

Australian Anti-Suburban Criticism in an Anglo-American Context:  
Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* in Comparison to Ann Beattie's *Falling in Place* and  
Barbara Gowdy's *Mister Sandman*

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Terhi Roivas: Australian Anti-Suburban Criticism in an Anglo-American Context: Jessica

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Pro gradu –tutkielmani käsittelee esikaupunkielämän ja siihen liittyvän keskiluokkaisena pidetyn elämäntavan kritiikkiä australialaisessa kirjallisuudessa. Aihe on ollut näkyvässä asemassa australialaisessa kirjallisuudessa viime vuosikymmenien aikana ja sitä on pidetty australialaiselle kirjallisuudelle ominaisena piirteenä. Esimerkkinä esikaupunkielämää kritisovasta romaanista käytän Jessica Andersonin teosta *Tirra Lirra by the River*, joka on yksi Australian nykykirjallisuuden kiitellyimpiä teoksia. Tutkielmassani tarkastelen esikaupunkielämän kritiikkiä historian ja sosiologian valossa ja analysoin kritiikissä esiintyvien teemojen käsittelyä Andersonin romaanissa, sekä vertaan australialaista kritiikkiä Yhdysvaltain ja Kanadan kirjallisuudessa esiintyvään vastaavaan kritiikkiin. Tarkoitukseni on selvittää, esiintyvätkö australialaiselle kirjallisuudelle ominaiset esikaupunkielämää kritisovat teemat myös Pohjois-Amerikan kirjallisuudessa ja tuoda australialaisen kritiikin analyysiin uusia ulottuvuuksia vertailun avulla. Pohjoisamerikkalaisena vertailuaineistona käytän yhdysvaltalaisen Ann Beattien teosta *Falling in Place* ja kanadalaisen Barbara Gowdyn romaania *Mister Sandman*. Tutkielman painopiste on kuitenkin Australiassa eikä amerikkalaisen kirjallisuuden teemoihin johtanutta kehitystä tarkastella yhtä tarkasti. Rajoitan tutkielman näkökulmaa myös analysoimalla kritiikkiä esikaupungin sukupuoliroolien pohjalta. Tämä jättää tutkielmani ulkopuolelle joitakin kritiikille keskeisiä teemoja, kuten etnisiin ryhmiin liittyvät ennakkoluulot esikaupungeissa.

Tutkielmani jakautuu kahteen pääosaan. Ensimmäisessä osassa tarkastelen Australian poikkeuksellisen nopeaan ja laajaan esikaupungistumiseen johtaneita seikkoja ja analysoin syitä siihen, miksi kritiikki on saanut niin merkittävän roolin australialaisessa populaarikulttuurissa. Tärkeimpinä taustatekijöinä käsittelen Australian poikkeuksellisen ankaria luonnonolosuhteita, jotka tekivät kaupungeista ja esikaupungeista välttämättömiä, Australian siirtomaahistoriaa ja Iso-Britanniasta siirtolaisten mukana tulleita, esikaupunkeja ja perhe-elämää ihannoivia arvoja sekä Australian teollistumista, jonka seurauksena naisten marginaalinen asema esikaupungeissa korostui. Tärkeänä kritiikin lähteenä pidän myös kahtiajakoista ajattelutapaa, jonka on esitetty olevan ominaista australialaisille. Kaupunkien ja erämaan, julkisen ja yksityisen, vallan ja voimattomuuden sekä monien muiden vastakohtaparien asetelmissa esikaupungit jäävät aina väliinpuotoajan asemaan eivätkä ne koskaan voi lunastaa niihin vastakohtaparien parhaiden ominaisuuksien yhdistäjänä kohdistettuja valtavia odotuksia.

Tutkielmani toisessa osassa tarkastelen lukuisia esikaupunkielämälle keskeisiä, usein kunniallisuuteen ja sosiaaliseen moraaliin liittyviä teemoja, jotka toistuvat kritiikissä. Näitä teemoja ovat koti- ja perhe-elämän korostus, yhteisöllisyyden katoaminen ja naisten eristyneisyys esikaupungeissa, taloudellisen hyvinvoinnin ja omistusasumisen merkitys sekä seksuaalisuuden hyväksytyt ilmenemistavat. Analysoin esimerkkejä kaikista näistä teemoista sekä niiden kritiikin ilmenemismuodoista tutkimissani kolmessa romaanissa. Yhteistä kaikille romaaneille on naisten passiivinen asema esikaupunkilaisvaimoina suhteessa miesten aktiiviseen rooliin työssäkäyvinä kaupunkilaisina. Loppupäätelmäni on, että kritiikin pääasiallisin kohde kirjallisuudessa on esikaupunkilaiselämäntavan tuottama yhdenmukaisuuden pakko: on noudatettava, tai ainakin teeskenneltävä noudattavansa, esikaupunkien kulttuuriin kuuluvia sosiaalisia normeja tullakseen hyväksytyksi. Totean myös, että kritiikki ei ole yksinomaan australialaisen kirjallisuuden piirre vaan pikemminkin moderni angloamerikkalainen teema. Australiassa kritiikillä on kuitenkin poikkeuksellisen keskeinen asema maan historian sekä esikaupunkien valtavan levinneisyyden vuoksi. Totean myös, että vaikka kritiikin kulta-aika oli 1960- ja 1970-luvuilla, sen käsittelemät teemat ovat edelleen relevantteja ja ansaitsevat kirjallisuudentutkimuksen mielenkiinnon.

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## 1. Introduction

Australian literature has only developed a generally acknowledged standing as an independent literary tradition during the past hundred years, although its roots extend much further back into the history of Australia. Nowadays, Australian literature is often considered part of postcolonial cultural studies, and a distinct branch of literary theory that has been shaped by cultural history unlike that of any other modern Western society. The hardships of colonialism, the harsh and unique natural landscape of Australia and the development of a modern society amidst war and depression have made Australian literature largely the literature of “persistence, endurance and repetition almost beyond endurance.”<sup>1</sup> Stemming from a history of penal colonialism, the themes of violence, fear, loneliness, alienation and oppression are also pervasive.<sup>2</sup> Later, more specific modern themes that have been widely recognised by critics have also emerged.

Today, Australia being the most urbanised, and suburbanised, country in the world, suburban life characterises the everyday routines of most Australian people: over 85 percent of Australia’s 20 million inhabitants call the suburbs home.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it can be stated that suburbia is where typical Australian life is to be found, since the contemporary, industrialised Australia is essentially a suburban, and not urban, society.<sup>4</sup> Due to the harsh natural landscape of the continent, Australia became urbanised very rapidly, and by about 1870, only a hundred years after the first white man set foot on the continent, the majority of Australians lived in one of the country’s major cities. Suburbanisation was a natural continuation of this process,

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Goodwin, *A History of Australian Literature* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Goodwin, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Trevor Hogan, “‘Nature Strip’: Australian Suburbia and the Enculturation of Nature,” *Thesis Eleven* 74 (2003): 60.

See also Anthony D. King, “Excavating the Multicultural Suburb: Hidden Histories of the Bungalow,” *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 76-77.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Kiernan, “Perceptions, 1915-1965,” *Narrative Formations A: Australian Texts and Contexts, Cultural Politics Reader*, ed. Clare Bradford et al. (Geelong: Deakin University, 1996) 2.

because there was plenty of suitable land available on the margins of the cities. Metropolitan transportation was effectively developed, and soon the commuter-style suburban life became possible in this young nation. At this time, the income distribution among Australians was considerably more equal than that in Britain or other European countries.<sup>5</sup> The immigrants who chose Australia as their new home came mainly from the large cities of Britain where suburban living was already considered a step upwards from living in the city, but where due to financial and class reasons houses in the suburbs were only available to a select few. In the Australian circumstances where a house in the suburbs was economically attainable and with the suburban middle class utopias already in place in the minds of British immigrants, it rapidly became the ideal of every family to have their own house with a garden and garage, where they could enjoy their daily routines of work and domestic life.<sup>6</sup> However, the idealisation of suburbia soon turned into criticism and even contempt for it. In the twentieth century, suburbia came to stand for all things dull and depressing; life there equalled “a living death of conformity and safety” in the world of consumerism and middle-class respectability.<sup>7</sup> This criticism also became visible in literature especially during the latter half of the twentieth century. Numerous Australian writers have looked at suburbia and its problems in their works, the best known of these perhaps being the Nobel prize-winning author Patrick White. In fact, descriptions of suburban living and anti-suburban criticism have been so prevalent in Australian literature that some critics have ventured to state that suburbia seems to denote a specifically Australian problem,<sup>8</sup> that the ideology of the modern suburb is an integral part of

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Gilbert, “The Roots of Anti-Suburbanism in Australia,” *Australian Cultural History*, ed. S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 33.

<sup>6</sup> Graeme Davison, “Australia: The First Suburban Nation?,” *Journal of Urban History* 22.1 (1995): 52-54.

<sup>7</sup> Garry Kinnane, “Shopping at Last!: History, Fiction and the Anti-Suburban Tradition,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 42.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew McCann, “Introduction: Subtopia, or the Problem of Suburbia,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): viii.

an Australian identity<sup>9</sup> and that “the view of suburbia as a homogenising ‘cultural desert’” is a particular aspect of Australian cultural history and literary criticism.<sup>10</sup>

In this thesis, my aim is to introduce some of the main strands of anti-suburban criticism in Australia and its literature, and examine the distinctively Australian aspects of the criticism. I will start by taking a closer look at the history behind the criticism of suburbia, and by examining a basic dichotomy in Australian culture, that of the bush vs. the city, or nature vs. society, which according to Graeme Turner is a pattern that is visible in most expressions of Australian tradition, including anti-suburban criticism.<sup>11</sup> In order to find out if suburbia truly is a distinctively Australian problem and anti-suburban criticism exceptionally important in Australian literature and culture, I will also study some aspects of suburban cultural history in the United States and Canada in conjunction with Australian history to highlight prominent features of the Australian tradition through comparison. I have chosen the United States and Canada as the objects of my comparison because of their cultural histories that carry significant similarities to that of Australia: all three share a strong frontier tradition and a British colonial history as well as a British-induced cultural suburban ideology.<sup>12</sup> A comparison between Australia and the United States is particularly interesting as both countries have considered themselves the first suburban nations and the most suburbanised countries in the world.<sup>13</sup> Both also share a very strong tradition of popular culture describing suburban living: most literary minds are surely familiar with American representations of suburbia in the works of John Updike or Sinclair Lewis among others. Canada, on the other

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<sup>9</sup> Ian Hoskins, “Constructing Time and Space in the Garden Suburb,” *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, ed. Sarah Ferber, Chris Healy and Chris McAuliffe (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994) 4.

<sup>10</sup> Wenche Ommundsen and Ron Vowles, “Narrative in the Mirror: Jessica Anderson, *Tirra Lirra by the River*,” *Narrative Formations A: Australian Texts and Contexts, Mapping the Narrative Territory Study Guide*, ed. Clare Bradford et al. (Geelong: Deakin University, 1995) 35.

<sup>11</sup> Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986) 25-26.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 7.

<sup>13</sup> According to Kenneth T. Jackson, 283-284, the United States is the only country in the world where the number of suburbanites is larger than the number of city-dwellers or farmers combined.

hand, offers fascinating comparisons as its cultural history is often equated with American history but, especially from the viewpoint of anti-suburban criticism in literature, it has not received the critical interest it deserves. In spite of the lack of critical interest, manifestations of anti-suburban criticism are, however, also readily visible in Canadian literature.

After outlining the cultural background of anti-suburban criticism both in Australia and in North America, I will advance to consider some specific themes in the framework of Australian anti-suburban criticism, such as the notions of middle-class respectability, domesticity, consumerism and sexuality, and also present some counter-arguments that have been made in the anti-suburban discussion in recent decades. In doing this, I will consider Jessica Anderson's novel *Tirra Lirra by the River* (1978), which is one of the most acclaimed contemporary novels in Australia. It tells the story of Nora Porteous, who returns to her suburban Queensland home after decades away in Sydney and London, and describes life in Australia and England from the early twentieth century up until the 1970s. Although social criticism is not the primary concern of the novel, it does present a concise picture of suburban life in Australia.<sup>14</sup> Thus, expressions of many of the main themes of anti-suburban criticism can be found in the novel, and will be looked at in conjunction with the general theory. Moreover, I will compare and contrast the analysis of expressions of anti-suburban criticism in *Tirra Lirra by the River* with two novels written by North American female authors that engage in similar themes in their works. In her 1980 novel *Falling in Place*, the American author Ann Beattie describes the life of the Knapp family in New York and the surrounding Connecticut suburbs in the late 1970s. The novel mostly concentrates on the commuting everyday life of John Knapp, but conveys its strongest messages through the description of the suburban existence of John's wife Louise and their children Mary and John Joel. In *Mister Sandman* (1995), the Canadian author Barbara Gowdy similarly describes the life of a

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<sup>14</sup> W. Wilde et al. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 26.

suburban family, the Canarys. Their life in the 1950s suburbs of Toronto is very different from the life of the Knapps or from the life of Nora Porteous, but it nevertheless brings into focus some of the same suburban themes as *Falling in Place* and, above all, *Tirra Lirra by the River*. Through the juxtaposition of these three very different novels, my purpose is to highlight the most important features of anti-suburban criticism in Australia through comparison, and examine the position of the Australian critical tradition in relation to a wider, modern Anglo-American context.

If one examines the literary criticism that has been presented on the three novels examined in this thesis, one will likely find occasional references to their suburban settings, but hardly any careful analyses of the use of these settings as part of the social commentary of the novels. In the case of Jessica Anderson, critics such as Thomas Glen and Elaine Barry have been predominantly interested in reading *Tirra Lirra by the River* in terms of post-colonial interrogations between Australia and Great Britain or as an examination of the individual and social identities of the novel's central characters.<sup>15</sup> Others have read *Tirra Lirra by the River* as a feminist novel and interpreted Nora's life as a journey in women's liberation and mentioned suburbia as the context of this journey only in passing.<sup>16</sup> Barbara Gowdy has received critical attention for her novels and short stories which examine bodily and social abnormalities in a way which makes them seem more normal than they would be in reality.<sup>17</sup> Although the suburban settings of *Mister Sandman* have been noted as one of the normalising factors, it is the dysfunctional family of the novel and the sexual adventures of its

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Glen, "Post-Colonial Interrogations," *Social Alternatives* 12.3 (1993): 8 analyses *Tirra Lirra by the River* as a post-colonial journey and a quest novel.

Elaine Barry, *Fabricating the Self: The Fictions of Jessica Anderson* (St. Lucia: UQP, 1992) and its discussion of Jessica Anderson's preoccupation with social structures and individual repression have been reviewed in Susan Lever, "The Cult of the Author," *Australian Literary Studies* 16.2 (1993): 229.

<sup>16</sup> Ommundsen and Vowles, 35-37.

<sup>17</sup> See for example María Jesús Hernández Lerena, "'The Business of Invoking Humanity': Barbara Gowdy and the Fiction Gone (A)stray," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 72.3 (2003): 715 and T. L. Craig and Marlene Goldman, "Fiction," *Letters in Canada* 66.1 (1996/1997): 191.



members that have been analysed more thoroughly.<sup>18</sup> Ann Beattie, on the other hand, has been hailed as a minimalist writer whose main object of interest lies in relationships and emotions between men and women as well as parents and children.<sup>19</sup> Again, suburbia is mentioned as the circumstance in which these relationships often take place but it has not been given a wider significance until Robert Beuka's 2004 work *SuburbiaNation* in which Beuka examines a number of American films and novels, including *Falling in Place*, in terms of their portrayal of suburbia.<sup>20</sup> In spite of this lack of previous critical interest toward the suburban settings of these three novels, it is, however, justified to read them as examples of suburban literature since, as Robert Beuka points out, the events of novels such as these three are in no way randomly placed in cities or suburbs but are inextricably connected to their environment and reflect values attached to suburbia as much as they depict the individual relationships or emotions of their main characters.<sup>21</sup> This central role of the suburbs and of the values attached to them in the lives of the inhabitants of suburbia will be demonstrated throughout this thesis by interpreting the novels on the basis of the history and sociology of suburbia in Australia and North America.

All three novels contain numerous significant markers that tie them to the countries of their settings, which allows me to use the novels as representations of their native cultures. Although I will discuss aspects of all three cultures, it is important to note, however, that my point of view throughout the thesis will remain Australian: Australian history will be studied more carefully than American or Canadian, and the thesis should not be read as a thorough discussion of anti-suburban criticism in these two countries brought in through comparison.

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<sup>18</sup> John Bemrose, "Be It Ever So Weird," *Maclean's* 108.45 (1995): T9.

<sup>19</sup> For discussion on *Falling in Place* and other works by Ann Beattie, see for example Steven R. Centola, "An Interview With Ann Beattie," *Contemporary Literature* 31.4 (1990): 405, Robert Beuka, "Tales from 'The Big Outside World': Ann Beattie's Hemingway," *Hemingway Review* 22.1 (2002): 111 or David Wyatt, "Ann Beattie," *Southern Review* 28.1 (1992): 145.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Beuka, *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Beuka, 21.

Also, the themes that will be discussed will be selected from the Australian viewpoint: although similar and related themes are also visible in American and Canadian texts, some themes that do not produce any interesting comparisons with themes that are important in Australian literature may be omitted entirely from this thesis.

There is also another important albeit weaker constraint with regard to point of view that should be noted at this stage. As life in the suburbs is the reality of most Australians today, the themes that have been discussed within the tradition of anti-suburban criticism in Australia are numerous. However, issues of gender have become especially important in the suburbs due to the different roles of men and women in suburbia. As the primary target of my analysis, Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River*, can also be read as a feminist novel and expresses many themes of anti-suburban criticism through a gendered perspective, this is also the point of view I will employ in my analysis. By this, I do not mean to pursue a pronouncedly feminist reading but rather use gender roles to construct a view of suburbia as according to John Murphy and Belinda Probert, "it is gendered identities and family relationships that best explain the peculiarly compelling, if also constricting nature" of the suburban experience.<sup>22</sup> Due to this viewpoint, I will consciously omit some important anti-suburban themes from my analysis. For instance, racial issues are often considered an important aspect of suburban prejudices but they will not be examined in this thesis as they are not relevant for my general gendered point of view or in my primary novel, *Tirra Lirra by the River*. I have also chosen my American and Canadian novels, *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman*, with this gendered perspective in mind: both novels could be read differently from other viewpoints but do present interesting insights to the gendered experience of the suburbs in the United States and in Canada.

