The Asian Australian Migrant Experience in Australian Literature
1965-1995

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Catherine P. Bennett
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Abstract

This thesis provides the first sustained exploration of representations of "Asian" migrant experience in Australian literature from 1965 to 1995. Since the publication of Mena Abdullah's and Ray Mathew's collection of short stories *The Time of the Peacock* (1965), the number of texts which address the Asian migrant experience in Australia has increased significantly, especially in the 1980s and early to mid-1990s. The thesis examines aspects of this developing field in the context of Australian literary discourse about "Asia" and international literature about Asian migrants in "Western" countries.

Primary consideration is given to texts according to the range and depth of their literary treatment of aspects of the experience of first generation "Asian" migrants. These texts have been selected from the work of Yasmine Gooneratne, Ee Tiang Hong, Sudesh Mishra, Satendra Nandan, Beth Yahp, Dewi Anggraeni, Don'o Kim, Alex Miller and Brian Castro. Many other texts are discussed in less detail. The countries from which migrant characters' transmuted memories and experiences are drawn include India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Fiji, Hong Kong and China. A principal contention is that the literary representations of Asia in these texts have been shaped not only by the legacy of European Orientalism but by the specific construction of the Asian as Other in Australian society.

Certain themes and patterns are shown to emerge in the period under discussion. Prominent among these is Australia's changing post-colonial relationship with British literary and cultural traditions, ranging from Yasmine Gooneratne's affectionate ironic regard in *A Change of Skies* to Brian Castro's attempts to dispel notions of a British nationalist hierarchy in Australia through deconstructive experiment in *Birds of Passage*. A second major theme is the role of politics and race relations in representations of migrant experience, which is expressed in heightened
form in the subject position of the political exile, as in the writings of Ee Tiang Hong, Sudesh Mishra and Satendra Nandan. A third area of significant literary exploration is located in the area of female "Asian" migrant identity examined here in the texts by Beth Yahp and Dewi Anggraeni. The role of "history" in its many forms and claims of "authenticity" are explored in relation to novels by Don'o Kim and Alex Miller. Finally, the prospects for a postmodern and transnational "Asian Australian" migrant identity are investigated in relation to Brian Castro's experimental fictions.

The authors under discussion have adapted literary forms and conventions in order to address the uncertain place of the Asian migrant in Australia. Realist depictions of the migrant experience, such as Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and Dewi Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces* and *The Root of All Evil*, feature model migrant characters who weather anti-Asian migrant prejudice with courage and determination. Different modes of representation are adopted in the more postmodern novels by Alex Miller and Brian Castro, which present the Asian migrant as a figure of modernity and a starting point for a reconsideration of language and representation more generally. In these more experimental texts, the Asian migrant figure occupies a subject position of particular insight into modernity, and the literary exploration of this position is shown to have ramifications for Australia and the urbanised world. The form of these texts and their specific engagement with historiography assert the role of the Asian migrant as an important historical figure in Australia.

Drawing on theories of postcolonialism, feminism, new historicism, multiculturalism and more traditional forms of literary analysis, this thesis proposes a place of prominence for Asian migrant fiction in Australian literature and society. In the period from 1965 to 1995, the Asian migrant experience has provided a focus for vigorous and dynamic developments in Australian literature, contributing to changed perceptions of Australia and introducing a new stage in the history of Australia's imaging of Asia.
Introduction

I. Contexts

The Asian Australian migrant experience has become a significant area of exploration in recent fiction and poetry published in Australia. By Asian Australian migrant experience I refer to the subject matter of the first generation migrant considered "Asian" in Australia and his or her transition into, and impressions of, Australian society. The authors of these works are often, but not exclusively, Asian migrant writers themselves. My focus is not so much upon the reality of "Asia" or the "Asian migrant" but rather upon the contemporary construction of the Asian Australian migrant in the context of Australian historical representations of Asia and the recent changes in attitude towards literary representations of the Asian migrant in Australia and in the First World. The attention to discourse and image construction rather than authorship in this thesis is reflected in the use of the term "Asian migrant text", which addresses the subject of the Asian migrant experience without reference to the author's ethnic background. This approach is explained further in the methodology section below. I shall be concentrating predominantly on texts which represent the first generation "Asian" migrant and limiting my discussion to novels, poems and short stories which have been written in English. Drama is not included because poetry and fiction have dominated the area and the inclusion of another genre would have made the project, which already traverses many new areas of discussion, too unwieldy.

The publication of fictional texts which address the Asian migrant experience in Australia and are written in English has been gaining momentum since the mid-1960s. Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew's
collection of short stories *The Time of the Peacock* (1965)\(^1\), originally published in *The Bulletin* in the late 1950s, was probably the first book which addressed the Asian migrant experience in the sympathetic voice of the insider\(^2\). In these short stories, the life of an immigrant Indian family in rural Australia is captured through the first person voice of Nimmi, the young daughter. Poignant intersections are traced between cultures in the racial conflict and friendships between Anglo-Australian and Indian characters, and the negotiation of religious beliefs and family loyalties between Nimmi's Bengali Muslim father and Kashmiri Brahmin mother. Through a number of the interrelated short stories, the family's bedraggled pet peacock Shah-Jehan provides a symbol of the Indian immigrant's attempts to find a place in 1950s Australia. Nimmi believes she sees Shah-Jehan briefly spread his peacock train and establish an Indian sense of pride in the Australian outback. But a lingering doubt remains that this vision may have been just a child's wistful dream. This element of doubt echoes the uncertain place of the "Asian" migrant in an Australian society dominated by a fear and suspicion of "Asia" and its citizens and this doubt continues, although often in a lightened form, to permeate many texts addressing the Asian migrant experience in Australia.

The publication of Abdullah and Mathew's short stories in *The Time of the Peacock* in 1965 foreshadowed a more vigorous development of writing about the Asian migrant experience in the 1980s. After outlining the primary texts and other works in the area, I shall explore the contributing factors to the general dearth of texts about the Asian migrant experience before the 1980s, and the literary developments and socio-economic reasons for the flourishing of texts about the Asian migrant

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\(^2\) Most of the stories from *The Time of the Peacock* were published in *The Bulletin* under both Abdullah's and Mathew's names. Thomas Shapcott suggests that Abdullah created "the essence" of the tales and that Mathew's role was merely facilitative. Thomas Shapcott, introduction, *The Time of the Peacock*, by Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew (Pymble: Angus & Robertson, 1965) ix.

\(^{2a}\) However, see Dai Yin's PhD thesis "The Representations of Chinese People in Australian Literature," Murdoch University, 1994.
experience in the 1980s and 1990s. A number of novels, in particular, have been produced with Asian migrant protagonists in an Australian setting. In Brian Castro's first novel *Birds of Passage*³, he explores the tenuous place of the Australian-born youth of Chinese appearance in an Australia which harbours a tradition of hostility towards individuals perceived as Asian. The exploration of the experience of the "Asian" in Australia is continued in Castro's *Pomeroy* and *After China*⁴. In *The Chinaman⁵*, Don'o Kim places his Japanese narrator on a terrifying and symbolic ship journey with a bigoted Australian crew member whose racism towards all Asians is charged with machismo. Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies⁶* directs an equal-handed comic irony towards Bharat and Navarinjini, the highly educated Sri Lankan migrant protagonists of her novel, and their Anglo-Australian neighbours and colleagues. Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game⁷* investigates the life and ancestral history of the artist Lang Tzu, a Chinese migrant to Australia. The narrator, Steven Muir, with a mixed Irish and Scottish heritage, becomes obsessed by Lang's family history, and through his historical fictions helps Lang discover a certain pleasure in his own cultural hybridity. The subject position of the political exile in Australia is explored in Satendra Nandan's *The Wounded Sea⁸* and Sudesh Mishra's poetry collection *Tandava⁹*, which provide retrospective visions of the Indo-Fijian community of Fiji from the vantage point of exile in Australia. Ee Tiang Hong's poems in *Nearing a Horizon¹⁰* focus on Malaysia, providing a strong social criticism of that country and to a lesser extent of Australia. Beth Yahp's short stories often explore the perspective of a Chinese

Malaysian woman who has migrated to Australia and affirm the character's cultural and gender loyalties through a maternal tradition of storytelling. Dewi Anggraeni's two novels Parallel Forces and The Root of All Evil and the short stories in Stories of Indian Pacific often address the particular fate of the "Asian" migrant woman in Australia; like Yahp's works, particularly her novel The Crocodile Fury, Anggraeni's fiction seems to write back to Australian popular perceptions of Asian women as passive, obedient and exotic. The above books are the primary texts analysed in this thesis. They represent an emergent genre of Australian literature which deals with the experience of migration from Asian countries.

