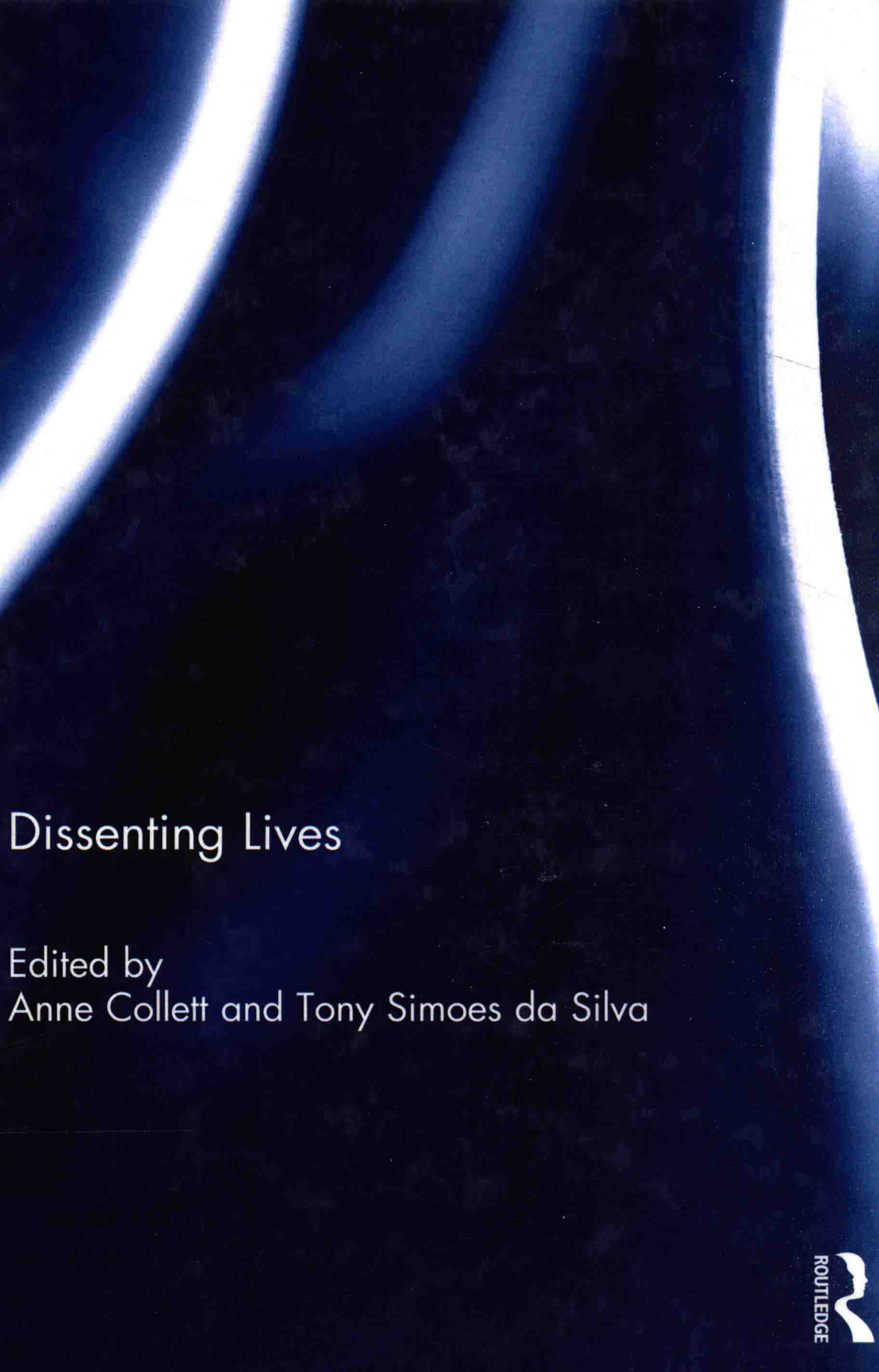
Dissenting Lives
Edited by
Anne Collett and Tony Simoes da Silva
ROUTLEDGE