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<sup>22</sup> John Murphy and Belinda Probert, "Anything for the House' – Recollections of Post-war Suburban Dreaming," *Australian Historical Studies* 36.124 (2004): 277.

I have already alluded to the argument that all of the three novels can be seen as representations of their native cultures. This is a point that must be borne in mind throughout the thesis. That is, it is important to recognise that none of the novels can be read as objective descriptions of reality, but as fiction are representations and interpretations of the cultural conditions in which they are set. In a way, the novels expose what suburbs are imagined to be like or what they stereotypically should be like. In Hayden White's words, "we cannot achieve a properly scientific knowledge of human nature [through the analysis of fiction], [but] we can achieve another kind of knowledge about it, the kind of knowledge that literature and art in general give us in easily recognizable examples."<sup>23</sup> This is precisely where the interpretative power of fiction lies: by paralleling and opposing familiar examples through the use of different settings, voices and stereotypical characters, and the use of various literary techniques such as metaphors, juxtaposition and intertextuality, the author can suggest connotations that give new meanings to familiar themes or reinforce existing images. Because different people may arrive at very different readings of a text depending on contexts and points of view, it is useful to recognise that interpreting fiction is "not a matter of choosing between objectivity and distortion, but rather between different strategies for constructing 'reality' in thought so as to deal with it in different ways."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, I do not claim to be looking for a universal truth about Australian suburbia through the analysis of fictive literature. Rather, my aim is to construct an image of how suburbia is experienced in the Australian cultural context by analysing three contemporary novels through the filter of cultural history for "through narrative [such as a novel], culture constitutes itself, explicates itself and confers meaning on its members' existence."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 23.

<sup>24</sup> White, *Tropics* 22.

<sup>25</sup> Frances Devlin Glass, "Surveying the Narrative Territory," *Narrative Formations A: Australian Texts and Contexts, Mapping the Narrative Territory Study Guide*, ed. Clare Bradford et al. (Geelong: Deakin University, 1995) 5.

By using historical and sociological texts in addition to literary criticism as my source of information on images of suburbia in the minds of Australians at different times, I am engaging in literary analysis that is common in the field of Australian literature: according to Graeme Turner, “it is customary to connect Australian writing with its history.”<sup>26</sup> However, as has been pointed out by H. Aram Veesser, historical texts do not “give access to unchanging truths nor express inalterable human nature” any more than do fictive texts such as novels.<sup>27</sup>

Hayden White adds that

historical events . . . are events which really happened or are believed really to have happened, but which are no longer directly accessible to perception. As such, in order to be constituted as objects of reflection, they must be described, and described in some kind of natural or technical language. The analysis or explanation, whether nomological or narrativistic, that is subsequently provided of the events is always an analysis or explanation of the events as previously *described*.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the conclusions of this thesis must be seen essentially as constructions based on the juxtaposition of historical and critical texts and fiction. Also, in writing this thesis, my interest lies in the idea of suburbia in Australian literature which should not be confused with the identities of actual suburbs.<sup>29</sup> The suburbia discussed in this thesis is essentially “a representational idiom: not a real place, but the fantasy of a place.”<sup>30</sup> Especially during the past six decades, this representational idiom of the suburb “has assumed meaning and cultural significance largely through its representations in the popular arts and media,”<sup>31</sup> which is what makes the analysis of anti-suburban criticism in literature particularly relevant.

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<sup>26</sup> Turner, 90.

<sup>27</sup> H. Aram Veesser, “Introduction,” *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989) xi.

<sup>28</sup> Hayden White, “New Historicism: A Comment,” *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989) 297.

<sup>29</sup> Kinnane, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew McCann, “Decomposing Suburbia: Patrick White’s Perversity,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 58-59.

<sup>31</sup> Beuka, 228.

## 2. Australian Cultural History: the Origins of Anti-Suburban Criticism

Since the 1950s, historians, sociologists and literary critics have introduced a number of perspectives on Australian suburbanisation and the development of anti-suburban criticism in Australian literature. Several writers have placed the roots of Australian anti-suburban criticism in early colonial experiences and the values of the first settlers arriving from the British cities. For example, Alan Gilbert and Graeme Davison have maintained that suburbia gained such importance in Australia because the first settlers left from overcrowded British cities where suburban living was the middle class ideal but where they themselves could never achieve the ideal.<sup>32</sup> In Australia they encountered unique climatic and economic conditions that promoted the very ideal of suburban houses and gardens and made the realisation of the British suburban values possible. The settlers, including freed convicts, set out to create a model society through egalitarian suburbia where class was irrelevant. This idealisation of the suburbs later served to intensify the criticism against suburbia when the utopia turned out to be a dystopia instead.

Industrialisation and the resulting reorganisation of time and social space have also been viewed as one of the bases of anti-suburban criticism in Australia. Of these, the redistribution of social space is thought particularly important from the point of view of the suburbs: the suburban home was separated from the workplace and the productive cities. Consequently, women as housewives were left in the margins of society along with the suburbs which, for women, came to represent a place to be escaped from. While the development brought on by industrialisation is obviously not unique to Australia, it is exceptionally interesting there because of the relatively late industrialisation of Australia: the country had already urbanised and suburbanised before its industrialisation which made the

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<sup>32</sup> Gilbert, 34-35 and Davison, 42.

changes to suburban living more visible in Australia than elsewhere where industrialisation and urbanisation usually occurred more simultaneously.

A further source for anti-suburban criticism can be seen to lie in the beautiful but harsh and hostile natural conditions of Australia. Despite the pioneer tradition of the early settlers, the Australian landscape was difficult to master and few could survive there. “The bush” became idealised and survival there came to represent spiritual fulfilment. The cities and even more the suburbs could not offer such experiences but instead came to stand for entrapment and restrictions. This idealisation of country life, its opposition to urban living and the position of the suburbs in between are most visible in the polar pattern of “the bush vs. the city”. According to Graeme Turner, most of the manifestations of Australian tradition are permeated by the binary pattern of nature and society, or the bush and the city: as well as formulating social and literary criticism, this pattern also orders the description of the Australian imagination.<sup>33</sup> To a certain extent, this dichotomy is also behind the negative images of suburbia that have been prevalent in Australia throughout the twentieth century: suburbia could never completely fulfil its promise of a perfect compromise between the polar ends.

In the following subchapters, I will examine these historical perspectives more closely and, through comparison with American cultural history, illustrate the development and importance of anti-suburban criticism in Australia.

## 2.1. Australian Colonial History

When British settlers first arrived on the Australian continent in the late eighteenth century, their first task was to come to terms with the formidable nature of their new home:

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<sup>33</sup> Turner, 26.

the Australian version of Nature was vast, indifferent and hostile. Thus, survival became the primary challenge for the settlers, while nature came to represent the “reality of exile.”<sup>34</sup> The settlers’ quest for a new home, however, was successful: in a few short years they had already started the first townships, and the urbanisation of Australia was well under way. The convicts played a very influential part in this progress; while serving their penalty, they worked to start the new society, and when freed, either by pardoning or escape, many started to rapidly accumulate new wealth and power.<sup>35</sup> Thus, especially for these released convicts, the Australian outback came also to indicate “the reality of newness and freedom”:<sup>36</sup> in spite of being harsh and forbidding, there was also something uniquely beautiful and spiritual in the landscape, and it was possible to find great satisfaction in the mastery of the forces of nature and the pioneering virtues of endurance and acceptance.<sup>37</sup> However, these virtues were not achievable for many as only few could survive in the Australian outback. Cities became a practical necessity despite being seen as “a trap for the human spirit.”<sup>38</sup> Again, the convict settler had to abandon the dream of freedom. This, according to Graeme Turner, is a defining feature of the Australian colonial experience: because of Australia’s origin as a penal colony, Australians never developed any kind of “consoling cultural mythology” against the disappointment of encountering the impossibility of the bush ideal. Instead, “the Australian myth accommodates us to the inevitability of subjection.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, according to Turner, a certain sense of helplessness and surrender seems to be ingrained in the minds of Australians in spite of the early pioneering virtues. This results in the construction of narratives of enclosure, restriction and entrapment in addition to a limited faith in social action, which are

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<sup>34</sup> Turner, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, second ed. (Sydney: Mead & Beckett Publishing, 1981) 24-25.

<sup>36</sup> Turner, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Turner, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert, 34-35.

<sup>39</sup> Turner, 74.

visible regardless of the settings.<sup>40</sup> Thus, these tendencies that are built into the culture and that are clearly visible in anti-suburban literature have their roots in the early Australian colonial experience.

This early Australian colonial experience of restriction and surrender in addition to the freedoms of a new country stands in contrast to the experience of the first settlers of America. Although the colonisation of the North American continent started three centuries earlier than that of Australia, some parallels can be drawn between the experiences of the early settlers. In America, as well as in Australia, the first settlers encountered a somewhat hostile environment: the harsh natural conditions pushed the American settlers to the limit. It may well be that the American settler has also felt trapped in these hostile conditions. However, in America, despite the difficult conditions, the cultural basis of the colonial experience was completely different from Australia: whereas Australians conceived their new home as a prison, the Americans settled their new continent in “a mission of hope.”<sup>41</sup> Contrary to the Australians, Americans developed early on what Graeme Turner calls “a consoling cultural mythology – the enabling myth of the priority of the individual and the self.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the early American colonial experience did not assume the same restrictions and conditions to the spiritual fulfilment of the individual as did the Australian experience. This may be one mitigating factor as regards the anti-suburban criticism of modern American literature: by cultural default, Americans believe in their possibilities of changing their life regardless of the circumstances whereas the Australians are prepared for submission because of their convict past. This, of course, is a gross simplification of history and an extreme position but it does offer some explanation to the different mindsets of the early settlers on the two continents which still influence the anti-suburban narratives of today.

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<sup>40</sup> Turner, 51.

<sup>41</sup> Turner, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Turner, 74.



In Australia, the rapid suburbanisation of the towns started when in the mid nineteenth century, in the aftermath of the gold rushes of Victoria and New South Wales, the new Australian bourgeoisie started to extend its power in the settlements. During the gold rushes, Australia was briefly the main destination of British emigrants and Australia's population grew quickly. Most of these founders of urban Australia left from the overcrowded cities of Britain where the British had already started to create the first suburbs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There, because of the high cost of commuting and land, it was only the upper middle classes who could afford suburban living at this time.<sup>43</sup> Owning a house in the suburbs was then considered a step up in the social ladder: it enhanced a family's social status and meant independence, security, pride and self-respect.<sup>44</sup> Most of the settlers who chose Australia as their new home in the nineteenth century came from conditions where the middle class ideal of a suburban home was forever out of their reach. In Australia, on the other hand, suburban houses and gardens were the very ideal promoted by climatic and economic conditions. The colonial governments invested in the development of urban technology thus making even the farthest suburbs accessible to all. The rapid suburbanisation of Australia was still accelerated by the relative wealth of the settlers: although not rich, the Australian immigrants were not the poorest to leave Britain. The passage to Australia cost four times the price of the fare for America, which made it impossible for the poorest to emigrate to Australia. Although assisted passages to Australia were offered, the lowest classes were still compelled to choose America, for the most illiterate and unskilled were denied assistance thus making the masses emigrating to Australia during the booms of the 1850s and 1880s relatively productive and able to support themselves.<sup>45</sup> This

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<sup>43</sup> See Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias – The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), especially the introduction and chapter 1, for a detailed description of the first Anglo-American suburbs in the United Kingdom.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert, 34-35.

<sup>45</sup> Davison, 52-53 and 64.

made the social structure of Australia in the nineteenth century exceptionally equal especially in comparison to other colonial nations such as the United States where class differences were pronounced. Whereas in Australia owning a suburban home was viewed as everyone's right in an egalitarian society<sup>46</sup> and looking for something different could be interpreted as perverse or unAustralian,<sup>47</sup> in America, suburban home ownership was considered "a process of economic isolation of individuals and alienation of social ranks":<sup>48</sup> it was considered important to live in the right area for then one could demonstrate one's economic situation and live among people of the same class.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, in the America of the nineteenth century, suburbanisation was not perceived as an egalitarian phenomenon covering the entire country as in Australia but as the development of individual suburbs tied to social classes. It has even been argued that in Australia, a genuine class consciousness never developed and suburbanism as the most pervasive form of Australian life can be seen as a cultural system opposed to class.<sup>50</sup> Alan Gilbert has argued that this is one of the reasons why "anti-suburbanism, as a specific, systematic cultural critique, may be more powerful in Australian life than elsewhere": in Australia, the criticism questions values and attitudes that are shared across the entire culture whereas, for example, in America, the discussion from the start has been more segmental and individualistic.<sup>51</sup>

As a consequence of the uniform values of the Australian settlers and the fairly equitable accumulation and distribution of wealth among them, the masses headed for the cities: in the 1880s, Australia's biggest city of the time, Melbourne, grew by 200 000 inhabitants in just a decade, becoming a city of nearly half a million inhabitants with 70 % of

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<sup>46</sup> John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner, *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987) 27.

<sup>47</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 32.

<sup>48</sup> John Archer, "Ideology and Aspiration: Individualism, the Middle Class and the Genesis of the Anglo-American Suburb," *Journal of Urban History* 14.2 (1988): 219.

<sup>49</sup> Archer, *Ideology* 223.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Gilbert, 36-37.

this increase being suburban.<sup>52</sup> In the same year, it was calculated that over half of the Australian population already lived in the cities, a higher proportion than in Britain, the United States or Canada.<sup>53</sup> For these people, the city was not so much a drab necessity but the place of “art, industry, commerce, excitement and achievement,”<sup>54</sup> another place for satisfaction that, this time, was derived above all from economic prosperity. The bush was, however, still treated as the epitome of Australian life: the builders of the modern cities enjoyed the bush ballads,<sup>55</sup> or the traditional literature of the white settlers, and thought the bush was the natural habitat of humans and animals alike.<sup>56</sup> In the suburbs, these people thought they could combine the best of both worlds: they could still enjoy the safe and comfortable life of the cities, while also escaping the crowdedness of the cities and taking pleasure from the unique beauty of Australian nature, the suburban nature being “nature tame and civilised, not red in tooth and claw.”<sup>57</sup> In short, the vast Australian middle classes were realising the utopian dream of all Western city-dwellers: in their construction of the suburbs, they were bringing nature to the town. But so was the bourgeoisie of other Anglo-American nations: the search for the perfect marriage of town and country already had a history dating back to eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>58</sup> In America, the idea that neither the city nor the country was really a suitable place to live had been in existence since the early 1800s.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Robert Fishman argues that “the site of the ‘exemplary’ suburb” in the late nineteenth century

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<sup>52</sup> Gilbert, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 109.

<sup>54</sup> Kinnane, 44.

<sup>55</sup> See John McLaren, *Australian Literature: An Historical Introduction* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1989) pp. 10-61 for a more thorough argument regarding the early white Australian literature.

<sup>56</sup> Gilbert, 34. This idealisation of the Australian outback has even carried over into contemporary Australian popular culture. Indeed, to an outside observer, the stereotypical image of Australia has perhaps been that of an outback country based on popular films such as *Crocodile Dundee* even though many expressions of the Australian imagination that have been popular within Australia have been concerned with suburbia.

<sup>57</sup> Gilbert, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Roger Silverstone, “Introduction,” *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 8.

<sup>59</sup> James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Fall of America’s Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Touchstone, 1993) 40.

was located in the United States and the American cities, freed from the constraints of the past, were forced to innovate and thus created the perfect suburb.<sup>60</sup>

As numerous sources will show,<sup>61</sup> it is neither the Americans nor the Australians who invented the suburbs as a marriage of town and country, but both have made the claim because of what Graeme Davison calls American or Australian exceptionalism. According to Davison, this is something that is always strong in new nations. Claims to be the first or the only serve as proof of being an exemplary society and give new nations distance from the conflicts of the Old World.<sup>62</sup> However, it may be that suburbia in Australia did gain exceptional importance after the late nineteenth century. Ian Hoskins maintains that in Australia, the construction of perfect egalitarian suburbia in the early twentieth century was closely connected to the construction of an Australian identity that was only just beginning to take shape: the suburb was seen as the best utilisation of the spacious continent of Australia where it would be possible to avoid the social problems that had already risen in Britain and America. Public housing was consciously rejected to avoid these social problems and the Australian suburbs were promoted with the notions of respectability and social progress.<sup>63</sup> Home ownership was encouraged during the war years as a way of gaining “a stake in the country”<sup>64</sup> that transforms the homeless immigrant into a “man of property.”<sup>65</sup> Australia was considered a kind of social laboratory: during the first half of the twentieth century, “the suburb . . . came to be seen as a retreat, an escape from the pressures, the horrors and experiences of the outside world, as not only the place where the chances of survival were

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<sup>60</sup> Fishman, 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Robert Fishman discusses the birth of the modern suburb extensively.

<sup>62</sup> Davison, 41.

<sup>63</sup> Hoskins, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Fiona Allon, “The Nuclear Dream: Lucas Heights and Everyday Life in the Atomic Age,” *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, ed. Sarah Ferber, Chris Healy and Chris McAuliffe (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994) 47.

<sup>65</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 27.

greatest but also where the future of Australian life was seen to reside.”<sup>66</sup> Occupying one’s own home in the suburbs was referred to as the “Australian dream.”<sup>67</sup> Although to an extent, the same argument has been made by Americans and Canadians as well and the suburban style of living in the United States has been labelled the American Dream,<sup>68</sup> the suburban boom there was not as immensely integral a part of national identities. The United States had gained its independence already in the eighteenth century and formed a steady identity as “a city upon a hill” on the basis of other factors than the suburban life style. In Canada, on the other hand, suburbia was extensively promoted only in the 1950s and 1960s as a solution to the post-war housing shortages<sup>69</sup> and thus was never aspired to as a specifically national goal. Indeed, it has been argued that it was the Australians who embraced the idea of suburbia more eagerly and advanced further toward its general realisation than any other nation.<sup>70</sup> As a consequence, it may be that anti-suburban criticism has also gained more force in Australia than elsewhere as suburbia has been a part of the creation of a national identity free from colonial pressures.

