'I MUST BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO TURN TO THEM FOR TOO MUCH LOVE IN MY LONELINESS': FLORENCE JAMES' EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE PARENTING DURING WORLD WAR II.

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Florence Gertrude James spent most of World War II living in Sydney with her two young daughters while her husband, John (‘Pym’) Heyting, served in London as an intelligence officer for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). James vividly captured her experiences of eleven days in September 1943 in her diary entries. James’ wartime diary lends insight into the difficulties of sole parenting during the war. Although by 1942 approximately one fifth of households survived with no male breadwinner, sole parenting remains a wantingly under-researched theme in histories of the period. James’ diary also captured a difficult and transitory period in her life, and one shortly preceding her co-authorship of Come in Spinner, probably the best known novel on World War II Australia.

*Come in Spinner* offers perceptive insight into life on the homefront and, particularly, the war’s impact on women’s lives. The novel centres on a beauty salon in an exclusive hotel, and interweaves the stories of three of its employees, Guinea, Deb and Claire. Numerous themes are explored, including the sexualisation of women during World War II and the association of this sexuality with sexual violence, personal empowerment, and insecurity. Characters have illegal abortions, are forced into prostitution, and struggle with personal relationships, wartime shortages, the black market and the competing demands of family and work. An overarching subtext is the incongruity between women’s wartime experiences and social expectations; Deb infers this duality when she claims that the majority of women are ‘domestic drudges’ while the rest are ‘kept for display’.

Despite the historical and literary significance of *Come in Spinner*, James’ life has not been documented in detail. James was born in New Zealand on 2

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3 This new, sexualised femininity is explored in Marilyn Lake, ‘Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II’, in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, eds Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
4 Tania Peitzker makes this argument in Peitzker, ‘The Queen of Australian Soap’.
September 1902 and moved to Sydney with her parents and sister in 1920. She completed an Arts degree at The University of Sydney in 1927 and, ‘bursting to do something with my life’, moved to London shortly thereafter. James travelled to London to establish a creative writing career. Several manuscripts were returned to her, and she supported herself through journalism and work as an independent literary agent. Ros Pesman contends that tension between a desire for independence and self-sufficiency on the one hand, and love and marriage on the other, characterised James’ time in London. Her letters home expressed this conflict; when James ended her engagement to Heyting, a Dutch-born lawyer whom she met in Australia, she explained to her parents:

I’ve been positively oppressed by the way I have conformed to Pym in everything and I’m not willing to go on doing it ‘till I have proved to myself that I can make my own life and make something worthwhile out of it.

After ‘falling in and out of love’ with several men, James renewed her relationship with Heyting and they married in London in 1932. Their two daughters, Julie and Frances Heyting, were born there in 1935 and 1937.

James returned to Sydney with her daughters in 1938. Although intended as a brief visit, they were caught by the war and remained in New South Wales until 1947. James received a prominent government job for the war’s duration as the Public Appeals Officer for the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPA). Meanwhile, Heyting served with the Royal Australian Air Force in London.

While none of its characters were autobiographical, Cusack and James wrote *Come in Spinner* to communicate ‘our experiences and horror at the impact of war on our own people and our city’. James likened World War II to a tidal wave where ‘everyone [was] torn from their roots’. Her employment at the RPA gave her insight into the difficulties of everyday life in the general population, and its location in Martin Place saw her witness the heart of Sydney during the war, where ‘every kind of military activity took place and the air was alive with the shouting and laughter of the crowds’.

The social turbulence depicted in *Come in Spinner* corresponds to histories of the period. Historians of women, femininity and World War II Australia have concentrated on young, single women and the vocational and sexual opportunities made available to them. Older women and women with young

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8 Ibid., 80.
10 Ibid., 86.
11 A transcript of this interview is located in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, at ML MSS 5877 (From hereon in referenced as, Florence James, ‘Interview’).
12 Ibid.
13 James, ‘Introduction’, viii.
14 For the theme of sexuality, see, for example, Lyn Finch, ‘Consuming Passions: Romance and Consumerism During World War II’ in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, eds Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For women’s work, see, for example, Darian-
children were placed precariously within the context of World War II: the war emphasised the experiences of young men and women, and the discourse of wartime participation, which connected women’s patriotism to their employment, competed with that of motherhood and the nuclear family. Joy Damousi examines the wartime experiences of wives and widows and, through focusing on the themes of absence and grief, emphasises the war’s often devastating impact on individuals’ emotional and psychological lives. James’ wartime diary reveals her personal negotiation of broader shifting femininities as well as the war’s disruption to her personal life. Specifically, the war devastated James’ marriage; it increased her emotional and financial responsibilities toward her two young daughters while making it difficult for her to provide this care.