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Dissenting Lives

This collection brings together a series of essays that combine the public and private nature of dissent, stories of dissent that encapsulate the mood of an historical or cultural period, or of a society. Dissent is most memorable when it is public, explosive, dramatically enacted. Yet quiet dissent is no less effective as a methodical unstitching of social and political mores, rules and regulations. Success depends, perhaps, less on intensity than on determination, on patience as much as courage. Moreover, although many persistent dissenters often gain an iconic status, most live dissent in the fabric of their ordinary lives. Some combine both. Imprisoned at Robben Island for 27 years, his image and voice erased from the print media or airwaves, Nelson Mandela remained, even in jail, one of the most powerful agents of dissent in South African society until his release in 1990. Deep connections, deep commitment, profoundly personal convictions and courageous public dissent are some of the threads that bind together this diverse and exciting collection of essays. Alone, each essay explores dissent and consent in stimulating and distinct ways; together, they speak both of the effects of dissent and consent and of their affective energies and potential.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Life Writing*.

Anne Collett is an associate professor in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. She has edited *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing and Culture* since 2000 and has written extensively on post-colonial poetry and women's writing and visual arts, including most recently, essays on Jamaican Canadian poet Olive Senior and Australian poet, Judith Wright.

Tony Simoes da Silva teaches Literature at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Recent publications include work on displacement and identity as conveyed through literary representations of refugees; on civil conflict and gender in the work of Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; and on Australian film and literature.

Life Writing

Academic Editor: Maureen Perkins, Macquarie University, Australia

Life Writing, founded in 2004 by Mary Besemeres and Maureen Perkins, is one of the leading journals in the field of biography and autobiography.

Its title indicates that it reaches beyond traditional interpretations of biography and autobiography as genres belonging solely in the study of literature. It welcomes work from any discipline that discusses the nature of the self and self-expression and how these interact with the process of recording a life. Life writing is about expanding the ways in which we understand how lives are represented.

The journal has a special, though not exclusive, interest in cross-cultural experience. It also has the unique and unusual policy of carrying both scholarly articles and critically informed personal narrative. It is published four times a year and its editorial board comprises leaders in the field of life writing practice.

Book titles from *Life Writing* include:

Trauma Texts
Edited by Gillian Whitlock and Kate Douglas

Poetry and Autobiography
Edited by Jo Gill and Melanie Waters

International Life Writing Memory and Identity in Global Context
Edited by Paul Longley Arthur

Dissenting Lives
Edited by Anne Collett and Tony Simoes da Silva

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Anne Collett is an associate professor in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. She publishes primarily on postcolonial poetry and women's writing, most recently including essays on Olive Senior, Judith Wright, Kamau Brathwaite and Emily Carr, and has edited a book on *The Unsociable Sociability of Women's Lifewriting* with Louise D'Arcens (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Anne is the editor of *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing and Culture*.

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Amanda Harris completed her PhD at the University of New South Wales, Australia in 2009 with a thesis on 'Female Composers and Feminist Movements in England, France and Germany at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.' Recent articles explore the perspectives of early first-wave feminist movements on women in music and discuss what Ethel Smyth's unpublished correspondence reveals about her sexuality and romantic life. Amanda is currently broadening

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Michael Jacklin is a research fellow in the School of English Literatures and Philosophy at the University of Wollongong, Australia where he is project officer on the multicultural subset of the AustLit database. His research interests include writing across cultures, exilic and diasporic writing, life writing and collaboration, Indigenous literatures and multicultural literature. His most recent publications focus on multilingual literatures in Australia and have appeared in *JASAL, Antipodes* and *Kunapipi*.

Margaretta Jolly co-directs the Centre for Life and Life Writing History Research at the University of Sussex, UK, and is reader in Education. She is editor of *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War* (Scarlet, 1997) and *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (Routledge, 2001) and author of *In Love and Struggle: Letters and Contemporary Feminism* (Columbia University Press, 2008; winner of the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK Book Prize, 2009).

Irene Lucchitti is a specialist in early twentieth-century Irish literature and culture, with expertise in life writing and translation studies. She studied the Irish language at the University of Sydney, Australia and completed her PhD in the English Language Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia where she is now an honorary fellow. She has published numerous articles and a book on the autobiography of Tomás O'Crohan of the Blasket Islands and is currently writing on a second Blasket writer, Peig Sayers. She is also following her work on the life writing of US performer Marta Becket with a study of the various writings and performances of singer-songwriter-novelist-lifewriter Jimmy Buffett.

Tony Simoes da Silva teaches in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Recent or forthcoming publications include work on the figure of the refugee in contemporary world writing, as well as on African fiction and life writing. He is the author of *The Luxury of Nationalist Despair* (Rodopi, 2000) and co-editor of the journals *JASAL* and *La Questione Meridionale*.

