanation as to why she chose to have Duke desexed—his father was apparently a prolific breeder, and she wanted 'to avoid the disruption of an "entire"

dog’—and her questioning of that decision also suggest an unsettling combination of guilt and pragmatism.

As with more conventional dog memoirs, the related stories of dogs’ lives in rural Australian memoirs also reflect the narrators’ personal transitions and growth. Given the shorter life expectancies of dogs compared to people, a dog’s related life story can often fit within a person’s own story. McHugh (2011, p. 119) even suggests that this is a primary contributor to the popularity of stories about dogs and other pets, asserting that ‘the pet memoir possibly booms today for the simple reason that people generally outlive their pets’. The positioning of the dog’s life story within the person’s story is significant, as the arrival or departure of the dog from the personal narrative tends to mark a key point in the writer’s own life.

In each of the six case study memoirs, the dog’s arrival in the author’s life is apparently fortuitous. Lucy in *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013), Larry in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001), and Jiff in *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012) are all depicted as unwanted pups until the respective authors find them, with Lucy coming from a pound and Larry and Jiff being the last remaining pups of their litters. Duke in *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014), Smokey in *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008), and Casuarina in *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008) each come from friends of the authors, which suggests that their adoptions were more by chance than by design (as might be the case if the dogs were purchased from a commercial breeder). The adoption of dogs from friends also extends the relational aspect of these dogs’ stories; in these cases, the adopted dog is indicative of the author’s wider social circle and the shared community in which both the person and dog belong.

The narrator's story in the rural Australian memoir frequently involves significant change, with the relational narratives about dogs reflecting the person's own growth or self-realisation through relevant transitional phases. For instance, in *Beaten by a blow*, McIntosh (2008) is commencing his career in the shearing sheds when he adopts Smokey; then Smokey's death near the end of the memoir signals McIntosh's attempt to move away from the shearing life and towards his responsibilities as a father and husband. In Parkes's (2012) *A youth not wasted*, Jiff is introduced midway through the memoir, prior to which Parkes had mentioned borrowing his father's dog as a travelling and working companion; the adoption of his own dog is a sign of Parkes's increasing independence in this coming-of-age story. For Lucy in *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013) and Duke in *How to get there* (MacKellar 2014), their moves to Goode's and MacKellar's respective partners' farms are shown to have rejuvenating effects for both the dog subjects and the narrating subjects. While Goode (2013, pp. 49–60) describes Lucy's transformation into a farm dog, she too is transforming into the role of farmer, wife and mother. Lucy features strongly in the early part of Goode's memoir, and her relative absence from the narrative after their move to the farm further reflects Goode's changing roles as a mother and farmer. The depiction of Lucy's death halfway through the memoir marks a significant point in Goode's story; a clear link can be drawn between Goode's (2013, p. 184) acknowledgement that Lucy showed her 'the power of a dog to pull heart strings' and her subsequent decision to produce what would become bestselling books of stories about Australian working dogs. In MacKellar's (2014) memoir, Duke's skill as a working dog not only brings him 'into

his own' but also allows MacKellar to become more involved in the workings of the farm and to start feeling that she could find a sense of belonging there.

The underlying optimism that Caesar (2009, p. 56) observes in dog memoirs is also present in these relational portrayals, even when the narratives relay frustrations or disconnects between people and dogs—such as when Duke refuses to get back into the car (MacKellar 2014, p. 41), when Larry has an altercation with a station owner's dog (McGinnis 2001, p. 35), or when Jiff refuses to work for the other stockmen (Parkes 2012, p. 295). These events are retold sometimes self-deprecatingly, but usually with a sort of fondness or respect for the dogs' individualism and loyalty. In some of the case study memoirs, the positive effects of the dog on the person's life are explicitly stated. Goode (2013, p. 184), for example, learns from Lucy about the power and reach of the human–dog bond; Parkes (2012, pp. 133, 180) gains a greater sense of independence and responsibility through his relationship with Jiff; and Woodford (2008, p. 129), through Casuarina's death, learns about 'the dangers of self-indulgence and anger'. In the other memoirs (MacKellar 2014; McGinnis 2001; McIntosh 2008), the author's personal development or self-realisation through experiences involving dogs is more implicit.

The sentimentality and anthropomorphism that Couser (2012b, p. 192) observes in dog memoirs are evident in the portrayals of dogs in the selected rural Australian memoirs, with the imposing of human feeling and understanding onto dog characters also contributing to the writers' self-portrayals. As with the conventional dog memoir, many stories about dogs in rural Australian memoirs ultimately involve the dog's death. Some of these dogs' stories end tragically, as with the deaths of Casuarina and Smokey, or at least sadly, such as with the depictions of Larry's and



Lucy's deaths. The narrative that precedes the dog's death—the story of the living dog—is presumably written from the perspective of a narrator who has already experienced the loss of that dog; these reminiscences about the dog's lived experiences, in a way, give new life to the dead dog. Kuzniar (2006, p. 142), in discussing portrayals of dogs' deaths in memoirs, points out that the dog's death 'is always too soon, before our own', and that its 'untimeliness is registered in the keen desire to resurrect the dog ... to imagine it still alive'. This resurrection of the dead dog through relational narrative in memoir is also often enacted through a sentimental lens. Even though the narrative surrounding the dog's death is sometimes treated in ways that appear to be the antithesis of sentimentality, this may instead be interpreted as a rural Australian form of sentimentality—one that presents as an outward toughness and no-nonsense manner stemming from the harshness of the land. Kuzniar (2006, p. 141) observes that, while dog memoirs 'conventionally begin with the puppy arriving in the new home, the close invariably betrays that the writing originates in mourning'. Elaborating on this, Kuzniar (2006, p. 142) suggests that the autobiographical writer tells the dog's story as a way of 'keeping it alive and endowing it with a future'. The author, in effect, revives, reunites with and possibly also reimagines his or her dog and relationship with that dog through the autobiographical writing process.

In rural Australian memoirs, the resurrected dog is often anthropomorphised through representations of his or her life and death. Goode (2013, pp. 49, 182–3), for example, writes that Lucy 'looks hurt' when visitors to the farm are put off by her manure-scented coat; and, even while acknowledging that dogs tend to go away to die alone, Goode explains that she wishes Lucy's death had been less 'lonely' and

that Lucy could have died ‘with dignity’. Also, for example, MacKellar (2014, pp. 41, 43) writes that Duke gives her ‘a dirty look’ and recognises ‘real rage’ in her, and she compares her dogs to tourists when she describes feeling like their ‘tour guide’ on the drive to the farm in Tasmania. Such anthropomorphic representations can help the writer to connect with the reader through the use of common language and descriptions that give human meaning to animal behaviour; as Bekoff (2002, p. 48) points out, ‘[a]nthropomorphism allows other animals’ behavior and emotions to be accessible to us’. However, Weil (2012, p. 19), in acknowledging that anthropomorphism can be a way of demonstrating empathy with the animal, also points out that it ‘risks becoming a narcissistic projection that erases the boundaries of difference’. This may be the case in some instances, especially in life writing, where the focus is often directed towards the self even when the narrative appears to be about others. As with relational narrative more generally, anthropomorphic references to a dog character in a personal memoir are the interpretations of the other’s actions, and these interpretations provide important insights into the autobiographer’s own character.

With the bush setting and way of life being pivotal to rural Australian personal memoirs, a further and important point of difference between the dogs’ stories in these memoirs and the conventional dog memoir is the sense of belonging and home in rural Australia that the authors gain through their relationships with their dogs. Colmer (1989, p. 12) identifies ‘a sense of place’ as a feature of Australian autobiography more generally; at the core of the contemporary rural Australian memoir, more specifically, is the narrator’s connection with and affection for the

bush and what it represents. The Australian bush, as Watson (2014, p. 66) explains, goes beyond the tangible:

The bush is a social construct as well as an ecological one: as much as the things that grow and live there, we define it by the people who inhabit it.

Socially constructed ideas of the bush permeate the narratives, and lead to a notable point of difference between the conventional dog memoir and the dog memoir embedded within rural Australian memoir. In each of the case study memoirs, the narrator's identification as someone who belongs in and feels a connection with the Australian bush can be attributed, at least in part, to his or her portrayed relationship with the dog. Representations of dogs in these memoirs contribute, moreover, to the national imaginary and an evolving Australian identity.

It might seem somewhat contradictory that autobiographical portrayals of this longing for the bush also sometimes present as outsider narratives. A particular type of Australian autobiography is, according to Colmer (1989, p. 4), 'the voice of the neglected or misunderstood outsider', and the rural Australian memoirs considered for this study offer further examples of this. The narratives fit with notions of 'the uncertain self' (Whitlock 2000, p. 233) and an elusive sense of 'home' (McCooey 2009, pp. 327–8) that apparently abound in Australian life narratives. Whitlock (2000, p. 233) observes that European settlement and colonisation of Australia 'profoundly challenged notions of self and place' such that 'a sense of estrangement' is a regular feature of Australian life writing. McCooey (2009, pp. 327–8) acknowledges the relevance of Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, noting that 'the sense of colonial culture being the familiar in an unfamiliar setting' is a feature

of Australian autobiography. In the narratives of rural Australians, the domestic dog, whose existence in Australia is tied to colonial culture, becomes a conduit through which the narrator's ultimate sense of belonging or otherwise may be projected.

Ideas of 'home' are tied to a person's sense of identity. As Fox (2016, p. 8) points out, 'self and home are inseparable elements', although ideas of what constitutes home can vary within and across cultures. The rural Australian memoir writers' depictions of their experiences with their dogs contribute to their own portrayals of feeling at home on the land. The resistance of the Australian bush to human habitation creates a strange ambivalence in people's relationship with the land. Manning Clark's (1992, p. 23) account of Australian settlement history acknowledges this resistance of the land to human endeavours—for example, 'ground bent the blades of [early settlers'] hoes ... giant ants bit them'. And Clark (1992, p. 103) further notes how, in the case of early settlers, mateship helped 'to offset the loneliness of their lives and to protect them against its dangers'. The mateship evident in relational narratives about dogs implies that the narrators' relationships with their dogs offer similar comfort and protection in a sometimes hostile environment. The desolation and dangers of the Australian bush—or its 'Weird Melancholy', as Marcus Clarke (1905, p. ix) aptly describes it—foster an allure, while mateship provides the necessary connections to the bush as home.

Portrayals of the author and dog's shared experiences suggest that the dog facilitates the person's ability to safely and appropriately experience and navigate through those places. Whitlock (2000, p. 255) claims that Australians use autobiography and biography as means of responding to 'their unsettled past'. A sense of displacement stemming from the nation's colonial past, as McCooey (2009,

pp. 323–7) also observes, can seem at odds with a narrator’s feeling of connection with the Australian land. The places in which the narratives are largely set are remote and generally inhospitable, and these settings tend to draw attention to the narrator’s displacement along with the personal resilience and determination required to endure the associated challenges. Towards the end of *How to get there*, when MacKellar (2014, p. 229) details various elements of her life on the farm that contribute to her feelings of belonging there, she uses the term ‘chaperoned’—as in, ‘chaperoned by dogs’—to describe the way the dogs accompany her on her morning walks. This may be an apt means of more broadly interpreting the dog’s role in the person’s navigation of the rural Australian environment, since to ‘chaperone’ can involve guiding or protecting another or others, possibly also ensuring that those being chaperoned behave appropriately in a given situation (*Macquarie dictionary* 2017). This role of the dog in chaperoning the person in unfamiliar or inhospitable surrounds is evident across the narratives, such as when Lucy acts as Goode’s protector during their hitchhiking journey to Esperance (Goode 2013, pp. 9–11), when Jiff accompanies Parkes while he works in remote locations (Parkes 2012, p. 180), and when Larry threatens a stockman who ventures too close to McGinnis and her sister (McGinnis 2001, p. 63). The writer’s sense of isolation and related vulnerability come through in various parts of the narratives; yet, the dog’s presence allows the person to safely venture into places and situations that may otherwise not be easily accessible to someone who was actually alone. In this way, the dog enables human solitude and independence in the sometimes unwelcoming Australian bush environment.

Beyond the chaperoning role, the dog also acts as an extension of the person's home. The narratives reflect how dogs help people to feel more at home and to gain a sense of belonging in sometimes uncomfortable surroundings, including by enabling access to rural experiences—by drawing the outsider inside and allowing identification with rural Australia. Fudge (2008, p. 23) proposes that the proverb 'home is where the heart is' might be changed to 'home, in fact, is where the pet is'; furthermore, Fudge links identity with home, suggesting that self is tied up with a sense of home—of where someone belongs. Garber (1997, pp. 37–9) also theorises that 'home is where the dog is', and narrative about dogs in rural Australian memoirs exemplify and reinforce this notion. The value of pets in gaining a sense of home is emphasised by Fudge's (2008, p. 13) observation that 'a stable sense of home is vital to many orthodox conceptions of human selfhood'. While the dog and the person belong together, the dog also belongs in those 'wild spaces' that Winton (2015, p. 7) refers to—places that represent an Australian way of being. In turn, the dog helps to bring a sense of home—of belonging and familiarity—to those spaces.

Even when, or especially when, the narrative moves between different rural locations, the dog is the narrator's constant, providing security and familiarity. This is perhaps most apparent in Larry's life story (McGinnis 2000, 2001), which is told across McGinnis's two memoirs and is preceded by McGinnis explaining her father's sentiment that a dog helped to make a camp 'complete' (McGinnis 2000, p. 76). After the McGinnises buy some land and establish a homestead, Larry often remains there when the family goes droving, and his greetings when they return—for example, his 'whiskery jaws barking a welcome' (McGinnis 2001, p. 156)—signal their arrival home. In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012, pp. 180–4) describes

spending weeks alone with Jiff as he works on a fence in a remote location and how, through this experience, Parkes ‘began growing into a new self’. Parkes’s home during this period is essentially his ute, with a stretcher on the back of it as his bed; at night he would lie on top of the stretcher while Jiff lay under it, and he would listen to classical music on the radio as he contemplated his surroundings and his place in the world. He states: ‘In my vast space I was at peace with my world and with myself and my dog’ (Parkes 2012, p. 184). The inclusion of his dog in this declaration reinforces the importance of Jiff to Parkes’s sense of belonging and identity in the remote Australian environment.