James kept a diary sporadically throughout her life. This article concentrates on eleven days in September 1943. Heyting’s visit of the previous week, the couple’s first meeting since 1938, appears to have driven James to document this particular period. While six diary entries were long and detailed, the final five retrospectively sketched her days; James’ initial incentive to document her life had apparently dissipated. On his visit, Heyting told James of an extramarital affair he was having in London. In her diary, James recorded her emotional despair at this news and how she planned to save her marriage by returning to London. The fractured marriage James represented in her diary foreshadowed her and Heyting’s divorce in 1948. Their divorce was initiated by Heyting on the grounds of James’ desertion, yet granted to James for Heyting’s adultery.

James’ diary entries of September 1943 preceded a further significant period in her personal and professional life. In December 1944, James resigned from the RPA and moved to Hazelbrook in the Blue Mountains with her daughters, Dymphna Cusack and Cusack’s niece. James’ diary suggests key motivations behind this dramatic change in lifestyle. It reveals her need of adult companionship as well as her perceived inadequacy as a mother and frustration as a creative writer. In several letters to Heyting, James hoped her move to Hazelbrook would facilitate her writing and allow her more time with her children:

18 James’ diary and papers are held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, at ML MSS 5877.
19 See North, ed., Yarn Spinners, 43.
Ever since I have talked with the girls about the possibility of my looking after them … they have been begging me to do it, quickly … we [Cusack and James] plan to live a rural life, writing, while the children are at school … for the children’s sake I shouldn’t attempt to prolong our present domestic arrangements.20

James’ creative writing flourished in the Blue Mountains, where she and Cusack co-authored the children’s book *Four Winds and a Family* followed by *Come in Spinner*.21

In 1948, the *Daily Telegraph* awarded *Come in Spinner* best new novel. *Come in Spinner* has been in print since it was published in 1951, and it has sold over one million copies in nine different languages.22 *Come in Spinner* represented the apex of James’ literary career—this is perhaps because, as Marilla North contends, Cusack helped James temporarily overcome her habitual procrastination.23 James worked in London from 1947 until she returned to Australia in 1967. In 1988, after the success of the television mini-series, James edited an unabridged version of *Come in Spinner*.24 In 1991, two years before her death, James assembled her correspondence and papers as a collection for the Mitchell Library.

James’ talent and aspiration as a professional writer plays an integral role in understanding the position her diary occupied in her personal life. In her work on prominent literary women’s diaries, Elizabeth Podnieks emphasises that professional writers are acutely sensitive to literary conventions and the diaries’ aesthetic potential.25 James typed her diary, further suggesting the carefulness with which she chose her words.26 James’ aesthetically stylised diary exaggerated a characteristic of all diary writing. Although diarists are limited by the meanings inferred and produced by language, they select the experiences they record, the meaning of these experiences and the detail in which they are described;27 diarists often, for example, construct socially-desirable identities by structuring their experiences according to ready-made narrative templates.28

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22 Bertrand, “‘Come in Spinner’: Two Views of the Forties’, 12.
24 Cusack and James, *Come in Spinner: Complete and Unabridged*.
James created a fictional world in her diary. This world manifested in her memories and hope for the future and centred on Heyting’s presence in her life. The ideal family James represented reflects her concern for self-improvement. It also functioned as a ‘mythical tranquillity’, which individuals construct in order to project their discontented, tumultuous lives onto harmonious, secure and socially desirable ideals. The emotional function of James’ diary extended beyond her need for reconciliation with Heyting. Accompanying her identity as a wife, those of mother and worker dominated James’ inscription of daily life. This article considers these identities separately. It focuses on how James used her diary to find compromise between social models of marriage and motherhood, which assumed the presence of a husband, father and breadwinner, and her daily experiences, permeated as they were with the multifarious consequences of Heyting’s absence. In her diary, Florence also integrated and attempted to balance the different layers and responsibilities that comprised her busy wartime life.