Several novels which I will address in passing include Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, Lillian Ng's Silver Sister, Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made and Arlene J. Chai's The Last Time I Saw Mother. Khan's Seasonal Adjustments is the tale of the return of the middle-aged Iqbal Chaudhary to his native Bangladesh, with flashbacks to his life in Australia. Ng's Silver Sister is the life story of Ah Pah, a Chinese peasant woman who joins a sisterhood and travels far beyond her childhood village, ending her first person narrative in Sydney. Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made considers the position of the Eurasian in Singapore and Australia from the perspective of a young Eurasian girl. Arlene J. Chai's The Last Time I Saw Mother focuses on a family mystery surrounding Caridad, a young Chinese-Filipino woman living in Sydney, and contains the first person perspectives of four women from the family.

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11 Dewi Anggraeni, Parallel Forces (Briar Hill: Indra, 1988); Dewi Anggraeni, The Root of All Evil (Briar Hill: Indra, 1987); Dewi Anggraeni, Stories of Indian Pacific (Eltham North: Indra, 1992).
13 Adib Khan, Seasonal Adjustments (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994).
14 Lillian Ng, Silver Sister (Port Melbourne: Mandarin, 1994).
15 Simone Lazaroo, The World Waiting to be Made (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994).
A number of other works which deal with the Asian migrant experience have been published in the 1980s and early 1990s. Several collections of short stories have appeared, including Chitra Fernando’s *Between Worlds* and *Women There and Here: Progressions in Six Stories* which focus on the lives of women in Sri Lanka and in the Sri Lankan community in Australia. Fernando has also published a number of short stories focusing on the migrant experience of Sri Lankans in Australia, particularly cultural misunderstandings and personal conflicts which arise from cultural dislocation. The migrant’s permanent state of longing, for either the new or original homeland, depicted in Fernando’s "Making Connections" is echoed in the short story "Alien", written by Chandrani Lokuge, another Sri Lankan writer. "Alien", with its narrative perspective of a recently bereaved young Sri Lankan woman living in Australia, is the only one of Lokuge’s short stories from the collection *Moth and Other Stories* which focuses on the Sri Lankan migrant experience; the other stories highlight the domestic, economic and political tensions of contemporary Sri Lanka. In "Alien" (like several other short stories from *Moth and Other Stories*) the initial mood of calm is broken suddenly by nightmare images linked with terrorism and ethnic violence. The female protagonist’s quiet appreciation of a peaceful Australian landscape is swiftly dispatched with unexpected images of violence, evoking the surprise and horror of ordinary people confronted by guerrilla warfare, death and oppression. Patricia Pengilley’s collection of interconnected short stories, *Midnight Voices*, begins with the first person narrative perspective of a

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woman in Australia who follows up her Anglo-Indian family history at the urging of an eccentric aunt and uncovers a series of mysteries and adventures from the days of the British empire. The lowly social position of the Anglo-Indian, excluded from high caste Indian and white British societies, is poignantly shown to lead "the most influential and gifted Eurasians to take on colours that will give them the best chance in life, they are forced into using camouflage" (131). In an Australian context, the Anglo-Indian migrants of the 1950s are presented as continuing to deny their Indian heritage from fear of social rejection: they "become chameleons" and "'whiten' (themselves) into white Australians" (131).

Although drama is not included in this thesis, it is impossible not to mention the contribution of the playwright Ernest Maclntyre and his play *Let's Give Them Curry* (1985) in a consideration of contemporary literary images of Asian Australian experience. *Let's Give Them Curry* explores a comic and poignant struggle by a Sri Lankan father to prevent his daughter marrying an Anglo-Australian. Issues of racism, the complexity of Sri Lankan post-colonial loyalty to Britain and the conflict of expectations between migrants and their children are major themes in this play.

Occasional poems or short stories by other authors have also been published, many of them using the first person migrant perspective. Ouyang Yu's poem "moon over melbourne" and the poem "that season of white milk flower" by the bilingual Vietnamese poet Le Van Tai are two examples. In Dipti Saravanamuttu's poetry the Sri Lankan migrant's connection to the original homeland is occasionally explored. For instance,

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in the long poem "Heartlands" a boy in his early teens returns to Sri Lanka from Australia and is taught an important lesson about Ceylonese history and family loyalties. The return to the migrant's first home is a common trope in literature written by migrants. Short stories by writers who have published little fiction to date include Tze Ying Hui's "Something That Burns Inside Me" and Jimmy Sadeli's tales of struggling Indonesians in Australia in "Vacancy" and "Plenty of Nails. As I write this Introduction, new texts in the area of the Asian migrant experience in Australia are constantly being published. It is an exciting area, full of contemporary writers addressing one of the oldest subjects of Australian literature, the migrant experience, (which resonates from the literature of the first white settlers) with a new focus, the place of the Asian Australian in contemporary Australian society. The theme of the migrant has a long history in world literature. In English it might be traced to the Anglo-Saxon poems "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer." By concentrating on the specific cases of contemporary Australian Asian migrant texts, I hope to contribute a new chapter to an ancient theme.

A central interest in this thesis is in the discursive placement of the "Asian migrant" within Australian literature: his or her position at the intersection of notions of Asia and of the migrant. A conjunction of socio-economic and cultural factors shaped the sudden burst of texts about the Asian migrant experience published in the 1980s and early 1990s. These factors included, as I shall illustrate in more detail below, changing immigration patterns; developments in Australian literature, such as the

ground swell of migrant writing communities in Australia following the Second World War; the changing literary treatment of "Asia" in the late 1970s and 1980s, by authors such as Robert Drewe and John Romeril and later Gerald Lee and Inez Baranay, which explored the fictionalisation of "Asia" in the Australian imagination; the greater interest in Asia due to a trade-linked desire for a greater understanding of the cultural specifics of the countries (and "tiger economies") of Asia; and the fascination with Asian migrant stories in the Western world, particularly the literary success of high-profile "Asian Cosmopolitan" writers in North America and Britain. Critical and popular interest in books about the Asian migrant experience has thus been strongly influenced by social and cultural developments since the Second World War which have shaped Australian discourse about Asia. The popular success of these fictions in the late twentieth century has also had its source in an enduring fascination with Asia in Australia. Australia's relationship with the region of the mind known as "Asia" is multifaceted; it stretches from a European heritage of exotic Orientalism to notions shaped by more recent historical moments drawn from white Australian social history and geography, and encompasses national narcissism, titillation, fear and (increasingly) a genuine desire for knowledge.

Between 1970 and 1990, a handful of Anglo-Australian writers have depicted the Asian migrant experience in some depth. Robert Drewe's short story "The 'Needle Story'"29, based on an actual incident30, explores another facet of Anglo-Australian notions of "Asia" in its treatment of the public humiliation of a Chinese Malaysian doctor and his family, including a satiric attack upon the media's treatment of them. The plight of Vietnamese refugees has inspired Anglo-Australian poets to sympathetic

29 Robert Drewe, "The 'Needle Story'," The Bay of Contented Men (Sydney: Pan, 1990) 105-122.
verse. Shane McCauley's compassionate poem "Vietnamese Exiles" is one example:

...Memories ride
The teetering syllables of their
Language, wincing as all around
Them our world takes on the camouflage
Of everything unexpected; we sit
Lamenting the loss of summer,
They are naked with loss of every season...31.

Another Western Australian writer, Alec Choate, also writes sympathetically of the tragic loss of homeland of Vietnamese migrants, and the process of coming to terms with a new land, in his poems "Vietnamese Children Painting Beside Lake Monger" and "Vietnamese Refugee Woman"32. In the short story "Yang Jim"33, David Bateson depicts the bewilderment of a young schoolboy newly arrived from Korea. Yang Jim struggles with the English language and feelings of difference but the story ends on a positive note when Yang's skill with a soccer ball and the "international language" of sport attracts some friends and lessens his isolation (20). I include these texts by non-Asian writers in my consideration of writing which addresses the Asian migrant experience. My critical approach is more concerned with the operation of the text than with links between author and biography, a matter which will be explored in more detail in the description of my methodological approach below. The primary focus of this thesis is upon texts written by Asian migrant writers themselves simply because the majority of texts which place the Asian Australian at the centre of their narrative are written by authors with similar backgrounds to those of their protagonists.

31Shane McCauley, "Vietnamese Exiles," The Butterfly Man (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre, 1991) 27.
Through the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream publishers, following a trend in North America, have been gaining a tentative confidence in texts which address the Asian migrant experience, particularly those written by authors who have migrated from Asian countries to live in Australia. The publication of these texts was initially confined to vanity publishing, small presses and little magazines but, in the late 1980s, they began to be taken up by larger publishing houses. However, difficulties remain for some writers. Dewi Anggraeni's three books have all been published by Indra Publishing, which began as a self-publishing enterprise undertaken by Anggraeni herself and her husband, Ian Fraser, after "too many publishing houses rejected the MS [sic] of Dewi's first novel as 'not commercial... ethnic fringe writing... not likely to attract sales', etc". Other items about Asian Australian life have been published in Outrider, a journal of ethnic literature which was launched in 1984 with the aim "to expand the concept of Australian literature by pleading for a stronger representation of so-called migrant writing". Such journals and migrant anthologies have provided important support for migrant writers from Asian backgrounds as for other non-Anglo-Celtic writers. A growing number of Asian Australian migrant novels are now being published by larger companies: Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Brian Castro's Birds of Passage and After China were published by Allen and Unwin; Beth Yahp's The Crocodile Fury was published by Angus and Robertson; Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies was published by Pan Macmillan; and Random House recently took up Arlene J. Chai's lengthy novel The Last Time I Saw Mother. The venture of large publishing companies into the area of fiction about the Asian migrant experience demonstrates that this area is no longer perceived as an irredeemably hazardous and unpopular publishing area.