In *Beaten by a blow*, McIntosh’s (2008) depictions of his travels with Smokey suggest a similar sense of home in the Australian bush and a security within himself that is made possible by the dog’s companionship. McIntosh describes regularly sneaking Smokey into the shearer’s huts where they would sleep on the same bed, suggesting that this act provides them both with the comfort and continuity of a shared home. However, McIntosh’s move into town destabilises this relationship and sense of home, which leads to Smokey’s death. Following the loss of his dog—or perhaps because of it—McIntosh appears more displaced than ever, seeming to not belong in town or in the bush. In a different way, Woodford’s (2008) account of Casuarina’s life and death in *Real dirt* also highlights the importance of the dog to a sense of home; her death seems to destroy any sense of home that Woodford might have had in Mongarlowe, prompting him to start building his new home near the coast. Woodford (2008, p. 143) states: ‘In my head I had moved to Cudbugga Forest the evening Cas died. But physically the shift would take another six months’. If a person’s sense of home is wrapped up in his or her identity, and if where the dog is

coincides with where the dog's person feels at home, then these stories serve as testimonies that the dog fosters a person's sense of home and belonging in rural Australia.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Relational narrative about a dog can be incorporated within a personal memoir to such an extent that the dog memoir materialises, as is evident in the narratives of several contemporary rural Australian memoirs. The dogs' stories within these personal memoirs reveal commonalities with conventional dog memoirs, including that the dog's arrival in the author's life and, in most cases, the dog's death are pivotal events in the person's overall story. Also, the relationship between person and dog is depicted as having a deeply meaningful and positive effect on the person's life. The convergence of the biographical and the autobiographical—whereby biographical accounts of the dog's experiences are, in essence, the writer's own experiences in relation to the dog—serves not only to provide an account of the dog's life and the person's relationship with the dog, but to also shape and define the personal memoir writer's autobiographical identity.

The narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs reinforce perceptions of a rural Australian lifestyle and character along with evolving ideas of national identity and bush, with portrayals of the dog and the person's relationship with the dog being pertinent to the person's self-portrayal. The dog is seen to facilitate the person's ability to navigate through and exist in rural Australia. The dog's place in the bush along with the dog's connection to the person bring about an important sense of home, which in turn affirms the narrator's sense of identity and belonging



in rural Australia. Through relational narrative about their dogs' lives and deaths, the narrators of the selected rural Australian memoirs project their attachment to the land and offer insights into the influence of the land on their own characters. These narratives, in which the dog is pivotal to the narrator's identity, sustain and renew ideas of the national character as being connected to the Australian bush and a rural way of life.

## Chapter 5 Intersections

### 5.1 Introduction

Ideas around interspecies entanglements are not entirely new and, like species themselves, have continued to evolve. Charles Darwin's concluding remarks in *On the origin of species* (1964, p. 489), first published in 1859, allude to the inherent entanglements in the natural environment:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.

Traces of this image of 'an entangled bank' can be found in Haraway's recent discussions around multispecies entanglements. In *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene*, Haraway (2016) proposes that the current epoch be referred to as 'the Chthulucene' in recognition of the inherent entanglements between the many and varied living beings on earth. The concept of the Chthulucene offers an alternative to ideas around the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, which define the current time in history according to the impacts of people and capitalism on the planet and which are based on notions of human dominance over the natural environment. Haraway (2016, p. 57) envisages a Chthulucene that 'must collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the exterminism of the Capitalocene, and chipping and shredding and layering like a mad gardener, make a much hotter compost pile'. Haraway's (2016, p. 32) 'compost' analogy represents the messy but necessary

interactions between different life forms, with humanity as the ‘humus’. Focusing more specifically on the relations between people and companion species, Haraway’s (2008) *When species meet* also acknowledges entanglements as being fundamental to each living being’s existence. Haraway’s (2008, p. 164) concept of ‘autonomy-in-relation’ recognises that the self arises from and relies on interdependence with others. Haraway (2008, p. 88) considers that ‘individual animals, human and nonhuman, are themselves entangled assemblages of relations knotted at many scales and times with other assemblages, organic and not’. Meanwhile, Despret (2013, p. 29) introduces the term ‘companion-agents’ to refer to the coming together of members of different species as ‘one for another and one with another’. The notions of ‘autonomy-in-relation’ and ‘companion-agents’ recognise that individual agency arises from and with others—that is, out of entanglements between living beings.

The prevalence of dogs in the narratives of personal memoirs is indicative of the entangled lives of people with those of their dogs. Beyond being a means of telling the dogs’ and the human narrators’ stories and of establishing autobiographical identity, relational narrative about dogs in memoir becomes an expression of interspecies relations and of dogs and people as companion-agents. Miller’s (2007) commentary on the relational in contemporary memoir—in particular, on how the ‘web of entanglement’ in the writer’s life is central to autobiography—offers a basis from which to explore intersections between the human and dog species as represented in the narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs. Contemporary ideas of entanglement in human–animal studies, such as those put

forward by Haraway (2008) and Despret (2013), corroborate the significance of non-human others in autobiographical writing.

Memoir comprises various intersecting elements. The genre exhibits intersections between, for example, fact and fiction, autobiography and biography, past and present, autonomy and heteronomy, and self and other. Relational narrative in memoir is representative of entangled lives in the way that it reflects the intersections between the autobiographical self and others. More specifically, relational narrative about dogs in rural Australian memoirs reveals some key points of intersection within humans' and dogs' entangled lives in rural Australian contexts. These entanglements largely revolve around work, interpersonal relations, and the land, with travel-related entanglements traversing all of these. An exploration of those entanglements, as revealed through autobiographical portrayals of human–dog relationships in rural Australian contexts highlights the intersections between genre theory and animal studies theory, further reinforcing the link between the fields of life writing studies and human–animal studies.

## 5.2 Entanglement

Chapter 3 of this thesis recognises that dogs live and interact with people in such ways that they are commonly regarded as people's closest non-human others. Chapter 4 regards relational narrative about dogs and human–dog relationships as a means through which memoir writers might convey their own stories and establish identity. This chapter continues the discussion by first exploring the entanglements in human–dog relationships, including by drawing on broader scholarship in human–animal studies and in life writing studies and practice.

In terms of the dog's particular closeness to people, animal studies scholar James Serpell (2017a, p. 302), for one, maintains that the dog is possibly human's closest non-human, emotionally or symbolically—the only possible exception being 'some non-human primates'. Serpell (2017a, p. 302) consequently asserts that, compared with other non-human animals, the dog 'makes a stronger claim to be treated as human'. This 'claim' might also account for the widespread inclusion of dogs, ahead of other non-human species, as prominent characters in autobiographical narratives. Even across the language barrier, the dog's ability to communicate with people (Haraway 2008, p. 216; Hart & Yamamoto 2017, p. 249), including by mediating communications between people (DeMello 2013, p. 1), makes them ideal companions and, therefore, ideal relational others. This goes some way to explaining why more Australian households include dogs as pets than they do any other animal species (AMA 2019, p. 6). Dogs' interactive and responsive qualities encourage close relationships between them and people to such an extent that a dog and a person can be seen as integral parts of each other's existence and character.

The dog and the person, as companions living in relation, come to define each other. Or, as animal welfare advocate and writer Roger Caras (1996, p. 87) suggests, '[t]he dog almost seems an extension of ourselves'. Similarly, art critic and writer John Zeaman (2011, p. 99) makes the following observation in his memoir, *Dog walks man*: 'Paired up with a dog, you become a new social entity, a two-headed creature'. The identification of a person and dog as being so interconnected as to be a single entity can be seen in everyday life in urban neighbourhoods and dog parks. Jackson (2012, p. 258) finds that strangers in dog parks will often initiate conversations by asking about the other person's dog, usually starting with questions

about which dog is theirs and what the dog is named. In these kinds of shared public spaces, people often come to know each other through their dogs, and will refer to each other by the respective dog's name. Zeaman (2011, p. 103), for example, acknowledges this when, in recounting his experiences of meeting other people with dogs while he was out walking with his own dog, he poses the rhetorical question: 'How many times ... had I referred to another dog walker as "Ruffie's owner", or even "Ruffie's mother"?' The identification of people with dogs is further expressed through the tendency for some people to contextualise their own experiences in terms of their relationships with dogs, including in autobiographical narrative.

Everyone exists in relation, since the workings of the natural environment ensure that no one lives in complete isolation from others of some kind. As Kalof (2017, p. 16) neatly explains:

We live in an ecological community of living beings; all of us depend on the oceans, land, and atmosphere to survive, and the ability to coexist is an essential component of survival for the entire biophysical world.

Autobiographical self-portrayals inevitably reflect this relationality of life, including the coexistence of different species. Even though scholarship on the importance of the relational to autobiography typically refers to the writer's relationships with other people, concepts around relationality can also apply to a writer's relationships with dogs, as Chapter 4 of this thesis addresses. Following from that chapter's application of relational life writing concepts—Eakin's (1999, p. 86) '*proximate other* to signify the intimate tie to the relational autobiographer', for example—to explore autobiographical self-portrayal through dog others,

relational narrative about dogs offers further insights into the places where and the ways in which people's and dogs' lives intersect. In noting that the relational is critical to the autobiographical memoir genre, Nancy K. Miller (2007, p. 544) observes that the autobiographer's 'web of entanglement' is 'one that we sometimes choose'. The idea that entanglement with others, as represented in autobiographical writing, may be chosen rather than merely happen out of chance or circumstance, is pertinent to the narrated human–dog relationship.

In the case of autobiographical writing, only a human member of a relationship can give an account of that relationship; yet, it is not only humans who choose with whom or what they become entangled. For thousands of years, dogs and people have chosen each other as companions and cohabiters (Clutton-Brock 2017). The modern domestic dog, as Serpell (2017a, p. 301) observes, has completely adapted to living with people, and, if given the chance, dogs would willingly go everywhere with their people. This inclination to selectively attach themselves to human companions, along with an ability to participate in their people's activities, differentiates the dog from other non-human animal species (Serpell 2017a, pp. 301–2). As with the memoir genre, however, the human–dog relationship may be considered limiting for those involved. Miller's (2007) and Serpell's (2017b) use of 'bondage' in their pieces about the memoir genre and about human–animal relationships, respectively, may be mere coincidence; in both cases, though, the term's use is suggestive of enslavement. Miller's (2007) article title, 'The entangled self: genre bondage in the age of memoir', alludes to the restrictions of genre conventions. Serpell's (2017b) book chapter includes a section headed 'Bonds or bondage?' in which he acknowledges a view of dogs, among other pets, as 'social parasites' who gain

advantage from people's caring instincts. However, in questioning this notion, Serpell (2017b, p. 84) suggests that the relationship between person and pet may be more likely to be mutualistic. Dogs and people have, in any case, made themselves amenable to living with each other—as different species in entanglement.

To exist in entanglement with another might happen by choice, by chance or out of necessity, and the notion of entanglement can have both positive and negative connotations. The *Macquarie dictionary's* (2017) definitions of 'entanglement' include 'the act of entangling', 'the state of being entangled' and 'that which entangles'. These, along with more specific terms used to define 'entangle', such as 'complicate', 'ensnare', 'enmesh' and 'embarrass' (*Macquarie dictionary* 2017), suggest a complex and not necessarily harmonious relationship between those who are entangled with each other. Haraway (2008, p. 88) highlights the inevitability and essentiality of entanglement between living beings, stating: 'Individuals and kinds at whatever scale of time and space are not autopoietic wholes; they are sticky dynamic openings and closures in finite, mortal, world-making, ontological play'. Drawing on Karen Barad's agential realism theory and concepts of intra-action and entanglement<sup>19</sup>, Haraway (2008, pp. 4–6) adopts the use of the term 'entanglements' when discussing the interactions between humans and other beings, including dogs. In relation to these entanglements, Haraway (2008) also applies Mary Pratt's (1991) term 'contact zones'. While Pratt's (1991, p. 34) 'contact zones' are the 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power', Haraway's (2008, pp. 205–46) adapted 'contact zones' are the places, both physical and abstract, where human and

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<sup>19</sup> Haraway refers to Barad's (2007) *Meeting the universe halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham.



non-human animal lives intersect and influence each other. Miller's (2007, p. 544) study of the relational in life writing similarly recognises the inescapability and necessity of relationships with others, even if the particular 'web of entanglement' might be one of choice. These overlapping concepts of entanglement suggest multiple and changing, and voluntary and involuntary, points of intersection between entangled beings.

In an extreme example of relational living and writing, British writer and naturalist Charles Foster experimented with living as, rather than merely with, other animal species. *Being a beast* (2016) is Foster's written account of his experiences living respectively as a badger, otter, fox, deer and swift—that is, by living in those species' natural habitats and adopting, as much as humanly possible, their ways of life. Acknowledging that the boundaries between species are 'certainly vague and sometimes porous', Foster (2016, pp. 1–21) posits that, by living as other animals do, he might better understand other animals. Domesticated environments, however, also provide opportunities to better know and relate to other animal species. The everyday cohabitation of people and pets, such as dogs, is indicative of those blurred boundaries between human and non-human animals and, arguably more so, of their entangled lives. Following from Foster's (2016, pp. 2–3) observation that even the 'man who talks to his dog is acknowledging the porosity of the boundary between species', the person who includes a dog as a relational other in autobiographical narrative enacts the interplay between species.