James’ diary played an explicit emotional, introspective role in her life: she used her diary, in part, to ‘stop churning over my personal problems’. Heyting’s infidelity was the most immediate ‘personal problem’ James hoped her diary would help resolve. James and Heyting blamed Heyting’s infidelity on their physical separation. This blame underpinned James’ plan to return to London, and James felt Heyting ‘had always laid everything on my shoulders for leaving England’.

The strain James and Heyting’s separation placed on their marriage was symptomatic of a more general trend. Numerous married couples were separated during the war, and the war’s impact on lives and identities encouraged an emotional distancing between them. Infidelity, or fear thereof, also increased during World War II: a rampant sexuality was combined with combat experience to symbolise ‘true manhood’; relationships between Australian women and American servicemen abounded in public discourse; and between 1945 and 1946, over one-third of venereal disease patients were married.

While the war often engendered physical and emotional distance between married couples, the turbulence of war also, paradoxically, often increased the need for personal intimacy. The expectation of personal intimacy between married couples was further encouraged in the modern, companionate model of marriage. Companionate marriage was defined by an independently negotiated, intimate and sexual relationship between husbands and wives;

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29 Ros Pesman also notes this preoccupation. See Pesman, ‘In Search of Self, Love and a Career’, 78-80.
30 The idea of a ‘mythical tranquillity’ is taken from Damousi, The Labour of Loss.
31 James, ‘Diary’, 03.09.1943.
32 Ibid., 18.09.1943.
33 As already noted, male breadwinners were absent from approximately one-fifth of households by 1942. See Darian-Smith, On the Home Front, 120. Wartime separation has not received significant historical attention. For an overview of the war’s impact on marriages, see White, ‘War and Australian Society’, 414-6.
during World War II, it was gradually replacing the institutional model, where marital roles were defined by convention and maintained by community and kinship pressures.\(^{37}\) Divorce statistics increased for a short period immediately after World War II. These statistics testify to the move from institutional to companionate marriage. The figures also demonstrate that the war often made this personal dynamic difficult to maintain.\(^{38}\)

James' diary entries indicate that the level of personal intimacy expected in companionate marriage deepened the affect Heyting's affair had on their marriage. James craved an emotional connection with Heyting, writing in her diary:

> On Monday morning we [James, Julie and Frances] saw him [Heyting] off … somewhat hurried at the end, quite without personal touch for any of us. Yesterday we received his first letter—to all three of us, a note of acknowledgment, nothing personal. And … remembering his words, ‘Now that we have talked this thing out it will be easier to write personal letters to you’, [I] wept weakly with disappointment.\(^{39}\)

James’ diary gave her an outlet to express the emotions engendered by her separation from Heyting, his recent visit and the news of his infidelity. Her diary recorded her despair and uncontrollable sadness:

> All the afternoon the tears kept rising to my eyes … and although I went to bed weary at 9 by 11 I was awake and for the rest of the night every point of our talks kept turning over and over in my head … finally [I] lay down on my bed and gave myself up to misery.\(^{40}\)

James felt irritable and irrational, and she berated herself for the emotional energy she expended on her marriage: she assured Heyting, ‘There won’t be any more break downs’,\(^{41}\) and she felt ‘obsessed’,\(^{42}\) ‘weak and foolish’,\(^{43}\) and that the ‘feelings got the better of my judgment’.\(^{44}\)

An idealised representation of married life accompanied this troubled depiction. This representation existed most consistently in letters to Heyting that James transcribed in her diary. Heyting was stationed in Brisbane for two weeks before returning to London. James hoped to meet him in Brisbane without Julie and Frances, and outlined this intention to Heyting using the


\(^{38}\) For analysis of divorce statistics, see White, ‘War and Australian Society’, 414.