## 2.2. The Industrialisation and Modernisation of Australian Society

The turn of the twentieth century idealisation of suburbia in Australia was not to last long. Already at the same time with the development of the utopian suburbia in the early twentieth century there were intellectuals who were arguing that, in addition to combining the most attractive features of cities and rural areas, the suburbs were also getting the worst of both worlds: in spite of good intentions, suburbia destroys the traditional forms of community

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<sup>66</sup> Allon, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto’s American Tragedy 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 130.

<sup>68</sup> See for example Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984) 18.

<sup>69</sup> J. M. Bumsted, “Home Sweet Suburb,” *Beaver* 72.5 (1992): 26- .

<sup>70</sup> Davison, 42.

found in rural life, but also eliminates the freedoms of choice and association that were seen to be characteristic of authentic urban life. Contrary to expectations, a house in the suburbs was not a safe haven among a community of other suburbanites. Instead, people were isolated in private homes and community was hard to find.<sup>71</sup> Violence and vandalism, on the other hand, were never strangers in the suburbs: suburbia did not provide a solution to the social problems of the city or the violent dangers of the bush. In Beverley Kingston's words, "the Australian suburban dream created at one fell swoop the Australian housewife's nightmare."<sup>72</sup>

This Australian housewife's nightmare of isolation was largely a consequence of the industrialisation and modernisation of society that brought with them a reorganisation of labour time and leisure time, and social space. The ideal of a traditional rural lifestyle based on nonalienated labour and a more organic relationship between the homestead and the bush was replaced by a division between the routine of work in the public sphere and compensatory leisure time in the private sphere.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the suburbs were left in the periphery of "real life": the urban became the centre of activity while the suburban was "too pleasant, too trivial, too domestic, too smug" to be included.<sup>74</sup> The household was no more an arena of economic activity as it used to be in the pre-suburban life of the mid nineteenth century. Work was now "waged and took place outside the home; and it was performed predominantly by men."<sup>75</sup> Women were assigned a domestic role in the service of home and family.<sup>76</sup>

By the 1920s, social respectability had come to be considered a key element of successful suburban life: respectable women did not work but focused on the unpaid labour of

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<sup>71</sup> Gilbert, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1975) 4 quoted in Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, "Sexuality and the Suburban Dream," *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 15.2 (1979): 6.

<sup>73</sup> Joan Kirkby, "The Pursuit of Oblivion: In Flight from Suburbia," *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 2.

<sup>74</sup> Gilbert, 41.

<sup>75</sup> Tony Bilton et al. *Introductory Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1996) 33-34 quoted in Kirkby, 2.

<sup>76</sup> Game and Pringle, 6.

homemaking and taking care of the children while their husbands provided for the family by working in the city.<sup>77</sup> Marriage and children were an integral part of respectability in suburbia: the “proper times” for different family stages were to be observed<sup>78</sup> and “women were encouraged to live vicariously through their children” and to consider the care of their children not only as a duty but a source of fulfilment.<sup>79</sup> Women’s isolation in the suburbs grew. According to Lyn Richards, isolation in the 1920s and the subsequent decades was “pictured in a context of stifling community and vulnerability of women to competitiveness, gossip and surveillance . . . Sweet, warm homogeneity has become hard, conformist homogeneity, *the* suburban dream, *the* suburban woman’s nightmare in the dead heart of the Family.”<sup>80</sup> Anti-suburban criticism in Australia started to intensify: suburbia was associated with a loss of personal identity, a sense of worthlessness, and a trivialisation of culture.<sup>81</sup> Suburbia had come to define the social and cultural horizons of women.<sup>82</sup>

It goes without saying that similar changes in the suburban environment were occurring throughout the Anglo-American world. Respectability was the crux of suburban ideals in America as well. Similarly, women felt lonely in American suburbia while men were used as providers for the family.<sup>83</sup> In his introduction to modern suburbia, Roger Silverstone describes this development in the following way:

Suburban culture is a gendered culture. Indeed, the suburbanization of culture has often been equated by its many critics with a feminization of culture. The suburban home has been built around an ideology and a reality of women’s domestication, oppressed by the insistent demands of the household, denied access to the varied spaces and times, the iteration of public and private that marks the male suburban

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<sup>77</sup> Game and Pringle, 7.

<sup>78</sup> Lyn Richards, *Nobody’s Home: Dreams and Realities in a New Suburb* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1990) 101.

<sup>79</sup> Game and Pringle, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Richards, 179.

<sup>81</sup> Game and Pringle, 12 and Gilbert, 39.

<sup>82</sup> Gilbert, 46.

<sup>83</sup> Gary Cross, “The Suburban Weekend,” *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 110-111.

experience and which creates, for them, the crucial distinctions between work and leisure, weekday and weekend.<sup>84</sup>

Gary Cross adds that for women, these distinctions did not exist: for them the weekend entailed the same housework as the weekdays, concentrating on the goal of creating an enjoyable private time for their family.<sup>85</sup>

In this general Anglo-American development, the suburbs and the division of gendered spaces are considered constructs of industrial society: with industrialisation came the desire to flee the polluting cities and the possibilities to do so with the development of transportation.<sup>86</sup> However, what is particularly noteworthy about the development of gender roles and masculine, urban and feminine, suburban spaces in Australia is that its roots reach all the way to the very beginning of the nation: “the Australian family was born modern.”<sup>87</sup> It was usually only nuclear families that emigrated to Australia thus severing the old structure of extended families. In fact, Game and Pringle argue that “what is most distinctive about Australia is that urbanisation long preceded industrialisation.”<sup>88</sup> The early suburbs were built floorboard by floorboard as the common pursuit of the family<sup>89</sup> although “it was largely for women and the production of children that the great Australian suburbs were built. The semblance of equality was achieved by the virtual conscription of women to the service of home and family.”<sup>90</sup> Instead of helping, the industrial development of Australia at the turn of the twentieth century only served to accentuate the domestic role of women: with new domestic technology, more and more women became fully involved with housework.<sup>91</sup> Although public transportation and other urban technologies like telephone connections were developed, they were not available to women: even in the 1950s these services were only

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<sup>84</sup> Silverstone, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Cross, 117.

<sup>86</sup> Cross, 108.

<sup>87</sup> Davison, 55.

<sup>88</sup> Game and Pringle, 6.

<sup>89</sup> See Murphy and Probert, 279-285 for description of the life of the “suburban pioneers”.

<sup>90</sup> Game and Pringle, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Game and Pringle, 6.



maintained to serve the needs of men and their businesses. Until in the 1960s cars started to become more common and women could drive themselves, women lived trapped in the suburbs.<sup>92</sup> Thus, industrialisation in Australia can be argued to have contributed more profoundly to anti-suburban criticism than in other Anglo-American nations as in Australia industrialisation essentially caused the fall from grace of the pioneering, nation building ideals of suburbia and resulted in a life of restrictions and divisions. In the United States, the anti-suburban criticism that started to emerge with industrialism was not so much directed at previous ideals common to the whole nation but instead at the new forms of life of the middle classes and thus remained more segmental. The end result of industrial development in both countries, however, remains the same: the spheres of feminine and masculine and public and private were separated and reinforced unequal gendered roles that came to be criticised through literature in both countries.

### 2.3. “The Bush vs. the City” and Other Dichotomies in Anti-Suburban Criticism

As we have already noticed in the above subchapters, the history of Australian anti-suburban criticism is pervaded by various polar opposites. The dichotomy between the city and the bush originates from the very start of the colonisation of Australia. These polar opposites have always represented the two acceptable modes of life: satisfaction was to be found in the honourable pioneering bush life, or in the building of a superior civilisation that was to become a social laboratory of democracy and egalitarianism.<sup>93</sup> The dichotomy of the private and the public has characterised suburbia after the industrialisation of society. The modern family of the twentieth century celebrated “the stabilizing function of women’s place

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<sup>92</sup> Deborah Chambers, “A Stake in the Country: Women’s Experiences of Suburban Development,” *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 92.

<sup>93</sup> Turner, 108.

as the soft, ‘expressive’ centre of the private family home” and “its necessary separation from the men’s ‘instrumental’ world of work and men’s ‘boundary role’ in linking the two.”<sup>94</sup> Feminist scholarship has used this dichotomy to describe the sexes’ different access to power and anti-suburban criticism has readily taken advantage of this argument “to attack the ways the city has been shaped to keep women confined to their traditional roles in the family as wives and mothers in suburbs based on an accentuation of woman’s role as mother and homemaker.”<sup>95</sup> While this dichotomy and its basis in reality have been questioned by some critics, it does still describe even the suburbanites’ own image of their lives<sup>96</sup> and orders the view of suburbia created in literature.

This binary way of thinking has been considered especially potent in Australia. As has already been mentioned, according to Graeme Turner, the dichotomy of nature and society, due to the unusualness of the Australian environment, has come to shape most expressions of Australian tradition and to order the Australian imagination.<sup>97</sup> Australian intellectuals have been forced to accept the polarity as a fact of existence that has become a part of Australian critics’ system of belief.<sup>98</sup> This view is shared by Fiske, Hodge and Turner who argue that both the opposition between nature and culture and that between public and private “are deeply structured into many aspects of Australian culture.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, in their book *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*, Fiske, Hodge and Turner predominantly use dichotomies to describe phenomena related to Australian popular culture, such as the beach or the pub.

While the basic binary patterns of nature and culture and public and private are the most common and important polarities to be used to describe Australian suburbia, numerous

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<sup>94</sup> Richards, 97.

<sup>95</sup> Richards, 97.

<sup>96</sup> Richards, 97.

<sup>97</sup> Turner, 25-26.

<sup>98</sup> Turner, 32.

<sup>99</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 28.

other dichotomies that have a bearing on anti-suburban criticism in Australia can be deduced from them. Perhaps one of the most essential ones is the dichotomy between freedom and entrapment. This division naturally dates back to the penal colonies. The first settlers were forced to start a new life on an extremely hostile continent. Due to the harshness of nature and their status as convicts, they were literally trapped in the settlements. Freedom was initially a distant dream, which only later became an attainable reality either in the bush or in the cities. In this dichotomy between freedom and entrapment, as well as in that of the bush and the city, the suburbs inhabited the middle ground between the polar ends: the freedom of choice of the cities was close but still never quite at hand. Bound by the middle class values of respectability and domesticity, the suburbanites of early twentieth century Australia still felt that they were robbed of the right to exert that freedom: they were trapped in the routines of labour and quest for prosperity. Thus, the Australian suburban culture became suburban homogeneity, and the culture of control, limits and the representation of what had been lost.<sup>100</sup>

Another related polarisation is that between power and powerlessness, which is inherent in the Australian culture, again because of its nature: people were initially powerless when confronted by the hostile continent, but gradually came to relative power when they learned to control it. Later, this dichotomy has been seen in practice through the division of public and private and the resulting gender relations of suburbia. Along with the separation of the public and the private, the place of power shifted exclusively to the sphere of the public, which was where economic activity took place. Economic activity being the principal route to power in a modern society, those influential in the private and domestic were deprived of social power. Thus, the suburban housewives were again left to the middle ground: although

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<sup>100</sup> Turner, 51.

they could exert power within the household, they had no influence whatsoever in the public sphere. This left women, and the suburbs, on the margins of society.<sup>101</sup>

A further dichotomy of importance in the anti-suburban criticism is that between good and evil. The Australian suburban culture came to be essentially about middle-class respectability, in which the importance of affluence, marriage and normative heterosexuality,<sup>102</sup> the symbols of suburban goodness, were stressed. This was contrasted with the perils of suburbia: domestic violence and other crimes such as robberies and muggings.<sup>103</sup> Again, the suburbs were left between the polar ends: the suburbs could never be exclusively positive or negative.

The number of these dichotomies that could be applied to Australian anti-suburban criticism is boundless. In all these dichotomies, there is, however, a common factor in regard to suburbia: it is always left to the grey zone in the middle. It is never fully one thing, nor another. It is “hybrid, even potentially abject.”<sup>104</sup> Whatever the tone or the subject, the suburbs still always “remain metonymic for the life half-lived.”<sup>105</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner have used the term “anomalous category” to describe these middle grounds: anomalous categories often gain special significance because they carry the meanings of both their polar opposites and thus become overloaded with potential meanings.<sup>106</sup> As a result of this process, suburbia, being a highly visible anomalous category in Australian life, has gained “a central mythic role” through the negations of the ideals between which it is perceived to reside in the Australian imagination.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Kirkby, 2.

<sup>102</sup> McLaren, 151.

<sup>103</sup> Jennifer Maiden, “The Suburban Problem of Evil,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 119.

See also Kirkby for discussion on the psychopathology of the everyday suburban life.

<sup>104</sup> Kirkby, 2.

<sup>105</sup> David McCooey, “Neither Here nor There: Suburban Voices in Australian Poetry,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 103.

<sup>106</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 59.

<sup>107</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 64.

Although these polarisations are considered exceptionally important in the Australian context due to the unusual history of Australian society, the unparalleled quality of its flora and fauna, and Australia's image as a social laboratory and a potentially "perfect society" that has made Australian intellectuals more prone to pointed criticism of the society than those of other Western countries,<sup>108</sup> they are naturally not exclusive to Australian society. On the contrary, when looking at the anti-suburban criticism of the literatures of other Anglo-American countries, we can see that polar opposites are a construction that is widely used. For example, Robert Beuka maintains that the themes of American suburban literature have "everything to do with the troubled nature of suburban place identification. For the suburb, in breaking apart the urban/rural binary that had previously characterized the American landscape, presents a third term in this equation, a space that remains an enigma even to itself."<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Beuka argues that

since its first appearance in the 1950s, the 'suburban debate' in both the popular media and sociological circles has centered around certain diametrically opposed visions of the suburbs – as both a self-sufficient space of the 'good life' and an alienating 'noplacé'; both an inclusive model of old-fashioned 'community' and a paranoid, exclusionary space; and both a matriarchal realm of female power and the worst sort of suffocating, male-dominated enclosure for women.<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, Robert Fishman has stated that true suburbs are always outcomes of two opposing forces and can never be understood without taking those forces into consideration.<sup>111</sup> According to John Archer, polar opposites like public and private or masculine and feminine are, as a matter of fact, constructions that are fundamental to modern Western culture that have found "a premier locale" for their "material articulation" in the suburbs.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, Archer adds that polarities like these were especially significant in colonial settings where the

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<sup>108</sup> Gilbert, 37.

<sup>109</sup> Beuka, 20.

<sup>110</sup> Beuka, 27.

<sup>111</sup> Fishman, 26-27.

<sup>112</sup> John Archer, "Colonial Suburbs in South Asia, 1700-1850, and the Spaces of Modernity," *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 52.

individual lived between the surrounding indigenous population and the authority of the Old World.<sup>113</sup> Thus, it is typical that both Australian and American suburbs have been characterised and criticised through binary logic according to which the suburbs are a logical impossibility that should not be there at all.<sup>114</sup> What has been especially prominent in Australian literature as well as American has been the different male and female roles in the margins of active society between the polar ends of the city and nature and public and private. Throughout the following chapters, we will be able to discern the omnipresence of these polarisations in conceptualisations of Australian suburbia and the constant struggle in the crossfire of different demands and desires in the lives of suburban women and men.

Whereas the previous section of the thesis examined the beginnings of the Australian anti-suburban criticism and demonstrated its importance in the Australian context, the following section will turn to Jessica Anderson's novel as an exemplary text of numerous specific themes of anti-suburban criticism in Australian literature. I will introduce several of these themes and trace their development through time in Australia and also in North America. Most of this discussion will revolve around the themes of suburban homogeneity and respectability in their various manifestations. Indeed, when in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the early Australian middle classes started to make their ways to the suburbs in masses, their values, according to Esson, changed from responsibility to respectability. Life centred around "feminine trivia (gossip and tea drinking), unmanly pursuits (gardening) and soul-destroying office work."<sup>115</sup> It became inauthentic and was largely based on utopian thought: domesticity, economic prosperity earned with hard individual work, and the avoidance of the political and sexual dangers of the city were

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<sup>113</sup> Archer, *Colonial* 52-53.

<sup>114</sup> John Hartley, "The Sexualization of Suburbia: The Diffusion of Knowledge in the Postmodern Public Sphere," *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 186.

<sup>115</sup> Louis Esson, "The Song of the Sububbs [sic]," *The Bulletin* 27:1356 (1907): 10 quoted in McCooley, 103.

considered the keys to middle class suburban happiness.<sup>116</sup> The suburban lifestyle became above all a culture of homogeneity in which feelings of isolation and entrapment were the reality hidden behind the perfect exterior. All of these bourgeois values and suburbia's position in the margins of society as a powerless supporter are presented to the reader in Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River*.<sup>117</sup> The protagonist, Nora Porteous, returns to her childhood home in a Brisbane suburb after several decades of absence to find a community, which lacks genuine communication completely, but where gossip and rumours are doubly more important. Opinions about anything more than the haircut of the lady next door are kept silent, and gardens are always in impeccable condition. During Nora's absence from Brisbane, she has been married in Sydney, and lived as a seemingly independent woman in London. In Sydney, her husband spends his days at the office, while Nora is not allowed to earn money with the dresses she loves to make and others love to wear, nor is her friendship with bohemian artists with carefree lifestyles approved of. Her management of the household is never quite adequate according to others, and she is to be blamed of the shameful fact that she and her husband, Colin, never had children. The novel is constructed in episodes that alternate between the present and the past and juxtapose scenes from the early decades of the twentieth century all the way to the 1970s involving an array of characters both in the suburbs and the city. Through these oppositions, Jessica Anderson gives power and continuity to the description and critique of many features that are typical of anti-suburban criticism found in literature.

Similar literary techniques involving juxtapositions and changes of point of view are also employed in both *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman*. Both novels are structured in a

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<sup>116</sup> McCann, *Introduction* ix.