An examination of relational narrative in contemporary rural Australian memoirs reveals the intertwining of dogs' stories with the writers' own stories, such that they appear virtually inseparable. Just as someone who speaks to their dog may be

acknowledging porous species boundaries (Foster 2016, pp. 2–3), the person who relates autobiographical stories through narrative about dogs is in a way expressing that porosity. As chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis find, relational narratives involving dog characters offer insights into the memoir writers’ perceptions of their relationships with their dogs and their own experiences in relation to their dogs. Further to this, the events depicted in those relational narratives reveal the intersections between the human and dog species in rural Australian contexts. Ideas of entanglement—that autobiography is about the writer’s various and intertwined relationships (Eakin 1999; Miller 2007; Smith & Watson 2010) and that different species exist in entanglement (Haraway 2008)—provide a basis for exploring intersections in the human–dog relationships portrayed in the selected memoirs, and intersections between the memoir genre and human–animal studies.

### 5.3 Points of intersection

The ‘rural’ descriptor, as outlined earlier in this thesis (see 1.6. Terminology and style; 2.3 Rural Australian memoir as a subgenre), is entirely human-centred in that its application is determined by and signifies people’s use of the land and their residence in it. Yet, it also connotes an environment in which many non-human animals exist—sometimes in harmony with people, sometimes in competition with people, and sometimes under the control of people. People’s relationships with certain animal species, or with individual animals, in the rural Australian environment might even manifest a combination of these qualities—harmonious, competitive or controlling—depending on the relevant circumstances and on the involved parties. For example, a sheep farmer who kills dingoes, as depicted in

*A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012, p. 163) and noted in Chapter 3 of this thesis (specifically, 3.3 Different animals), demonstrates control over this other animal in response to competition over a resource—the sheep. The dingoes’ elimination might then allow sheep to live in relative harmony with but still under the control of people, who ultimately determine how the sheep will live and die. Rural settings abound with entanglements involving people and other animals, reflecting the messy ‘compost’ of the multispecies world.

Dogs, with their ability to move between human and non-human domains, are often caught up in, if not directly implicated in, the inherent entanglements of the rural environment. In discussing Jakob von Uexküll’s *Umwelt* theory, Despret (2016, pp. 165–6, citing Deleuze & Parnet 2007; James 1996) observes the ‘associated worlds’ of farmers and animals as ‘[w]orlds whose coexistence creates, experiences, invents, declines, sometimes as a composition, sometimes as a simple copresence’. Living and working with people and in relation to other animal species, the farm dog acts as a nexus between human and non-human animal worlds and as a potential intermediary between people. Autobiographical representations of dogs offer examples of Despret’s ‘companion-agents’ in action. More specifically, the narratives of rural Australian memoirs reflect the dog’s entrenchment in rural Australians’ work and personal lives, and show how the dog crosses between human and non-human species’ worlds.

Focusing on intersections between dogs and people, the following discussion draws on examples from the selected memoirs to highlight the significance of those intersections to life writing in rural Australian contexts. The points of intersection between human and dog lives—the contact zones—in these memoirs are frequently

situated in depictions of work, interpersonal relationships, and the land. These elements of rural Australian life, and their relevance in terms of intersections between people and dogs, are addressed in turn. First though, intersections represented through people's travels with dog companions in rural Australian contexts will be discussed, with travel activities frequently traversing those other elements of rural Australian life.

## **Travel**

Rural Australia is characterised by its remoteness, harsh environmental conditions and farming occupations. The geography, way of life and nature of the work can require those people who live and work on the land to spend considerable time travelling, often over vast distances in sparsely populated places. While, historically, much of this travel was carried out on horseback or, for long journeys, by train, now it is mostly undertaken by motor vehicle—trucks, utes, cars, quad bikes or motorcycles. The dog is the pet that has best adapted to this lifestyle and mode of travel and, in Australian literature and popular media, is the non-human species most regularly depicted travelling in or on motor vehicles with people. Dogs are usually willing travelling companions and generally do not require any special enclosures, as other pet animals like cats, birds, rodents, fish, reptiles or horses might, to enable them to travel in motor vehicles. The relative ease with which they can accompany their people in this way, and their usual enthusiasm for doing so, allows dogs to be more fully integrated in people's lives and families.

The working dog and the ute, together and separately, are commonly associated with the rural Australian lifestyle, as Chapter 4 of this thesis recognises. More than

this, though, the ute represents a common point of intersection between people and dogs in rural Australian situations. In the literal and the figurative sense, the ute is a vehicle through which entanglements between dogs and people are facilitated. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that associations between dogs and utes appear in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs. Goode (2013, p. 8), for example, remarks: ‘I have never met a farm bloke, except for my brothers, who can talk about anything other than cattle, dogs, utes and sheep’. And while reminiscing about visiting a family friend’s farm as a child, Goode’s depiction of dogs on the back of a ute lends a sense of authenticity to a quintessentially rural scene. Goode (2013, pp. 32–3) writes of how the farmer slaughters a sheep for food, after which:

... he wraps the sheep in a cotton sheet, puts it into the back of the ute with us and a couple of sheep dogs, and we bounce back across the rough paddocks to the house.

In *How to get there*, MacKellar (2014, p. 135) describes going to the beach in the ute accompanied by the three dogs:

Both corgis squeeze into the front of the ute and Dusty leaps onto the tray. I clip the chain to her collar and we head off to the beach. ... The corgis have their noses pressed to the glass. They have on their happy faces ... The black dog dances on her chain ...

This scene is midway through MacKellar’s memoir, at a point when she has been living in Tasmania for several months but still seems somewhat unsettled or disconnected there. Her depiction of this outing with the dogs in the ute indicates a lightening of mood. After describing going for a run and a swim, then returning to

her vehicle with the dogs, MacKellar (2014, p. 137) states: ‘It’s moments like these when I’m confident that this gamble will pay off, that I’ve made a good choice’. Her depiction of the dogs on and in the ute not only gives a sense of MacKellar’s more contented feelings, but it also contributes to the overall sense of location—the rural setting and MacKellar’s new home. Similarly, in *Through the farm gate*, Goode’s (2013, p. 50) description of Lucy’s transition from city to country life, which includes Lucy having adopted a working-dog demeanour in the way that she rides on the back of the ute, helps to convey a sense of place and to illustrate the positive effects that the move has had on both Goode and Lucy. The person’s physical and emotional closeness to the dog, and the satisfaction and comfort that both parties might gain from this, is also revealed in *A youth not wasted* (Parkes 2012), such as in the scene where Parkes is undertaking fencing work in remote locations with only his dog, Jiff, for company. Parkes (2012, pp. 180–4) describes setting up a stretcher bed on the back of the ute to prevent ants from getting into his swag and how, in the evening while he lies on the stretcher, Jiff also climbs onto the ute tray and lies beneath the stretcher. The narrators’ descriptions of these seemingly benign events imply the coming together of people and dogs, with and through each other, in mutually beneficial ways and facilitated by the ute.

In McIntosh’s (2008) and Woodford’s (2008) memoirs, key scenes that involve depictions of their dogs on the back of utes are considerably bleaker. A scene in *Beaten by a blow* sees McIntosh having just spent the night in a police cell in the remote New South Wales town of Bourke after a day of heavy drinking. Broke and jobless, and having also crashed his car, McIntosh (2008, p. 241) explains: ‘I had no way of getting home even if I wanted to’. He then manages to get a lift with a

shearing contractor to a potential job and, during this journey, he rides in the back of the contractor's ute with Smokey and the contractor's dogs. Even though, at this stage, McIntosh (2008, p. 241) states that he 'didn't seem to care any more' and 'couldn't feel anything', his depiction of his dog, Smokey, 'tucked in between [his] legs' opposite the contractor's dogs gives a strong sense of mutual support between the two of them. Their physical entanglement seems to mirror their emotional entanglement. And McIntosh's feelings of disconnection from other people is somehow emphasised by this image of him riding in the back of the ute with the dogs. In *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008, pp. 126–9), the pivotal scene involving the death of Woodford's cattle dog, Casuarina, starts with Woodford describing the seemingly commonplace activity of driving into town with the dog on the back of the ute. However, as presented in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis (specifically, 3.5 Subjective affection), the outing ends in devastation when the dog dies following Woodford's failure to properly secure her. Depictions of events such as these in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs demonstrate the fraught nature of human–dog relationships. Dogs and people may be entangled in ways that are not always harmonious, may sometimes even be harmful or fatal, and yet the human–dog bond is such that dogs and people continue to choose each other as companions.

A dog's apparent willingness to be with his or her people and to go everywhere with them, as Serpell (2017a, p. 301) infers, is represented in various parts of the narratives of rural Australian memoirs. In *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, pp. 225, 283), for example, references are made to chaining the dogs up at the homestead to prevent them from following human family members when they go droving. A dog's inclination to go anywhere with his or her people is also implied when McGinnis

(2001, p. 285) describes Red's determination to join her and her siblings when they go out in the family ute one night to fight a bushfire:

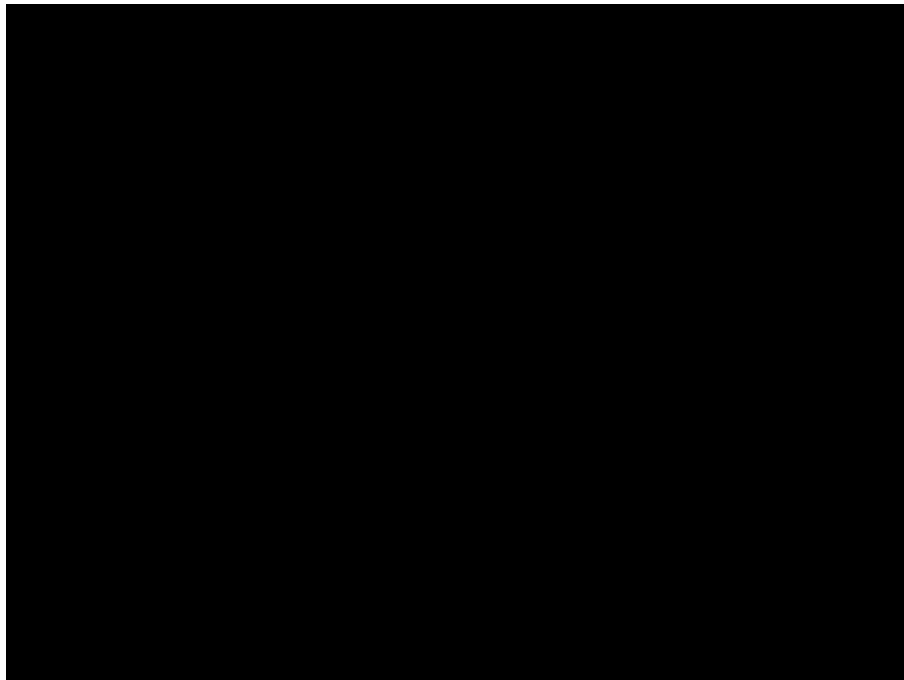
... Red, thinking he was missing out on something, leapt aboard just as we pulled away.

Patrick heard the thump as the dog landed in the tray-bed. He stuck his head out the window, bellowing, 'Go home! G'wan, you great galoot! Go home!' but Red never took any notice of Patrick anyway. He stayed where he was, a black shape against the stars, his ears and tongue blown back by the wind.

McGinnis's depiction of a defiant Red on the back of the ute, accompanying his people, suggests that this is where the dog feels he belongs. Accounts such as these not only help to affirm human-dog attachments but also the associations that people make with dogs and utes in rural Australian settings.

The reliability with which dogs and utes are jointly included in the narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs is indicative of their combined representativeness of life on the land. Sara Henderson's (1992) pioneering example of the rural Australian memoir, *From strength to strength*, even includes a photograph that shows a relaxed-looking dog sitting with children on top of the cabin of a ute that Henderson describes as a 'typical stock-camp Toyota' (see Figure 33). These depictions of dogs and utes appear to be doing more than merely reinforcing a cultural stereotype, as this commonplace activity of the farmer travelling with his or her dogs on the back of the ute also signifies the interconnected lives of people and dogs.