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> During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. (Mandela, 'I Am the First Accused', p.133)

Dissent is most memorable when it is public, explosive, dramatically enacted. Yet quiet dissent is no less effective as a methodical unstitching of social and political mores, rules and regulations. Success depends, perhaps, less on intensity than on determination, and while Margaretta Jolly makes no such distinction when she refers to 'persistent dissenters' in her contribution to this collection, much of the writing she examines falls into the latter category. Moreover, although many persistent dissenters often gain an iconic status, most live dissent in the fabric of their ordinary lives. Some combine both, however unwittingly they may do so. Imprisoned at Robben Island for 27 years, his image and voice erased from the print media or airwaves, Nelson Mandela nevertheless remained even in jail one of the most powerful agents of dissent in South African society until his freedom in 1990. This quiet but persistent dissent against the apartheid regime emerged in the post-apartheid period as one of the most effective 'consenting dissenting voice[s]', to borrow again from Jolly's essay. Mandela's life story resonates strongly with the concerns of this special issue of *Life Writing*: from Jolly's opening essay the issue registers a dynamic understanding of the meaning of 'dissent', one that frequently evolves into consent and back again. Indeed, both her essay and Mandela's life story bring into focus another thread that emerges in the issue, one explored in a number of the contributions here collected—the role of the public intellectual as a dissenting voice but then also as a catalyst for new forms of consent. In the words of another iconic dissenter, Edward Said, writing in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994):

> the public realm in which intellectuals make their representations is extremely complex, and contains uncomfortable features, but the meaning of an effective intervention in that realm has to rest on the intellectual's unbudgeable conviction in a concept of justice and fairness that allows for differences . . . (69)

That is no less the case of the anonymous dissenter, and one aspect highlighted in many of the essays is the role of the dissenter as an agent of change, alone or in a group. As we write, political and social scientists seek to make sense of one of the most dramatic moments of lived dissent on the global stage, the so-called Arab Spring revolution, with the influential magazine, *Foreign Affairs,* devoting much of its May/June 2011 issue to the topic. On one level a spectacular performance of dissent, the protests of millions of anonymous people across Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Syria have shown how individual voices came together to trigger change that is reverberating across vast and complex social structures.

Dissenting Lives brings together a series of essays that combine the public and private nature of dissent symbolised by the above examples. Each writer is concerned with stories of dissent that encapsulate the mood of an historical or cultural period, or of a society. *Dissenting Lives* came out of a symposium held at the University of Wollongong in 2010, organised by Anne Collett and Tony Simoes da Silva. Initially intended to bring together a series of discussion papers concerned with life writing and postcolonial themes and contexts, the event soon took off in a different direction. The title of the issue has evolved from an earlier iteration as 'Dissenting Voices', under which rubric these essays were presented at the workshop, and while a postcolonial framework might still apply to reading the texts discussed, most authors have avoided it. The shift recognises the direction the seminar itself took but also aptly reflects the substantial rewriting undertaken by most authors whose work is included in the issue. Margaretta Jolly herself responded to the papers presented at the workshop by revising her own argument, stressing in this final version the deeply intertwined nature of personal and collective dissent.

In 'Consenting Voices? Activist Life Stories and Complex Dissent', Jolly (this issue) explores the shifts that occur in the lives of 'persistent dissenters' as social and personal conditions change, but also as these dissenters age. The discussion considers whether 'life stories help us to understand patterns of dissent and consent' and 'turn[s] to some activist life writings and life stories to show that "dissent" is often likely to become "consent", but not necessarily with any less political commitment and effect.' Quoting words by Carole Hanisch in her essay, 'The Personal is Political', Jolly considers how dissent is performed, produced and consumed in a complex traffic where the act of dissent so often is co-opted into a broader discourse of 'manufactured consent', to cite Noam Chomsky's memorable phrase. After a brief overview of main trends in '[s]ocial movement theory', Jolly notes, in words especially apt to this issue, that '[t]he birth of a social movement needs an initiating event that will begin a chain reaction of events' and that '[t]ypically activist leaders lay the ground with interventions

designed to spark a movement.' Setting out a framework for a wide-ranging discussion of life writing by political and social activists, she writes:

> Social movement theory helps us see dissidents' life writings as part of historical patterns as well as processes. It also helps us to explain how the same person can be both dissenting and consenting, insider and outsider, as they live through the life cycle of a movement.