<sup>117</sup> This reading is supported by the allusion of the title of Anderson's novel to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott* in which the Lady lives in captivity in a castle outside the town of Camelot. In the poem, the Lady observes the life of Camelot through a mirror, but remains a mere onlooker at the margins of the society. The poem has often been thought to describe the anxiety of an artist as an outside observer of society but from a contemporary, suburban point of view, it can also be read in terms of the anxiety of a suburban housewife.

non-linear way slowly giving the reader pieces of information that are accentuated through the voices of different characters. In *Falling in Place*, the main focus is on the Knapp family and people connected to it. The narrator is predominantly the father, John Knapp, through whose eyes the differences between late 1970s life in inner city New York and suburban Connecticut are pictured. The suburbs are represented by John's wife Louise and their children Mary and John Joel. The city, on the other hand, is portrayed through John's colleagues and his lover Nina and her friends. Through this cast of characters, Ann Beattie creates a picture of active and free city life and a stagnant suburban existence concentrated on keeping up appearances.<sup>118</sup> A very similar portrait is described in *Mister Sandman* by the members of the Canary family. Although during the decades from the 1950s to the 1970s the suburban culture of the Toronto of the novel starts to change towards slightly more liberal values, the façade of respectability and appearances are kept even within the family: for the commuting father Gordon and his wife Doris and children Sonja, Marcy and Joan, life changing events randomly take place in the city and are systematically hidden in the suburbs. All through the parents' homosexual affairs, Sonja's teenage pregnancy and Marcy's promiscuous teenage years, the characters' happiness seems secondary to keeping up a respectable front.

In the following chapters, I will examine the various sub themes of suburban homogeneity and respectability concentrating on the analysis of *Tirra Lirra by the River* but comparing and contrasting it to *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman*. I will first turn to the theme of domesticity and its various manifestations.

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<sup>118</sup> The passivity of the suburbs is also suggested by the title of the novel. *Falling in Place* is a reference to the novel *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray. In *Falling in Place*, many of the characters struggle to establish themselves in society in much the same way as the characters of *Vanity Fair* do. In Beattie, 100, John Knapp, after reading *Vanity Fair*, observes that often things just happen until one finally notices that everything has fallen into place according to the rules of the surrounding society without any conscious, active involvement.



### 3. The Importance of the Perfect Family Home: Domesticity in the Suburbs

As we have already noted on pages 19 and 20, family and home-making were in the heart of suburban social respectability in Australia from the early decades of the twentieth century onwards. The suburban pioneering virtues of building a new nation together had been replaced by competitiveness and stifling homogeneity. According to Alan Gilbert,

suburbia was from the beginning virtually synonymous with domesticity. Suburbs were places for families and children: for the men, the “breadwinners” returning daily, places to be husbands and fathers; for the women, places to concentrate on being wives and mothers. Suburbia was, *par excellence*, the great Australian habitat for the production, protection and socialisation of children.<sup>119</sup>

Indeed, Lyn Richards argues that in Australia, marriage has always been seen as the natural and inevitable path to respectable adult life: “everyone marries, and married people have children.”<sup>120</sup> In the early twentieth century, respectable women were fully occupied with the care of the family home<sup>121</sup> and “expectations about happiness through domesticity were powerfully reinforced in the commentary of popular magazines, and they reverberated in government policies and discourses on family support, home ownership and responsible citizenship.”<sup>122</sup>

These domestic ideals of the suburban life are expressed in *Tirra Lirra by the River* throughout the novel. One of their most conspicuous embodiments is the description of the life of the Rainbow family. Dorothy Rainbow, Nora Porteous’s sister Grace’s childhood friend, is an attractive young suburban lady, who is married to Bruce Rainbow. Dorothy herself is never seen in the suburban streets as she is at home, “busy with house and

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<sup>119</sup> Gilbert, 35.

<sup>120</sup> Richards, 100.

<sup>121</sup> Game and Pringle, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Murphy and Probert, 287.

babies,”<sup>123</sup> while Bruce provides for the family by working at the “Rural Bank.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, the Rainbows are pictured as the perfect suburban family:

This was the time when Grace’s and my mother’s letters were telling me of her [Dorothy Rainbow’s] clever children, her good husband who was ‘doing so well’, and the extended house that Grace said was ‘the best home in the street.’<sup>125</sup> . . . of course she was happy. ‘Why shouldn’t she be? She has all any reasonable person could want.’<sup>126</sup>

Here, Grace has articulated exactly the kinds of ideals of domesticity that were prevalent in the Australian middle class suburbs. The novel does not, however, settle only for this slightly sarcastic description of the suburban lifestyle but presents rather extreme criticism for it. Although Dorothy Rainbow is supposed to have a perfect life, it slowly becomes evident that she has for a long time been highly anxious in her happy home: she starts to seem increasingly sad and nervous. Finally, when the routine becomes too much for her, she murders all of her family except for one son who manages to escape, and commits a very suburban suicide by putting her head in the gas oven. This is exemplary of Jennifer Maiden’s argument that the regular and regulated rhythms and routines of everyday life allow for people to take time to ponder on dramatic events as well as the events in their daily routines, and to slowly develop easy, violent responses to these events. Maiden argues that the suburbs are precisely the kind of place that offer both time and space to analyse the life lived there, and thus, violence often is an attempted alternative to the stifling routines of the faceless culture of the suburbs.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, Dorothy’s breakdown in the novel is expressly labelled “suburban neurosis.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, it is implied that the reasons behind Dorothy’s behaviour are to be found in suburbia and can be perceived as her final attempt at an expression of free will. Therefore, by presenting this extreme tragedy and closely connecting it to the Rainbows’

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<sup>123</sup> Jessica Anderson, *Tirra Lirra by the River* (1978; Sydney: Pan MacMillan Australia, 1997) 23.

<sup>124</sup> Anderson, 21.

<sup>125</sup> Anderson, 83.

<sup>126</sup> Anderson, 23.

<sup>127</sup> Maiden, 119.

<sup>128</sup> Anderson, 181.

suburban lifestyle, *Tirra Lirra by the River* presents a sharp argument against the values of domesticity: in spite of outward respectability, even they cannot bring rewards to the stifling routines of the suburbia but foster the repression of human subjects by normalising them.

This pointed criticism is reinforced by the events of the novel's protagonist Nora Porteous's life. Nora, in an attempt to escape the monotonous and grey Brisbane suburbs of her childhood, marries a Sydney lawyer, Colin Porteous. The newly wed couple are looked on with respect and expectations of children and a family home maintained by Nora are never concealed. Even though at first Colin concedes to Nora's wish to live in the city, Nora is expected to stay at home in spite of being offered a job while Colin works. It is implied that Nora must bear such idleness as "it is only until the children come."<sup>129</sup> Later, the opportunity arises for Colin and Nora to move into his mother Una's house in the suburbs. Nora enters a period of time she labels "my term in Una Porteous's house."<sup>130</sup> It is precisely Una Porteous, and her family who provide the most pronounced enforcement of suburban values of domesticity on Nora: Nora is claimed to be a failure and the whole situation a tragedy when after several years of marriage Nora still is not pregnant.<sup>131</sup> Una takes care of the household while Nora is left in the periphery and slowly excluded from the family. Thus, it is argued that without children to make the home and roles of the parents perfect, there cannot be any true happiness or success in terms of suburban respectability. Indeed, the marriage finally ends in divorce that Nora is blamed for: "if only you had learned how to *handle* him."<sup>132</sup> This view of the marriage as being Nora's responsibility and of Colin as a victim is consistent with the view common in the suburbs in the early decades of the twentieth century that "for a woman

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<sup>129</sup> Anderson, 53.

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, 70.

<sup>131</sup> This view of Una and Colin is supported by the possible allusion in Una's name to Edmund Spenser's poem *The Faerie Queene* in which Una is considered the personification of the church and of wisdom and as such is the guardian of proper moral values. Also the name Colin suggests a connection to Spenser's work: in *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, Spenser is thought to have used the character of Colin to voice his views on the state of manners in society. This is also the role of Colin Porteous in *Tirra Lirra by the River*: along with his mother he is the strongest reinforcer of suburban values in Nora's life.

<sup>132</sup> Anderson, 87.

to fail at marriage meant that she had failed in business.”<sup>133</sup> Criticism of the unfair treatment of women in suburban marriages is presented later in the novel, after the divorce, when Nora gets pregnant after a short affair: the assumption that Colin cannot be blamed for the failure of the consummation of the suburban family ideals is proved incorrect.

Similar ideals of domesticity and “familism” also abounded in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>134</sup> Although in the America of the 1920s it was acknowledged that women did have the same freedom as men, the wise and fulfilling choice for every woman was considered to be “to marry, have children and have a home.”<sup>135</sup> Magazines and advice literature used guilt as their main incentive for women to make sure their housekeeping was up to standard and implied that it was a woman’s job to keep a marriage alive by keeping her looks while maintaining a perfect family home.<sup>136</sup> Unhappiness or dissatisfaction were not to be displayed and self-control was one of the most important virtues of a housewife.<sup>137</sup> In Canada, life in the mid-twentieth century was similarly dependent on a clear understanding of the different roles of husbands and wives.<sup>138</sup> When asked, girls in their early twenties declared that they would choose marriage over career “if the opportunity comes because the rewards of marriage are obvious, those of a career uncertain.”<sup>139</sup>

When we examine these values today, one easily thinks that they are outdated. Certainly, the society has changed during the past eighty years and it may be argued that during the latter part of the twentieth century, marriage has lost some of its position as a

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<sup>133</sup> Margaret Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 23.

<sup>134</sup> Familism is a term used by many suburban critics and sociologists interested in families and kinship to refer to the importance of family values in the life of an individual. For example, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, familism can be defined as “a social pattern in which the family assumes a position of ascendancy over individual interests”. It is in this sense I use the term in this thesis.

<sup>135</sup> Marsh 136-137.

<sup>136</sup> Marsh, 138-139.

<sup>137</sup> Marsh, 23-24.

<sup>138</sup> Bumsted, 26- .

<sup>139</sup> Bumsted, 26- .

woman's only chance at prosperity. However, even in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the suburbs remained criticised for their "patriarchal familism."<sup>140</sup> Indeed, even in the 1990s, according to Sharpe and Wallock, the suburban ideals originating from decades ago were still widespread.<sup>141</sup> According to much popular fiction, women are still to remain housewives to preserve suburban domesticity and the suburban way of life that shelters families from the perils of the city, and in some cases also from the wilderness.<sup>142</sup> In an ideal scenario, "the middle-class housewife still stands at the stove while commuting husband and rambunctious kids dominate the action."<sup>143</sup>

The effects of time, but also the persisting values of domesticity are visible both in *Mister Sandman* and in *Falling in Place*. In *Mister Sandman*, we get to follow the life of the Canary family for two decades from 1956 to the 1970s. Gordon commutes every day to the city of Toronto while his wife Doris remains at home taking care of their daughters Sonja and Marcy and 15 year old Sonja's daughter Joan. While the changes in the ideals of domesticity are visible in Marcy's real and Sonja's imagined development into career girls, Marcy's move into a city apartment and Doris's 1970s job in a lingerie shop, it is invariably the women and predominantly Doris who take care of the home while Gordon remains blissfully ignorant of any household troubles. Even when working, Doris spends her lunch hours cooking for the children. It is implied that Marcy as the most social and intelligent of the girls will one day have children and do the cooking for her man. Moreover, Doris explicitly states her impression that "'normal' women were in their kitchens dreaming up the winning answer to 'Why I Love Tenderleaf Tea'".<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, "Bold New City or Built-Up 'Burb? Redefining Contemporary Suburbia," *American Quarterly* 46.1 (1994): 2.

<sup>141</sup> Sharpe and Wallock, 17.

<sup>142</sup> Sharpe and Wallock, 19.

<sup>143</sup> Sharpe and Wallock, 23.

<sup>144</sup> Barbara Gowdy, *Mister Sandman* (London: Flamingo, 1995) 64.

This emphasis on women's domesticity is introduced in the novel in side notes and small comments so that it is unintrusive on the reader and thus naturalised as a normal state of affairs. However, from the very first pages of the novel, the reader is alerted to the banality and even ludicrousness of suburban respectability as Doris solves the family's money problems by entering a contest in which housewives compete about whose life is the most miserable. Doris wins the contest by lying that she is a widow with two handicapped children and gains fur coats, television sets and pots and pans that are supposed to pull her out of misery. Later in the novel, contrasts to the suburban lifestyle are presented in other women as well as the Canary women and criticism of suburban ideals is brought along through these juxtapositions. For instance, Doris has a brief affair with a woman, Harmony, who works as a head nurse and whose life is described as very different from Doris's own rather busy everyday life. Harmony lives alone in a very exotic looking apartment where on her days off, she is seen "just lounging around"<sup>145</sup> comfortably without the suburban worry of how the apartment and her lifestyle look to others. This is a stark contrast to Doris's own life: the affair happens at a time when Doris and Sonja have temporarily moved to Vancouver to conceal Sonja's pregnancy and thus protect the Canary family's suburban respectability.<sup>146</sup> The affair ends up not being Doris's only one. Although most of her liaisons happen with other suburban women, they do draw the reader's attention to other life choices and sources of happiness than family and home management and the fact the domesticity does not equal satisfaction. This notion is still strengthened by the description of Marcy's life in her twenties: her city apartment looks like a Las Vegas show room and she regularly keeps five boyfriends at a time. Thus, the novel ultimately questions the suburban values of domesticity by making

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<sup>145</sup> Gowdy, 17.

<sup>146</sup> This contrast is strengthened by the name Harmony which suggests connotations of a life of inner peace and contentment.

a clear difference between Doris's and Marcy's words and their actions, and seeks an alternative way of life.

In *Falling in Place*, although it is set in the timeframe of one summer in the year 1979, in a time when suburbia had already "fallen from grace" and its superficiality had been conceded,<sup>147</sup> both the development and the stagnation of suburban values of domesticity are evident. In the novel's description of the unnamed Connecticut suburb which is the home of the Knapp family, we find a contrast between the ideal suburban families of the Knapp's neighbours and Louise Knapp's friend Tiffy. While for example John Joel Knapp's friend Parker's mother is a housewife who is only seen baking cakes and playing tennis with other neighbourhood housewives, Louise's friend Tiffy, on the other hand, works as a feminist researcher at a university and is found sharing garden work with her husband and washing the car. Tiffy does not have any children and is perceived by Louise as a fantasy of the woman she could have been. Louise herself is positioned between these two extremes: she dreams of moving into the city like Tiffy eventually does and deserting her role as a housewife but despite John's offer to move them into a New York city apartment, refuses to leave the suburbs because she believes the suburbs to be better for the children. Louise's struggle between the two polar ends is typical of criticism of domesticity: she remains torn between her own desires and the suburban values. As a result, she is left helpless and for a long time, unable to act in between the dual forces. Finally, Louise puts her doubts about the suburban values into words: "I guess you always wonder," she said, "if you'd be a different person if you lived somewhere else. It's so beautiful here, and we don't notice it very much, and when we do, it doesn't seem to help us be happy".<sup>148</sup> Thus, the novel presents an example of typical 1970s suburban criticism by pointing out that the peaceful and controlled environment is not a sufficient condition for individual fulfilment, contrary to the ideals.

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<sup>147</sup> Beuka, 161.

<sup>148</sup> Ann Beattie, *Falling in Place* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1980) 155.

This tenacity of the suburban values of domesticity and familism throughout the decades has also been noted in Australia. As Alan Gilbert argued in 1988

recent cultural trends – notably those associated with feminism and environmentalism – have modified some of the stereotypes. . . . Housewives who aspire as strongly as ever to the traditional norms of motherhood and home management might now feel more defensive about these ‘suburban’ roles. . . . Under the same pressures, the once-sharp role-differences, which (in theory at least) left the paternal breadwinner mercifully isolated from the world of aprons, tea-towels, clothes-lines and soiled nappies, have become more blurred. . . . But none of these changes has altered [the fact] that the lure of the suburb, like the values and expectations associated with suburban life-styles, remains today recognizably the same as it was in colonial Sydney or ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ [in the 1880s].<sup>149</sup>

This argument is supported by Lyn Richards’s recent research. She maintains that still, “the powerful ideas of family are the traditional ones; ideas of independence for women and egalitarianism for marriages are rare and almost always mixed with old values.”<sup>150</sup> If we look again at *Tirra Lirra by the River*, we can observe the persistence of domesticity and the importance of family in Nora’s description of her return to her childhood home in the Brisbane suburbs in the 1970s. We are introduced to Betty and Jack Cust, Nora’s elderly neighbours who take care of Nora when she upon her arrival in Brisbane falls ill with pneumonia. They are retired but still seem to observe some of the traditional family roles: Betty cooks and takes care of other household chores while Jack drives Betty around but is slightly clumsy when it comes to housekeeping. Surprisingly enough, Jack is the one who seems to be the less conservative party of the couple: he would like to travel to Europe and taste life outside their suburban home, but Betty refuses to go. “‘Something or other always happens,’ murmurs Betty. . . . ‘One of the children has a baby, or is just about to have one . . . ?’ ‘Or one of the babies is just about to walk or talk,’ says Jack. ‘Or someone has hurt their little

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<sup>149</sup> Gilbert, 36.

<sup>150</sup> Richards, 157.



toe.”<sup>151</sup> This ironic remark from Jack draws our attention to the sometimes quite far-fetched reasons for not leaving the suburbs or the family. The inadequacy of the suburban domesticity is accentuated in Betty’s description of Grace’s, Nora’s sister’s, life. Grace never left her childhood home but remained living there with her husband after the death of their mother. Throughout her life, Nora has always felt Grace’s disapproval of her divorce and of her preference to live in a city apartment rather than a suburban house. Upon hearing of her sister’s death and her wish to keep the Brisbane house in the family as long as Nora is alive in case she ever wanted to move back, Nora’s first thought is “She’s still trying!”<sup>152</sup> As Grace is the one suburban housewife that remains in Nora’s life throughout the novel and thus offers constant reminders of the domestic ideals, the critical statement we find at the end of the novel gathers all the more force. While talking with Betty Cust, Nora hears that Grace was ultimately not happy in her suburban, well kept home despite her earlier claims otherwise. The reason for this, according to Betty was “that for the whole of her life, she had tried to have faith, and that for the whole of her life, she had only opinions.”<sup>153</sup> This statement, contrasted with her earlier remark that it is precisely her beliefs that enable her to be happy in the suburbs, presents a clear anti-suburban argument: no matter how much you try to believe that suburban domesticity is the key to happiness, the suburbs cannot fulfil their promise of a “state of grace.”<sup>154</sup>

#### 4. Decline of Community: Women’s Isolation in the Suburbs

In conjunction with the anti-suburban discussion in Australia, it has often been stated that the suburbanisation of cities has led to the decline of community. Much of this decline,

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<sup>151</sup> Anderson, 129.