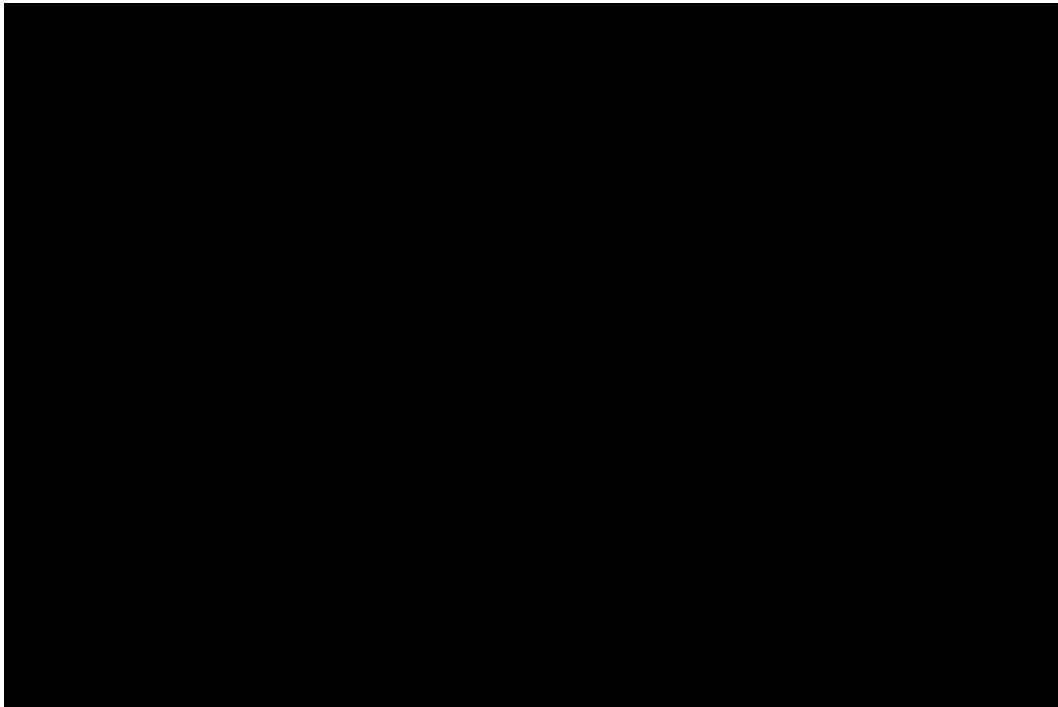


‘A typical stock-camp Toyota, ready to leave—a last-minute engine check’ (Henderson 1992)

Figure 33: Photograph of ute, people and dog in Henderson’s (1992) *From strength to strength*

Still, the culturally stereotypical image of the dog on the back of the ute endures as being in some way emblematic of the rural Australian way of life and of the dog’s place in it. For example, an *ABC News* story about a kangaroo who lives on a West Australian farm and ‘is convinced he is a dog’ (Varischetti 2016) includes a photograph of the kangaroo on a ute with farm dogs (see Figure 34). The article also mentions some of this kangaroo’s dog-like attributes, including that he ‘lives on the back patio’, sleeps on his own ‘dog bed’, and that he wears a collar ‘like a dog’. The name which the farmers have given him, ‘Dusty’, also happens to be a popular name for Australian farm dogs—for example, the *Guardian* reports that ‘Dusty’ is the fourth most common name for Australian kelpies (Evershed, Liu & Hunt 2016), and MacKellar’s labrador in *How to get there* (2014) is also named Dusty. The

photograph of the dogs and kangaroo on the ute serves as further evidence of Dusty the kangaroo's dog-like nature. Given the ABC's stated commitment to providing the Australian community with credible information, as reflected in its editorial policies (ABC n.d.), the editorial decision to include this photograph with Varischetti's (2016) story would seem to acknowledge a widely held view among Australians that the back of the farmer's ute is the dog's place.



'Dusty the kangaroo living life as a farm dog at Wittenoom Hills in Western Australia (Supplied: Felicity Stewart)' (Varischetti 2016)

Figure 34: Photograph of dogs and kangaroo on ute (included in 2016 *ABC News* story)

Notwithstanding the discomfort and risks of travelling on the back of a ute, or that a dog's relegation to the back of a vehicle may be justified for practical reasons, there are also apparent elements of subordination associated with this practice. Narratives that depict a person travelling with a dog or dogs on the back of a ute or similar vehicle offer clues to the nature of the relationship and, more specifically, point to an imposed or assumed power imbalance between people and dogs. In *Beaten by a blow*, for example, McIntosh's (2008, p. 241) depiction of himself riding in the back of the ute with the dogs—and, therefore, like a dog—affirms his feelings of low self-worth at that time. In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012) also alludes to the idea of the back of the vehicle being the place for dogs and others who are deemed less worthy. In a scene early in his memoir, Parkes, then aged 17, travels from Carnarvon to Mount Augustus with his father's dog, Smokey, for company. Parkes (2012, p. 79) describes how he and Smokey travel the 294-mile (473-kilometre) journey on the mail truck, riding on top of the vehicle's cargo load:

The driver had two other passengers in front, so a young bloke and his dog travelled outside, on top. The load was rearranged to make a small depression for me and Smokey to lie in so we didn't fall off.

While Australian laws would now prohibit such an arrangement, this scene takes place in the 1950s, when it might not have been unusual for people and other animals to travel unrestrained on the back of vehicles. Still, it suggests that a young man and a dog were considered less deserving than others might be of a place inside the truck's cabin. Because Parkes is travelling with a dog, he too must endure the discomfort of travelling on the truck's load. Entangled with the dog, the person may take a subordinate position in the human-centred social order.

In a similar vein, depictions of dogs travelling in the front of the vehicle, alongside people, implies a realignment of the power relationship between people and dogs. The image of the person and dog travelling together in the vehicle's passenger compartment promotes a perception of the human–dog relationship being based more on equal status, like friends travelling together, or even of a relationship in which the person is subservient to the dog, like a chauffeur–employer relationship. MacKellar (2014, p. 43), for example, alludes to this idea of a person working for a dog when she describes feeling ‘like a tour guide’ for her two dogs when driving to their new home in Tasmania. While MacKellar may not be driving a ute, her dogs are apparently occupying the passenger areas of her vehicle, allowing parallels to be drawn with other narrated instances of dogs travelling in the passenger compartments of different types of vehicles. Even if the person driving is, by default, in a position of control, the perception that arises when dogs travel in vehicle spaces usually meant for people brings into question the master–servant or owner–property scenario by which the human–dog relationship is frequently regarded. The ute also lends itself to a further power play—with its open tray at the back being easily accessible to active working dogs, it offers possibilities for dogs to decide to join their people on outings, invited or not, as Red in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, p. 285) apparently demonstrates in the firefighting scene. This motor vehicle becomes not only a practical means of transport and a symbol of rural Australia but also a carriage for the exchange of power within human–dog relationships.



Figure 35: *Graziher* Summer 2018 cover image (Harris 2018)

Farm dogs are also often seen travelling with people on motorcycles or, more frequently of late, on quad bikes. In such instances, the dogs might be seated in front of or behind the rider—or both, as the above *Graziher* magazine cover image of western New South Wales contract musterer Sally Smyth with her working dogs illustrates (Figure 35). Goode (2013), for example, describes instances of travelling by both motorcycle and quad bike with her Jack Russell terriers. Towards the end of *Through the farm gate*, Goode (2013, p. 290) explains how, when taking the lead role in managing the farm while her husband works as a counsellor for drought-affected farmers, she involves her dogs in her new routine:

So each morning, I kick the motorbike into life, put a Jack Russell up in front of me and go through the paddocks checking that water troughs are not overflowing or blocked, and that cows are not pushing through fences.

Similarly to how the depiction of Lucy on the back of the ute marked her authenticity as a working farm dog—or at least as acting like one—the image of the dog and the motorcycle also helps to create an impression of Goode’s authenticity in her new role. Dogs on a ute appear again in the latter part of Goode’s (2013, p. 293) memoir when she writes of her exhaustion after one particular day’s work on the farm, which involved repairing holes in fences and retrieving escaped cows and calves, following which she puts her tools and dogs in the ute and goes home. After her family moves to a farm of their own rather than managing other people’s farms, Goode (2013, p. 306) describes how the quad bike becomes the chosen mode of transport for her and her dogs:

I get round the farm on a quad bike now. ... I have strapped a crate on the back to carry the electric fence tester, a shifter, my pocket knife, a water bottle and two Jack Russells.

The close succession with which Goode lists the two dogs and the various tools and supplies needed for farm work suggest that the dogs are among her farming necessities. More generally, the apparent passing mentions of dogs and the different means of transport on the farm represent the adaptability and interactions of people and dogs in a rural setting.

For MacKellar in *How to get there* (2014), riding on the quad bike with her partner, Jim, and his dog, Ethel, becomes an apparent point of connection between

her and Jim. In a scene towards the end of the memoir, MacKellar (2014, p. 208) writes:

Ethel, Jim's corgi, loves the bike, and she presses her small body against me as she braces against the bumps. I'll be covered in corgi hair for the rest of the day, but I don't care. The two of us are both happy to be out.

The idea of being 'covered in corgi hair' is another reminder of the intersections between dogs and people, as dog hair that sticks to a person's clothing serves as a physical manifestation of their entangled lives. This scene contrasts with an earlier one in which MacKellar (2014, p. 182) describes her long list of family responsibilities and household chores, which includes vacuuming because it 'sees us drowning in corgi hair if it doesn't happen'. This requirement to be rid of the dog hair in the house is among MacKellar's (2014, p. 182) 'utterly interrupting interruptions' (quoting A.L. Kennedy<sup>20</sup>), her 'invisible jobs' with 'no end'. Yet, in that later scene on the quad bike, the possibility of being covered in hair from her partner's corgi can be read as a sign of her growing sense of belonging in her new home and relationship. The quad bike, which enables travel and close physical contact with the dog and her partner, is the point of intersection that facilitates these feelings of belonging.

Events that involve dogs and at least one, but sometimes several, of the typically rural Australian modes of transport—utes, trucks, cars, motorcycles and quad bikes—recur in the memoirs that are the focus of this study, and often appear quite

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<sup>20</sup> The expression 'utterly interrupting interruptions' comes from Kennedy's (2013) *On writing*, published by Jonathan Cape, London.

early in the narratives. The early placement of references to dogs and transport help to contextualise the narrative settings; such placement also provides a pre-emptive signal of the dog's importance to the person's story. Subsequent references to dogs and rural means of transport affirm the belonging and status of dogs in rural Australian contexts and the intertwined lives of dogs and rural Australian people. For example, in *Heart country*, the McGinnises' dogs, Larry and Red, appear in the opening paragraph of the memoir, with McGinnis (2001, p. 1) describing the two dogs jumping off the truck's load when the family stops for a break while out driving. This portrayal of the dogs travelling on the back of the truck alludes to the dogs' subordinate roles while also providing a sense of the entangled work and family lives of the McGinnises and their dogs. These entanglements become more evident as the story progresses, with the dogs frequently included in McGinnis's depictions of her and her family's experiences. Similarly, in *Beaten by a blow* (2008), the early scene where McIntosh adopts Smokey, as noted in Chapter 4 of this thesis (see 4.3 Dogs' related stories), establishes the dog's importance to McIntosh and his story; McIntosh's entanglement with his dog is subsequently reflected in frequent references to driving with Smokey to various sheep stations for roustabout and shearing work.

Less typical, and breaking from the more conventional portrayals in rural Australian memoirs of dogs and people travelling together, is Goode's (2013) early depiction of travelling by train with her border collie, Lucy, in *Through the farm gate*. Goode (2013, pp. 7–11) affirms her and Lucy's interconnectedness by recounting their trip to Esperance to visit Goode's brothers, as also outlined earlier in this thesis (specifically, 4.3 Dogs' related stories). This part of Goode's memoir



deals with a period when Goode is temporarily escaping from her city life, but before she moves to the farm in south-eastern South Australia; by including this scene involving train travel with her dog, Goode also effectively delineates her earlier city-based life from her ensuing rural one. Subsequent parts of Goode's memoir that portray her travelling with dogs on utes, motorcycles and quad bikes, as with other rural Australians' memoirs, reinforce the rural Australian settings. The concurrence of narrative about dogs and about transport in these memoirs also corroborates the assorted vehicles as enablers of the entangled lives of people and dogs in rural Australian contexts.

## **Work**

The usefulness of working dogs, and their ability to outperform people and machinery when herding livestock, is often spoken of in proud and practical terms by rural Australian people. It appears that, among rural Australians, there is a social and economic value to having a good working dog, even if that value may be hard to quantify. While the University of Sydney's working dog study—the 'Farm dog project'—reportedly calculated a farm dog's labour as being worth around 40,000 Australian dollars, it also apparently acknowledged that the dog's value goes beyond monetary considerations ('Australian working dogs provide five-fold return on investment, study suggests' 2014). Having a good working dog seems to be a source of self-esteem among rural Australian people, in that the respect that the dog gains from other people is implicitly transferred to the dog's human companion.

This cultural phenomenon is apparently a lasting one. Greenway (2003, p. 130), in examining the history of dogs in colonial Australia, notes that in the mid 19th

century '[sheep dogs] were worth money and their ownership entitled a man to a special degree of respect', and also that 'the relationship between shepherd and dog was significant to a man's status, as his reputation was often judged according to the work of his dog'. Accordingly, the shepherd's 'image of himself ... was intimately tied to his dog' (Greenway, 2003, p. 130). In the 21st century, the broad appreciation that Australians have for working dogs is commonly represented in popular media, such as in news articles or interviews. For example, in a recent *Sydney Morning Herald* story about New South Wales stockman Murray Wilkinson and his working dogs, Julie Power (2017) quotes Wilkinson as saying:

One dog can do the work of six to eight men ... And I have never had a dog call in sick on Monday. They are available rain, hail and shine, and they work for a bit of kibble, a few pats and affection.

The *ABC News* story about the University of Sydney 'Farm dog project' ('Australian working dogs provide five-fold return on investment, study suggests' 2014) quotes West Australian sheep farmer Phil Dorrell's praise of dogs' reliability and viability as workers:

I couldn't put a figure on it but they do save you a hell of a lot of money ... With the dogs we don't have to check the oil, don't have to check the fuel in them ... They don't get flat tyres and they work all day.

The inherent respect that rural Australians have for working dogs is further acknowledged in the ABC TV *Landline* story, 'Working dog' (Lee 2013), which includes Victorian sheep farmer and kelpie breeder Ian O'Connell's observation:

‘... there’s jobs that we see that dogs do that no amount of humans could do’. These favourable comparisons of dogs to human workers or farming equipment emphasise a reliance on constructive and productive human–dog relations in certain rural Australian situations, such as when working with sheep.

A dog’s willingness to work, and to work in a way that helps to achieve human objectives, also receives positive attention in rural Australians’ autobiographical stories. Porcher and Schmitt (2012, p. 40) point out that farm animals live and work in a ‘profoundly human’ workplace, but one in which the human–animal relationship is fundamental. This understanding of the farm as a human world of work leads to an associated idea that non-human animals—livestock as well as dogs—can be active and willing participants in that work. Porcher and Schmitt (2012, p. 43) posit that non-human animals’ participation in farm work is evidenced by the way that farming people regard those other animals as having subjectivity and intentions, and that the animals must want to do the work in order for it to be done. In *Beaten by a blow*, for example, Smokey is admired and coveted for his ability and desire to work with sheep, with McIntosh (2008, pp. 105–6) recalling a station hand saying to him on one particular occasion:

That dog of yours is a natural and all. Did you he know he rounded up them sheep after we let em go? He’s got it. ... Do you wanta sell him?