Coincidentally, in June 2011, as the collection was being assembled, Noam Chomsky was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize by the Sydney Peace Foundation. One of the world's best known dissenters, Chomsky has lived his life on a stage from where he has performed his dissent persistently and courageously. Very often a lone voice raging against the system, he has also played a crucial role as a Pied Piper leading dissenting masses calling for change and for freedom. Famously the co-author of *Manufacturing Consent* (with Edward Herman), Chomsky has dedicated his life to unstitching the more or less visible ways in which dissent is policed, discouraged, denied. As a public intellectual, Chomsky has made the most of an ability to think aloud, to prevaricate in verbal and written performance. Like Mandela, Chomsky symbolises a commitment to the power of the dissenting voice that provides an apt background to this issue.

Indeed, Chomsky was awarded his prize soon after the whirlwind of dissent made its way round the Middle East, its actors drawing, however unconsciously, on the beliefs Chomsky made synonymous with his life; and there too a single agent of change is said to have triggered the revolution of the masses. Unlike Chomsky, however, Mohamed Bouazizi performed his dissent not in the powerful language of intellectual and academic discourse but in the only way be believed he had at his disposal: by setting himself alight in public. Bouazizi's dissent served as a catalyst for a series of acts that have now seen the collapse of a number of dictatorships in the Middle East and the intensification of civil rebellions. In 'Terrorism After the Revolutions: How Secular Uprisings Could Help (or Hurt) Jihadists', one of the many expert opinion pieces published since Bouazizi's death, Daniel Byman links Bouazizi's spectacular but paradoxically rather private dissent to the toppling of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and even to what he perceives as a decrease in Al Qaeda's influence. The essays in this collection all have something in common with these political and intellectual threads.

In 'Detention, Displacement and Dissent in Recent Australian Life Writing', for example, Michael Jacklin (this issue) explores one of the most fraught issues in Australian society—that of reception accorded refugees and asylum seekers. At one end of the spectrum are those who believe Australia is failing its ethical and legal obligations in its treatment of such individuals; at the other end are those Australians who insist that the country has an inalienable right to select whom it admits as would-be Australians. Caught in the middle of these heated dissenting conflicts are the refugees and asylum seekers themselves who have exercised their own forms of embodied dissent by sewing their lips in a vow of silence and starvation (Mares; MacCallum). In his essay, Jacklin takes up the persistence of

the dissenting voice on the contentious issue of refugees and asylum seekers in contemporary Australia. Noting that '[r]efugee issues have been a factor in every Australian election over the past ten years', Jacklin sets out to consider the role of refugee narratives in these fractious debates. Specifically, he is concerned with 'whether refugee narratives have a wider effect on the public debate in Australia regarding refugees and detention'. In a discussion of two such life writing narratives, Mahboba Rawi's *Mahboba's Promise* (2005) and Najaf Mazari's *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* (2008), Jacklin ponders the subtleties of dissent in different settings, national and political, and the internal tensions of works caught up in the conflicting currents of protest, of assimilation and rejection, where the refugee negotiates complex nationalist ideologies of home and exile, of belonging and alienation. Writing with Mazari's text in mind, Jacklin states that '[n]ot all refugee narratives are propelled by acts of dissent' and that 'Mazari has opted to avoid dissent wherever possible.' Indeed, he proposes that '*The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* is the story of a refugee learning to cope and adapt, with dissent playing little part in this narrative of a dislocated life.'

In a move that further complicates the collection's focus on the narrative of dissent, Nicola Evans (this issue) asks at the outset of her discussion: 'Must our stories be told at all?', and goes on to remark:

> [that her] goal here is not to undermine the value of life writing, but to suggest that the genres of life writing might be usefully extended to include forms of anti-life writing, strategies of "life withholding" emerging in the wake of the boom in forms of confessional narrative proliferating across media.

In a detailed discussion of filmmaker David Lynch, Evans draws on film auteur theory to examine Lynch's calculated subversion of the celebrity status of the auteur. Evans situates Lynch's work and his persona as auteur within a broader discourse in which the life of the work of art is inseparable from that of its creator. In the Jamesonian postmodern movement, authorship is framed and authenticated by marketing and advertising campaigns in which the author is expected to participate. Evans asserts:

> A host of extratextual materials accompany the release of films and books like an expanding entourage clustering around a star. Driven by the multiplication of distribution channels and the hunger for more and more content, both books and films come with a generous collection of promotional and behind the scenes information.