<sup>152</sup> Anderson, 143.

<sup>153</sup> Anderson, 194.

<sup>154</sup> Anderson, 101.

according to Gilbert, follows directly from the stress on domesticity in the suburbs: because of the importance of family and the private home, there is a tendency for families to become isolated from each other. The only connections between these separated units are based on the place of residence and a similar lifestyle, but there is no global culture which would maintain the diverse network of communities and associations, which according to Gilbert's argument are found in the city. Thus, the suburbs become faceless and one-dimensional without a distinctive communal culture.<sup>155</sup>

In *Tirra Lirra by the River*, this facelessness and lack of communality is precisely Nora's experience of both the Brisbane and Sydney suburbs she lives in. For instance, on her return to Brisbane, Nora feels that she has once again entered a place where she has to put on an act and watch her behaviour in order to maintain the respectable façade that has been created by her family.<sup>156</sup> This feeling of facelessness and isolation resonates also in Nora's account of her childhood in the same suburbs. Then, Nora felt she had to hide some of her physical characteristics and do things she was not comfortable with due to peer pressure. Consequently, Nora spends much of her time alone, taking long walks, reading and doing crochet work, while all her friends became mere acquaintances for the lack of common subjects of interest.<sup>157</sup> This lack of communication and community is also highlighted in the description of Nora's life in the Sydney suburbs. There, the only deliberate attempt at communality with fellow suburbanites occurs when Nora and Colin join a Tennis Club. The experience, however, is left unfulfilling at least for Nora as Colin makes her feel embarrassed about her eagerness to play. Indeed, the role of wives at the Green Gardens Tennis Club is to look fresh and bake good cakes. Even amongst themselves, the only topics of discussion and communal interest revolve around cakes and the appearances of others while deviations from

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<sup>155</sup> Gilbert, 39.

<sup>156</sup> Anderson, 33.

<sup>157</sup> Anderson, 16-19.

this fake communality are frowned upon.<sup>158</sup> In her misery caused by Colin's domineering behaviour and lack of like-minded peers, Nora seeks refuge again by taking long walks in the suburbs, hoping to find consolation in the faces of casual passers-by, but never finds any.<sup>159</sup>

This complete lack of social relations in the suburbs is made to seem all the more stifling by descriptions of alternatives for this lack of communality in *Tirra Lirra by the River*. For example, at the early stages of their marriage, Nora and Colin live in an apartment building in the Sydney Harbour at some distance from the suburbs. The apartment building is one of four buildings that share a common portico where Nora finds it easy to meet friends to whom she can relate: "the double front doors stood open day and night, and at whatever time I went there, I always found someone about and was sure of a welcome. I would talk to them, pose for them, drink their coffee, listen to their music, and borrow their books."<sup>160</sup> This warmth found among city apartment buildings stands in stark contrast to the novel's description of the "big flat chequerboard suburb"<sup>161</sup> where "there are telegraph poles on one side of [the] street, and from these poles long black wires extend to the houses, two or three to each pole, for all the world like a small pack of dogs tethered to a post."<sup>162</sup> Indeed, along with the inner-city London apartments where she lives after her divorce, and the theatre she works at in London, the time spent in the Sydney Harbour is the only time in her life when she does not feel a longing panic for escape in the faceless world. It is clearly argued in the novel, then, that despite the cold and stony exterior, the city hides much more warmth and communality than the uniform facades of the suburbs. This has also been a statement presented in much of the wider anti-suburban criticism in Australia.

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<sup>158</sup> Anderson, 83-85.

<sup>159</sup> Anderson, 82.

<sup>160</sup> Anderson, 54.

<sup>161</sup> Anderson, 51.

<sup>162</sup> Anderson, 128.

As we can infer from some of the above examples of the lack of community, the social isolation of the suburbs has been especially problematic for women as their social lives consist solely of relationships within the suburbs. Indeed, the isolation and loneliness of women has been an important issue within the discussion of the lack of community in the suburbs. According to Lyn Richards's research, community in Australian suburbia is very much based on children: without children with whom to spend time outside and about whom there are endless topics of discussion, the women of suburbia do not have any natural reasons to get to know anyone.<sup>163</sup> When there is community among the suburbanites, women often feel it is stifling, compulsory community of surveillance.<sup>164</sup> This is echoed by men's views on neighbourhood friendships according to which close relationships within the suburb endanger the family's private space.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, if we think about the descriptions of suburbia in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, neighbours are either not mentioned at all like in the sequences about the Sydney suburbs or are considered intrusive despite their helpfulness like in the Brisbane suburb of the 1970s. In fact, the only mention of neighbours in suburbia emphasising the friendships found there is to be seen in the sequences about Nora's childhood when the children of the area knew each other through school. But even then, meetings with friends were limited to chance encounters on the street; house visits seemed to be unheard of in the suburbs. We have already seen the lonely past times of walking, reading and needlework which Nora uses to fight the boredom of suburban life.

Turning to anti-suburban criticism in America, we can find numerous examples of suburban reality for women being predominantly that of boredom and isolation. Out of our North American novels, *Falling in Place* in particular provides examples of this. Oftentimes, Louise Knapp is found occupied by such mundane chores like taking the garbage out or

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<sup>163</sup> Richards, 255-257.

<sup>164</sup> Richards, 179.

<sup>165</sup> Richards, 245.

cooking dinner. In spite of her friendship with Tiffany, Louise feels there are no intelligent people in the suburbs to talk to<sup>166</sup> but the only communication is small talk at the gym about “what it feels like for Marge to do those stretch exercises with no tits.”<sup>167</sup> Even with Tiffany, Louise has started to feel inferior and bored because of the lack of mutually interesting topics of conversation.<sup>168</sup> According to Kenneth T. Jackson, this kind of social isolation is in large part due to the lack of the social relationships of the city that men acquire while working.<sup>169</sup> This criticism is also illustrated in *Falling in Place* in Louise’s comment that she can no longer cope with the city while John seems to be perfectly fine there because of his daily commute.<sup>170</sup> This is also in agreement with Robert Beuka’s argument that the still ever so strong emphases on family along with the relocation of families to suburbs further and further away from the city estranges women from the society at large<sup>171</sup> and often causes women to suffer from “a sense of dislocation and purposelessness”<sup>172</sup> in a “soulless landscape producing a soulless populace.”<sup>173</sup>

Taking a survey of anti-suburban criticism in Australia, one gains the impression that this experience of purposelessness and soullessness has perhaps not been such a clear target of criticism in Australia. Perhaps this is due to the pioneering history of suburbia in Australia: despite isolation and loneliness in the suburbs, it was important to struggle to raise the family as families were essential for the growth of the nation.<sup>174</sup> However, on a close reading of *Tirra Lirra by the River*, we can see that the sense of dislocation and purposelessness Beuka describes is by no means nonexistent in Australia. Possibly the most powerful illustration of the purposelessness of Nora’s existence in the suburbs is presented through her actions during

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<sup>166</sup> Beattie, 59.

<sup>167</sup> Beattie, 27.

<sup>168</sup> Beattie, 143-144.

<sup>169</sup> Jackson, 243-244.

<sup>170</sup> Beattie, 59.

<sup>171</sup> Beuka, 152.

<sup>172</sup> Beuka, 151.

<sup>173</sup> Beuka, 112.

<sup>174</sup> This view is supported by Deborah Chambers. Please see Chambers, 95.

the latter part of her marriage to Colin. Then Nora feels that “all my talents were blighted by panic and despair, so that there were only the ill-cut dresses for the women [which Nora makes] and the cakes for the tennis club.”<sup>175</sup> “My few books, all poetry, became useless to me. My panicky mind blocked the rhythms and garbled the words, and very soon I began to wonder what I had ever seen in them.”<sup>176</sup> For want of things to do, Nora starts to first learn geometry and later French despite Una’s obvious question: “But what good will it do you?”<sup>177</sup> This comment by Una again echoes the view that without children, suburban life lacks its key element and demonstrates the connection between domesticity and the lack of community and isolation in the suburbs: as family and children are all a woman is supposed to need to be happy, efforts at other meaningful relationships are futile.

##### 5. Economic Prosperity: “Terracotta Houses with Round Trees”<sup>178</sup>

As we have seen in the above account of domesticity and familism for example in the description of the Rainbow family, the basis for domesticity and respectability produced by a proper family life in Australia has for decades been the owner-occupied, single-family home. According to Lyn Richards, home ownership is one step on the proper path to family life while renting is not an acceptable long term option but only a temporary thing that has to be done sometimes while waiting for the right house or gathering the money to buy.<sup>179</sup> Patrick Troy has even argued that from the 1930s onwards, a common reason offered for home ownership has been “that those who lived in flats would not develop families, or if they did would have the ‘wrong’ kind of families with high levels of delinquency etc.” thus making the

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<sup>175</sup> Anderson, 93.

<sup>176</sup> Anderson, 78.

<sup>177</sup> Anderson, 81.

<sup>178</sup> Adapted from Anderson, 51.

<sup>179</sup> Richards, 117.

realisation of domesticity and familism impossible without a single-family house owned by its occupiers.<sup>180</sup>

Fiske, Hodge and Turner connect this emphasis on home ownership to Australia's colonial history: "the Australian way is (and has always been) to own a home on a plot of its own, so that the homeless immigrant is magically transformed into a man of property."<sup>181</sup> Indeed, the stress on economic prosperity and the ownership of property is one of the features that have been considered distinctive of Australian suburbia. According to Alan Gilbert, in 1975, at the period of time in which all our three novels are set, over 80% of all private houses in suburban Sydney were occupied by their owners,<sup>182</sup> making Australia "the epitome of a home-owning society" and the ideal of home ownership Australia's most important national value expressed as "The Great Australian Dream."<sup>183</sup> Gilbert maintains that ownership of real property has always been socially extremely important in suburban Australia: "the distinction between freehold tenure and tenancy of land had persisted as a primary criterion of status. It still meant much to be a freeholder; and for the proud suburban home owner, the suburban dream realised meant independence, security, pride and self-respect — all ancient, evocative yeomen virtues."<sup>184</sup> In fact, the fulfilment of the ideal of home ownership and the upward mobility it produced were especially in the early twentieth century the most frequent explicit expressions of the pursuit of respectability in the suburbs.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> P. N. Troy, "The Benefits of Owner Occupation," *Urban Research Program Working Paper Series No. 29* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1991) 21 quoted in Patrick Troy, "Suburbs of Acquiescence, Suburbs of Protest," *Housing Studies* 15.5 (2000): 723.

<sup>181</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 27.

<sup>182</sup> Gilbert, 35.

<sup>183</sup> Jim Kemeny, *The Myth of Home Ownership: Private versus Public Choices in Housing Tenure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 112.

<sup>184</sup> Gilbert, 35.

<sup>185</sup> Hoskins, 15.

Home-ownership along with upward social mobility are also the values of Colin Porteous, Nora's husband, and his mother Una in *Tirra Lirra by the River*. Their preferred environment, where they also want Nora to live, is a typical suburb:

It was a red-brick house in a big flat chequerboard suburb, predominantly iron-grey and terracotta in colour, and treeless except for an occasional row of tristanias, clipped to roundness and stuck like toffee apples into the pavement. 'If I had to live here I would die,' I told Colin.<sup>186</sup>

Despite Nora's persistent protests, she is denied her wish to live in an inner-city apartment, when there is the possibility to live in a house owned by a family member. Colin uses the threat of losing his job because of the 1930s Depression as an excuse to persuade Nora to move to his mother's suburban house but does present a more accurate reason as well: Colin wants to live with his mother to be able to support her. Without Colin's financial aid, Una would have to move to a flat which Colin considers an absurd idea:

'Would you like to live in a flat, Nora, after having had your own home?'  
 'Yes.'  
 'Well, Mum's different.'  
 'I know. That's why I don't want to go.'  
 'Oh, come on, Nora, be reasonable. It won't be for long.'  
 'Oh. Won't it?'  
 'Of course not.'<sup>187</sup>

Here, it is implied that for Nora and Colin to live elsewhere than in Una's house and force Una to move would rob the Porteous family of their hard-earned affluence. Later, when Nora asks Colin about moving to a place of their own, "Colin replied with surprise, 'But why should we move? We're quite comfortable here,' I [Nora] knew this was the reply I had inwardly expected, and that I must speak of moving no more."<sup>188</sup> Here we can see that in the suburbs, according to the traditional view of them, as long as you have earned your house,

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<sup>186</sup> Anderson, 51.

<sup>187</sup> Anderson, 67.

<sup>188</sup> Anderson, 77.



you can just live comfortably in it and concentrate on the next step on the path to respectability, the family.

While in Australia, home ownership has been considered a shared goal for the whole nation to secure a national identity, in America, the basis for the idealisation of home ownership has been quite the opposite. There, single-family homes have been promoted as a way to personal fulfilment<sup>189</sup> and a means to strengthen the ties of one's own social class instead of creating a unified national identity as in Australia.<sup>190</sup> Thus, individuality has been an important force behind the suburbanisation of America through home ownership as there, private property is considered above all a marker of one's individual identity.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, home ownership in the United States is nearly as common as in Australia with two thirds of the population owning their own homes.<sup>192</sup> It has also been the subject of much politicising and stereotype building in the United States as well where it has been promoted as the ideal for "men of sound character and industrious habits."<sup>193</sup> In other words, home ownership in American suburbia is stereotypically connected to personal success or failure.

This is aptly illustrated in *Falling in Place*. In the novel, we are introduced to John Knapp's city mistress, Nina. She lives in a small apartment in the New York city centre and works at a department store. While John admires Nina's freedom to come and go as she pleases and the easiness of the upkeep of her apartment, Nina herself thinks she has lost her big chance to achieve one of the important things in life when she failed to interest her former boyfriend Spangle in settling down with her. Spangle tells,

He couldn't imagine her with some middle-aged man, a man with money, who worked at a fancy job and had a fancy house in the suburbs. Lemon lilies on the front lawn. Sprinklers on the putting green at the country club. Was Nina getting old? Was

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<sup>189</sup> Archer, 217.

<sup>190</sup> Archer, 223.

<sup>191</sup> Nancy G. Duncan and James S. Duncan, "Deep Suburban Irony: The Perils of Democracy in Westchester County, New York," *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 164.

<sup>192</sup> Jackson, 7.

<sup>193</sup> Jackson, 193.

that why that life had started to attract her? He had asked her that, and that had been the wrong thing to say, too: Even if she found it attractive, she said, she wasn't going to get it. And if she had ever had a chance, it was gone now. He was guilt-stricken.<sup>194</sup>

Furthermore, during a fight with John, Nina expresses the opinion that John's possessions and life in the suburbs alone mean that he has achieved much in his life:

'What do I have?' he had said, and she had been completely exasperated. 'Pillars at the end of my driveway,' he had smiled. 'What else?'  
'Acres of land. Children. A big house. Try to *realize* what you have.'<sup>195</sup>  
'Because you pretend your house is *nothing*, that *all* of it is nothing, and I know it isn't true.'<sup>196</sup>

However, in the account of the Knapp family life, we find criticism of these ideals. We have already seen earlier how Louise Knapp thinks that in spite of the beautiful surroundings, the family does not seem to be happy. John finds a cramped city apartment cosier than his big house in the suburbs and even the children find suburban life boring. Perhaps the most ironic criticism of the ideals of home ownership comes from John when he speculates on why Nina likes him: "She's seen what a good job I've done making a life for myself, and she probably thinks she can learn from me. Give her an idea about how to be loyal to the person you marry, how to raise children – things like that."<sup>197</sup> This comment is introduced in the novel at a time when it has become evident that both John and Louise are unhappy in the marriage, John is having an affair in the city and living with his mother during the week in a suburb closer to the city for convenience's sake, Mary is doing poorly at school and is angry at everyone around her, and John Joel, playing with his friend's father's gun, has just accidentally shot Mary in the stomach, putting her in a hospital and himself in intense therapy. Thus, in addition to presenting the ideals of home ownership as a road to success, John's comment and

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<sup>194</sup> Beattie, 270.

<sup>195</sup> Beattie, 323.

<sup>196</sup> Beattie, 324.

<sup>197</sup> Beattie, 274.

its context also introduce the counter-argument that home ownership and family life in the suburbs along with it are not sufficient conditions for a fulfilling life in and of themselves.

Comparing the anti-suburban criticism concerning the ideal of home ownership in the United States and in Australia, it is evident that they are based on fairly different cultural virtues. In Australia, starting a home meets the conditions for being a good Australian and following the proper path to adulthood. In the United States, in spite of peer pressure being naturally also strong, home ownership and familism are perceived more as personal choices and individual successes or failures. However, if we compare the above analysis of *Tirra Lirra by the River* and *Falling in Place*, these differences lose their meaning: for the people living in the suburbs as well as for those who aim to live there, a house is an important sign of wealth and affluence, but not necessarily a guarantee of happiness for anyone.