In *Heart country* (2001), frequent depictions of the McGinnises’ dogs accompanying the family on droving runs reaffirm their interconnectedness with the author and other family members. McGinnis’s (2001, p. 74) observation that Larry and Red ‘saved the horses miles a day by driving the stragglers tail of the mob’, for example,

recognises and praises the family's dogs' participation in and contribution to the McGinnises' droving work. And in *A youth not wasted*, Parkes (2012) notes the strong relationship and interconnectedness that forms between a person and a dog through working together. In a scene where Parkes and Jiff are moving sheep between two yards, Parkes's (2012, p. 260) comment that he 'preferred to have just Jiff working with [him] than any combination of blokes' is remarkably similar to the farmers' assertions in the media reports noted above. Parkes's (2012, p. 260) depiction of Jiff's yard work serves as an example of independence and interdependence between human and dog—of 'autonomy-in-relation':

He worked from the back, of course, but he continually came around the side to see how the front was going and to see if I wanted him to do something else. The last animal through the gate was always the black dog, wagging his tail and looking at me for further instructions.

While the overall objective in this example—moving sheep into a pen—might be dictated by the human, the dog's desire to work is also being satisfied. Here, the two species—human and dog—are working together for a mutually beneficial purpose, and the dog apparently works for people without the threat of punishment or promise of reward. It might be inferred from such portrayals that the dog's willingness and ability to work with a person and to meet the person's objectives, and the person's desire and ability to work with the dog and to satisfy the dog's working drive, combine to enhance and strengthen the human–dog relationship.

While working well together may reinforce the bond between person and dog, that bond also makes the work possible, even pleasurable. Drawing on research into animals and work, including that of Porcher and Schmitt, Despret (2016, pp. 180–1)

notes that farm work involving relationships and cooperation between people and non-human animals, when going well, is barely visible. It becomes more visible, however, when the usually cooperative relationship between the person and the non-human animal is somehow ruptured—when one or the other party acts in ways counter to productivity. A situation in which the non-human animal is uncooperative, as Despret (2016, pp. 181–2) points out, emphasises that the animal is otherwise ‘participating, intentionally, in work’. Extending on an example of cows as the non-human animals in the human–animal relationship, Despret (2016, p. 182) suggests that viewing the work arrangement as a partnership also encourages consideration of the human and non-human animals ‘as connected together in the experiment they are in the process of living and through which they together constitute their identities’. Given the centrality of work to the rural Australian identity and way of life, the working capacities and abilities of dogs are often portrayed as important elements of the dog characters, and as contributing to the apparent interconnectedness between people and dogs, in rural Australian memoirs.

Narratives about dogs who refuse to work in the ways that people want or expect them to can reinforce, sometimes indirectly, the importance and value of ‘good’ working dogs to rural Australians. In praising Duke the corgi’s working abilities, for example, MacKellar (2014) points out that her partner’s dogs refuse to work for her, and it is only because of Duke that she is able to help with penning up sheep for shearing. MacKellar (2014, p. 110) explains: ‘... Duke’s the only dog who will work for me. Jim’s dogs ignore me completely. Without Duke I would not have a hope of getting sheep into the pen’. And in *Through the farm gate*, Goode (2013, p. 101) refers to the working dogs as going ‘on strike’ when she describes the dysfunction

that results from the farm's city-based co-owners visiting and trying to involve themselves in farm work. As Porcher and Schmitt (2012, p. 43) plainly state, 'when animals do not want to work, the work cannot be done'. The farm dog's collaboration is needed for the farm person to achieve certain tasks. Narratives about dogs who refuse to contribute in ways that people expect or desire of them are, therefore, narratives about agency and the value (if only from a human perspective) of cooperative human–dog relationships.

While dogs' innate abilities for farm work are extolled in rural Australians' stories, dogs' abilities to learn and to transform into workers also receive significant attention. In the narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs, such references to dogs' transformations into effective workers offer further affirmation of the value that people place on dogs' aptitudes. In *Beaten by a blow* (2008), Smokey's presence as McIntosh's companion at various sheep stations is presented as a source of ongoing hostility from other (human) workers. However, McIntosh comes to gain some personal satisfaction and social status from his colleagues' appreciation of Smokey's aptitude and developing skills as a worker. McIntosh (2008, p. 92) describes teaching Smokey to work with sheep, starting with training him 'to sit, and stay, and to get away back'—the latter of these being a specific command given to dogs when herding sheep. McIntosh (2008, p. 90) also proudly recounts how his supervisor admires Smokey's working abilities: 'Draphine started taking him during the day and working him. Reckoned he was a beauty. Said he was smart and sharp, but I already knew that'. These depictions of Smokey learning to work with sheep are closely followed by the supervisor telling McIntosh—albeit somewhat testily—that he can start shearing: 'Jesus, get yourself some combs and

cutters for Greystones Station in July. I'll see ya there' (2008, p. 95). It may be no more than a coincidence that, when Smokey starts being seen by the other shearing workers as useful, McIntosh's potential as a shearer is also acknowledged. However, the close placement of these events in the narrative suggests a stronger association—as if, in keeping with Caras's (1996, p. 87) assertion, the dog and the dog's person are viewed as extensions of each other. McIntosh's and Smokey's lives are so inextricably linked—entangled—that the valuing of one seems to transfer to the other.

In *How to get there* (2014), the emergence of MacKellar's corgi, Duke, as a useful and enthusiastic worker becomes relevant to MacKellar's own sense of purpose and her feelings of belonging on the farm. As MacKellar (2014, p. 116) explains, it is apparently important to her, too, that her partner appreciates her dog's usefulness:

Even Jim acknowledges that [Duke] can pack more sheep into the race than any of his dogs. It's a reluctant admission, though, and I'm always looking for examples of how handy Duke is to emphasise his talents to my somewhat sceptical partner.

MacKellar's pride in Duke—and, by extension, in herself—is particularly evident in the scene in which he herds a mob of errant ewes from a far paddock and across a creek. MacKellar (2014, pp. 116–21) seems intent on showing Jim that Duke is up to this task—and that, through Duke, she is too. Afterwards, she ruminates on how she needs to involve herself more in the farm—'to feel a part of the mechanics of the place'—to move towards feeling a sense of belonging there (MacKellar 2014,

pp. 121–2). In this way, Duke’s usefulness as a worker seems intertwined in MacKellar’s feelings of belonging on the farm and in her new relationship.

In some cases, the dogs in rural Australians’ stories are portrayed as demonstrating an ability to think and act independently from their people but still within the construct of a human workplace. Dogs who round up sheep without, or with only minimal, human instruction are cases in point. Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 73) postulate that dogs like to herd because the herding activity, rather than a desire to please the person directing them, is ‘self-rewarding’. In *A youth not wasted*, for example, Parkes (2012, pp. 133–5) recalls a time when his father’s dog, Smokey, was left in sole charge of keeping a mob of around 500 sheep rounded up while the men stopped for a tea break, and how Smokey would engage in this apparently self-rewarding behaviour. Parkes (2012, p. 134) observes how ‘when [Smokey] thought [the men] were not watching, he would play a game’—this ‘game’ involved singling out and stalking a sheep until that particular one ran away, then chasing the sheep down and herding him back to the mob. While the sheep dog may find an inherent satisfaction in working, like that suggested by Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 73), Parkes’s depictions of Jiff and Smokey suggest that, at times, they can also be selective about who they work for and with. An example of this, which is also detailed in Chapter 4 of this thesis (see 4.3 Dogs’ related stories), involves the occasion on which Jiff refuses to work for Parkes’s colleagues, even when they try to instruct him in Parkes’s usual way, and instead defiantly walks away and lies down under a horse (Parkes’s 2012, p. 295). The dogs’ displays of agency in relation to people and other animals in these human-dominated



work environments are, in effect, contextualised expressions of autonomy-in-relation.

The human–dog working relationships depicted in rural Australian memoirs highlight the reciprocity between people and dogs. For example, Parkes’s (2012) depiction of his and Jiff’s relationship (outlined in 4.3 Dogs’ related stories), suggests that, while Jiff relies on Parkes to be able to fulfil his own desire to work, Parkes also depends on Jiff to be able to do his job properly. Acknowledging on occasions that he could not have achieved certain work tasks without Jiff’s help, Parkes (2012, p. 260) also declares at one point: ‘The relationship that can develop between a man and a dog when they both have work to do can be sublime’. This interdependence is similar to that depicted in Haraway’s (2008) explanation of the dog and human functioning together in the sport of agility trials. Haraway (2008, pp. 175–6) writes that ‘both players make each other up in the flesh’ and that they must ‘learn ... to move as someone new of whom neither can be alone’. Their relationship is ‘co-constitutive’ (Haraway 2003, p. 12), where each party functions in their respective role in relation to the other. How this differs from working with a human partner, who at least speaks the same language, is highlighted through Haraway’s explanation, and is further embodied in depictions of human–dog working relationships in contemporary rural Australian memoirs. The portrayed interdependence supports the claim that the relationship between a person and their working dog is not necessarily ‘unidirectional’, as some may perceive it to be, but that it is ‘bidirectional’ (Payne, Bennett & McGreevy 2015, pp. 71–2). Neither the dog nor the human could independently complete the tasks such as those described

by Parkes; they must work in partnership—as ‘companion-agents’ (Despret 2013, p. 29)—and find a way of communicating with each other, to achieve their goals.

Portrayals of people and dogs working together in rural Australian memoirs suggest an interdependent work relationship, but also one that fosters the realisation of agency and autonomy through each other. Perspectives reflected in the narratives also support prevailing ideas, such as those put forward by Payne, Bennett and McGreevy (2015, p. 73), on how working together might reinforce the bond between dog and person and enable a healthier human–dog relationship. Some narratives involving rural Australian people and dogs imply that this positive relationship between them might transfer to more harmonious interpersonal relationships, following from the self-assurance and respect a good working dog brings.

### **Interpersonal relations**

Narratives in contemporary rural Australian memoirs recognise dogs’ contributions in helping people to establish a sense of belonging, home and self. By extension, autobiographical narrative offers perspectives of the dogs’ influence on human–human relationships in rural Australian contexts. Dogs are commonly thought to facilitate social interactions between people, and the ways that dogs are shown to work, communicate and socialise with people reaffirm their special status among pet species. These relations between people and dogs encourage further entanglements within and between the two species. Serpell (2017b, p. 85), for example, notes that various studies have found that people of different ages and physical abilities ‘enjoy more frequent and more positive interactions with strangers when accompanied in public by a dog than when unaccompanied’. Emma Power

(2013), through a Sydney-based study of people who live with dogs in apartments, recognises that dogs facilitate social interaction between people, but also that people realise other social benefits through their dogs, such as by being more recognisable to neighbours and by being more able to maintain a healthy social distance.<sup>21</sup> Results from AMA's 2019 survey about pets in Australia reaffirm that some people find social benefits through their pets, including dogs. Dog walking provides opportunities to meet neighbours and other people walking their dogs; a pet such as a dog can provide a common point of interest to talk about with 'like-minded people'; and, when meeting someone for the first time, a pet can be a 'conversation starter' (AMA 2019, p. 15). These suppositions that dogs are social facilitators do, however, tend to relate primarily to dogs' coexistence with people in urban contexts. While some of the narratives in rural Australian memoirs support the idea that dogs can aid connection between people, others challenge the commonly accepted view of dogs as social facilitators.

Rather than facilitating interactions between strangers, dogs in rural Australian memoirs are more likely to be portrayed as reinforcing connections between people who are already involved in a relationship with each other. Early in *How to get there*, for example, MacKellar (2014) points out that a common thread between her and her new partner, Jim, is that they each have a corgi. Acknowledging the dog's ability to serve as a point of connection between people, MacKellar (2014, p. 39) writes of how she initially wondered whether Jim, a sheep farmer, was lying about

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<sup>21</sup> At the time of finalising this chapter in early 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the terms 'social distance' and 'social distancing' are in common use with respect to ensuring a safe and responsible physical distance between people (sometimes also referred to as 'spatial distance'). In this chapter, with reference to Power (2013), the use of these terms relates also to maintaining a healthy and beneficial emotional or psychosocial distance between people.

having a corgi in an attempt to bond with her, especially given that the corgi is not a typical Australian farm dog breed. In *A youth not wasted*, Parkes's (2012, p. 132) adoption of Jiff, the kelpie–border collie cross, results from Parkes's father's encouragement. Subsequent depictions of Jiff and of Parkes's father's kelpie, Smokey, as each being 'a one-and-a-half-man dog' (Parkes 2012, p. 133) reinforce the link between Parkes and his father. Parkes (2012, p. 133; photograph caption) explains that Jiff 'worked wholeheartedly for me, a bit grudgingly for my father and not at all for anyone else' and that Smokey 'belonged totally to my father and a little bit to me' (see Figure 25 in Chapter 2 of this thesis). When, towards the end of the memoir, Parkes (2012, p. 328) writes about moving to the city, his decision to leave Jiff—his 'soul mate' (photograph caption at Figure 25)—in his parents' care may be taken as a sign of not only the strength of his bond with the dog but also the strength of his relationship with his parents. AMA (2019, p. 24) reports that most Australians with pets will rely on their (human) family members or friends when they need help with looking after those pets, and that this reflects 'the close emotional bond the majority of owners have with their pets'. By the same token, it reflects the bonds that people have with those other people with whom they entrust their pets and, furthermore, the entangled relationships of humans and non-humans. In *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008), the centrality of Casuarina and Solly to the family unit is conveyed through the inclusion of photographs of these dogs alongside other family members and among the various photographs of the people and places mentioned in Woodford's story (see Figure 24 in Chapter 2 of this thesis). The collective grief of Woodford's family when Casuarina dies, along with their individual responses to the dog's death, as depicted by Woodford (2008, p. 128) and noted earlier in this thesis

(specifically, 3.5 Subjective affection; 4.3 Dogs' related stories), is also indicative of family relations in connection with and through the dog.