Co-opted by the publicity campaigns for his films as a mouthpiece for creative genius, the auteur, Lynch, finds refuge in a playful banality that offers up the superficial self of consumer society. At the heart of Evans' essay is a fascination with the ways in which Lynch simultaneously engages the paratext (Genette) designed to supplement his work and to deflate and deflect its power and function. For Evans, 'Lynch is a master of deflecting the gaze of the consumer elsewhere' and it is this ambivalence that 'makes the satellite texts doubly interesting'. Yet, despite what she identifies as Lynch's mastery at side-stepping

consumerist discourses where the work of art exists only insofar as the author is willing to collaborate in hawking it, Evans remarks on the 'the sheer volume of talk that David Lynch has put on record', much of it *about* him.

In '"The Closet of the Third Person": Susan Sontag, Sexual Dissidence, and Celebrity', Guy Davidson (this issue) focuses on selected writings by Susan Sontag to examine the private/public divide in the life writing of celebrity literati. On one level, an intellectual who came to be known for her iconoclastic thinking, Sontag restrained her dissent to a public arena in which her personal life was a no-go area. Drawing on Jonathan Dollimore's work on sexual dissidence, Davidson notes that his 'aim is neither to upbraid Sontag for her lack of openness, nor to express disappointment that such an influential individual should have proved unwilling to come out and more definitively'. Davidson proceeds to tease out in her writing some of the 'ways in despite or indeed because of her reticence, queer sexuality centrally informed her career'. Focusing in his essay on a juxtaposition of Sontag's canonical *Against Interpretation* and 'a recently published selection from Sontag's journals and notebooks', *Reborn*, Davidson sets out to answer the question:

> [i]f in her essays Sontag implicitly and self-reflexively raises the possibility of an autobiographical reading of a prose famous for its impersonality, what difference does it make that we now have available the journals in which the first person, rather than being covertly expressed, dramatically emerges?

The essay's concern with the persistent tension between private and public and with the ways in which dissent perhaps can only ever be public resonates strongly with Jolly's work. Sontag's refusal to allow readers to see her private self in her essays, despite the obvious traces, suggests how the dissenting voice inevitably presupposes a dissenting life. In a point that is echoed in some of the other essays in the collection, Davidson suggests that the act of speaking out against something necessitates a personal, embodied commitment if it is to be read or seen as authentic and credible. In a sense, to dissent is to out oneself as more or less ready and willing to be co-opted into public discourses of protest and transformation, in this instance sexual. As he remarks:

> For Sontag, queer sexuality lies at the heart of contradictory desires to expose oneself and to hide within writing. These contradictory desires were to be played out in a career as a celebrity writer who barred talk of her queerness, and in an impersonal writing which encoded the deeply personal fact of queerness.

Echoing Jolly's paper, Davidson too offers an interesting twist on the view 'that "dissent" is often likely to become "consent"'.

The same could also be said of the 'lives' of Ethel Smyth, a relatively unknown/unheard composer (relative that is to her male peers) whose memoirs gave her the public face, the public acclaim, and as deafness increased, the public voice her music did not. The act of writing against the grain—writing that put the case for a politics of gender that repeatedly marginalised her

music—became a force for inclusion, not necessarily in the musical canon, but in a literary canon. Although Amanda Harris claims that 'it is possible to see [Smyth's] writing as an opportunity that she came to regard not as merely complementary to her music but as essential to its survival into posterity', Harris' essay reveals the degree to which Smyth's memoirs, and increasingly, her diaries, gave her power over the construction and reception of her (creative) life that was otherwise unavailable to her:

> The memoirs, intended as an authoritative source that would convince the public of Smyth's value as a composer, were designed to have an impact on the current reality of her life. The diaries, containing more nuanced reflections . . . were designed as a historical record which might outlast her and provide an authoritative account of her life for future researchers.

In light of this, we might understand this 'life' as guided and energised by (feminist) dissent, and yet, although this is certainly true, we might also understand the alternative form of creative output as a form of consent. A 'significant change in [Smyth's] outlook on life following her loss of hearing, which coincided with the publication of her first book, is indicative of how central writing was to the recovery of her creative persona', observes Harris, but in allowing her 'to continue beyond the loss of her ability to appreciate music', writing, and in particular, life writing, gave Smyth an eager public to whom she consented whilst in the very act of dissent. Although Smyth acknowledges the significant role her writing played in the performance of her musical works, she also notes that it was for her writing that she had 'become quite famous', and it was to this public that she played in the latter part of her life.