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34 Ian Fraser, pers. comm., 26 April 1994.
Australian writing about Asia has been strongly influenced by traditional European ways of viewing the Orient. In his seminal book Orientalism, Edward Said has argued that the discipline of Orientalism has been "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". Said contends that the traditional opposition between "Orient" and Occident and the related system of ideas surrounding the Orient is the result of a complex "structure of cultural domination" in which the concept of the Orient has provided certain functions of self-definition and imperial justification for European countries. The discourse of Orientalism has had a powerful effect on Australian literary representations of "Asia". As a result of the Orientalist beliefs of their native Europe, white settler Australians generally had the conviction that Asians were not their equals either culturally or intellectually. On the few occasions that characterisations of Chinese or Indian characters do occur in early Australian fiction, they are rarely sympathetic. An anonymous song "Dick the Digger: A Tale of the Buckland", published in J. Small's The Colonial Songster (c.1884), illustrates the hostility of white gold diggers towards the Chinese:

For pick, pick, it made him sick  
To think that he was getting daily, a  
Heap of these accursed Chinese  
And he cried "They'll ruin Australia".

Even Henry Lawson's short story "Ah Dam", which begins charitably enough with a tribute to the virtues of the Chinese, uses a set of racist comparisons between a fine upstanding Irish detective and a guilty, rather simple Chinese opium smoker. An emphasis on differences of race between Asians and Australians occurs in many of the works of fiction about Asia.

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37 Said, 27.  
and Asians of the 1890s. This theme is illustrated by the titles, such as: The Yellow Wave, Yellow and White, White or Yellow? and The Yellow Man. Such generalisations about Asians on the basis of race were also often displayed in the short stories and cartoons of The Bulletin. Late nineteenth century Australian literary imagery of Asia and Asians had a positional emphasis on racial distinctions between a superior European Australia and an inferior Asia, and a sense of agitation about threats to racial purity through migration and the possibility of an Asian invasion. The legacy of Orientalism, when coupled with Australia's geographical status as a British outpost far from the protection of the imperial centre, has been the source of much racism and xenophobia towards Asia.

Although the image of Asia and the Asian has been strongly influenced by European models, the Asian Australian has a characteristic construction as Other within Australian literature which has been shaped by historical, geographical and cultural specificities. This stems partly from the unique nature of Australian perceptions of Asia due to geographical placement. Whereas the traditional European "Orient" centred on the Middle East- Egypt, the Levant, Arabia- with India also an area of fascination, for geographical reasons the "Orient" that has dominated the Australian national imagination is constituted primarily of the countries of Southeast Asia, India, China and Japan. (In my discussion, I have also explored the representations of the Asian migrant from the Indo-Fijian community and Sri Lanka as part of my consideration of Australian perceptions of Asia, with recognition of the specific imaging of the Pacific). Other influential factors which have shaped the images of the Asian migrant in Australian literature have been the literary construction of the Australian national identity in opposition to the Asian as Other and historical developments such as migration by (and Anglo-Australian

41 Broinowski, 7-11.
responses to) Chinese gold diggers, indentured labourers, and Filipina mail order brides. These elements of the Asian Australian migrant experience are subjects of consideration in the primary texts of this thesis.

Within the history of Australian literary representations of Asians and Asia, an interest in the Asian's experience in Australia is a recent trend. The appearance of fictional texts which address the Asian migrant experience has been shaped by Australian immigration policy. Asian migration has only occurred in significant numbers from the 1970s onwards. Racially based immigration policies severely restricted the number of migrants from Asia from the late 1880s until the abandonment in 1973 of the Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the White Australia policy. Since the 1950s non-Caucasians had, however, been allowed limited entry to Australia if they were students or part European. After a 1966 relaxation of immigration policy some non-Caucasians with professional and technical skills were also given permission to settle in Australia. However, it was only after 1973 that a significant number of Asian migrants began to arrive in Australia. The dimensions of Asian migration to Australia are difficult to quantify because of the varying definitions of "Asia" which are used for demographic and statistical analysis. Until late 1990 even the Federal government bodies ABS and DILGEOE had different definitions of "Asia" based on geographic definitions and politico-geographic boundaries respectively. Such varying definitions reflect the elusive and subjective nature of the category itself and the status of "Asia" as a European construction and imperial stereotype which has limited descriptive value in spite of its continuing popular usage. (By the

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Jayasuriya and Sang point out that the number of Asian migrants has fluctuated considerably with changes to immigration eligibility criteria. Laksiri Jayasuriya and David Sang, "Asian Immigration: Past and Current Trends," Current Affairs Bulletin 66(11) 1990, 4-14.

Jayasuriya and Sang, 6.

Jayasuriya and Sang, 6.


Bureau of Immigration Research, Australia's Population, 44.
end of 1990 the "Australian Standard Classification of Countries for Social Statistics" had been adopted by ABS and DILGEA: this classification acknowledged the problematic and limited nature of the term "Asia" and replaced it by a number of main regional groups, including Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and Southern Asia\textsuperscript{48}). According to ABS statistics about settler arrivals by region of birth, the number of migrants from Asian countries rose from 9 percent in 1972 to 37.3 percent in 1988\textsuperscript{49}. (The ABS definition of Asia generally includes West Asia and the Middle East but Lebanon, Turkey and Cyprus are excluded from this particular statistic)\textsuperscript{50}. Another statistic estimates that the Asian-born population has increased from 1.8 per cent to 5.4 per cent of the total Australian population since World War II\textsuperscript{51}. It is not surprising that this increase in numbers has led to a growing number of texts about the Asian migrant experience being written by both those perceived as Asian migrant writers and by Anglo-Australian writers, and that an increasing number of readers find them relevant and interesting.

Another factor which has influenced the lack of texts about the Asian migrant experience until the early 1980s is that for many years Asian Australians were seen as a social aberration without the symbolic power of either the "typical" white Australian or the exotic Other. Australia, like many Western countries, has often defined its national identity against the region of the imagination known as "Asia". For my definition of the nation I draw on Timothy Brennan's embellishment of Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as imagined community:

\textsuperscript{48}Bureau of Immigration Research, \textit{Australia's Population}, 45.
\textsuperscript{49}Jayasuriya and Sang, 6.
\textsuperscript{50}Jayasuriya and Sang, 6.
\textsuperscript{51}Bureau of Immigration Research, \textit{Australia's Population}, 45.
Nations... are imagined constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role\textsuperscript{52}.

In Australian representations of Asia, Asia has often appeared as the Other, a place of excessive sensuality, disease, corruption, laziness and the antithesis of the assumed characteristics of Australia. The construction of the Asian has thus been a method of defining Australian national identity through an Orientalist binary opposition which places Australia in the place of "positional superiority\textsuperscript{53}, and yet creates a complex dependence in which Australia develops a narcissistic "preoccupation" with an imaginary Asia which is also an "inverted self-image\textsuperscript{54}. Australia's own identity has thus become dependent to some extent on the distinction between Asia and Australia, a situation which has led to a reluctance to relinquish self-serving stereotypes of an imaginary Asia. As a result of the pervasive construction of an oppositional "Asia" and "Australia", or "Asian" and "Australian", the term "Asian Australian" has seemed an oxymoron and the "Asian Australian" figure an inappropriate point of exploration for a society attempting to consolidate its national identity and developing national literature with reference to a British cultural heritage. The literary image of "Asia" and the "Asian" has connotations of exoticism, sensuality and difference. However, the figure of the Asian Australian lacks these qualities in a pure form; when even the most exotic individual becomes a neighbour some of the mystery dissipates. As Terry Goldie has observed from an international perspective with regard to Australia, Canada and New Zealand "The mystical exotic element of the orient is quickly lost in simplistic racism when the oriental becomes an immigrant\textsuperscript{55}. The Asian


Australian is a figure who cannot be a completely "authentic" exotic Asian Other but is "contaminated" by contact with the West. As Spivak has pointed out with concern in an interview, the simplistic notion of authenticity is only considered a feature of the Other (in this case the Asian); "the dominant self" (the Anglo-Australian) is free to be "authentic without a problem, naturally available to all kinds of complications". (Rushdie, in criticising the category of Commonwealth literature, has similarly criticised the restrictive notion of authenticity. He suggests that "Authenticity is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism. It demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogeneous and unbroken tradition"). The general silence about the Asian Australian migrant experience in Australian literature until the 1980s and early 1990s may thus be seen to be influenced by its discursive placement: the inability of the figure of the Asian migrant to completely fill the traditional position of the Asian as exotic Other and support the consolidation of Australian national identity.