In some instances, the narratives in rural Australian memoirs portray situations in which dogs help to maintain appropriate or safe social distance between people.

Emma Power (2013, p. 590) finds that, in the context of Sydney apartment living, 'dogs act as "distancing devices", enabling people to maintain a social distance that is foundational to good neighboring and community practice'. Power (2013, p. 586) describes a social distancing effect resulting from the 'neutral conversation point' that dogs offer—in this way, the dogs, as topics of conversation, provide a figurative buffer zone that allows strangers to interact without intruding on each other's sense of privacy or personal space. Less subtle examples of dogs as 'distancing devices' are found in some depictions of interpersonal interactions, and of dogs'

involvements in these, in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs. For example, in *Through the farm gate*, when Goode (2013, pp. 9–11) recalls hitchhiking from Kalgoorlie to Esperance, she depicts her dog, Lucy, as helping to enforce personal boundaries between herself and three men in a truck. After Goode accepts a ride in the truck, one of men suggests putting Lucy in the back, but Goode insists that Lucy travel in the cabin with her—explaining to the reader: 'I am relying on the dog for my safety' (2013, p. 10). The men reluctantly allow Lucy to ride in the truck's cabin on the proviso that she will not bite them or 'fart'. Goode (2013, p. 10) finds herself sitting between two of the men, whose 'body language is still cocky', with Lucy on her lap. One of the men suggests that Goode put Lucy on the floor so that she (Goode) would 'be more comfortable', but Goode insists that Lucy remain on her lap. She tells the men that Lucy 'prefers to watch the road', and she demonstrates

Lucy's protective abilities. On Goode's instruction to 'Get 'em', Lucy snarls and growls at the men, then relaxes after Goode tells her 'that's enough' (2013, pp. 10–11). The four-hour journey thus begins with Lucy's growling and snarling performance, following which the four human occupants build a rapport by exchanging stories about themselves, and it ends with Goode and the driver waving farewell to each other 'like best buddies' (Goode 2013, p. 11). The dog's role in facilitating this ultimately friendly and respectful exchange between Goode and the men is perhaps a modified, or nuanced, form of the social distancing function that Power (2013) describes. More than providing a safe social distance, the dog's presence in such potentially fraught situations can go beyond 'distancing' to also serve a 'moderating' function. In this moderating capacity, a dog may divert the focus of an interpersonal exchange—potentially diluting the intensity of the exchange by offering a distraction or a talking point—and may also compel people to behave in socially appropriate ways.

The scene in *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001, p. 63) where the McGinnises' Smithfield collie, Larry, threatens a stockman who walks into the family's camp area is another example of a dog being portrayed as enforcing distance between people—or as moderating interpersonal interactions. This expectation of the dog is further confirmed by McGinnis's father telling the group of stockmen, 'That dog'll have yer as quick as look at yer ... I keep him to watch out for me girls' (2001, p. 63). Given the nature of memoir as a creative form of self-expression, it is possible that such events are incorporated in Goode's (2013) and McGinnis's (2001) stories for narrative effect, since more mundane interpersonal exchanges where dogs are present may not be considered as having reader appeal. Yet, the scenes involving

the truck journey and the drovers' camp firmly situate the narratives in rural Australian contexts, suggesting that they are representative of the more typical kinds of interpersonal exchanges in rural Australian situations compared with those that might occur in urban environments. With existing studies on human–dog relations tending to focus on specific urban environments, such as high-density residential settings (Power 2013) or dog parks (Jackson 2012), the available literature has limited capacity to account for dogs' moderating functions in rural settings. For example, in the urban confines where Power's (2013) study was situated, it would be more common for people to interact while walking through the neighbourhood with their dogs, visiting dog parks, or passing each other in apartment block common areas. While parallels can be drawn between human–human and human–dog relations in rural and urban environments, since dogs and people live together in both of these environments, these particular urban scenarios are somewhat removed from the reality of those who live in rural Australia. Personal accounts, as conveyed through the memoirs, can therefore offer views of dogs' roles in interpersonal interactions in rural Australian situations.

Given the sparse population and pastoral interests that characterise rural Australia, the lives of the people who reside there intersect in different ways and in different places than might be typical for urban dwellers. The dog's entanglements in interpersonal exchanges is, therefore, likely to play out differently in rural contexts. In the absence of focused studies into how interpersonal relations may be mediated and shaped by dogs specifically in rural Australian contexts, representations of these entanglements in the memoirs of rural Australians offer some perspectives for consideration. Based on various accounts offered in the

memoirs, the rural Australian environment also presents situations in which dogs can be a point of friction, or at least difference, between people. In *Heart country* (McGinnis 2001), for instance, the dogs, Larry and Red, are portrayed as integral family members, yet their potential to antagonise others is also occasionally revealed. In the example involving Larry's fight with a dog at the station where McGinnis is collecting water, McGinnis gives the impression that this is characteristic behaviour for Larry—a behaviour that drew much hostility from people, as she states, 'Not a few had wanted to shoot him' (McGinnis 2001, p. 36). When, immediately following Larry's altercation with the other dog, who happens to be the station manager's wife's dog, McGinnis (2001, p. 36) says to Larry, 'Get yourself onto the load, you useless mutt, and let's get going before we're caught', she is recognising the conjoined nature of their relationship, the shared responsibilities for their individual actions, and how the dog's behaviour can have repercussions for relations between people.

Narrative about Smokey in *Beaten by a blow* (McIntosh 2008) further emphasises the fraught relationships between people that can arise from the dog's proximate existence, and also highlights some culturally and locationally specific influences on some human–animal interactions. In the previously mentioned scene where he is riding in the back of the ute with the dogs, McIntosh's portrayed feelings of isolation and despair seem slightly alleviated by the fact that he at least still has the company of his dog. Yet, this relationship with Smokey sometimes appears to compound his isolation from other people, mainly because his shearing colleagues take exception to Smokey's barking and to McIntosh's inclination to bring Smokey into the shearers' huts where dogs were not allowed. Throughout the



narrative, there are occasional hints at Smokey behaving aggressively when working with anyone other than McIntosh. This behaviour escalates such that the shearers' union representative warns McIntosh (2008, pp. 193–4), 'There've been a couple complaints about it barkin and all at night. ... And your dog's tried to bite a couple of station hands as well. ... watch him, ay'. Smokey's usefulness as a worker is apparently not enough to redeem him—one of the shearers threatens to shoot Smokey, and McIntosh's supervisor also offers to 'put him down' (McIntosh 2008, p. 208). McIntosh resists these attempts to dismantle the entity that he and Smokey had become—a dismantlement that would evidently destroy their 'co-constitution' and, therefore, part of McIntosh's own sense of self. McIntosh's account of how he eventually shoots Smokey himself is significant in terms of human perceptions and treatment of other species, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, and in terms of relational self-portrayal, as discussed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, Smokey's story and his ultimate demise are indicative of intersections between human–dog relationships and human–human relationships.

McIntosh's decision to kill Smokey partly results from other shearing workers' hostility towards the dog—hostility that extends to McIntosh himself—and from McIntosh's related concerns about Smokey's behaviour around other people. As McIntosh (2008, p. 243) explains:

... I knew I couldn't take Smokey to the [shearing] sheds any more and I couldn't leave him at home when I was job hunting and risk him biting Lonnie [McIntosh's daughter]. I didn't think he would, but I couldn't risk it.

Up to the point where McIntosh kills Smokey, repeated references to his colleagues' hostility towards his dog may prepare the reader for this climactic scene, yet this event in this narrative still has a shocking effect. Even with the risks, the fatal consequences for Smokey seem avoidable and unnecessary. Other station workers, who were aware of Smokey's aggressive tendencies, had previously offered to buy him; McIntosh, however, did not see this as an option. According to McIntosh (2008, p. 243): 'No one could win him over. They could pat him but he didn't take to anyone except me'. McIntosh (2008, p. 243) rejects his wife's suggestion to take Smokey to the pound, stating that he also 'couldn't do that'. Within the complex array of entanglements involving McIntosh, his colleagues, his family and his dog, the exclusivity with which McIntosh views his and Smokey's relationship ultimately confirms the dog's fate.

In comparatively benign scenes in *Through the farm gate*, Goode (2013) also evokes the negative attitudes that some people have towards dogs in her depiction of the train journey that she took with Lucy. After the train arrives in Kalgoorlie, Goode learns that the bus to Esperance does not leave until the next day, with the local publican explaining to her: '... you're meant to stay in town and have a look around. But you'll have to find somewhere else for the dog. We don't take dogs' (2013, p. 9). Also resisting others' attempts to disrupt human–dog entanglements, Goode decides to hitchhike for the last leg of the journey and determinedly ensures that the single entity—or 'two-headed creature', as Zeaman (2011, p. 99) describes the person with dog—remains intact. Goode's (2013) depiction of the journey from Adelaide to Esperance with Lucy, when considered alongside McIntosh's (2008) depiction of the events that led to Smokey's demise, highlights different responses

in Australian society towards the human–dog relationship and the affirmative, obstructive or destructive effects that these have on the entangled lives of people and dogs. In Goode’s (2013, pp. 7–11) story, while the guards on the train welcomed Lucy into their space, even sharing their food with her, the hotelier refuses to accept dogs at all on their premises, and the men in the truck only begrudgingly accept Lucy in the passenger compartment. Differences in the ways that people interact with or regard dogs are reflected in Goode’s depictions of Lucy, the train guards, the publican, and the men in the truck in these early scenes of the memoir. In the different situations described, Goode’s and Lucy’s close relationship, while characterised by interdependence, also appears to offer them each a certain level of freedom and autonomy.

Goode’s (2013) memoir proceeds to bring attention to the great extent with which dogs can be a common point of interest between people and to unite those who may otherwise appear to have little in common. Lucy’s eventual death of old age is a focal point in *Through the farm gate*, and Goode (2013, pp. 184–5) recounts how, shortly after Lucy’s death, a news report about transport workers threatening to go on strike prompts her to think about the farm dog’s willingness to work: ‘Complaining unionists and workaholic dogs—extreme opposites—give me a story perfect in its explosive potential’. Goode, who at the time presented a weekly piece about rural life for the ABC’s *Country hour* radio program, decides to ask listeners to share their stories about working dogs. This leads to the selection of short stories that came to be published as *Great working dog stories* (comps Goode & Hayes 1990). The interspecies connection that drives people’s interest in writing and reading dog stories is, however, shown to go beyond offering a popular and

marketable outlet for creative expression; Goode (2013, p. 194) portrays the working dog as uniting people and encouraging city dwellers to also take an interest in country life:

Writers of stories about their dogs travel to the launch and I watch an extraordinary mingling of country and city and the juxtaposition of rural work being done among tall buildings and shop windows. People crane to see the dogs, ask how they know what to do, why sheep are in the city and what does wool feel like. Most people in the mall have never seen working dogs do what they are bred and trained to do.

This scene shows the dog as being the connexion between life in the city and life on the land by bringing rural people together in the city, and by helping to foster urban people's interest in and understanding of rural life. Given both rural and urban Australians' familiarity with dogs in their different contexts, dogs offer a common point of interest that can also be a conduit for interpersonal connections across the supposed rural–urban divide.

### **The land**

To live on the land in Australia is to coexist with many other animal species and often in rugged, harsh and dirty physical environments. The nature of such a way of life provides many opportunities for people's and dogs' lives to intersect.

Contemporary rural Australian memoirs often portray these intersecting experiences as facilitating people's life on the land. Combined, dogs' adaptability to rural environments and their suitability as humans' companions make them the ultimate enablers of their people's rural lifestyles. By bridging the divide between people and other animals or, conversely, acting to guard the boundaries between humans and

others, dogs help people to live and work in proximity to other animals and to respond to the exigencies of the natural environment.

Goode's (2013, pp. 298–300) narrative, for example, illustrates the 'associated worlds' (Despret 2016, pp. 165–6) of human and non-human animals when her Jack Russell terriers hunt down a fox. The dogs and fox engage in a protracted and bloody fight. Goode intervenes and ends up killing the fox with the weapons she has at hand—she steps on the fox's head, ties his jaws and legs with twine, and cuts his throat. Goode justifies her actions by pointing out that the fox is a pest and was living near the nesting place of rare curlew birds. While this might be indicative of the different statuses accorded by some people to different species, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the scene also reinforces the dog's alignment with humans. It shows the domestic dog crossing over into the world of the wild and, in a sense, drawing the human into that world—one from which they can both retreat, with the dog remaining part of the human's inner circle. Even the earlier scene in *Through the farm gate* (Goode 2013, p. 49) where Lucy rolls in manure and approaches horrified visitors from the city while 'wearing her new perfume' is indicative of the dog's ability to bring aspects of the non-human world into human-dominated spheres. The dog, driven by instinct to roll in another animal's excrement, is effectively delivering that excrement to people, requiring them to see, smell, or possibly touch it. The dog imposes the filth of the land on people, connecting the people with other animals who live there, and compelling them to acknowledge the essentiality of the coexistence of different animal species in the rural environment.