\(^{39}\) James, ‘Diary’, 14.09.1943.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 13.09.1943.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 13.09.1943.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 14.09.1943.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 20.09.1943.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 14.09.1943.
language of personal and sexual intimacy that characterised companionate marriage:

Evenings are lonely my dear, but morning brings courage … I want so desperately to be with you until you go. Just to share in quiet content your off duty hours for a few days would be heaven … I love you with my whole heart.\textsuperscript{45}

The discrepancy between the marriages James depicted in her letters and diary reflected the different function of these genres. Wartime letters helped cement and nurture relationships, and servicemen’s wives were encouraged to write with ‘mental, spiritual, companionable seduction’.\textsuperscript{46} James crafted her letters carefully. She drafted them over several days; on four consecutive days she: ‘Tried to write to Pym but had no clear sense of direction’;\textsuperscript{47} ‘wrote draft after draft of letter to Pym until 11:30’;\textsuperscript{48} ‘Obsessed with letter. Spent whole day on writing and reading’;\textsuperscript{49} ‘letter still on my mind’.\textsuperscript{50} James censored the content of her letters to Heyting, partially because of her ‘nagging feeling that any personal sentiment in my letters is extremely unwise at the moment’.\textsuperscript{51} The intimate language James employed in her letters may have aimed at reigniting the romance between her and Heyting, whereas James appeared to use her diary to achieve personal resolve.

The marriage James represented in her letters to Heyting was not, however, solely for his benefit. By quoting letters in her diary, James blurred the distinction between these genres and underlined their personal significance. James’ idealised representation of marriage existed elsewhere in her diary, taking the form of memories and a projected future: James longed for the ‘husband … whom I knew in our early married days and whom I had always loved’\textsuperscript{52} and hoped her journey to London would realign her marriage with these memories.\textsuperscript{53} By projecting the present turbulence of her marriage onto an ideal future with Heyting in Brisbane and later London, James could devise active steps to improve her life: she planned to organise childcare and transport to farewell Heyting in Brisbane and save money to travel to London. James was conscious of this active role and its emotional function: she found ‘waiting the hardest of all for me’,\textsuperscript{54} and believed ‘making a plan for myself and putting all my energy behind it is the only way for me to keep sane’.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 14.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{46} American fashion writer Ethel Gorham in Dominic J. Capeci, “‘Never Leave Me’: The Wartime Correspondence of Peg and George Edwards, 1944 to 1945’, \textit{Michigan Historical Review} 27, no. 12 (Fall, 2001): 97. Also see Damousi, \textit{The Labour of Loss}, 108.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., ‘Diary’, 19.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 20.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 21.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 22.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 14.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 18.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 13.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 12.09.1943.
\textsuperscript{55} Letter to Pym quoted in her diary, ibid., 13.09.1943.
The extent that James used her diary to express her emotional response to Heyting’s affair and devise plans to improve her troubled marriage reflected the absence of support within her home environment. James lived alone with her eight and six year old daughters, Julie and Frances. Although James received ‘joy’ and comfort from her children, this support caused James considerable guilt:

Have tried to keep my own misery from the children, successfully so far as weeping goes, but they have been so tender and loving … I must be very careful not to turn to them for too much love in my loneliness—but I get so much joy from them and they are so tender and responsive that I find it very hard to play a sufficiently detached part for their good.  

As a place where James expressed her feelings without remorse, her diary performed the role of someone with whom she was in intimate contact.

Living alone with Julie and Frances made it difficult for James to play the selfless, supportive role expected of mothers. James often reversed the nurturer/nurtured paradigm of the mother-child relationship in her diary. The stress of her marital problems also made James irritable and easily frustrated with her children: ‘I didn’t realise how nervously strung up I was until I got home and found myself impatient with the children, tears, and everyone distraught. Julie got my bed ready for me’.

The additional emotional care Julie and Frances required because of Heyting’s absence compounded James’ sensitivity toward her reliance on them. Children often suffered from their father’s absence during war, commonly because of their disrupted family lives or fear of their father’s death or abandonment. Frances and Julie felt Heyting’s loss acutely because of his recent visit, and James ‘could hardly bear’ their distress:

All this week, it has been Julie who has missed Pym so bitterly, the first two mornings she wept when she woke up and at night she cried herself to sleep. But it was Frances today who broke down … I found Julie comforting a weeping little Frances who was sobbing, ‘I want Daddy, I want Daddy’.