It has been difficult for Australian literature to move away from the familiar dichotomy of East and West, and the stereotypes and functions which Asia's difference from Australia have provided for national definition. In the Australia of the 1980s and early 1990s the Asian migrant experience provided an increasingly popular site of discussion and a trope of contemporary Australian social change. The contemporary appeal of the Asian migrant experience is that it promotes an exploration of Australia's changing relationship with Asia, its development into a society of cultural plurality, together with ideas of citizenship and cultural loyalty; but it also encourages an insight into the psychic changes of the individual faced with the uniquely uncertain place of the Asian Australian citizen, and the changes of outlook, perceptions of belonging and home which alter with the

migrant experience. In a literary landscape increasingly dominated by postmodern literary trends, the figure of the Asian Australian also provides an attractive site for the discussion of heterogeneity and the connections between language, reality and representation. Further, the fiction of the Asian migrant experience in the late twentieth century is an important part of the process of questioning Orientalist assumptions about the essential oppositional difference of Australia from Asia. A strong image of the Asian Australian challenges the notion of the Asian as a perpetual foreigner in Australia and thus fundamentally questions the traditional binary opposition between Asia and Australia, and our Antipodean strain of Orientalism.

The comparatively swift movement of the Asian migrant text to large publishing houses has been influenced by the groundwork of a number of minority cultural groups which have worked, since the 1950s, for the recognition of migrant literature written by non-Anglo-Australians. The postwar boom of Southern European migrants, particularly from Italy and Greece, resulted in a dramatic change of self-perception for Australian society. As a result of this changing pattern of migration, in the 1970s the Australian government adopted the public policy of Multiculturalism (copied from Canada). The Whitlam government paved the way for a Multicultural policy and the Fraser government, which gained power in December 1975, "gave shape and structure to multiculturalism in Australia". Multiculturalism is an official recognition by the Australian government of the diverse ethnic origin of the Australian population, with the stated purpose of protecting and aiding those who are not part of the founding majority group. Multiculturalism has its literary equivalent in Multicultural writing—also known as Ethnic or Non-English Speaking

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58 Freda Hawkins, Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared (Kensington: NSW UP, 1989) 228-229.
59 Hawkins, 214.
Background (NESB) writing\textsuperscript{60} which emphasises the diversity of writing available by writers from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds and in languages other than English. The main aim of Multicultural writing has been to redress marginalisation and create a space for migrant voices to be heard. The implementation of these policies has included government financial support for the publication of "migrant literature", which reflects aspects of the migrant experience of non-Anglo Celtic minorities and is written by migrant writers.

The focus of Multicultural writing to date has most often been upon Southern European authors and subjects, especially Italian and Greek experience, and also Jewish experience. Small presses and magazines involved in the publication of Multicultural writing in the late 1970s to 1980s included Cavalier Press, Dezsery Ethnic Publications, Ethnic Avenger Publications, Leros Press, Phoenix Publications, \textit{Elagul}, \textit{Radici}, \textit{Chronico} and the \textit{Journal of Intercultural Studies}\textsuperscript{61}. A number of anthologies of Multicultural writing were produced in the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, \textit{Displacements: Migrant Storytellers}(1982), \textit{Joseph's Coat}(1985), \textit{Displacements II: Multicultural Storytellers}(1987), \textit{Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing}(1988), \textit{Neighbours: Multicultural writing of the 1980s}(1991), and \textit{Who Do You Think You Are: Second Generation Immigrant Women in Australia}(1992). These collections employ a number of different editorial definitions of the "migrant" writer. \textit{Neighbours}, for instance, contains stories by both first-generation and second-generation migrants, writers of English-speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds and even writers who address migrant themes, whereas \textit{Beyond the Echo} includes only fiction and poetry by writers with "non-Anglo-Celtic" backgrounds. As George Kanarakis has observed, migrant

\textsuperscript{60}Papaellinas briefly outlines the different names given to writing in this area. George Papaellinas, ed., introduction, \textit{Homeland} (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991) xi.

writing in Australia has numerous incarnations and has variously been defined by "the language in which a work is written and, consequently, its intended readership" (which aligns it with a particular national literature), or by:

...geographical, social or literary criteria, such as the country in which the writer is living at the time when a work is written, the length of time the writer has lived there, the theme of a work, the country in which it is set, or even the writer's relationship with a person of a migrant background.62

Some of the writers whose work has been the subject of critical attention in the area of Multicultural writing are Ania Walwicz, Angelo Loukakis, Antigone Kefala, Vasso Kalamaras, Thalia and Zeny Giles. A book of criticism, Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations(1992), and a bibliography, Gunew et al.'s Australian Multicultural writing(1992), have also been published, indicating the diverse range of non-Anglo-Celtic writing that has emerged in Australia. The bibliography, like the anthologies of Multicultural writing, contains little information about writers from smaller, more recent migrant communities, such as those from Southeast Asia.

The notion of Multicultural writing has come under attack in the 1980s and 1990s, just as the policy of Multiculturalism has been severely questioned63. George Papaellinas has argued that Multicultural writing is "a new nationalism, replete with its approved imagery, its bureaucratic jargon, its dogma"64. He agrees with the writer Dimitris Tsaloumas' statement that Multicultural writing "reflects only the official sanctioning of a cultural ghetto for non-Anglo writers...65. Even one of the leading creators of the Multicultural writing genre, the critic and academic Sneja Gunew- who,

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63Hawkins describes a number of objections to the policy of Multiculturalism. See Hawkins, 214-217.
64Papaellinas, xi.
65Papaellinas, xi.
with Jan Mahyuddin in the Introduction to Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing (1988) argued for the unproblematic necessity of Multicultural writing as "an act of positive discrimination" - has questioned in recent critical articles the terms "multicultural writer", "migrant writer" and "ethnic writer". In a reflection of the critical interrogation of the labels "multicultural", "NESB" and "ethnic", some of the more recent anthologies which emphasise writing by migrants and cultural diversity have had more general titles which avoid the key phrases of Multicultural writing, such as, An Arc of Australian Voices: An Anthology of Writing (1990), Homeland (1991) and Harbour: Stories by Australian Writers (1993). The anthologies Homeland and Harbour were commissioned as part of Carnivale, a New South Wales multicultural festival, and form an innovative attempt to move beyond restrictive notions of the ethnic or multicultural. These texts contain short stories inspired by the title themes of the anthologies and are written by authors from a range of backgrounds, including those who are not perceived as "migrant" writers, such as Peter Corris, Dorothy Hewett and Archie Weller. The innovative construction of these texts invites questions about the generic boundaries of migrant writing: should Multicultural writing be viewed as separate from Australian literature? Why are authors who deal with themes of migration and become immensely popular - such as Elizabeth Jolley and David Malouf - not generally considered as Multicultural writers? It is in an atmosphere of interest in, and debate about, Multicultural writing that literature about the Asian migrant experience has developed. Part of the challenge for writers addressing this area is to break away from the restrictive label of "Multicultural writing".

beyond the specific experiences of one cultural group towards an emphasis on broader questions. I believe that many of the texts I discuss in the following chapters achieve this goal and thus enter a broad definition of "Australian literature", just as, in some respects, they contribute to an international literature of diaspora. In some ways the movement beyond the shelter and the stereotype of Multicultural writing has been easier for those writing about the Asian migrant experience in Australia because of an increasing interest at the level of popular culture (enhanced by trade links) in Asian cultures and the novelty of an Asian perspective on Australian society.

Since the late 1970s Australia has been attempting a psychological reorientation towards Asia which has been driven by economic concerns. Traditional Australian cultural representations of Asia are filled with images of the Asian as a foreigner, exotic, alien and a threat to the (white) Australian way of life. This attitude towards Asia has been subject to gradual change in Australian government policy, the business world and Australian literature. In the late twentieth century, it is to those voices deemed "Asian", a descriptive term now connoting economic dynamism, to which Australia's powerful business groups and politicians are listening most anxiously during times of world recession. Australian business and government is eager to align itself with some of the fastest growing "tiger" economies in the world. In 1983, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Bill Hayden, gave the Victor Gibson International address in which he emphasised the increasing economic importance of Asian countries to Australia:

What was regarded as a region peripheral to the centre of world events or as a source of threats to Australia, has come to be seen as an area with which Australia's future is inevitably interdependent...67.