In various rural Australian memoirs, interactions between dogs, livestock and people show dogs as being at the junction of interspecies entanglements in the

context of the narrators' lives on the land. McGinnis's (2001, p. 74) depiction of the dogs reducing the horses' workload by helping to keep the drove of cattle together and moving in the right direction, for example, also transfers to the McGinnises themselves, as it implies that the dogs have a positive effect by reducing the time that they spend and the distances that they travel on their droving runs. Beyond offering descriptions of the dogs' actions in these situations—such as McGinnis's (2001, p. 74) depiction of Larry 'nudging [the calves'] hocks with his nose to keep them moving'—these scenes suggest that the dogs interact with the other animals in ways that facilitate and gratify the McGinnis family's rural lifestyle and connection to the land. Larry and Red straddle the associated worlds of humans and non-humans, occasionally acting as a buffer between them but also performing functions that enable people to maintain productive lives on the land. The dogs alleviate some of the associated hardships for those people and for the other animals.

In particular, the toughness of people in response to the harshness of the land infuses some of the narratives involving dogs in rural Australian memoirs.

McGinnis's (2001, p. 305) portrayal of Larry's death towards the end of her memoir, with the family placing his corpse 'in the grass for the birds to find', is a further indication of the entanglements of people, dogs and other animals in the tough rural Australian environment. It also echoes the subtext of an earlier scene in which McGinnis (2001, p. 71) laughs insensitively at a visiting padre's story about helping to bury a child's dog. When she apologises to the padre, he replies, 'That's all right ... I know how hard this country is, and if you want to last out here you have to be tough' (2001, p. 71). This toughness is also on display in *Beaten by a blow* (2008) in a scene where McIntosh bogs his car at night and, during torrential rain, walks

barefoot with a colleague and Smokey for several kilometres to a sheep station. As well as the dangers posed by floodwater and by snakes and other creatures, the threat of a wild boar in the area concerns the men, as McIntosh (2008, p. 232) describes:

There had been a huge, rogue wild boar in the area. We didn't want to get cut down by the razor-sharp tusks it was rumoured to have, and I didn't want Smokey to get hurt or killed. I picked him up and carried him. If a boar could eat a lamb while it was being born, and eat distressed ewes, it wouldn't hold back if it could get at us.

The scene epitomises the entangled worlds of different species, the unpredictability and hazards of the environmental conditions, rural people's fortitude and pragmatism in the face of the dangers of the land, and the overriding bond between person and dog.

In *Real dirt* (Woodford 2008, pp. 126–9), the collision of events that lead to Casuarina's death, along with the aftermaths, illustrate the potential impact and reach of interspecies entanglements in a uniquely rural Australian setting. The idea that Casuarina may have fallen from the ute when Woodford swerved to avoid a wombat on the road, as Woodford (2008, p. 128) suggests, reflects a very rural Australian portrait of interspecies entanglements. Consequently, the trauma of Casuarina's death, which fortifies Woodford's will to build his family's sustainable home and farm, leads to Woodford's and his family's greater engagement with the rural community and environment in which they live. Woodford's (2008, p. 172) subsequent adoption of Solly the border collie also aligns with his connection to the land, given Solly's peaceful nature and willingness to 'share his space with any

wildlife that comes near'. There is an apparent fit between this dog and Woodford's environmentalist ambitions and his own relationship with the land and its various inhabitants. The front-cover photograph of the memoir (see Figure 16 in Chapter 2 of this thesis), which shows Woodford with a dirt-covered hand and Solly with dirt on his paw, also implies their connection through the land.

A physical connection to the land is also alluded to in an early scene in *How to get there* (2014) when MacKellar is preparing to leave the family farm in New South Wales to move to Tasmania. MacKellar (2014, p. 32) writes of wanting to 'get down on the ground and roll in the dirt, cover myself in it, smell of it, be stained with it, carry it with me'. Her desire to roll in the dirt seems, on its own, quite dog-like. But further to this, a comparison might be drawn between a desire to be covered in dirt from 'the country of [her] heart' (2014, p. 237) and then actually being covered in her partner's dog's hair when, as noted earlier in this chapter, they ride on the quad bike together—that the corgi hair, like the dirt from her family's farm, feels like home. In the book's 'Acknowledgements' section, MacKellar (2014, p. 242) recalls some of her misgivings following her move to her partner's farm in Tasmania, such as 'you feel out of place, struggle in your new relationship, question your identity, your sanity'. By the end of the memoir, however, MacKellar (2014, p. 229) has revealed that she is on the way to finding the sense of belonging that she is looking for:

When I dig in the garden, or scatter grain for the chooks ... when I walk in the stillness of the morning chaperoned by dogs, or stand in the yards surrounded with sheep and work with the man I love, then I start to feel I have reached the place I'm meant to be.



In this closing scene, MacKellar acknowledges the dogs' companionship in the context of farming life as contributing to her connection to place.

The dog's role in delivering the land to the person, and the person to the land, is an underlying theme across each of the memoirs. Likewise, the person's role in giving the dog access to the natural environment is also apparent. The person and dog, entangled with each other and within the wider environment and its inhabitants, are ultimately shown to be participants in and facilitators of each other's life on the land.

#### 5.4 The memoir and human–animal studies

Collectively, these memoirs portray some key places where and ways in which human and dog lives intersect in rural Australian contexts. Depictions of travel, work and interpersonal interactions in the company of dogs reveal the entanglements in human–dog relationships. Some of these entanglements can be ultimately fatal for the dogs, as McIntosh's (2008, pp. 243–5) and Woodford's (2008, pp. 126–9) recollections illustrate. Or the entanglements can lead to the person being ostracised by other people who may feel threatened or annoyed by dogs—also as portrayed in McIntosh's (2008) memoir and in parts of McGinnis's (2001) memoir. Yet they can facilitate or reinforce positive connections between people—as occurs with MacKellar (2014) and her partner, and with Parkes (2012) and his father, and as Goode (2013) alludes to on a wider scale. Through such entanglements, though, the humans and the dogs might each gain some freedom or autonomy, and this is perhaps most evident in depictions of working relationships. Narratives about working with dogs—particularly in MacKellar's, McGinnis's and Parkes's

memoirs—highlight the interdependent working relationships between the two species. The sense of purpose and place projected through the narration of events in which the person and dog are working together is a distinctive feature of most of these memoirs.

Importantly though, the intersections between the humans' and dogs' lives appear at some of the most critical points in the memoirs and, therefore, in the writers' own stories. In *Through the farm gate* (2013), Goode's bond with Lucy is the inspiration behind her bestselling books of working dog stories. In *How to get there* (2014), MacKellar's interactions with dogs—her own and her partner's—help to bring about her sense of belonging in her new home and relationship. In *Heart country* (2001), Larry's death draws McGinnis's story to a close as she begins to realise her writing ambitions. In *Beaten by a blow* (2008), Smokey's death marks a major transition in McIntosh's own life as he tries to leave shearing work and find a job that will let him be with his family. In *A youth not wasted* (2012), Jiff is one of Parkes's primary concerns when he leaves his life on the sheep stations to live and work in the city. And in *Real dirt* (2008), Casuarina's death provides the necessary motivation for Woodford to create his sustainable farm and new home. In these memoirs, narratives about the dogs in the writers' lives can be regarded as biographical representations of dogs' lives—as dog memoirs within personal memoirs, as Chapter 4 of this thesis recognises. But rather than focusing solely on the writer's or the dog's life, these relational narratives—with the multitude of intersections in the portrayed relationships—may also reflect a move towards the posthumanist life narrative by representing 'a becoming together' (Huff 2017, p. 280). Narratives that reflect this relationality also reveal the contact zones,

according to Haraway's (2008) application of this concept, where entanglements take root in human–dog relationships. Portrayals of dogs in personal memoirs help to identify places where humans and dogs meet and, through those meetings, influence each other's life.

A writer who includes an other in a story that purports to be autobiographical—that is, a story about the writer's own life—is acknowledging the entanglement of the two lives. Whenever a dog is included in relational narrative in a memoir, the writer is portraying an intersection between their lived experiences. Despret's (2013, p. 44) proposition that human and non-human animals 'become "companion-agents" through encounters, conflicts, collaborations, frictions, affinities—a rapport of forces' is played out in the life narratives of rural Australians. The notion of 'companion-agents'—that agency exists in relation to each other in human–animal relationships—applies within the framework of relational narrative theory to the ways that dogs are portrayed as being enmeshed in rural Australian people's work, relationships and travels, and as helping people to negotiate the general challenges of life on the land. As 'proximate others' (Eakin 1999, p. 86) or 'significant others' (Smith & Watson 2010, p. 86), dogs' stories are bound up in the writers' own stories to such extents that it could reasonably be deduced that a person's story is meaningless without the dog's.

In *Dog years: a memoir*—Mark Doty's memoir that centres around his relationships with his dogs—Doty (2008, p. 30) observes:

The dog exists in relation; her identity has been built around a particular person or persons, a set of social circumstances. They are, to put it grandly, her ontological ground, the location of who she is, from which all possibilities of action and all choices arise.

By including dogs' experiences in their own life narratives, though, memoir writers demonstrate the reciprocity of this relational existence. Relational narrative about dogs might be seen as representative of the mutuality—the interdependence—in human–dog relationships from the human's viewpoint. In discussing relational narrative, Eakin (1999, p. 51) refers to a 'myth of autonomous individualism' as having influenced writers' and critics' views of autobiography. Eakin (1999, pp. 48–53) suggests that a person relinquishes autonomy in their relationships with others, offering the example of Christopher McCandless—that is, the story of McCandless's solo travels through different parts of the United States and his ultimately lonely death in the Alaskan wilderness<sup>22</sup>—as a case against the autonomous life. However, concepts of 'autonomy-in-relation' and 'autonomy as trans-acting' (Haraway 2008, p. 164) may apply to relational narrative, as these suggest that individual agency or autonomy is gained through relationships with others. As Despret (2013, p. 44) claims, 'being autonomous means being pluri-hetero-nomous'. Human–dog relationships are frequently characterised by this kind of interdependence; or, as Haraway (2003, p. 12) explains, they are 'co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating'. Through this relating, each party might empower the other, as autobiographical depictions of people and dogs working together suggest.

Relational narrative about dogs is also a means through which the writer connects with the reader. If, as Miller (2007, p. 545) proclaims, the reader 'is the autobiographer's most necessary other', the inclusion of dogs in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs provides a key point of contact between the writers and

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<sup>22</sup> Eakin refers to Jon Krakauer's (1996) *Into the wild*, Anchor, New York.

readers of these memoirs. The dog, or at least narrative about the dog, serves as an intersection between writers' and readers' different worlds. An exchange between Goode and the publisher of her compilation of short stories about Australian working dogs, as recounted by Goode (2013, p. 192), could be regarded as testament to the appeal of stories about dogs:

... Only 2000 copies had been published Australia-wide and all have sold out in a few days. Poor Stuart, I chew his ear, telling him I can't believe he had no faith the book would sell.  
'We have already ordered a reprint,' Stuart says, hoping to placate me.  
'We didn't think they would sell in the city. Stories about working dogs are a limited market.'  
'But, Stuart, everyone loves dogs,' I say.

The appeal of dogs' stories within personal memoirs stems from the intertwining of human and dog lives, and from the dog's ability to cross species boundaries. The dog's integration in the world of humans means that many people are likely to share a common interest in dogs. The memoir genre provides a means of connection because readers can relate in some way—perhaps through the portrayed experiences, places or characters—with the memoir writer's personal story (Gutkind 1997, pp. 69–70). Autobiographical narrative about dogs enables an association between people and across cultures. Like those contact zones where intersections between people's and dog's lives are represented in the narratives, these relational narratives also serve as contact zones through which people can connect and relate.

Nonetheless, the idea of the reader as the narrator's 'most important other' may also be a perpetuation of anthropocentric ideas around life narrative and its social and cultural functions. Rather than being limited by Lejeune's (1989)

autobiographical pact, with its emphasis on the relationship between the writer and reader, Huff (2019, pp. 445–6) proposes a new model for studying life narrative: ‘the zoetropic pack’. Huff’s concept of the zoetropic pack decentralises the human in autobiography by challenging ideas of human exceptionalism and, instead, encouraging broader thinking about relationality in people’s lives and in their narratives. While still accepting Lejeune’s autobiographical pact as ‘important’ and ‘foundational’ in defining and studying autobiography, Huff (2019, pp. 446–7) suggests that the incorporation of Haraway’s ideas around interspecies interconnectedness into life writing studies can help to reconceptualise autobiography as being ‘about lives other than human ones’. Further to this, and extending on the ‘compost’ analogy (Haraway 2016), Haraway (2019, p. 565) proposes the concept of ‘compost writing’. Recognising life writing as being about the intermingled, interdependent stories of the self and others, ‘compost writing’ is a novel and possibly fitting way of considering contemporary memoir with its inherent entanglements. In supposing that all living beings on earth are caught up in others’ lives and deaths, Haraway (2019, p. 566) regards those narratives ‘formerly mistaken as autobiographies’ as being ‘composting life-and-death stories’. Representations of the entangled lives of people and dogs among other living beings and natural elements in rural Australian memoirs resound with these ‘composting’ qualities.

Rural Australian memoir might also offer a slightly alternative view of ‘compost’, in which non-human animals, rather than people or as well as people, form the ‘humus’—to use Haraway’s (2016, p. 55) extended analogy. More specifically, the dog’s mediating and moderating functions, as reflected in the life

narratives of rural Australians, suggest the possibility that dogs are important contributors to the humus—the humanity—that develops out of the entangled, interspecies composting nature of life. In light of this, analysis of the portrayed experiences could be viewed as studies of the dog’s role and of human–dog relationships in rural Australian contexts. But also in terms of relational narrative within a ‘compost writing’ framework, the dog’s stories moderate and mediate the narrative delivery such that the human–dog relationship may be regarded as the humus.