The emotional needs of children added further pressure on sole parents, who grappled with their own loneliness and wartime shortages on medical facilities,

56 Ibid., 13.09.1943.
57 Ibid., 12.09.1943.
59 For mothers and motherhood during World War II see Kate Darian-Smith, A City in War: The Home Front in Melbourne 1939-1945 (PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1987), 55-76.
60 James, ‘Diary’, 17.09.1943.
61 Capeci, “‘Never Leave Me’”, 94.
62 James, ‘Diary’, 18.09.1943.
63 Ibid., 12.09.1943.
food and other household items; one woman, for example, remembered her husband’s wartime absence as leaving a ‘terrible hole’ in her life. James was sensitive to the difficulty of coping with the transformed domestic circumstances of war, and, together with Cusack, communicated this through a central character in *Come in Spinner*:

> When men get into the Services they just shelve all their personal responsibilities and women have to take them on. We’ve got to manage on less money, bring our kids up without any help, and we’re expected to put up with the loneliness of having no social life and all the rest of it.

Despite the altered context of World War II, the ‘ideal’ role of mother changed little from the inter-war model. Mothers were encouraged to ‘keep the home fires burning’ and ensure continuity between their family’s pre-war and wartime lives as much as possible. In theory, this stability protected children from the turbulence of war, assured absent husbands of their family’s security, and gave soldiers something to fight for and come back to upon their return home.

The supportive, domestic model of motherhood belonged to the nuclear family ideal, which remained constant despite the absence of numerous husbands and fathers during the war. James ascribed to the nuclear model of family life, telling Frances that ‘Daddy’s [sic] have to look after Mummies, and Mummies look after their babies’. Although James represented Heyting and her children contemporaneously, images of her ‘family’ relied on Heyting’s presence, and were subsequently located in the past and future. James asked Heyting to ‘remember the times when we picnicked with the children and were a happy little family’. She in turn reminisced, ‘Today a week ago, Pym and I took the children up middle harbour rowing—our last day of his leave, or last day as a little family’. Finally, James hoped to ‘re-establish our home with our children’ in London. James’ nuclear family accompanied her romantacised marriage to form an idealised world. This fictive world appeared to give James hope for the future, helping to sustain her through her overwhelmingly discontented life without Heyting.

The inflexibility of motherhood and the nuclear family meant individuals carried the emotional and financial responsibilities of sole parenting without

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65 James, *Come in Spinner*, 213.
66 For motherhood during the inter-war period, see Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day*, 65-83, esp. 79-80.
67 See McKernan, *All In!*, 6.
68 For the symbolic importance of the ‘home’ in soldiers’ lives, see Damousi, *The Labour of Loss*, 107-8; Darian-Smith, ‘Remembering Romance’, 120.
70 James, ‘Diary’, 15.09.1943.
72 Ibid., 13.09.1943.
73 Ibid., 12.09.1943.
adequate social recognition or the accomplishment that often flows from this recognition. Instead, images of motherhood encouraged the guilt and inadequacy James felt in relation to her children. The wartime role of mothers was important and symbolic, yet it was also passive: soldiers, and the women who freed them for service, assumed active roles in the war.74 During World War II, mothers were confronted with the connection between women’s patriotism and paid employment on one hand and the inflexible stereotype of motherhood on the other. For James, the incongruence between motherhood and work was particularly apparent because her career formed an unusually important component of her identity. As noted, during the inter-war period, James hoped to become a creative writer in London, and she viewed marriage cautiously because she wanted to ‘do well not just as Pym’s wife but as me’.75 By associating her vocation with social independence, James aligned herself with contemporary feminism, which connected women’s paid employment to gender equality.76 James adopted feminist standpoints in other areas of her life: for example, *Come in Spinner* highlighted the war’s impact on women, and included the social issues of abortion, enforced prostitution and rape from women’s perspectives.77

A vocation was increasingly incorporated into young, single women’s social identities during the inter-war period.78 James had two young daughters by World War II, however, which placed her ambiguously within the context of women’s war work.79 On one hand, during World War II, several social and legal codes that prevented married women from working in the inter-war period were relaxed.80 Government factories admitted married women by June 1941, and Manpower actively recruited them by 1942.81 The widespread absence of male breadwinners also saw mothers commonly shoulder additional financial responsibility for their families.82 On the other hand, the workplace assumed workers to be free from domestic responsibilities: few part-time options were available,83 and the government failed to establish new childcare centres, suggesting their reluctance to overtly sponsor the removal of mothers from their children.84 Furthermore, media and social commentary blamed