Hayden also emphasised the need for a greater cultural knowledge and sensitivity to appreciate the complexities of societies in Asia because "we need to avoid the sort of insensitivity and naivety which rules out scope for constructive interaction". The Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation forum was initiated by the Hawke government and emphasised the government's increasing diplomatic and trade attention towards Australia's geographical neighbours. Under Prime Minister Paul Keating, this attention towards making Australia "a sophisticated trading country in Asia" (one of Keating's election promises) has been pursued even more vigorously. Political commentators such as Greg Sheridan from The Australian, have greeted this policy with enthusiasm. There have, however, been critics of this approach, including the Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey ("I do not accept the view, widely held in the Federal Cabinet, that some kind of slow Asian takeover of Australia is inevitable. I do not believe that we are powerless...") and Samuel Huntington, an American scholar who has criticised Australia for "defecting from the West' in its push to cultivate closer ties with Asia". Social justice activists are also perturbed by the Australian government's reluctance to condemn human rights abuses in East Timor, for instance, in preference to the preservation of diplomatic and economic ties. The power structure has changed dramatically in the Indo-Pacific over the last century: instead of excluding "Asia" through aggressive immigration policies and trade ties with Europe, Australia is asking to become part of the Asian trade scene. The irony of the 1980s and 1990s is that the ancient, defensive construct of "Asia" as Other which was fostered to empower the British Empire, and Australia as one of its colonies, is now

68Hayden, 584.
70Greg Sheridan, "Riding the Tail of the Asian Tiger," The Australian 1 Apr. 1992: 11.
hampering Australia from achieving its late twentieth century desire to be accepted as a primary trading partner by its near neighbours.

Despite the official pressure towards improving Australia's relationship with its near geographical neighbours in the 1980s and early 1990s, the position of the Asian migrant in Australia has remained uncertain. A suspicious resentment of the "Asian" which dates back to Australia's earliest expressions of nationalism continues to surface. The uncertainty of the Asian Australian's acceptance in Australian society was illustrated by animated debates about Asian immigration in the 1980s. In 1984 the historian Geoffrey Blainey argued that the immigration intake of specifically Asian migrants was too high\textsuperscript{73}. Blainey suggested that Asians would disrupt the stability and social cohesion of Australian society because Asian migrants were fundamentally different from Australians in their values- having a lack of respect for democracy, civil liberties, press freedom, religious tolerance- and declared that public opinion was against further Asian migration\textsuperscript{74}. The Liberal Party briefly endorsed this view and the debate received much media attention. In 1988, the Leader of the Liberal Opposition, Mr John Howard raised this issue again in some brief political comments about the disproportionate intake of Asian migrants. Questions about the size and proportion of Asian immigration continue to be an issue in Australian politics. In 1990, with the publication of the paper "Asian Immigration: Past and Current Trends"\textsuperscript{75}, two respected academics in the fields of Social Work and Social Administration and Psychology, Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya and Dr David Sang, felt that there was sufficient public opinion supporting Blainey's views to merit a paper defending Asian migrants against charges of possessing excessively different values from the rest of Australian society and a disproportionately high immigration level. Similarly, the independent Bureau of Immigration Research included a

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\textsuperscript{73}See Geoffrey Blainey, All for Australia (North Ryde: Methuen Haynes, 1984).
\textsuperscript{74}Paul Kelly, The End of Certainty: the Story of the 1980s (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1992) 124-134.
\textsuperscript{75}Jayasuriya and Sang, 4-14.

From 1970 to 1990 there has been a dramatic shift in Australia's attitudes towards "Asia". What is happening now that the Others of Asia have become, in some cases, our next door neighbours? How are contemporary Australian writers addressing this cultural change? Within the literary texts about Asian migrant protagonists there is often an emphasis through structural devices on creating a sense of belonging to the Australian cultural and historical landscape on the part of a particular community. This creation of a sense of belonging to the new country is a common trope of migrant fiction, but seems particularly strong in fiction about the Asian migrant experience, perhaps forming a response to the special vulnerability of the Asian migrant in Australian society. As I shall illustrate in the following chapters, the attention to history, particularly the migrant community's history in Australia, provides an important element in Asian migrant texts of counterring notions of the Asian as a temporary sojourner and a perpetual foreigner. The sense of instability and uncertainty surrounding the Asian Australian migrant has also made this subject position an attractive point of departure for broader questions about modernity in, for instance, Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game* and Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China*.

The swing in government policy and social mood towards Asia has had its impact upon the arts. In 1991 it was decided that fifty per cent of the budget of the Australia Council should be spent on the Asia-Pacific region. The increasing interest in Asian texts in English Departments at Australian universities, and in the area of post-colonial studies, is an indication of a widespread interest in fostering ties with Asia and gaining more knowledge.

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about the countries of Asia. In academic circles, an increasing interest in the region has been reflected in the publication of books such as Alison Broinowski's *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (1992) - which explores Australian cultural representations of Asia in the visual arts, film, drama, poetry and fiction - and the publication of articles such as Zhang Longxi's "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West", Veronica Kelly's "Orientalism in Early Australian Theatre" and Nicholas Jose's "Non-Chinese Characters: Translating China". The growing engagement with Asian languages, Asian studies courses and, within English Departments, post-colonial theory and Asian texts, further emphasises the growing interest in Asian Australian cross-cultural contact. This tendency towards a stronger focus on Asia and the official acceptance of Australia's cultural diversity - through policies such as Multiculturalism and immigration selection procedures - have gradually shifted the figure of the Asian migrant into public consciousness. It is in this atmosphere of a national interest in Australia's geographical neighbours that Asian migrant literature is developing.

Although the initial focus of Australian literature about Asia was on European-derived fears about invasion and racial miscegenation, twentieth century Australian writing about Asia has also covered the ordeals of Australian soldiers in Japan, Korea and Vietnam, Australian travellers seeking exoticism or spiritual enlightenment, thrillers set in an

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80 *Hotel Asia* is a collection of prose which provides an overview of writing in this area by charting "the imaginative responses of Australian travellers to Asia" from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century (1). Gerster defines travel writing in its broadest sense, including autobiography and fictional works. The book includes extracts from Guy Boothby's *On the Wallaby* (1894), C. J. Koch's *Across the Sea Wall* (1965) and Nicholas Jose's *Avenue of Eternal Peace* (1989) amongst others. Robin Gerster, ed., *Hotel Asia* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1995).
incredible Asia of questionable morality, and expatriates playing out national fantasies against a colourful Oriental pageant. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a burst of novels about Australian expatriates were published which were set in the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. These novels included *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978), *Monkeys in the Dark* (1980), *Turtle Beach* (1981), *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* (1979) and *Cherry Bloom* (1980). (Commercial films were subsequently made of the first and third of these). A frequent focus of these texts is the exploration of the Australian national character: the various cultural landscapes of the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia are virtually interchangeable sites of difference to which Australian characters respond and in which they are reflected. The perspective of the tourist dominates these texts (although their protagonists are journalists, diplomats or international officials). The landscape and people provide a background of colour and exoticism, and political and social reality are of little interest except where they affect the psychic development of the Australian abroad. Few of these novels attempt first person insights into the minds of the indigenous people. *Monkeys in the Dark* occasionally enters the thoughts of an Indonesian character, the nationalist poet Maruli. However, this character never disrupts Western views about Asia and merely serves to emphasise the primitive sensuality of d'Alpuget's Djakarta, where "Sex was in the air, like the smell of *kretek* smoke..."81. This link between Asia and sensuality is a common trope in Orientalist visions of Asia. As Robin Gerster observes, "tourism is an act of possession and dominance"82. The experience of the temporary Western visitor to Asia is tinged with sexuality and heightened by a sense of power, and the traditional representations of Asia are as a female realm, exotic and sensual83. Tourism can also reflect the experience of colonial domination ("tourists have to be 'accomodated',

82Gerster, introduction, 8.
83Gerster, introduction, 7-8.
'catered to', made to feel 'at home'\(^8^4\). The self-conscious analysis of such power relationships only entered Australian literature in the late 1970s. In Robert Drewe's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* the perceptions of the Australian protagonist, the Australian buffalo specialist Richard Cullen, are given a rare ironic distance from narrative approval. *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* explores the attitude of the Australian to Asia, building to a climax where Cullen's Orientalist imaginative excesses are dramatically confronted by the poverty of a Third World society. As a region of the mind, Asia has historically been an accommodating landscape for numerous Australian works of fiction. Drewe's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*, like Romeril's play *The Floating World*(1974), heralded an increasing awareness of Australian writers about the problematics of Australians' preconceptions of Asia.

In the 1980s and 1990s there has been a greater acknowledgement of the fluidity of fictionalisations of Asia in the Australian imagination, and a concomitant interrogation of the connections between signifier and signified. The scrutiny of Australian perceptions of Asia has led to the opening up of new areas of exploration, including the role of Asia in the Australian imagination and the social impact of Australian tourists and travellers in Asia. Inez Baranay's novel *The Edge of Bali*(1992), for instance, explores the perceptions of three different Australian tourists and the impact of the culture of tourism on Bali. Gerard Lee's black comedy *Troppo Man*(1990) similarly focuses on Australians in Bali, exploring the innocence and grotesquerie of Australians in Asia through Matt, a well-meaning but self-righteous young teacher. In Murray Bail's *Homesickness*(1980) and David Foster's *Plumbum*(1983) the behaviour and expectations of Australian travellers are treated with lively satire. The expansion of writing about the Asian migrant experience may thus be linked with the current critical and literary interest in creating new, more complex representations of Asia and its relationship with Australia.

