



T1900156756

**I am the Amazon
who Dances on the Backs of Turtles:
The Politics and Poetics of Writing Self and
Community**

Mary Hutchison

March 1999

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of New England**

Certificate of Originality

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 to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Mary Hutchison

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Chapter one Writing self and community: a body of work	1
Chapter two 'Doing it ourselves': radical adult education and feminist social activism	25
Chapter three 'Representing ourselves': community arts, community writing and publishing and Homefront women's community writing and publishing group	49
Chapter four Homefront: doing community	79
Chapter five Changing the story lines	113
Chapter six Coming to voice: Homefront community writing and publishing practice	140
Chapter seven Writing self and community: a cultural practice	172
List of references	197

Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to thank my supervisor Margaret Somerville for support, confidence, friendship, and holding the course clearly and firmly, and Laura Hartley for sharing enthusiasms, diversions, ideas, coffee, understandings, books. To other colleagues at the Fireman's Cottage - thanks for food, conversation and support: Fionnuala Neville, Kerith Power, Rebecca Spence.

A large part of this thesis is based on my work with Homefront women's writing and publishing group. Thank you to all those women from whom I learned, and continue to learn, such a lot. Thanks especially to Paris Hunter and Margaret Innes who have shared 'Homefront business' with me in recent years, and whose involvement in my research and engaged supportive response to my writing has been integral to my thesis.

To the people with whom I had conversations which furthered my thinking, and who read drafts and made invaluable comments - thank you: Annie Bolitho, Maureen Cummuskey, John Docker, Darryl Dymock, Peter Hicks, Barbara Holloway, Sarah Lloyd, Celia Munro, Sylvia Martin, Al Thomson.

Thanks also to Pat Tandy whose skills as a librarian greatly assisted my research.

The hospitality provided by Jean Harkins and Pam Richards in Armidale and Sylvia Martin and Lizzie Mulder at Lorelei made it possible to work away from home. Thank you. Thanks also to Elizabeth Hutchison for her constant, much appreciated support.

Special thanks is due to Maureen Cummuskey for proof reading and formatting the ms. And for providing the moral and practical support that no thesis writer can do without.

My acknowledgements would not be complete without mentioning the Hatchet Faced Harridans whose particular skills as midwives of PhD theses have been much appreciated.

Abstract

In this thesis I explore the writing practice I have been engaged in for a number of years. I conceptualise this practice as *writing self and community*. A critical element of my interest in writing self and community is the political intention to work against hegemonic cultural constructions and create space for diverse and resistant voices and stories. The argument of my thesis is that taking up writing in this way engages both the politics and poetics of representation - both its discursive and semiotic dimensions.

The first part of my discussion introduces my writing practice and locates it in the discursive and practical context of radical adult education and cultural activism. I draw on understandings of individuality and community in these contexts and show the relationship between politics and culture in the radical tradition. I suggest that the counter-hegemonic intention of cultural activism is to ‘represent ourselves’.

In the second part of my thesis I develop my discussion through examples of my practice and focus particularly on material from the Homefront women’s community writing and publishing group which is, in a sense, the story of my thesis. I use both expository and evocative styles of writing and include voices other than my own, as well as my own in different registers.

I also focus in more detail on the political and poetical dimensions of writing as a representational form. I suggest that the wider discursive contest for social meaning is played out in practices of textual representation as well as in discourses concerning these practices. I propose that a counter-hegemonic writing practice involves using imaginative writing strategies and conventions in unorthodox and transgressive ways, with a view to agentially re-writing the subordinate subject. The social relations of this practice and its intention are those of the inclusive, mutual making of community through alliances across different social positions.