The importance of demonstrating affluence and success brings us to another common theme in Australian anti-suburbanism that concerns economic prosperity: suburbia as a site of consumption. According to Roger Silverstone, suburban culture is essentially a consuming culture for it is consumerism that makes suburbia “a life of style.”<sup>198</sup> Here the polar opposites of city and suburb and work and leisure become especially important: along with the industrialisation and suburbanisation of society, the city has become a place of work and production while the suburb represents the sphere of leisure time and consumption. In other words, as opposed to the city, where the work is done, in suburbia the well-deserving suburbanite can enjoy the fruits of his labour: new curtains can be bought, the new car is washed every Sunday, and the wife gets a new dress made when the bonuses are paid. This division has left men and women in highly differentiated positions. While men have been the active party which produces the prosperity that is to bring respectability in the suburbs, women have been reduced to a passive role of domestic consumption which is designed to

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<sup>198</sup> Silverstone, 8.

display status and membership of a certain community but also to express familial privacy and the uniqueness of each family.<sup>199</sup> Gary Cross mentions that consumerism was particularly significant during the Depression of the 1930s: as money was short, public displays of prosperity became all the more important for the social status of suburban couples.<sup>200</sup> While Cross considers predominantly the American consumer culture of the suburbs in his article, he also mentions that consumerism and similar gender roles of producer and consumer are also prevalent in Australia.<sup>201</sup> This is supported by Fiske, Hodge and Turner who state that in Australia as well, consumption as a suburban leisure activity constructs both a personal and a social identity through the display of certain commodities.<sup>202</sup>

*Tirra Lirra by the River* offers several examples of suburbia as a site of consumption. Perhaps the most stereotypical display of suburban consumerism is Nora's account of her and Colin's new car in the 1930s:

He bought a Dodge motor car, and every Sunday morning he cleaned and polished it on the driveway near the front gate. I think the closest I ever came to attacking him physically was one Sunday afternoon, when, as I got into the front seat beside him, he said in one of his genial outbursts, 'Well, Mrs Porteous, aren't you proud of your nice clean car?' On most Sunday afternoons, he would take Una Porteous and me to visit those of his relatives who had not suffered too badly in the Depression.<sup>203</sup>

In this passage, we can see how Colin uses his new car as a display of prosperity during the Depression and equates himself to other affluent people by carefully picking only some relatives to visit with his new car. As usual in the novel, an opposing argument is also presented as Nora articulates her discontent with such suburban pleasures. On the other hand, in the novel, Nora is also heard lamenting her limited possibilities to purchase new goods to

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<sup>199</sup> Cross, 116-118. See also Alison J. Clarke, "Tupperware: Suburbia, Sociality and Mass Consumption," *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 132-133 for discussion on women's passive role as consumers.

<sup>200</sup> Cross, 120-121.

<sup>201</sup> Cross, 123.

<sup>202</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner, 96.

<sup>203</sup> Anderson, 85.

make their home better. She has to ask permission from Colin for all purchases and later, is denied all use of money while Una takes care of the shopping for the family. As consumerism at this time represented respectability in the suburbs, the removal of money deprives Nora of all the domestic power a housewife usually has. As a consequence, Nora starts to slyly steal coins from Una and Colin to be able to buy lottery tickets and dream of new wealth all of her own and consequently, of gaining power over her life again. What makes this behaviour from Nora's part particularly significant is the mention of a Sydney newspaper where cartoons and humorous articles regularly showed housewives stealing from their husbands: "the popular acceptance of these jokes suggests that in Australia I had many sisters in petty theft."<sup>204</sup> This clearly demonstrates the reduction of power which resulted from the regulation of the money available for women to use in the suburbs and accentuates the prominent role of consumerism and shopping in suburban life.

While *Falling in Place* largely displays similar consumerist ideals to *Tirra Lirra by the River* and assigns in the Knapp family John to the active power of production and Louise to the passive role of a consumer in the suburbs, in *Mister Sandman* we can find strikingly different ideas of work and consuming. For instance, in the Canary family, even if it is predominantly Gordon who makes the money, it is Doris who takes all care of spending the money. In fact, Gordon remains completely unaware of the financial state of the family and it is Gordon whose weekly spending money is regulated, not Doris as perhaps the Australian and American ideals of suburban consumerism would suggest. Furthermore, the novel depicts also the daughters of the Canary family as producers as much as consumers, albeit in different ways. Marcy quickly develops a career in a city employment agency and makes, and spends, money herself. Sonja, on the other hand, stays at home in the suburbs but works from there first sorting bobby pins and later knitting, making even more money than Marcy in the city.

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<sup>204</sup> Anderson, 80.

But contrary to Marcy, she does not spend her money but saves it meticulously, thus gaining the power to consume but choosing not to use it. Although these descriptions of women being in control of money create a picture opposite to the traditional view of the suburbs and allow women much more financial power than usual, on further consideration they do nevertheless seem to fit in also with the view held by J. M. Bumsted that continued economic affluence has been one of the most important expectations of Canadian suburbia along with home and family.<sup>205</sup> For example, Marcy's conspicuous consumption in the city could be interpreted as a display of affluence that the Canary family could never afford in her suburban childhood home. Similarly, Sonja's large unused savings and her staying at home can be viewed as a reinforcement of the level of affluence already achieved by the Canary family: if needed, Sonja will help her parents financially in order to maintain the standard of living she is accustomed to. Also, when viewed as a suburban novel, it is significant that money is considered such a central element in *Mister Sandman*: by highlighting the fact that the Canary daughters have managed to accumulate fortunes of their own so easily and contrasting this affluence with the Canary family's earlier lack of wealth, the novel draws attention to the ideal that in suburbia, affluence and its display in consumerism are considered important even by those to whom these ideals seem trivial at first glance. To a degree, this is also portrayed in *Tirra Lirra by the River*: although Nora never considers fulfilling the expectations of suburbia particularly important, she does take pleasure in riding to the city to buy curtains and bedcovers and later, after the divorce, when actually living in the city, in being able to spend money on interior decorations and fancy food. Thus, despite the different patterns and gender roles of consuming portrayed in *Mister Sandman* and *Tirra Lirra by the River*, they both seem to argue that consumerism is a deeply ingrained value of the suburbs despite its ability to rob women of the only domestic power they have in the suburbs. Also, this account of

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<sup>205</sup> Bumsted, 26- .

consumerism in the suburbs affirms the conformity and homogeneity that have been the objects of much criticism in Australian literature: amid the chequerboard-like neighbourhood there live bourgeois women who are above all concerned with their own affluence and appearances, and the newcomers are also taught to conform to the manners and rituals of this society, no matter what their individual aspirations may originally be.

An issue which is obviously related to the stress on economic prosperity and consumerism in suburbia is the importance of work. In order to attain the affluence required for respectability, one needs honest work, which according to the suburban stereotype has traditionally meant jobs in white-collar occupations. This is illustrated in *Tirra Lirra by the River*. Colin Porteous is a lawyer with a permanent position, which makes him “Prince Charming himself” according to Nora’s sister, Grace.<sup>206</sup> Also, Bruce Rainbow, the husband of Dorothy Rainbow and the father of a seemingly perfect middle-class family living in its own house, works as a clerk at the “Rural Bank”, presenting the stereotype of a middle-class white-collar occupation.<sup>207</sup> This image of respectable work is strengthened by the description of Nora’s friends from the apartment building in the Sydney Harbour. Most of the inhabitants are artists or artisans who according to Colin are not worth knowing: “I don’t like that mob over there. . . If you ask me, they’re pretty queer.”<sup>208</sup> The most powerful example of unacceptable characters in Sydney is Lewie Johns, one of the Sydney Harbour inhabitants, who is an unemployed artist. Combined with other traits considered unacceptable in the eyes of the suburban bourgeoisie, such as homosexuality, Lewie represents the epitome of the lack of respectability: Colin considers him lazy and unusual in the most hostile sense of the word.<sup>209</sup> Unlike Colin, however, Nora never quite seems to accept the values attached to proper breadwinning jobs. For instance, although she worries about Lewie and his well-being

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<sup>206</sup> Anderson, 49-50.

<sup>207</sup> Anderson, 21.

<sup>208</sup> Anderson, 56-57.

<sup>209</sup> See for instance Anderson, 58 or 74 for Colin’s expressions of contempt for Lewie.

during the Depression in the 1930s, she also partly admires his life: unlike Colin and the other suburbanites, Lewie is able to express himself in ways that Nora herself feels have always been unattainable to her in suburbia. Also, she cannot find intellectual and spiritual fulfilment in the suburban economic safety, but would rather live in a small apartment closer to the city with its opportunities and uncertainties. Thus, the novel criticises the trap of routines of labour in which most of the middle-class suburbanites live and illustrates the lack of creativity for which the suburbs are often criticised.

This criticism of routine working life is echoed in both *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman*. Unlike *Tirra Lirra by the River*, however, it is the men of the families who are most discontented with their daily routines. Both John Knapp and Gordon Canary work in city offices and commute to work from the suburbs. As the novels progress, both men grow increasingly unhappy with their commuting weekdays. This dissatisfaction is exemplified by the following description of John Knapp's attitudes towards commuting:

Nothing was worse than being caught in New York late on Friday and having to ride the commuter train home. The few times he [John Joel] had done that with his father, his father had always stood in the bar car instead of sitting down, standing and being shaken around, saying that he knew he couldn't really get out, but standing gave him the illusion of escape. When the voice came over the p.a. system and began announcing where the train was headed, the message always started: 'Make sure you're right.' John Joel's father always sighed and bent his head back when he heard that, and then shook his head as the announcement went on: Stamford, Noroton Heights, Darien  
<sup>210</sup>  
 ...

Although expressed by men, this passage clearly parallels the criticism presented by Nora in *Tirra Lirra by the River*: despite the affluence brought by respectable jobs, the everyday life centred on that financial security and routine can feel more stifling than empowering for men as well as is exemplified by the ironic possibility of misunderstanding the train announcement, "Make sure you're right".

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<sup>210</sup> Beattie, 119-120.



Here, it must be noted that this importance of paid work in the suburbs, in concordance with the values of domesticity presented earlier, only applies to men in both Australia and America. For most women in suburbia, on the other hand, paid employment has long been unheard of: women were to take care of the home that has been provided by the men and only take care of the unpaid domestic work, thus fulfilling the above demonstrated claims for respectability. A common belief throughout the twentieth century has been that women's employment will cause children to suffer and deprive them of the care they need.<sup>211</sup> In the America of the 1920s, it was argued that women should not have jobs because it was not cost-efficient: in spite of the additional income, money would have to be spent on maids and household appliances to help women carry out their housework duties with less time. Husbandly help never occurred to anyone.<sup>212</sup> Gradually, the views of the middle classes did become liberalised in regard to working women, but still their income was considered "second income", and they were only "working mothers", not proper workers like men.<sup>213</sup> Even in the 1970s, Australian women themselves thought their employment had damaging effects on the communality of the suburbs, not to mention the children.<sup>214</sup>

These attitudes towards women's employment are also visible in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, in which Colin is highly negative towards any attempts Nora makes at earning some money of her own, and supplementing his income: "Colin held the opinion, common in those days, that a man was disgraced if his wife worked for money."<sup>215</sup> Later, Colin announces that times have changed, and that Nora should now charge for the dresses she has been making for free for the neighbourhood ladies. And "three months after I had begun to earn money, Colin came home with a girl. . . . 'I want a divorce,' he said. 'I want to marry Pearl. I'll do the right

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<sup>211</sup> Richards, 148-152.

<sup>212</sup> Marsh, 141.

<sup>213</sup> Gilbert, 45.

<sup>214</sup> Richards, 164.

<sup>215</sup> Anderson, 55.

thing about money, of course. And then, there's your dressmaking."<sup>216</sup> In addition to the illustration of Alan Gilbert's proposition that generous divorce settlements can be seen as payment for women's domestic labour,<sup>217</sup> it is implied here that Nora could never be the kind of wife that was presumed of her in the suburbs because of her longing for independence through an income of her own. The impossibility of the idea of female employment is also articulated by Ida Mayo, a Sydney city friend of Nora's, after the divorce but again denied by Nora:

'You will soon be getting married,' I told Ida one day.  
 'He's a dear old fellow, but I'll marry nobody.'  
 'Neither shall I.'  
 'You? *You* will. What else can you do?  
 'What a thing to say! Work, of course.'  
 'What at?'<sup>218</sup>

Here, even the woman who has taught Nora skills with which she is able to attain employment does not consider working a possibility. Thus, the above passage further illustrates the preposterousness of the idea of a grown, single working woman in an era when marriage was the basis of middle class respectability. However, even Nora, despite her advocacy of women's employment, seems to agree with the destructive effects it has on the communality of suburbs. When Nora, after her return to Brisbane and recovery from pneumonia, takes a walk on the same streets where she used to meet neighbours in her childhood, she finds the streets deserted while materialism prospers:

Many cars are passing on the road. People are coming home from work.<sup>219</sup> . . . Beyond this house there are only roofs. When I knock, some creature, bird or lizard, bursts startlingly through the bamboo, then the resonance of my knock sinks into silence. Still, I will walk by the river. But nor can I find the river. And from whom can I ask directions? Two women, standing with folded arms talking on a driveway, go into the house just as I am about to hail them. And everyone else is in cars. These cars, so

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<sup>216</sup> Anderson, 88.

<sup>217</sup> Gilbert, 45.

<sup>218</sup> Anderson, 99.

<sup>219</sup> Anderson, 25.

continuously and swiftly passing, change me from a walker to a pedestrian. I am the only pedestrian in all these streets. I turn back the way I came, and as I make my way past fences and fancy letter-boxes, carports and garages, paved terraces and blue swimming pools, I must frequently swerve to avoid the huge dusty leaves, from monsteras and umbrella trees and the like, that hang over footpaths.<sup>220</sup>

This 1970s portrayal of the deserted suburbs is echoed in *Falling in Place* in which Louise finds herself stranded in suburbia but cannot find a way out in her attempt to provide the best surroundings for her children. She feels she cannot carry an intelligent conversation anymore as she does not have any natural connections to anyone: “It bothers me that I don’t have many friends. Tiffy’s my best friend, and I don’t have a world in common with her. Sometimes I just think she feels sorry for me.”<sup>221</sup> However, this is also true of Louise’s relations with other full-time housewives. In fact, regardless of their occupations, be it housewife or real estate agent, most women in *Falling in Place* seem to be preoccupied only with their own missions of baking the perfect cake, playing tennis, or rescuing women from masculine oppression. Therefore, the novel seems to place the reason for loss of communality more in the surroundings themselves instead of female employment. When examined more closely, this can also be detected in *Tirra Lirra by the River*: in the 1920s suburbs of Sydney where married women’s employment was nonexistent, communality was equally scarce despite the common sphere of life as we have already seen earlier in this chapter.

What is interesting to note about female work outside the home is that in the end, it does not seem to be the women’s absence from the home that is criticised but the money they bring in and the disturbing effect this has on the suburban power relations. This can be inferred from the acceptability of volunteer work in suburban values. This is illustrated above all in *Falling in Place*, where Louise Knapp is seen making special arrangements for the

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<sup>220</sup> Anderson, 198.

<sup>221</sup> Beattie, 145.

family dinner because she herself is being a “do-gooder” at the hospital<sup>222</sup> but also mentioned in *Tirra Lirra by the River* in which Grace tries to cheer Dorothy Rainbow up by taking her with to her volunteer work at the Red Cross.<sup>223</sup> For Grace as well, her volunteer work was something extra on top of her household duties: she still takes care of her husband’s dinner every night and plays dominoes with her son after dinner.<sup>224</sup> These descriptions from the novels are in concordance with Deborah Chambers’s argument that women’s work in voluntary organisations is essentially regarded as an extension of their domestic work which supports the productive roles of men.<sup>225</sup> They also illustrate Frederick Elkin’s argument that women are still responsible for all housework despite their duties outside the house<sup>226</sup> and the similar, above mentioned statement by Margaret Marsh that no help was to be accepted from the husbands when it came to housework. Thus, it is aptly demonstrated in the novels how women were limited to the margins of productive society and remained without active power in the consumer society of the suburbs.

## 6. Sexuality in the Suburbs: the Sanctity of Marriage

Sexuality, and more specifically acceptable and respectable sexuality, is a central theme in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, especially in Nora’s life. Ever since she was a child, she has felt very insecure about her sexuality: in the suburbs, sexuality was always present in the abusive advances of the boys, but it could never be talked about. When married, presumably in a relationship in which expressions of sexuality were acceptable, Nora is accused of both being frigid and too active. Later, after her divorce, Nora has a brief but illegitimate affair,

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<sup>222</sup> Beattie, 6.

<sup>223</sup> Anderson, 39-40.

<sup>224</sup> Anderson, 102.

<sup>225</sup> Chambers, 99.

<sup>226</sup> Frederick Elkin, “Family Studies in the Canadian Context,” *Models & Myths in Canadian Sociology*, ed. S. D. Berkowitz (Toronto: Butterworths, 1984) 58.

and gets pregnant. She then has an abortion, which proves so traumatic that she becomes celibate in consequence. Similar negotiations with sexuality are also present in both *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman*. In *Falling in Place*, the problems of finding proper expressions for one's sexuality haunt especially Mary, but are also pondered on by other characters, men and women alike. *Mister Sandman*, on the other hand, is even more preoccupied with sexuality. Most of the events in the novel involve in some way a usually quite deviant expression of sexuality. Among the issues considered are homosexuality, teenage pregnancy, rape and cheating.

Issues similar to these have also been discussed more generally in the sphere of anti-suburban criticism. As can be inferred from the values of domesticity and the importance of family, marriage has always been considered the only acceptable forum for expressions of sexuality in the suburban culture. In fact,

it is perhaps the sexual dissidents who are the most rigorously policed victims of the suburban cult of conformity. Of all the hegemonies of suburbia, it is the hegemony of heterosexuality that cuts deepest, bites hardest, and the reason is evident: The family is crucial to both the decision to move to the suburbs and to the whole suburban way of life.<sup>227</sup>

Indeed, sexuality is one of the factors that reinforce the gender roles of suburbia: masculinity entails an active role of touching and looking while the feminine role is that of being touched or looked at.<sup>228</sup> In other words, sexuality in a suburban marriage is “yet another service that women had to perform for their husbands.”<sup>229</sup> However, even within marriage, sexuality has had “connotations of animal-like procreation”<sup>230</sup> and a potential for violence<sup>231</sup> thus making it something to be controlled, naturally by men.

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<sup>227</sup> Andy Medhurst, “Negotiating the Gnome Zone: Versions of Suburbia in British Popular Culture,” *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997) 266.

<sup>228</sup> Game and Pringle, 11.

<sup>229</sup> Game and Pringle, 7.

<sup>230</sup> Gilbert, 45.

<sup>231</sup> Maiden, 119-120.