\(^{8^4}\)Gerster, introduction, 7-8.
Another element of the public appeal of the Asian Australian migrant text is the insight which it is presumed to give into Australian society. An interest in the perceptions of the outsider has been an enduring feature of Australian history. Australia's position as a settler colony has led to a deployment of the apparently outward gaze in the search for national self-definition. This began with white Australia's sense of marginality and inferiority from the British metropolis. From the arrival of the first waves of predominantly British settlers until the 1950s, Britain was generally accepted as Australia's cultural centre and therefore what the British thought of Australia provided a primary interest. In the nineteenth century, opinions of Australia were gleaned from visitors from Britain. Richard White points to:

...that long string of works by visitors to Australia— the immigrant mechanics, the Cunninghams, the Trollopes, the Sales, the Dilkes, the Twains— whose impressions of Australia as travellers have been embroidered into the images of Australia that we have constructed for ourselves... the way others see us, I want to argue, is ultimately the way we see ourselves.

White also argues that for economic reasons, because the development of a colony towards a self-sustaining economy needed to attract capital, much attention became focused on promoting Australia's image abroad in order to attract labour and capital. In the 1950s the continuation of the attention to foreign perceptions of Australia was illustrated by the presence of shipping reporters, such as the young John Pilger, who recorded the comments of the new migrant arrivals about their first impressions of Australia. As British official and cultural authority declined in Australia, the stereotypes of the typical Australian in the style of The Bulletin and its offshoots in the 1880s

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86White.
and 90s- of laconic white men from the outback- were challenged by changing demographics, women's liberation movements and more enlightened immigration and censorship policies; the perception of what it was to be Australian became much more problematic. The refracted visions of overseas visitors therefore continued to be treated as an important area of insight through which to catch a glimpse of the elusive essence of Australia.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the focus shifted from European (particularly British) and American impressions to "Asian" perceptions of Australia. As an illustration, the Outside Images of Australia: How Others See Us conference, held in Perth in July 1992 had a strong focus on what were considered to be "Asian" visions of Australia. Numerous papers were given at this conference, by journalists, poets, literary theorists, diplomats and sociologists and it was greeted with enthusiasm by the local and national news media. Particular attention by the news media was given to the comments of the Indonesian ambassador, His Excellency Sabam P. Siagian. The structure of another conference in 1992, "Media Images of Asia/Australia: Cross Cultural Reflections", by the Faculty of Communication at the University of Canberra, also emphasised the importance of Asian images of Australia. (Several papers from this conference were also published in a special feature section of the magazine 24 Hours, titled "Asia and Australia: What sort of stories do we tell about one another?" in April 1993). In a country with a tradition of interest in the views of the foreigner, the Asian perspective is gaining increasing attention. For this reason alone, there is a good chance that the Asian migrant experience written by the Asian migrant author will continue to receive attention. The serious and sustained attention given in this thesis to major literary texts in this new and developing genre is thus closely linked to other areas of discourse in Australia.

The developing interest in the area of the Asian Australian migrant experience by writers and publishers has been strengthened by the
popularity of Asian migrant stories in Britain, Canada and the United States of America. The attraction of the Asian migrant story has been demonstrated in the early 1990s by a flurry of films, both arthouse and Hollywood, which have explored the experience of the Asian migrant: for instance, Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*, Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach*, Wayne Wang's *The Joy Luck Club* (based on Amy Tan's novel of the same name), and *The Wedding Banquet*. In the field of literature a similar boom has occurred. In Britain novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Timothy Mo's *Sour Sweet* (1982), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) have established the tale or perspective of the "Asian" migrant as a subject of distinctive and often award winning prose. In the United States, Maxine Hong Kingston's novels *China Men* (1977) and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Amongst Ghosts* (1975) have created an innovative and characteristic style of writing which incorporates elements of folk tale and legend to discuss the place of the Chinese in North America. Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990) explores the lives of four generations of women of the Wong family in Canada and in *Obasan* (1982), Joy Kogawa traces the experience of the Japanese in Canada during internment in World War II. Rohinton Mistry's short story collection *Tales From Firozsha Baag* (1987) describes an Indian apartment house in Calcutta and the lives of its tenants, with the occasional story referring to the life of the emigrant to Canada along with the responses of friends and relatives who remain. Michael Ondaatje's autobiography *Running in the Family* (1983) is a series of first person personal reminiscences, tales, family anecdotes and poetic impressions of Ceylon structured around the narrator's return journey from Canada to Sri Lanka. The public popularity and critical acclaim received by literature about the Asian migrant experience in North America and Britain has, I contend, contributed to the Asian Australian migrant story being read within the context of the
international development of Asian migrant stories rather than Australian Multicultural writing alone. As a result of the international literary trends regarding Asian migrant stories which are developing in the West, these texts have to some extent escaped the limiting stereotypes which can plague migrant writing when narrowly defined; particularly the assumption that migrant writing is untextualised in style, with parochial content and a limited appeal to a small migrant community. Further, the international success of Asian migrant stories, the innovations in this area, and the fame of writers such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Timothy Mo and Salman Rushdie, have shaped to some extent the preference in Australia for certain literary codings of Asia, and the Asian migrant, and forged the way for the creation of a literary niche for writing about the Asian migrant experience in the West. Nevertheless, the Asian migrant story in Australia continues to be fraught with difficulties related to the symbolic richness and historical force of Orientalism and the image of the Asian as exotic Other, which is often attractive to the Western reader and writer alike, and the ignorance of Anglo-Australian readers about the specific cultures of Asia. As I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, the notion of Asia as Other, pervasive stereotypes about Asian migrants as threatening invaders and eternal foreigners, and the desire for certain (exotic) codings of Asian difference are elements which the primary texts of this thesis often work against, although with differing degrees of success.

The success of texts about Asian migrant experience in Australia can be viewed productively within a world-wide flourishing of writing by authors whom I will term- after Timothy Brennan's term "Third World Cosmopolitan"88- "Asian Cosmopolitans". By "Asian Cosmopolitans" I

88 "Third World Cosmopolitan" is a descriptive term Brennan uses to refer to "those writers Western reviewers seemed to be choosing as the interpreters and authentic public voices of the Third World- writers who, in a sense, allowed a flirtation with change that ensured continuity, a familiar strangeness... Alien to the public that read them because they were black, spoke with accents or were not citizens, they were also like that public in tastes, training, repertoire of anecdotes, current habitation" (viii-ix). Brennan emphasises the predominantly middle-class nature of these Third World citizens, who travel to London,
refer to migrant writers who are presented by Western reviewers as authentic representatives of Asia, and prevailed upon for their opinions as the voice of Asia. The term "cosmopolitan" refers to the background of the writer: his/her familiarity with more than one society and relatively privileged, often highly educated background. Although the subject of this thesis is the broader area of writing about the Asian migrant experience—which is not necessarily (or only) written by authors with "Asian migrant" backgrounds- the phenomenon of the "Asian Cosmopolitan" writer as a promotional category is a significant literary development which requires discussion because it illustrates the thirst in the West for authentic Asian perspectives, the importance of identity politics and the pressures placed upon the writer in this position to continue writing about "Asia". The fame of "Asian Cosmopolitan" writers such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Timothy Mo and Salman Rushdie combined with the innovative nature of their literary works has shaped to some extent the preference in Australia for certain literary codings of Asia, and the Asian migrant, and forged the way for the creation of a literary niche for writing about the Asian migrant experience in the West. Further, the similarities of experience and background between authors- in particular their shared status as intellectuals- demonstrates the social forces and patterns of power which shape the literary representations of the Asian migrant experience.

Some insight into the future of literary representations of the Asian migrant experience can be gained from a brief comparison between the Australian literary scene and the development of literary categories in the United States of America and Canada. In the late 1960s to 1970s, all three countries ceased overtly discriminatory immigration policies towards Asian countries. At approximately the same time, the field of Multicultural
writing was developing in Australia, with fictional texts and critical works being published by the larger and more established immigrant communities of non Anglo-Australians, such as Italians, Jews and Greeks. Will "Asian Australian" writing- with its defining emphasis on a cohesive ethnic community and the cultural background of the author- eventually become a similar category? My contention is that this category would be fraught with problems related to identity politics and an uncritical acceptance of the terms "Asia" and "Asian". I therefore suggest that the term "Asian Australian literature" should be confined to use in discussing the codings of the Asian in Australia- such as the subject matter of the Asian migrant experience in the context of Australian discourse about "Asia"- or that it involve more specific geographical categories.

