The Cave: A Search for the Mother’s Story in Narrative Literature

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This thesis is presented for the degree of

Research Masters with Training in English and Creative Arts

Murdoch University
March 2010
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Helena Kadmos
Dedication

To Tricia and Fiona, who for many years were cherished neighbours in their caves, and with whom I enjoyed coffee and muffins often.

And to my boys.
Abstract

The mother’s voice is underrepresented in literature. The mother has been a silent figure, always present, often near, featuring in the story of another, but rarely the focus of the story. She has been spoken for, about and around, but rarely empowered to speak for herself.

In this thesis I argue that the mother’s story, in narrative fiction and memoir, should be available, and culturally valued. Since the diversity of women’s experiences of mothering cannot be explained by any single theory or ideology, narrative may articulate the complexities and ambiguities experienced in motherhood in ways that scholarly discourses do not always allow.

This thesis includes a creative component—a collection of related fictional stories narrated by one mother, and entitled “The Cave”. Adopting the concept of the cave, as a metaphor for the transformative potential of mothering, the fiction draws on the mundane, everyday experiences of a life that is centred on caring for children. The exegesis that follows is based on three approaches to mothering narratives: their research, reading and writing. It explores the emergence of the mother’s story within theoretical discourses around motherhood, and its more recent appearances in fiction and non-fiction narratives. It suggests reasons for the absence of the mother’s subjective voice, argues that women have been disadvantaged by this silence, and seeks new possibilities for representing the complexity of mothering experiences.
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Acknowledgements

This research project would not have reached completion without the generous support of my supervisors. I thank Dr Simone Lazaroo and Dr Anne Surma for sharing their time and knowledge, and for patiently and expertly helping me to discover my own voice.

Professor Vijay Mishra’s meticulous teaching of the finer points of the research process equipped me with the skills to get started, and Dr Cecily Scutt’s writing skills workshops and fabulous “Writing Space” ensured that I stayed on track.

I thank Stuart Fenner, for his love and unwavering support from the very beginning. Additional thanks to Stuart, Tricia Mitchell, Jane Miles and Jo Morrison for their critical readings of various chapters of this thesis along the way.