A challenge for the life writing scholar is to go beyond seeing the human narrator as central to the narrative. Likewise, the animal studies scholar faces challenges in interpreting human–animal relationships from the non-human’s perspective. A paradox in human–animal studies, as McDonnell (2013, p 6) suggests, is that, within the confines of human language and thinking, a scholar’s attempts to challenge ideas of human exceptionalism and to empathically interpret other animals’ experiences, ‘to question the co-construction of the categories of the human and the animal’, may actually reaffirm those categories. Huff’s (2019) zoetrophic pack confronts this challenge through an approach to life writing studies that necessarily intersects with human–animal studies. The zoetrophic pack concept promotes new ways of thinking about life writing that might ‘pull autobiography studies into the Chthulucene’ (Huff 2019, pp. 447–8). This reconceptualisation of autobiographical writing as being about the ‘compost’ of relationships urges the life writing scholar to look beyond the human characters and to attempt to read and interpret the narratives through an interspecies relational lens that draws on scholarly knowledge about non-human animals. Through an examination of portrayals of the entangled lives of people and

dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoirs, it becomes evident that understandings of relational life narrative intersect with understandings of human–dog relationships. The interspecies entanglements and intersections reflected in the narratives encourage a reading of these memoirs through an approach that recognises interdisciplinary intersections between life writing studies and human animal studies.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Relational narrative is crucial to the memoir genre and is a means through which entanglements in the writer’s life are expressed. Relational narrative specifically about dogs represents the intersections between people’s and dogs’ lived experiences and the porous boundaries between people and dogs. Living at the intersections with and within other species’ worlds, the dog also facilitates interactions between humans and other species. In the narratives of rural Australian memoirs, the dog is sometimes portrayed as crossing between human and non-human species’ worlds. Portrayals of the places where dogs’ and peoples’ lives intersect—the ‘contact zones’—in these memoirs help to understand the ways that humans and dogs influence each other’s lives in rural Australian settings. Applying concepts of entanglement in human–dog relationships to the reading of relational narrative about dogs therefore also highlights an intersection between life writing studies and human–animal studies.

Interspecies entanglements, such as those represented in the narratives, can be complex and not always harmonious. For the dog, they can even sometimes be fatal. Some narratives challenge the view that dogs are social facilitators, while others



imply that dogs can have a positive effect on interpersonal relations. Narratives centred around the person and dog working together, particularly when herding livestock, support the view that such activities reinforce the human–dog bond. The integration of dogs’ stories in the narratives of rural Australian memoirs represents how dogs are integrated in people’s lives, and their overlapping stories contribute to a sense of place and culture that distinguishes these memoirs. But these narratives also highlight the mutual support by which human–dog relationships are often characterised and how this might bring about ‘autonomy-in-relation’. Dogs’ stories are intertwined in the writers’ own stories such that their combined experiences seem inseparable.

From Darwin to Haraway, views of interspecies entanglements have evolved; and from Lejeune to Huff, understandings around autobiography and the human narrator’s responsibilities to others have also evolved. Miller’s view of the memoir writer’s relationships as a ‘web of entanglement’, combined with Haraway’s views of the co-constitution of human and non-human animal species, enables the conceptualisation and exploration of interspecies entanglements through relational narrative. Huff’s concept of the zoetrophic pack is representative of the adaptive possibilities of life writing scholarship, and it offers a paradigm for future explorations of autobiographical writing and the intertwined lives of different animal species. As long as people continue to include dogs and other non-human animals in their personal memoirs, as they reliably do in contemporary rural Australian memoirs, these texts offer abundant possibilities for life writing scholars to explore autobiographical representations of human–animal relationships.

## Conclusion

Autobiographical writing, which includes memoir, has a long history in English-language writing practice. In Australia, it has been a popular form of self-expression since the arrival of the first European settlers. Memoir's potential to offer more intimate and personal accounts of a nation's history and character than might be found in official records affirms the genre's ongoing cultural significance. In contemporary rural Australian memoirs, the inclusion of dog characters reflects the importance of dogs to a way of life that is redolent of the nation's settler past, helping to reinforce an Australian identity linked to the bush. Portrayals of human-dog relations in these memoirs show that dogs are valued and necessary companions for people living and working in remote parts of the country. Furthermore, dogs who serve practical purposes for their people, such as through their working abilities, are shown to flourish in these environments and are often presented as sources of pride and self-esteem among rural Australians. Living at the junctions between humans' and other species' worlds, and between domesticity and wilderness, dogs are shown to help people navigate through the social isolation and physical hardships of life on the land in Australia. The dogs' and people's interwoven stories in contemporary rural Australian memoirs highlight the entangled lives of people and dogs within a changing and multispecies world. The insights that these memoirs offer into people's relationships with dogs in rural Australian contexts augment broader understandings of human-dog relationships.

In answering the question of how narrative about dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir contributes to autobiographical identity, functions more broadly within the subgenre, and builds on perceptions of human-dog relationships, this

thesis first recognised and defined rural Australian memoir as a distinct subgenre. Then, by drawing primarily on examples from six memoirs published during the first 15 years of the 21st century, it identified dogs as significant others in the narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs and considered the ways that dogs are portrayed among a range of human and non-human characters in those narratives. Building on perceptions of species differences, as reflected in the memoirs, the thesis explored relational narrative about dogs and the ways that a person's autobiographical identity may be formed through the dog as a relational other. This culminated in an exposition of the intersections between people's and dogs' lives, which considered how those intersections revealed in the narratives of contemporary rural Australian memoirs also highlight intersections between genre theory and animal studies theory. The resulting findings of this thesis advance life writing scholarship by: identifying rural Australian memoir as a subgenre of literary and cultural value; recognising relational narrative about dogs as an authenticating element of rural Australian memoir and as a medium for exploring autobiographical identity and human–dog relationships; and confirming the interdisciplinary significance of life writing studies.

The rural Australian memoir subgenre is distinguished by its predominantly rural Australian narrative setting and by the narrator's portrayed agricultural way of life. Publishing and population information presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis reveals that personal memoirs about life on the land remain popular with Australian writers, readers and publishers at a time when Australian society is becoming increasingly urbanised. Common elements among contemporary rural Australian memoirs, as found among the memoirs' book titles, cover images and narratives, emphasise the

centrality of work, family and environmental conditions in the lives of rural Australians while also alluding to the charms and challenges of the rural way of life. These aspects of the subgenre appeal to nostalgic ideas about Australia's settler past and reinforce a romanticised image of rural Australia and the people who live there. The rural Australian environment is also inhabited by a range of non-human animals, both domesticated and wild; accordingly, the autobiographical narratives of rural Australians include various human and non-human characters. Dogs typically feature among these characters, such that the inclusion of dogs in rural Australian memoir becomes an identifying aspect of the subgenre.

Dogs emerge as exceptional others in the multispecies environments in which contemporary rural Australian memoirs are set. Acknowledging an entrenched speciesism in Western culture that sees people place humans uppermost in the species hierarchy, Chapter 3 of this thesis finds that the memoirs of rural Australians reflect culturally influenced and individual perceptions of different species within a hierarchical framework. Dogs, being widely regarded as people's closest non-human others, occupy a privileged position above other non-human animals in the species hierarchy. In rural Australian memoirs, dog characters are distinguished from other non-human animals in various, often anthropomorphic, ways that include references to their individual names, descriptions of their working abilities, and depictions of their deaths. While many non-human animals in rural environments are regarded only in terms of their utility or economic value, the dog is an exception. Beyond their value as workers, dogs are people's family members and close companions. Accordingly, dogs tend to be treated with greater degrees of sentimentality than are other non-human animals in rural Australians' personal memoirs. The treatment

afforded to dog characters in these memoirs is indicative of the especially close relationship between people and dogs, within and beyond rural settings.

The closeness with which humans and dogs live, and the interdependence between these two species in rural settings, positions dogs as ideal relational others in the memoirs of rural Australians. By extending notions of relationality to encompass non-human others in rural Australian contexts, the analysis of these memoirs confirms that relational narrative theory, as originally conceived, is applicable beyond portrayals of the autobiographical writer's close human relations. Chapter 4 of this thesis finds that relational narrative about dogs in contemporary rural Australian memoir blends autobiography and biography to such extents that the dog memoir materialises from, and becomes integral to, the personal memoir. Biographical representations of dogs' experiences in relation to the writers' autobiographical self-representations emphasise the depth and mutuality of the human–dog relationship. The dog's apparent affinity for rural life helps to connect the person to the land and to establish an identity associated with the bush and the rural way of life. Stemming from the interconnectedness between the person and dog, the dog's story becomes a means through which the writer conveys his or her own story. In contemporary rural Australian memoir, links between autobiographical identity and the traditional view of the national character are strengthened by the writer's narrated experiences in relation to the dog's.

Relational narrative about dogs provides further opportunities to explore the entanglements involving people and dogs in rural Australian contexts. Life writing scholarship has evolved to recognise the many inhabitants of the earth and the varied influences on autobiographical writers' lives. Rural Australian memoirs are studies

of interspecies entanglements, with the intersections between people's and dogs' lives featuring among these. As Chapter 5 of this thesis reveals, the memoirs reflect travel, work, interpersonal relations and the land as key points of intersection in the entangled lives of rural Australian people and dogs. Acknowledgment of these portrayed entanglements encourages the reading and analysis of life writing within multidisciplinary frameworks, enabling more nuanced and adaptive interpretations of autobiographical works in response to changing life writing practices and interests. Intersections between the fields of life writing studies and human–animal studies emerge, in particular, through the application of cross-disciplinary understandings of entanglements in the analysis of relational narrative about dogs. In turn, the examination of relational narrative about dogs as non-human others in the personal memoirs of rural Australians helps to draw attention to the interdisciplinary relevance of life writing scholarship.

Through an examination of recently published rural Australian memoirs, this thesis responds to gaps in scholarship on 21st-century Australian life writing, rural Australian memoir, dogs in Australian autobiographical writing, and the links between life writing studies and human–animal studies. For the field of life writing studies, the findings have several meaningful applications. Presenting a definition of the rural Australian memoir subgenre and confirming the subgenre's place in the national literature establishes a basis from which the life writing scholar can explore writing, reading and publishing interests and trends specific to this subgenre. With relational narrative about dogs being identified as an important feature of contemporary rural Australian memoirs, this thesis affirms and extends on the applicability of relational narrative theory to include dogs among the memoir

writers' relational others in different settings. The analysis of memoir writers' use of relational narrative recognises the dog's ability to coexist with people and to adapt to different environments and situations; in doing so, it further validates the adaptability of relational narrative to different kinds of relationships and narrative settings. People's and dogs' intertwined stories, as found in life narratives, provide insights into people's perceptions of and experiences with dogs, and these can feed into understandings of human–dog relationships.

The applicability of this study's findings beyond the field of life writing studies evokes the extensive interdisciplinary reach of life writing scholarship. This thesis emphasises links between life writing studies and human–animal studies through its examination of relational narrative about dogs, with the findings supporting a view that people's relationships with their dogs can be more significant than the relationships they have with other people. The importance of the dog's story to the person's own story in contemporary rural Australian memoir is indicative of the intertwined lives of people and dogs in rural Australian settings; meanwhile, the growing popularity of dog memoirs, more generally, suggests that the study of life writing about dogs holds much potential. The entangled lives of people and dogs are such that personal narratives about dogs will reliably continue to provide lines of scholarly inquiry relevant to both life writing studies and human–animal studies. Increasing recognition of the interconnected lives of people and other beings presents opportunities to extend life writing practice and scholarship further into other disciplinary fields. As a relatively young field of inquiry, life writing studies continues to advance and adapt to changing practices and expanding knowledge. Just as views on interspecies relations are continuing to evolve, so too are

understandings around life writing theory and autobiographical identity. While memoir's popularity endures, opportunities for scholarly inquiry into autobiographical portrayals of self and others of all kinds can be expected to grow and to lead to more meaningful insights into the ways that people and other beings live in the world.



## Appendices

### Appendix A Rural Australian memoirs 2001–2015

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## Appendix B Book cover image citations

The following citations, cross-referenced with relevant figure numbers from Chapter 2 of this thesis, refer to the books' publishers or authors according to whether the cover images were obtained from publishers' websites or were digitally scanned from the physical (hard copy) books. Full source details for images are included in the reference list.

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Figure 13	<i>Love in the outback</i> (Pan Macmillan Australia n.d.b) <i>Outback midwife</i> (Penguin Random House Australia n.d.g)
Figure 14	<i>Educating Alice</i> (HarperCollins Australia n.d.e) <i>The view from Connor's Hill: a memoir</i> (Scribe n.d.) <i>Jackaroo: a memoir</i> (Penguin Random House Australia n.d.f)
Figure 15	<i>When the dust settles</i> (HarperCollins Australia n.d.h) <i>Under the mulga: a bush memoir</i> (University of Queensland Press n.d.) <i>The station at Austin Downs: one family's adventure on the land</i> (King 2004)
Figure 16	<i>The country wife</i> (Penguin Random House Australia n.d.c) <i>Beaten by a blow: a shearer's story</i> (McIntosh 2008) <i>Real dirt: how I beat my grid-life crisis</i> (Woodford 2008)
Figure 17	<i>From strength to strength</i> (Henderson 1992)
Figure 19	<i>Unfettered and alive: a memoir</i> (Allen & Unwin n.d.g) <i>Johnathan Thurston: the autobiography</i> (HarperCollins Australia n.d.g) <i>The truth of the matter</i> (Melbourne University Publishing n.d.)
Figure 20	<i>Bridie's choice</i> (Allen & Unwin n.d.b) <i>The girl and the ghost-grey mare</i> (Penguin Random House Australia n.d.e) <i>Come rain or shine</i> (HarperCollins Australia n.d.d) <i>An outback life</i> (Allen & Unwin n.d.e) <i>Out of the blue</i> (Allen & Unwin n.d.d) <i>How to get there</i> (MacKellar 2014)
Figure 21	<i>Heart country</i> (McGinnis 2001)
Figure 22	<i>A youth not wasted</i> (Parkes 2012)
Figure 23	<i>Through the farm gate: a memoir</i> (Allen & Unwin n.d.f)

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