Like Australia, America and Canada have received large numbers of permanent settlers who have displaced the indigenous peoples and created populations of long-term, foreign-born residents89. However, America and Canada have much larger populations- in 1993, 257 million and 28.1 million people respectively- and thus a larger net number of Asian migrants, more regional publishing and small publishing enterprises. The sociopolitical circumstances surrounding the development of Asian American writing differs substantially from that in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s. The Asian American movement began in the late 1960s as a result of a rapid population increase in the Asian community (especially on the West Coast) following reforms to immigration law in 196590. The growth of the African American civil rights movement encouraged other minority groups to assert their visibility, and the term "Asian American" was adopted for political purposes, with the assumption that "regardless of individual origin, background, and desire for self-identification, Asian Americans have

89Charles Stahl, Rochelle Ball, Christine Inglis and Pamela Gutman, Global Migration Movements and their Implications for Australia (Canberra: AGPS, 1993) 83.
been subjected to certain collective experiences that must be acknowledged and resisted."\textsuperscript{91} The Asian American literary movement began as a political movement, created for political leverage at a time when there was less perceived diversity and certain clearly dominant cultural groups amongst "Asian Americans". The Japanese (who had been "colonised" by the Americans since the Second World War) were the dominant ethnic group before 1970, at fifty-two per cent of the population, but by 1990 the Chinese formed the largest ethnic group, at twenty-three per cent, with a greater variety of distinct national and ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{92} However, in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s the diversity of those perceived as being from "Asia" is much greater than that of America in the 1960s. As a result, there is a greater sense of difference between national groups which are potentially "Asian Australian". Wars between nations and ethnic groups, different languages and religions all increase the divisions between these communities. The divisions within these groups have also been increased in an Australian context by their different treatment under Australian immigration policy, such as the unprecedented granting of political asylum to Chinese students by the Hawke government in 1989. From this perspective, the potential for a grassroots development of an Asian Australian literature based on ethnicity seems unlikely. However, the attractive nature of the term "Asian" for Australian society- its familiarity and its continuing, often indiscriminate, use in Australian popular culture- suggests that "Asian Australian literature" may become a literary category.

Since its inception the term "Asian American" has been subject to debates about its definition and, once established, the literary category of Asian American writing has proven difficult to eradicate for those who wish to do so. The editors of one of the first Asian American anthologies \textit{Aiiiiieee} (1974) defined Asian Americans as those who were "American

\textsuperscript{91}Wong, 6.
born and raised, who got their China and Japan from... the pushers of white American culture" 93. This rather narrow, anti-immigrant stance may be contrasted to Kok Cheung and Stan Yogi's definition in their bibliography of Asian American literature, which includes "works by writers of Asian descent who have made the United States or Canada their home, regardless of where they were born, when they settled in America and how they interpret their experiences" 94. The debate about who has the authority to speak for whom in this field has continued in a number of critical articles, many problematising the term but ultimately unwilling to do away with it completely. The conflict surrounding Asian American writing recalls to some extent the discussion of "Multicultural writing" in an Australian context; both arguments involve the use of a generalised literary category for a minority group which can be seen as both enabling and limiting. In "Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature", Shirley Geok-lin Lim finds the notion of a homogeneous rubric of "Asian American literature" simplistic in late twentieth century America, where separate local ethnic literatures are forming under the hegemonising power of the label "Asian American" 95. She suggests that the paradigm of Asian American literature is "collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions" and should be shifted from one ethnic literature to that of a multi-ethnic product 96. Yet despite the convincing deconstruction of the term "Asian American" it is difficult to relinquish, as illustrated by a number of recent bibliographies and critical texts which continue to use the term. The related term "Asian Australian writer", with its appeal to the author's ethnic origin, may be similarly difficult to resist in the wake of Multicultural writing in Australia.

93Lim, 155.
94Wong, 7.
95Lim, 162
96Lim, 158.
Although the enduring nature of the term "Asia" in Australia and the example of Asian American literature could lead the term "Asian Australian" to be adopted in Australia, the fact that the ground of intellectual debate around the area has shifted somewhat with the publication of Said's Orientalism may lead to a greater hesititation regarding the development of an "Asian Australian" literary category. In a post-Orientalism academic atmosphere, in which the idea of "Asia" itself has been acknowledged as a homogenising Western construct, the epistemological tool of the "Asian Australian" writer is perhaps less likely to develop. Further, the Canadian literary scene has never embraced the term "Asian Canadian" as a useful category. This is demonstrated in the phrasing of the titles of relevant anthologies from the 1970s to the 1990s. Occasional collections of "Asian Canadian" writers have appeared, such as Green Snow: Anthology of Canadian Poets of Asian Origin(1976) and Gulls Flying in the Mist: Asian-Canadian Writing(1987). The tendency though has been to emphasise more specific geographical and gender statements of the writers' cultural background: South Asian Women, Indo-Caribbean, Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, Asian Canadian women. However, other pressures would seem to encourage the adoption of the term "Asian Australian migrant literature". Asian Australian writing could easily be developed as a subset of Multicultural writing as a defence against the widely discredited policy of 1950s and 1960s assimilationism. Critical attention in the area has also been stimulated: "Writers of Asian background" were recently covered under the subheading "Immigrant Experience in Australian Literature" in the Oxford Companion to

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Australian Literature. The curiosity about Asian perspectives of Australia, the popular acceptance of the term "Asian" and the desire to know more about Asia would together seem to encourage the swift development of anthologies and articles addressing "Asian migrant fiction" in Australia. Further, because individual national cultures have produced relatively few migrant texts there may be a desire to eschew their differences and amalgamate these areas under a general "Asian Australian" title. My preference is that, if generalisations on the basis of authorship are required, the more descriptive national labels of origin such as those used by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs should be applied. In 1994, DILGEA grouped countries into "broad geographic areas on the basis of their similarity in terms of social, cultural, economic and political characteristics." These involved three sub-categories of Asia, namely Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and Southern Asia. More descriptive geographical terms such as these would emphasise some of the complexities within the popular term "Asia" while also giving a number of ethnic minority groups a name: as Trinh Minh-ha has observed with regard to the problematic term "Third World", a name can empower a minority group.

In the 1980s and early 1990s the Asian migrant protagonist entered Australian literature and signalled the beginning of the most recent chapter in the representations of Asia and the Asian in Australia, and one in which the traditional oppositional division between Asian and (European) Australian, East and West, has been profoundly questioned. In the following chapters I shall illustrate the developments within this field of writing: the major authors in the area, the narrative developments, and the

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100Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, c.1989) 97-99
dominant philosophical issues. Some central themes of the primary texts include the treatment of British post-colonial loyalties and traditions (Chapter 1), the subject position of the political exile (Chapter 2), the representations of the Asian migrant woman (Chapter 3), and the strong place of historical devices and explorations in the texts (Chapter 4). These characteristics will be set within the broader trends of writing in this area, which has shifted in recent times from the realist approach with model migrant characters who refute the images of excess traditionally associated with the Asian migrant in Australia to more recent developments, by writers such as Brian Castro and Alex Miller, of the Asian migrant as a figure of uncertainty and inhabitant of the borderland between categories, a position which enables an exploration of issues of modernity.

II. Methodology

In acknowledging my approach as a critic, the importance of which Said emphasises in his discussion of the "personal dimension" in Orientalism\(^1\), I should point out that my own inventory of historical traces as a third generation Australian inclines me towards understanding the text about the Asian migrant experience in its context within Australian literature\(^2\). I am an Australian-born woman with an Anglo-Celtic background; my mother and her family hail from the south of England and my paternal great-grandfather and his family from the northeast. A personal fascination with my mother's decision to move from England to Australia in the late 1960s and a shared interest with my father in

\(^{101}\)Said illustrates his own approach by approvingly quoting Gramsci ""The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory'." Said, Orientalism, 25.

\(^{102}\)Although I consider the outlining of my personal background a useful starting point for a critical discussion, I do not wish to suggest that my critical position- or indeed the views of any critic or author- are completely determined by historical forces and life experience. I would suggest, drawing on Jan Gorak's perceptive interpretation of Said's approach to this question, that "human beings... are themselves agents of, as well as somewhat independent actors within their actual history". Jan Gorak, The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea (London: Athlone Press, 1991) 152.
Australian literature have partly directed my thinking towards the literary treatment of migrancy in Australia. Also on the personal level, I attended government schools of which friends were immigrants, or the children of immigrants, from countries considered part of Asia. My undergraduate anthropological studies on Indonesia, the Philippines and contemporary Australian society encouraged a cross-cultural perspective and from here it was a short conceptual step- with the aid of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Alison Broinowski's *The Yellow Lady* and the ideas in Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back* to a consideration of the developing place of the Asian migrant in Australian literature. My background in anthropology has also influenced my interest in the social development of writing about the Asian migrant experience- its connection to immigration patterns, its place within extra-literary Australian perceptions of Asia, and its sociology of production- rather than an attention to the biographical connections between the migrant author and his or her text.