In accordance with these views, in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, expressions of sexuality in Nora's life are almost invariably initiated by men and perceived as oppressive by Nora. Her first tentative sexual experiences come from the suburbs of her childhood where boys of her own age used to chase the girls after church and "try to pull down our pants one minute and abjectly beg the next. As we made our escape they would villify us horribly. Nobody was raped. Escape was optional, and for me, in spite of my sexual excitement, imperative. I hated being pulled about and roughly handled. It made me bored and grieved and angry."<sup>232</sup> These early experiences carried over into Nora's adulthood and her marriage with Colin:

I got no more enjoyment from it than I had from the mangling and pulling about by the boys under the camphor laurels, of whose activities it seemed a simple but distressing extension. . . 'Do this,' Colin Porteous would say. 'Do that.' And I would do this and that, and not know whether to laugh or cry in my misery. He was always very amiable about it. 'Well, you're frigid, and that's that.'<sup>233</sup>

Later, after the move to Una Porteous's suburban home, Nora suffers from loneliness and seeks contact with her husband:

Lying under the yellow bedcover, I would watch Colin undress, and as he was getting into bed I would reach out, and pull him down towards me, and sigh with relief at the contact. One night he said quietly that not every man liked his wife to behave like a whore, and a few weeks later he cried in spontaneous anger, 'Look, just lie still, will you? That's all you have to do.'<sup>234</sup>

In these excerpts, the passive sexual role of women becomes quite evident. Sexual expressions in Nora's marriage are dictated by Colin and mainly serve the purpose of having children: when neither frigidity nor more active sexual behaviour on Nora's side produces the desired outcome, she is accused of aberrant sexuality that does not belong to suburban respectability. Based on *Tirra Lirra by the River*, it could even be said that the women of suburbia are conditioned from an early age to submissiveness and attempts at their own

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<sup>232</sup> Anderson, 18.

<sup>233</sup> Anderson, 53.

<sup>234</sup> Anderson, 75.

initiative are not tolerated. Later after Nora and Colin's divorce, Nora makes an initially successful attempt at a pleasurable sexual relationship during her journey to London. When the brief relationship ends in her shipboard lover's return to his wife and Nora's unwanted pregnancy, we are again reminded of the predominant values of the society by an abortionist: "Stop that noise. Don't tell me it hurts. . . . You women. You make me sick, the whole rotten lot of you. There's only one sure way to avoid pregnancy, but oh no, you haven't the decency for that..."<sup>235</sup> This still strengthens the view that women should not be actively associated with sex: all sexual failures, whether they are due to too much activity or too much passivity, are blamed on the women thus leaving women again at the periphery of activity and keeping them in their place with claims on respectability and norms. Quite surprisingly considering the slightly feminist tone of the novel, to some degree, *Tirra Lirra by the River* seems to agree with the view of suburbia: after the abortion and the suffering that resulted, Nora never has a sexual relationship again, thus yielding to the moral codes and sexual norms of the suburbs.

In addition to sexuality within marriage, *Tirra Lirra by the River* also deals with homosexuality which naturally is not part of the stereotype of acceptable sexuality. Colin again voices the values of the suburbs by describing homosexuality "as something vile and horrendous,"<sup>236</sup> and also by forbidding Nora from seeing Lewie merely because of his homosexuality, who is described by Colin as a "queenie boy"<sup>237</sup> and a "poofter."<sup>238</sup> Nora herself presents a much more humane view of homosexuality thus again voicing an opinion opposite to the suburban values: in her naivety Nora first befriends Lewie before understanding that the men he complained about were not just friends, but then "it was too late to be horrified because he had become the best friend I had had since my school days."<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Anderson, 113.

<sup>236</sup> Anderson, 56.

<sup>237</sup> Anderson, 88.

<sup>238</sup> Anderson, 58.

<sup>239</sup> Anderson, 86.

Homosexuality in *Tirra Lirra by the River* is also closely connected to the sexual dangers of the city. In the cities there were “adult playgrounds such as night clubs and casinos”, where casual relationships were pursued<sup>240</sup> and which presented great dangers to the dominant suburban values of comfort and safety. After Nora and Colin’s move to the suburbs, Lewie remains Nora’s closest friend in the city, with whom she is finally forced to lose contact because of the difficulty of the journey into the city and because he is not considered proper company by Colin. However, in portraying a warm and close friendship between Nora and Lewie, the novel again partly refuses the traditional values of the suburbs, and states that sexual orientation or habits do not make a person any lesser human being than the respectable, heterosexual suburbanites are.

Although in *Falling in Place*, sexuality is not considered an equally important issue, similar themes of proper sexuality can be discerned there as well. For example, Mary Knapp and her friend Angela are preoccupied by how to look and what to say to please boys so they can marry money. Their teacher, on the other hand, is seen harassed by various shady male characters but in the end gets quite literally saved from them by a long term relationship as her boyfriend drives away a harasser.<sup>241</sup> However, of the two North American novels, it is *Mister Sandman* that brings sexuality to the fore as one its central themes. The demands of respectability become evident from the very first pages of the novel when we see Sonja, pregnant as a result of a random passer-by as good as raping her as a result of her not knowing what he is doing, being moved to Vancouver with her mother to have her baby and return to pretend that the newly born baby is her sister. Sonja’s sister Marcy is not to be told the true reason of the visit because “you couldn’t expect a six-year-old to hold a secret as big as this one.”<sup>242</sup> Later, the unacceptability of unmarried sexual relationships is highlighted

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<sup>240</sup> Kinnane, 45.

<sup>241</sup> Beattie, 342.

<sup>242</sup> Gowdy, 5.



further by Marcy: “She is aware of the ignominy of unwed mothers, there being a home for unwed mothers at the end of the street where if you climb the brick wall you sometimes catch a glimpse of them in their white maternity dresses, drifting around the back lawn like dandelion seeds.”<sup>243</sup> This description quite clearly states that unwed mothers are to be uprooted like weeds and secluded outside the respectable society as outcasts thus paralleling the views presented by the abortionist in *Tirra Lirra by the River*.

Perhaps the most powerful observations about sexuality are, however, presented by Doris, Gordon and Marcy Canary in *Mister Sandman*. After years of celibacy in their marriage, both Doris and Gordon drift into homosexual relationships outside their marriage both in the city and in the suburbs. Naturally, these sexual adventures are hidden from all around them, but what is interesting is the manner in which this is done. Gordon has been talking about pursuing a promotion in his job in a book publishing company and when he starts spending evenings and nights away from home, Doris naturally assumes he is having important meetings to advance his career. Doris uses equally respectable covers for her numerous relationships: one woman is a nurse who treats her in her office, one is a makeup representative going from house to house in the suburbs and appearing at the Canary house door from time to time, and one is a neighbour with whom Doris exchanges recipes and cooking utensils. Marcy, on the other hand, sleeps around in her teens quite openly while still making carefully sure that her simultaneous boyfriends do not find out about each other. When one does learn of the others, he throws Marcy out of the house, calling her a slut, thus reminding the reader of the commonly accepted opinion. The promiscuous sexual behaviour of all of the Canary family is eventually disclosed to the other family members by Joan, Sonja’s brain damaged daughter, who has never spoken a word but, without the others knowing, has taped their speech and combined their word into a tape that reveals it all. While

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<sup>243</sup> Gowdy, 42.

the characters are initially shocked by the secret lives of all their loved ones, they slowly start to come to terms with it and even agree that they have all been “not unhappy”<sup>244</sup> in their lives and continue living as they have before. At the very end of the book we even see this highly dysfunctional family in a more positive light than ever before playing in the backyard of their house together. Thus, *Mister Sandman* quite powerfully acknowledges the individual desires of the characters that may be different from the traditional suburban values. However, it never allows them to be fully displayed and thus suggests a very high social price to be paid for deviance: to be even relatively happy and lead a functional life in suburbia, it is necessary for these aberrant sexual expressions to remain behind the façade of marriages and respectable sexual pursuits. Therefore, the final comment of *Mister Sandman* remains in unison with that of *Tirra Lirra by the River* and reinforces the importance of sexual homogeneity and respectability in suburbia.

#### 7. The Entrapment of Conformity: Is It All About Appearances?

As we have quite clearly seen during the last few chapters of this thesis, anti-suburban criticism in Australian literature revolves closely around themes related to family and respectable middle class life. Expectations of a proper suburban lifestyle are strict and behaviour deviant from these expectations is frowned upon. The very basis for the suburbanisation of Australia has been collective: the suburban lifestyle has been promoted as the nation’s best interest and individual grumblings should be suppressed. While the foundation of suburbanisation and expressions of suburbanism in America have been slightly different, we have seen that the resulting way of life and the implications it has for suburbanites are strikingly similar to those observed in Australia. What comes most to the

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<sup>244</sup> Gowdy, 264.

fore, then, is a compelling need for conformity in the suburbs and a resulting sense of entrapment which often produces the loss of feelings of autonomy and control. Indeed, “mindless conformism”<sup>245</sup> and entrapment are among the most visible themes in anti-suburban literature.<sup>246</sup> What is more, according to Alan Gilbert, suburban life has actually legitimised the emptiness experienced by many suburbanites and made it seem normal even to the degree that inhabitants of suburbia “were so dead spiritually that they could be smugly complacent about their condition.”<sup>247</sup> Gilbert goes on to argue that this false consciousness of the lives lead by suburbanites is especially strong in the lives of women who most fall victim to the conformity of suburbia.<sup>248</sup> This has been demonstrated in the previous chapters for example in Nora’s resignation to the stifling home conditions in both Sydney and Brisbane, her endless attempts to please Colin and Una, the embodiments of suburban conformity in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, and Dorothy Rainbow’s violent reactions to her unfulfilling life. Louise Knapp’s failure to be happy in the suburbs in spite of the perfect suburban conditions is also emblematic of the same state of entrapment and echoes Robert Beuka’s argument that suburbia has threatened the American ideal of individualism with enforced conformity.<sup>249</sup>

What naturally follows from feelings of entrapment and enforced conformity is fantasies of escape. While Catherine Jurca considers escape from the suburbs a conventionally masculine desire in literature<sup>250</sup> and Margaret Henderson in contrast portrays escape from the suburbs a characteristically feminist theme,<sup>251</sup> it remains clear that escape has been recognised as a reoccurring theme in anti-suburban literature. Ironically, escape in suburban literature,

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<sup>245</sup> Gilbert, 37.

<sup>246</sup> For further discussion on authors considering conformity, control and a sense of false consciousness significant in suburbia, please see Hoskins, 2 and Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburbs and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 6.

<sup>247</sup> Gilbert, 40.

<sup>248</sup> Gilbert, 45.

<sup>249</sup> Beuka, 6.

<sup>250</sup> Jurca, 60.

<sup>251</sup> Margaret Henderson, “Subdivisions of Suburbia: The Politics of Place in Melissa Lukashenko’s *Steam Pigs* And Amanda Lohrey’s *Camille’s Bread*,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 73.

just like the suburb itself, presents itself as a double-edged sword: the suburb itself is an escape from the perils of the city or the wilderness<sup>252</sup> but still, in many accounts, it is above all a place to escape from.<sup>253</sup> According to Kim Dovey, the suburb is an escape from potential powerlessness and inferior status to a life of middle class respectability. However, in producing the desired respectability, the suburban home ultimately is a form of entrapment which in turn produces powerlessness, lack of control and social problems that must then be escaped from.<sup>254</sup> If we look at *Tirra Lirra by the River*, it is not difficult to find examples of both female and male fantasies of escape, both from the city and the suburbs. The novel's protagonist herself raises escape as one of the main themes of her life as the many periods of waiting in Nora's life all revolve in some way around escape. In her childhood in the Brisbane suburbs, Nora immerses herself in literature, needlework and long walks to spend the endlessly long time until a suitable gentleman takes her away to a place where peer pressure is nonexistent. Indeed, when she first meets Colin Porteous who soon expresses desire to marry, Nora's and her sister's first thought is that finally, she would be able to leave the hateful suburbs.<sup>255</sup> As we have seen, her marriage does not quite live up to initial expectations and Nora once again enters a period of waiting to escape.<sup>256</sup> She buys lottery tickets to gain money and dreams of all the fabulous things she would buy if she were free.<sup>257</sup> Nora even expressly labels her marriage as her time of captivity.<sup>258</sup> To contrast these evident desires to

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<sup>252</sup> Kim Dovey, "Dreams on Display: Suburban Ideology of the Model Home," *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, ed. Sarah Ferber, Chris Healy and Chris McAuliffe (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994) 145.

<sup>253</sup> Christos Tsiolkas, "Aleka Doesn't Live Here Anymore," *Cinema Papers* 117.30-32 (1997): 45 quoted in Kirkby, 16.

<sup>254</sup> Dovey, 144-145.

<sup>255</sup> Anderson, 50.

<sup>256</sup> Nora's escape from the Brisbane suburbs with Colin and her subsequent unhappiness in her marriage again echoes Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott*. Nora considers Colin as her own Lancelot who frees her from the confinement of her suburban childhood home. As in the poem, the escape is a failure and Nora's married life like a curse. Unlike *The Lady of Shalott*, however, Nora manages to fight her curse and leaves the marriage, which by feminist critics of *Tirra Lirra by the River* has been read as an indication of an improvement in the position of women: instead of having to succumb to their fate like *The Lady of Shalott*, women are now able to choose.

<sup>257</sup> Anderson, 82.

<sup>258</sup> Anderson, 94.

escape the suburbs and the values attached to them, we have already seen an example of wishes to escape the perceived powerlessness of city life and gain status in the process in Colin's persistent desire to move and to live in the suburbs.

These fantasies of escape in *Tirra Lirra by the River* are paralleled by similar accounts in *Falling in Place*, in which Louise Knapp initially has exemplified the desire to escape the dangers of the city to provide a safe haven for her children, and later, a fantasy of escaping the mindlessness of the suburb by moving into a city apartment.<sup>259</sup> However, contrary to *Tirra Lirra by the River*, escape from the suburbs is not exclusively a female fantasy: in *Falling in Place*, John Knapp expresses an even stronger or at least more pronouncedly articulated desire to leave the suburbs for good than does Louise. Opposite to Louise's submissiveness to the circumstances, he pursues his fantasy quite actively by leading a double life of being a suburban father and a city lover while spending his weeks at his mother's house closer to the city on the pretence of his mother needing help due to illness. This difference in Louise and John's gendered suburban roles of activity and passivity is intensified by the fact that although the point of view of the novel frequently changes throughout the novel placing the focus on different actors, Louise is only described through the eyes of others. Thus, she remains on the margins of meaningful events, her power over her own life is marginalised and she feels robbed of her individual freedoms, victimised by the ideals of domesticity that caused the Knapp family to move to the suburbs in the first place. While Jessica Anderson has chosen in her novel to only employ the point of view of Nora and keep her as the sole central character thus omitting any possible male suburban dissatisfactions, we can see in the several narrators of Ann Beattie's novel numerous examples of the fact that while men in the suburbs often hold the key power to actively change their lives, they still harbour the same fantasies of escape that women do. Indeed, if

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<sup>259</sup> Beattie, 327.

we consider the submissiveness of the female characters of the novels in terms of activity to improve their conditions in contrast with the actions both Colin Porteous and John Knapp take to carry out their escapes, we can detect the more active role men have in suburban life, which we have already mentioned above for instance in conjunction with sexuality. The men are seen actively producing a change in circumstances while the women content themselves with what is offered to them. In fact, it is only male characters who initiate the process of escape, be it for themselves or through their own actions, for the women. For example, both of Nora's big escapes from the suburbs are due to Colin: the first escape results from their marriage, the second from their divorce. Louise Knapp does attempt an active change in her life by asking for a divorce herself but even then, she needs to rely on John to support it as she would like him to take care of the children. It is then again in John's hands whether or not Louise achieves the life she is dreaming of. Indeed, often in the female fantasies of escape, the factor which seems to make them particularly oppressive is the lack of power and control that is a part of the reasons to escape and also the very excuse for the inability to carry out the escape.

This is exemplary of the loss of control and free will that is often associated with suburban life.

According to Jennifer Maiden, in situations of boredom and lack of free will, people tend to develop reactions that look desperate but are in fact designed to regain one's autonomy. These final expressions of free will, which are often acted out in acts of violence or sexuality, are visible especially in the female characters of *Tirra Lirra by the River* and *Mister Sandman*.<sup>260</sup> In Jessica Anderson's novel, we have already seen Dorothy Rainbow's violent response to her deprivation of control over her life. In addition, a similar attempt is made by Nora herself when she tries to commit suicide to escape the life she considers a failure. But even that does not bring her relief: county workers find her in her apartment when

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<sup>260</sup> Maiden, 119 and 122.

they come to fix her plumbing and deliver her to a hospital. In Barbara Gowdy's novel, on the other hand, it is Doris's affairs which can be viewed as an expression of her individuality and her own free will. If we set aside the fact that these desperate actions are usually executed by suburban women, we can also find a comparable example in *Falling in Place* in which out of nothing better to do, John Joel Knapp plays with his friend's father's gun and shoots his sister. This illustrates the argument presented by Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck that violent responses such as this often result from an environment devoid of personal challenges and a chance to develop a sense of self.<sup>261</sup> This can be viewed as a continuation of the lack of alternatives for the women and children of suburbia: while the men are seeking active lives in the city to escape the suburban conformity, women resort to desperate measures as their last attempt at change.

Robert Beuka presents an additional theme in relation to female fantasies of escape. He argues in his discussion of *Falling in Place* and the film *Stepford Wives* that in these two narratives about suburbia as often in many others, escape for women is not pursued as an active, physical escape to another location but it is frequently disguised in suburban women's relationships with other, like-minded women. For these women, these relationships provide a mental possibility to forget the oppressive suburban life and immerse oneself in matters of mutual interest.<sup>262</sup> In *Falling in Place*, the representative of escape in female relationships is obviously Louise's relationship with Tiffy, who unlike any other woman in the Connecticut suburb works and carries an independent life outside the suburb and thus provides Louise with a connection to that outside world. In *Mister Sandman*, the most important of these alleviating female relationships is perhaps Doris Canary's first affair with Harmony, who makes her discover new aspects of herself. Even if Doris does not as a result of the

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<sup>261</sup> Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000) 116 and 119.