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74 See Darian-Smith, ‘Remembering Romance’, 124.
77 For a discussion of the feminist implications see footnote number two.
80 For women’s work during the inter-war years, see Elder, “‘The Question of the Unmarried’” ; Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day*, 67.
82 Ibid., 120.
83 Kate Darian-Smith maintains that, while the government encouraged employees to establish part-time options, employees were reluctant to establish positions and women were unwilling to accept the positions made available. See Darian-Smith, *A City in War*, 197-200.
84 This argument is presented in Swain, ‘In Whose Interest?’ A similar argument is made, in the British context, in Denise Riley, ‘Some Peculiarities of Social Policy Concerning Women in Wartime and Postwar Britain’, in
working mothers for ignoring their children and the apparent increase in childhood delinquency.85

The military allotments James received from Heyting did not cover her living expenditure.86 James also benefited from women’s increased opportunities in the workplace: her position at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPA) was one of the prestigious government positions made available to women for the war’s duration.87 While James felt obligated to work, and considered her career to be important, her work also gave her immediate access to social concerns regarding the employment of mothers: she was a board member of the Australian Child Welfare Association and wrote an article on childhood delinquency.88

James’ diary gave her a forum to address the threat her vocation posed to her role as mother. In the eleven days James recorded, she viewed her employment as a means of funding her journey to London, which she believed would benefit herself, her marriage and her children: James had ‘one purpose, to make and save money as fast as possible so that when there is an opportunity, cash shall not stand between us [James and her children] and our joining Pym’.89 By associating her work with her return to London, James emphasised her financial responsibility toward her family and connected her employment to their welfare.

Nevertheless, social apprehension regarding the employment of women with young children focused on the negative effect of their absence from home; where young children were concerned, motherhood was associated with full-time care and guidance.90 James’ office work consumed her workdays, and her landlady cared for Julie and Frances after school.91 James’ diary gave her a forum to transform this reality and align her life more faithfully with images of ideal motherhood. James’ work at the RPA only ever featured as brief, summary references, such as ‘Worked fairly well until 4 p.m’92 and ‘final copy of [the article for] RPA, stayed back’.93 Tellingly, James’ activities with the Australian Child Welfare Association were the only work experiences she recorded in detail.94 In contrast, James emphasised her maternal identity. Although Julie and Frances did not figure as physically present characters in James’ record of workdays, she emphasised activities that concerned them:

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85 Darian-Smith, A City in War, 207-18.
86 See James’ letters to Pym from November 1944 in North, ed., Yarn Spinners, 66-68. The military allotments received by family members were usually below basic wage levels. See Darian-Smith, On the Home Front, 122.
87 See North, ed., Yarn Spinners, 65.
88 See Florence James, ‘Diary’, 17.09.1943.
89 Ibid., 20.09.1943.
90 The obligation of maternal care was particularly acute when children were of preschool age. See Swain, ‘In Whose Interest?’ 29. When James’ diary was written, Julie and Frances were, respectively, six and eight and attended primary school.
91 James’ childcare arrangements are detailed in North, ed., Yarn Spinners, 65.
92 James, ‘Diary’, 17.09.1943.
93 Ibid., 20.09.1943.
94 See especially ibid., 13.09.1943.
Busy at RPA all day—particularly satisfactory afternoon. Visited Dymocks at lunch time and bought Julie 3rd number book, also a volume of little children’s songs ... J. [Julie] told me on the telephone last night that she with two others had been put up into Miss King’s class .... Frances went up into 1A.95

In this passage, James condensed her paid employment into the dismissive phrase ‘all day’. The acts of buying a children’s book in her lunch break and speaking to Julie on the telephone underlined James’ absence from her children; they also, however, emphasised that, despite engaging in full-time employment, James was continually involved in her children’s lives.