To whom did Eliza Davies play? In *The Story of an Earnest Life: A Woman's Adventures in Australia, and Two Voyages Around the World*, published in 1881, Davies claims that she wrote out of duty and published her life of 'trials, temptations, pain, privation, persecution, and exposure' that others might derive strength and hope from her victory over adversity and the success of her dissent. This dissent not only took the form of a classic feminist dissent from 'nineteenth-century imperial ideologies of marriage and domesticity', but in what Sarah Ailwood (this issue) describes as 'the absence of state-sanctioned legal guidance or redress', Davies dissents from the unsympathetic avenue of colonial law to free her from a violently abusive husband, and turns, in part, to biblical argument for aid. Interestingly, the means she finds to address her problems and to effectively construct a form of dissent that will serve her ends, presents its own difficulties. As Ailwood observes, 'For Davies, the New Testament tradition failed not only in its limited models of empowered female selfhood, but also in its models of victimised female selfhood': Davies records how, on the night of her final flight from her husband, she realised that Jesus 'could not sympathize with me, because he was not a woman . . . He was never situated as I then was.' But the 'missionary memoir', popularised by female missionaries during the 1830s and 1840s, provided Davies with a genre that 'offered women whose experience did not reflect the culturally-approved roles

of wife and mother a model for reflectively interpreting their lives that was sanctioned by alternative religious ideologies'. The 'life' that Davies chooses and constructs for her public is to a large degree self-fashioned, but it is also one that draws on the strengths and reveals the weakness of the various competing or complementary discourses available. In this case, 'alternative modes of life writing enable Davies to construct a self that is independent of her husband, in text if not in law.' It is in this text that Davies describes the herculean task of investigating and preparing evidence to prove the case for divorce, and the harrowing act of writing her deposition: '... while writing of cruel deeds, I seemed to be living in the dark past, with all my dead hopes scattered around me. Tongue cannot tell what torture I suffered while writing that document.' But her tongue is enabled by the memoir, and although it is a tale of much suffering—suffering consequent in part upon Davies' dissent from husband, society and the law, it is a suffering that will be relieved in ultimate success—a success that she tellingly attributes not to the law of men, but to the law of God to whom she has consented: 'When the decision of the Court was written on parchment, how did I feel? My prayer had been heard and answered by a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, and I was legally and morally free.' The 'life' makes clear a self-hood achieved in large part through writing—on Court parchment, in the New Testament of the disciples and the memoirs of female missionaries, in Davies' legal deposition and ultimately, in her autobiography.

The life of Marta Becket affords the reader no such release. Hers is the most profound and the most desultory of dissenting lives. In Irene Lucchitti's essay (this issue), 'The Other Side of the Curtain', she reveals how a performed life took such an extreme form of dissent as to subsume that life in a fantasy of life. Self and other participate in a ghostly performance of present absence. Becket performed a solo-life on the stage of an abandoned theatre in Death Valley Junction to, as often as not, an empty house—empty that is, except for the Renaissance audience she painted on the walls of her self-styled Amargosa Opera House. Her act, initially hosted by her husband, was performed after his death as if he had been there—offering a theatrical rendition of his absence by leaving gaps in the spaces he would have filled and painting him into the backdrop. Lucchitti remarks on 'the psychological slippage' that is revealed in Becket's described negotiation of the passage between the life of imagination and the life of the 'real' world: 'As she emerges from the experience, life seems wooden while Art is a living thing.' Hers is a deeply unsettling and poignant story of dissent from 'the world'—she is 'her own closed circuit'. Yet, 'while [Becket] states repeatedly throughout the text that her central relationship is with her self and her imagination and that she is her own best friend, it is clear,' writes Lucchitti, 'that her self continues to elude her in this written performance of a staged life.' 'Life is a stage,' writes Becket, in a performance of words many times performed, to which she adds her own reflection—a reflection that disappears into a hall of mirrors: 'Millions of plays are going on at once. I didn't realise that I, too, was a part of this drama. I was too busy observing and recording it.' Somehow in the observing and recording, it would seem that Becket