<sup>262</sup> Beuka, 159.

relationship physically leave her suburban life as Beuka's argument also suggests, she does gain a more active hold on it and manages to find sources of pleasure inside the suburbs.<sup>263</sup> While female relationships as sources of escape have not expressly been mentioned in Australian anti-suburban criticism, *Tirra Lirra by the River* does provide numerous examples of them. In her childhood, Nora finds consolation in random encounters with Olivia Partridge who seemed to wish for escape as much as Nora did. During her marriage with Colin, Nora confides in Ida Mayo who understands Nora and also teaches her to make dresses, which later proves an important source of independence for Nora. Later in her adult life in London, Nora befriends two women, Hilda and Liza, who continue to provide Nora's only connection to the city during her final period of waiting after her return to the Brisbane suburbs. Thus, it can be argued that this mental escape through female comrades is present in Australian anti-suburban literature as well.

These desperate attempts at autonomy, fantasies of escape from the entrapment of conformity produced by the ideals of domesticity, and homogeneity in sexuality and material conditions lead one to wonder if perhaps appearances and the concealment of any deviations from the suburban ideals might be the very core of the success of the suburban lifestyle and the source of much of the anti-suburban criticism in literature. Looking back at chapter two and its discussion of the various dichotomies that lie behind suburban values and their criticism, we recall that the dichotomy of public and private is considered one of the central conceptualisations of the modern suburb. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this thesis, boundaries between public and private dominate most of the gender roles of suburbia and produce the essential power differences among those roles: suburban men are in many ways fully functional in the productive and public sphere of the city while suburban women remain constrained to their passive and private roles as domestic workers and often feel they

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<sup>263</sup> This view is again strengthened by the name Harmony: as a result of her affair, Doris finds a way to accommodate her individual desires to the social demands of the suburbs and thus leads a more harmonious life.



have lost their capacity to function in the active urban environment. In many critical works interested in suburbia, the suburban garden is often employed as an example of the borderline position occupied by suburbia in relation to public and private. For example, Fiske, Hodge and Turner argue that while the suburban house is the realm of the private, the garden in front of the house is maintained for the public, to create an impression of wealthy life as part of the suburban society.<sup>264</sup> Jean Duruz connects the suburban garden above all to the suburban female role and defines the garden as a female public space which “becomes a compensation for a diminished positioning within gendered relations of power.”<sup>265</sup> She adds that the suburban garden stresses the links between beauty and a well-ordered environment, and high morals. Thus, she maintains that working on a leafy suburban garden provides women with a possibility to display the kind of values that suburbia promotes and to conceal any deviations from this to the back of the suburban house.<sup>266</sup> This argument is echoed by Ian Hoskins who states that “the interior of the house was an opaque private space capable of deflecting public gaze [while] the exterior of the home and its setting, the garden were visible to all.”<sup>267</sup> In the words of a Daceyville suburbanite, “what went on in people’s homes, of course, one wouldn’t know – because the wives were very Stoic about their husbands you know.”<sup>268</sup> Thus, it is in fact the women of suburbia who occupy the boundary role<sup>269</sup> and have the duty of hiding human misery behind “the quiet shared decorum of these middle-class suburbs.”<sup>270</sup>

Upon examining all three of the novels we have been analysing, we can easily identify the garden as the public sphere of the suburban family. In *Tirra Lirra by the River*, the theme of suburban gardens is maintained throughout the novel. We have seen the changes

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<sup>264</sup> Fiske, Hodge and Turner., 30

<sup>265</sup> Jean Duruz, “Suburban Gardens: Cultural Notes,” *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, ed. Sarah Ferber, Chris Healy and Chris McAuliffe (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994) 203.

<sup>266</sup> Duruz, 202.

<sup>267</sup> Hoskins, 12.

<sup>268</sup> Hoskins, 12.

<sup>269</sup> Richards, 98.

<sup>270</sup> Murphy and Probert, 289.

of gardening fashion recounted by Nora upon her return to the Brisbane suburb and the mention that everyone had certain kinds of gardens then. Certainly, even though it is not mentioned, “the best home in the street” occupied by the Rainbow family involves a garden which hides the misery of Dorothy so well that no one could predict the violent demise of the family. Even more omnipresent in the novel is Grace’s garden, which is always her pride and joy and the only thing that occupies her life after the death of her husband. This in itself could be interpreted according to the ideal of the separation of private and public: with the death of her husband, Grace’s family has lost its public figure. With her garden, she then tries to make up for its absence and to maintain a respectable front. In the end, we learn that Grace was not happy in her suburban life after all and also discover that the front garden has gotten badly out of shape: “She had to let the front go, it was too big. And too public.”<sup>271</sup> This could be read as a comment on the private role of women: the front garden was too public for Grace to be able to maintain the front by herself. Also, it can be argued that the ruin of Grace’s front garden is proof of her unhappiness in the suburbs: she did not care much about maintaining a public façade anymore but wished to concentrate on the private parts of the house, thus acting on her own interests instead of the general interests of the suburbs.

While *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman* give less attention to the garden theme, perhaps illustrating its exceptional significance in Australia, they do show signs of the same values of a public façade in front of the private house as does *Tirra Lirra by the River*. In *Falling in Place*, we often see Louise and her neighbours engaged in garden work, among them Tiffy and her husband. It is precisely Tiffy who provides the most apt example of gardens as a cover for private lives. In spite of the harmony displayed by Tiffy and her husband in their garden, Tiffy moves to the city only shortly afterwards thus revealing the discontent that was hidden inside the walls of their house. In the Knapp property, the big leafy

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<sup>271</sup> Anderson, 191.

trees that are often mentioned throughout the novel hide the dysfunctional and unhappy family which starts to unravel when the most traumatic event of their lives takes place in the garden in public view: after John Joel shoots Mary, their perfect public front is ruined and the family is never again the same. Only weeks after these events, the Knapp's decide they will divorce and move to the city thus ending their suburban lives. *Mister Sandman*, if possible, portrays an even more dysfunctional family than the Knapps. It is interesting that most of the events which seem to belong to the lives of all normal families often take place in their garden: hot summer's days are spent there reading and spending time together. The garden is also the only place where Joan plays like a normal child, elsewhere she merely sits still. In contrast, the family members have a habit of sharing their secrets with Joan who spends her days in Marcy's closet and the house basement, both places where no public eye could ever reach. Thus the garden is used to build a front of normalcy and respectability in *Mister Sandman* as well.

It seems evident based on the three novels that gardens do certainly present a public front which hides all kinds of private lives in the suburbs. Based on the theme of suburban gardens, we can deduce that respectable appearances are indeed often what is most sought after in the suburbs. In fact, if we expand our analysis of public and private in the novels slightly, we note that especially the American novels take public appearances and what they hide as their key elements. In *Falling in Place*, the beautiful house of the Knapp family hides an unhappy couple with dissatisfied and bored children. The Knapps still carry out the rituals of a suburban family with its compulsory barbeques<sup>272</sup> on Fridays, dinners at a Chinese restaurant on Saturday nights and trips to the dentist with dad despite the fact that no one wants to be present. In the adjoining house, Mary's friend Angela hides an eating disorder and alcohol use from her parents with loud music while her parents are preoccupied by being

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<sup>272</sup> Compulsory barbeques as a display of status are discussed in Beuka, 136.

perfect lawyers and real estate agents. John Joel's friend Parker reads magazines filled with violence and porn and digs around his basement finding the gun that shoots Mary while her mother is concentrating on baking the perfect orange cake for her friends. *Mister Sandman* similarly displays several families with hidden secrets, commonly through Marcy's various boyfriends: behind the lawns and the picket fences there are hidden retarded brothers, blind aunts who wet themselves, alcoholism, stuffed cats and toy villages in the backyard. Over time, Marcy discovers that each and every one of her boyfriends have something about their families that they do not want anyone to know. The Canaries themselves are obviously in the centre of hidden lives in *Mister Sandman* with Sonja's teenage pregnancy and Doris and Gordon's affairs which are hidden behind the exterior of a happy working family. Even at the end of the novel when the family members know each others' secrets and are able to be themselves, whatever that may be, in the privacy of their homes, in public they go on putting on the same front they always have: "They could be a family spending a day at the beach together. If they were on a beach. If it was day."<sup>273</sup> These final words of the novel emphasise the fact that despite their eccentricities, the Canaries can act like a normal family. This, paralleled with other descriptions of secretive families, presents a view of make belief lives which only seemingly fulfil the interests and dreams of the people living them. Thus, critics have indeed been right in criticising the mindlessness and unfulfillingness of suburban life.

While false appearances and secrets behind them do not rise as markedly to the fore in *Tirra Lirra by the River*, they do form an inarguably essential part of the criticism in Anderson's novel as well. Whereas the two North American novels describe the suburbs through various different characters who present different sides of the same themes, *Tirra Lirra by the River* voices a fairly constant criticism through the stable point of view of the novel, and scatters pieces of information in the form of conversations and letters which

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<sup>273</sup> Gowdy, 268.

support Nora's negative outlook on the suburbs. Despite the perfect houses and handsome husbands which represent the suburban ideals, all of Nora's contemporaries end up disappointed in the suburbs and in one way or another hide their true selves from public view. While we only see a glimpse of Dorothy's and Grace's unhappiness, the novel presents a thorough criticism of suburbia in Nora's attitudes. She is not happy as a housewife in a monotonous suburbia where new cars and perfect houses and children are important, but to the outside viewer her life must seem the picture of the suburban ideals: she leaves her childhood suburban home to marry a respectable man who provides her with another picture perfect suburban home. It is true that Nora manages to fulfil the dream of escape and moves to London to pursue a career as a dressmaker. However, she does eventually consider herself a failed critic of suburbia: she returns to the suburb to still keep up the appearances of her family residence. In spite of her efforts to lead her own life, she never questions the suburban ideals publicly but remains attentive of them, thus pretending to honour the values and maintaining a respectable front. Therefore, it can be argued that the importance of appearances and the public preservation of the traditional suburban ideals and the individual purposelessness they produce form the very crux of Australian anti-suburban criticism as well: it is not the fulfilment of the values presented in the earlier chapters that is crucial for successful suburban life but how well you can *pretend* to fulfil them.

#### 8. Some Counter-Arguments: Is the Criticism Relevant?

Throughout the past decades, writings about Australian suburbia have been predominantly negative. In fact, positive views of the suburbs have been practically non-existent. Since the 1990s, however, there have been critics who have argued that the criticism is not actually relevant, at least in present day Australia. This is the view held by Garry

Kinnane who, in contrast to critics who claim that suburban values originating in the early twentieth century are still going strong, states that the overall post-war affluence of Australia has brought suburbanites the possibility to make choices regarding their lifestyles to an unprecedented extent: living in the suburbs should be considered above all one's own choice and not a fact dictated by class values.<sup>274</sup> Also, it has been argued that anti-suburban criticism has always been based more on images of suburbia than the actual reality. According to Alan Gilbert, the Australian suburbs are actually much more complex and varied social systems than the stereotypes and the criticism against them suggest.<sup>275</sup> For example, he states that the stereotypes of domesticity have never been entirely accurate: the suburbs are not merely places for mums and dads and children, but also the places of older generations with different suburban lifestyles. Also, he points out that the apparent facelessness and lack of community in the suburbs may be the result of ignorance and poor observation more than anything else.<sup>276</sup> Moreover, according to David McCooey, representing the suburbs has been a highly nationalised act: to differentiate themselves from Britain, the social critics of Australia have wanted to find new social problems that would be specific to this new continent. In the process, according to McCooey, the reality has moulded into stereotypes that are above all constructions, not representations, of reality.<sup>277</sup> The fact is that the suburbs, in addition to being criticised as “an alien, nondescript ‘noplacé’ lurking on the margins of the landscape and the culture,”<sup>278</sup> are the place that most Australians still call home. According to Kinnane, it is not true that life in the suburbs is passive and meaningless. He argues that

the cultural clichés about suburbia have no claim of authenticity on our imaginations, that there is as much suffering and happiness, as much crime and passion, as much art and industry going on in the suburbs as anywhere else, except that it is often

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<sup>274</sup> Kinnane, 43.

<sup>275</sup> Gilbert, 35.

<sup>276</sup> Gilbert, 46-47.

<sup>277</sup> McCooey, 105.

<sup>278</sup> Beuka, 243.

beneath the surface or behind the deceptive facades of tranquil streets and respectable houses.<sup>279</sup>

In Kinnane's argument, then, the result of keeping up appearances is not mindlessness and unfulfillingness. The individual pursuits of suburbanites are only buried behind the suburban façade, but not forgotten.

Despite her very strong anti-suburban stance, Jessica Anderson does also present some slight counter-arguments to the anti-suburban criticism in *Tirra Lirra by the River*. For instance, contrary to the common stereotype that the suburbs stifle art and culture,<sup>280</sup> Nora discovers that she actually made the best art of her life while she was living trapped in the Brisbane suburbs.<sup>281</sup> Also, she states that for her entire life, she has always been waiting for something instead of acting on her desires.<sup>282</sup> By saying that this is also true of her life outside the suburbs, Nora confirms the argument by Hugh Stretton that suburbia is not what destroys the individual wishes of people:

Plenty of dreary lives are indeed lived in the suburbs. But most of them might well be worse in other surroundings. . . Intelligent critics don't blame the suburbs for the empty aspirations: the aspirations are what corrupt the suburbs. The car is washed on Sunday mornings because its owner has been brought up to think of nothing better to do, not because suburbs prohibit better thought.<sup>283</sup>

Thus, it should be considered if the life half-lived in the suburbs is actually a feature of the individual, not the environment. This question is further validated by the portrayal of city characters in *Falling in Place* and *Mister Sandman*: plenty of equally dreary lives are lived in the cities at the centre of action contrary to what anti-suburban criticism leads us to believe. Indeed, it may not be the environment itself that produces the criticism. Therefore, the commonness of anti-suburban writings especially in Australian literature according to critics

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<sup>279</sup> Kinnane, 45.

<sup>280</sup> See for instance McCann, *Introduction* for more argumentation on this.

<sup>281</sup> For instance, Anderson, 22 and 183.

<sup>282</sup> Anderson, 93, 200.

<sup>283</sup> Hugh Stretton, *Ideas for Australian Cities* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1975) 10 quoted in Kinnane, 44.

such as a McCooey may merely be the result of the fact the most Australians have lived in the suburbs for decades and there is always something wrong with everyday lives. In the end, it may be that there are no essential flaws in the suburbs after all.

## 9. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to introduce and illustrate the main themes of anti-suburban criticism in Australia and to examine the roots of this criticism. Despite the counter-arguments that have been presented in favour of suburban life and questions on whether criticism of suburbia in itself is relevant today, it is inarguable that anti-suburban criticism is an important theme in Australian literature. It should be borne in mind that it is not the actual suburbs as sociological and geographical facts that are criticised in literature but rather a representation, an image of what suburbia should be in an ideal world. Like any dream, the ideal of suburbia has never been fully realised: regardless of the early settlers' promises, suburbia was not a perfect retreat from the menacing world but instead a place where ordinary, everyday lives are lived. And there is always room for criticism in ordinary lives.

As has been demonstrated in this thesis, the roots of Australian anti-suburban criticism are deeply embedded in the cultural history of Australia. From the beginnings of the federation, the bush and the city have been the main modes of living dictated by necessity. Both of them have always had their sources of heightened emotions, and possibilities of satisfaction. Suburbs were created to facilitate this satisfaction by combining these environments, but soon faced intense criticism. Being in the grey zone between the extremes, the suburbs could never meet the ideal but also had their own problems that were intensified by the great expectations of suburban life. The perfect balance between urban and suburban lives, public and private lives, active and passive lives, resulted in a gendered division of



roles, desires and power relations. Men were the active parties who produced the conditions for the perfect suburban home: there was food on the table, new curtains and cars could be bought and the lawnmower was kept in shape to maintain the leafy garden of the family home. Women were left behind in the mornings as housekeepers, mothers and fulfillers of the family's needs. While men were given their leisure time during the weekends after a hard week at work, the women of suburbia continued working. They were marginalised to supporting actors in their own lives and often were given no real possibilities of improving their situations. Society's pressure was strong: a new nation was being built. This left the unhappy suburban wives no choice but to suppress their individual ambitions and put on a brave front. The appearance of perfect suburbanism presenting the ideals of domesticity and respectability replaced the pioneering spirit that had brought individual satisfaction in the past. The perfect suburban lives had turned into a segregating and secluding everyday existence.

Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* presents an exemplary picture of stereotypical Australian suburbia and of the criticism against it by introducing a series of characters battling with the suburban expectations of respectability. Through the portrayal of the life of a single character throughout the decades, the novel paints a picture of suburbia as an outwardly evolving environment which still in late twentieth century was based on ideals originating at the turn of the century. Through comparison to North American novels, Ann Beattie's *Falling in Place* and Barbara Gowdy's *Mister Sandman*, we have been able to establish the validity of the Australian criticism as a modern phenomenon and demonstrate the fact that similar criticism is indeed still justified. The times may have changed and the physical environments may vary but the values of suburbia remain amazingly stable across time and culture. Anti-suburban criticism obviously is not exclusively an Australian phenomenon as has been shown in this thesis through comparison, but, being based on the

historical background extending all the way back to the start of the nation, it may indeed have a special significance there. While critics elsewhere have not been equally interested in anti-suburbanism in fiction before, critical works such as Robert Beuka's *SuburbiaNation* and Catherine Jurca's *White Diaspora* do show a rising critical interest in the subject outside Australia as well. Telling of the stability of suburban values and their criticism is also the recent interest displayed by the wider public toward suburban themes. One only needs to look at recent television series such as *Desperate Housewives* or films like *Virgin Suicides*, *Mona Lisa Smile* or the remaking of *Stepford Wives* to be able to say that anti-suburban criticism is still as compelling as ever. Certainly, it has been demonstrated in this thesis that it is worth while to analyse these works in terms of their suburban settings since they are not randomly placed in the suburbs but they rather portray suburbia as an inseparable part of their social commentary<sup>284</sup> and thus present anti-suburban criticism as a theme that has not lost its validity even today. Indeed, suburbia, where the early twentieth century ideals of marriage, home-ownership and respectable social behaviour remain powerful, still represents life and home for the majority of Australians, and an interesting theme for fiction and literary criticism.

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<sup>284</sup> Beuka, 21.

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