The competing demands of work and family seem balanced in the confines of James’ diary. Alongside her activities at work and her care for Julie and Frances, James neatly interwove her domestic responsibilities: ‘Chores all day. Washing, ironing, mending until evening’.96 James had a preoccupation with time management, however, which suggests the contained life she represented in her diary belied a more chaotic existence: James hoped to ‘use my waking time to the greatest possible advantage’,97 and used her diary to manage her time and reflect on her day in terms of efficiency and overall productiveness: ‘Have had a splendid day, not a wasted moment’.98

As with many female war workers, James struggled to combine her work and family responsibilities. She later recalled: ‘My war had been spent in Sydney with my two young children … my work … involved me in social functions and erratic hours, [which] often made things complicated’.99 During World War II, women’s domestic responsibilities saw them abscond from work more often than their male counterparts.100 The demands made on James’ time impinged on her creative writing. In the immediate future, James hoped to publish short stories and enter a writing competition; she represented these goals in terms of financial responsibility and career aspiration.101 James found little time to write and felt frustrated at herself because of this: ‘I have done nothing to my story today except think about it’102—‘morning a loss’.103

The subjective experiences James recorded in her diary of September 1943 need to be seen in the context of contemporary debates over companionate marriage, motherhood and female war workers. When considered in relation to social prescriptions of behaviour, James’ diary points to general pressures placed on mothers whose husbands were absent during World War II. It reveals the strain wartime separation placed on marriages, the acute emotional responsibility sole parents felt toward their children, the financial necessity that

95 Ibid., 16.09.1943.
96 Ibid., 19.09.1943.
97 Ibid., 13.09.1943.
98 Ibid., 15.09.1943.
100 Darian-Smith, A City in War, 198-9; McKernan, All In! 213-5.
101 See James, ‘Diary’, 13.09.1943.
102 Ibid., 12.09.1943.
103 Ibid., 18.09.1943.
encouraged mothers into the workforce and the time constraints placed on mothers who worked.\textsuperscript{104} Yet James’ wartime experiences were also atypical. The emphasis James placed on her career during her inter-war years in London had not dissipated once she had children and, while divorce increased immediately after the war, couples seeking divorce remained in a significant minority.\textsuperscript{105} Finally, James’ introspection and her use of diary writing to achieve emotional resolve may have led her to exaggerate her own failure to meet social expectations of wives and mothers in the diary.

In her diary, James represented a life in transition; she yearned for the past and hoped to recapture these idealised memories in the future. James’ unhappiness, her sense of failure toward her children, her repeated references to the past and attempts to reunite with Heyting can be seen as struggles to accommodate her experiences with her expectations of family life: as a failure of social models to adequately adapt to the disruptive context of war. While revealing an incongruity between her experiences and expectations of family life, James' diary also helped her manage the social, symbolic, material and emotional disruption of World War II. In her diary, James interwove her responsibilities as a wife, mother and worker, and integrated her paid employment into her maternal identity. Her entries addressed what she perceived as her failure to meet social ideals of marriage and motherhood by conforming to them in depictions of the past and future. James’ utopian construction of marriage and family life also projected her discontented present without Heyting onto an idealised future where he was present. With the benefit of hindsight, James’ diary recorded her adaptation to significant changes in her life, most importantly her post-war position as a single parent and divorcee. James’ diary also depicted the busy and unfulfilled life she hoped to resolve by moving in with Cusack the following year.

In \textit{Come in Spinner}, Cusack and James represented the acute personal and more general turbulence of war in vivid and sympathetic detail. From the busy, unfulfilled and insecure life James depicted in her diary, it is not difficult to see how James helped create this world. Representations of wartime life such as that found in \textit{Come in Spinner} would have given James social mediums to compare and help validate her experiences. The incongruence between daily life and social models, and the emotional and psychological impact of wartime femininity on women’s experiences give \textit{Come in Spinner} an important, enduring role in Australia’s literary history and histories of World War II Australia. James’ diary demonstrates how she internalised, negotiated and contained the contradictions and pressure of wartime life on a daily basis.

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\textsuperscript{104} For accounts from women whose husbands were absent during World War II, see Goldsmith and Sandford, \textit{The Girls They Left Behind}, 91-99. The most detailed examination of sole parenting during World War II Australia is found in Darian-Smith, \textit{On the Home Front}, 55-67.
\textsuperscript{105} See White, ‘War and Australian Society’, 414.