With reference to the boundaries of my research, I have chosen to address only texts which have been written in English. Naturally enough, many texts about the Asian migrant experience have been written in languages other than English. For reasons of scale and the absence of English translations, I shall not be considering these. These would provide a separate study in themselves. Two recent publications including Sang Ye's travel stories *The Finish Line: A Long March by Bicycle through China and Australia*, which is full of acute observations of life in both countries, and Ding Xiaoqi's *Maidenhome*, a collection of short stories focusing mainly on the daily life of women in China- although one story, "The Angry Kettle", is set in Australia. (The last chapter of *The Finish Line* has also been published in *Harbour: Stories by Australian Writers*). Sibnarayan

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Ray's less widely distributed *Autumnal Equinox*\(^{106}\) contains poems translated from the original Bengali, which make use of a mixture of Western and Indian mythology and the occasional Australian reference. It is likely that the area of English translations of "Asian" texts, particularly those with some connection with Australia, will continue to increase and be sparked by the migration to Australia of well-known writers such as Ding Xiaoqi and by growing expertise in the translation of literary texts.

The definition of "Asian migrant writing" in the following discussion is directed towards writing about the Asian migrant experience rather than literature written by Asian migrants; the emphasis is on subject matter rather than authorship. As noted above, a common reading strategy of texts which address the Asian migrant experience is to link the text with the biography of the author, an approach influenced by the definitions of Multicultural writing in Australia, which often define Greek Australian literature, for instance, on the basis of the author's ethnic background. The perils of this approach were evident in 1995 when Helen Darville/Demidenko's Miles Franklin award-winning novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper* was judged by many according to the false (Ukrainian) biography which the author promoted about herself. My contention is that in texts about the Asian migrant experience a critical approach which emphasises authorship unduly privileges an autobiographical style and sociological or ethnographic detail. By placing the boundaries of this thesis on the literary representations or images of the Asian migrant experience rather than on the migrant author I wish to avoid the ghettoisation of writers under the term "Asian migrant writing" and stress the versatility of the writers who address the Asian migrant experience. However, as indicated earlier, I am appreciative of the importance of the phenomenon of the "Asian Cosmopolitan", or Asian migrant writer, as an international literary force which has been partly responsible for providing an entry into

publishing for those authors tackling "Asian" subject matter with an "Asian" cultural background in Australia. By limiting the application of an identity politics which links an author's ethnicity to the legitimacy of his or her writing, I wish to indicate that an author should not be prevented from writing of ethnic experience of which s/he has no personal background. Although the threat of the cultural appropriation of migrant experience by the dominant culture might arguably be increased by this position, I would suggest firstly, that the deliberate avoidance of certain areas of Australian cultural life by creative writers is a more dangerous alternative and secondly, that a writer can address a subject position of which s/he has no direct experience, and therefore cultural appropriation is not unavoidable. I adopt Spivak's notion that an author can "(earn) the right to criticize" through "language, through specific programmes of study... but also at the same time through a historical critique of your position as the investigating person". In Chapter 4, issues of identity politics and the European author's entry into Asian migrant experience are addressed in more detail with regard to Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*.

A central methodological approach in the following chapters is that texts are produced in a specific cultural context and that the workings of discourse, social forces and historical background are important matters of consideration. I take the position, with Said, that:

...texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted.

As outlined above, this thesis illustrates and analyses the developing literary representations of the Asian migrant experience within the context of the discourse of Australian images of Asia and broader social and economic developments. In discussing the primary texts within Michel

107Spivak and Gunew, 197.
Foucault's definition of a discourse, I consider not only the prevailing stereotypes and images surrounding the Asian and Asian migrant in Australia but also, to some extent, issues of power relations: which groups within Australian society are being permitted to speak in the area of the Asian migrant experience, and how this is shaping representations of the Asian Australian which are entering public discourse.

A number of ideas from post-colonial theory and practice are deployed in this thesis. Some of the works under discussion, such as the novels by Brian Castro, Alex Miller and Yasmine Gooneratne, show an awareness of post-colonial concepts and practices and therefore encourage a reading which includes post-colonial elements. The post-colonial notion that a hybridized and syncretic view of the world can lead to the questioning of monocentrism and of pervasive myths of group "purity" is used to explore writing about the Asian migrant experience. The placement of the Asian migrant figure or subject position at the intersection of cultures and the powerful mythology of East and West is therefore considered in light of the potentially liberating possibilities of the cross-cultural perspective explored in post-colonial theory. The post-colonial notion of counter-discursive strategies which challenge the beliefs of a dominant cultural group is applied to the Asian Australian migrant context with attention to realist strategies of irony, the multivoiced narrative and the historical narrative as well as a number of postmodern devices. The concept of "hybridity" is also used to highlight the inventive use of cultural traditions from two or more cultural sources for an often subversive purpose. Another idea drawn from post-colonial theory and used in this thesis is Homi Bhabha's contention that the grand narratives of History and Literature, realism and historicism, are intimately linked. This argument is used to shed light on the treatment of history in Miller's and Castro's

109 Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 36-7.
novels and the ways in which these texts abandon a search for origin in preference for a celebration of division and difference.

In using the notion of counter-discourse and a subversive marginality with reference to texts which address the Asian migrant experience, I contend that these texts make an important contribution to what Bhabha terms "the narrative address"\(^{111}\) of the (Australian) nation by countering Orientalist simplifications and rewriting received white Australian history from an "Asian Australian" perspective. However, the primary texts are also produced in a complex context which blurs the boundaries between dominant group and minority, the powerful and powerless. Although the majority of authors under discussion can be considered as marginalised by virtue of their ethnicity and vulnerability to commodification as "authentic Asian" representatives, in other important ways- in terms of class, education and occupation (many are university academics or otherwise members of an intelligentsia)- these authors are relatively powerful. The literature of the Asian Cosmopolitan can on one level be viewed as containing ideas which to some extent disrupt and challenge accepted values\(^{112}\) and traditional notions of the Asian as Other, but it can also be considered an example of incorporated disparity, the "special" exceptions to a rule of exclusion which perform their own titillative function for a dominant Anglo audience and which disguise the operation of power and exclusion. An analysis of power relations regarding the production of literary images of Asia requires some consideration of these complexities. The term "Asian Cosmopolitan" is thus used in part to highlight the privileged background, as intellectuals and metropolitan travellers, of many of the writers addressing the Asian experience. The term is also used to highlight the ways in which the literary trend of the Asian


\(^{112}\) Said's definition of criticism is that which "(disrupts) the comfort of accepted values". Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic, 14.
Cosmopolitan, particularly the emphasis on the links between an author's ethnicity and text, exemplifies the continuing Australian (and Western) thirst for information about Asia in a Western world which is struggling to internalise the insights of Said's *Orientalism* while craving the cultural difference and tantalising exoticism of its traditional Other.

A reasonably close textual reading is favoured in this thesis because many of the primary texts have not been the subject of sustained academic criticism before. As indicated earlier, the relationship between author and text is not a central element of my discussion. In referring to the author by name, I usually refer not to the actual individual, whose intentions and expectations are inaccessible and in a process of constant change, but to his/her body of texts. These include works of creative writing, critical analysis and biography. While I accept that a liberation from the controlling critical force of the Author- the source of authority and closure, Derrida's "transcendental signified", who can "explain" the text and halt the play of difference- is desirable, I also find that, like Barthes, I am drawn to a limited notion of the author. The relationship between author and text appears in various ways in my discussion. Firstly, as outlined above, the link between author and text is employed to some extent in my discussion of the phenomenon of the "Asian Cosmopolitan". Secondly, an understanding of power and cultural hegemony necessitates a knowledge of the broad background features of the author's life (gender, class, ethnicity) to give some indication of which groups are gaining control of the developing discourse of the Asian migrant experience.

Thirdly, the oeuvre forms the structural basis for several chapters but it is used in a thematic rather than chronological fashion in the light of Barthes' treatment of "the oeuvre as an everpresent intertext, a space to be ranged forwards and backwards without progressional responsibilities".\(^\text{113}\)

Thus in the discussion of the stylistic and thematic continuities between Gooneratne's *Relative Merits* and *A Change of Skies* in Chapter 1, the emphasis is on the shared features of these two prose works as texts which successfully address the subject of the post-colonial experience and migrant experience respectively, and its implications for shared literary knowledge between these two fields, rather than the chronological placement of the texts.

Fourthly, the unique features of an author's writing style is also a matter of interest in my discussion; as Barthes proposed in *Writing Degree Zero*, style is the *etymon*, "the silver thread which both unites a writer's work, and sets it off against that of others". In each chapter I attempt to give a sense of the particular style of each author's writing and the characteristics which set it apart from other texts. Finally, my attention to an author's life experience varies as a result of the differing approaches in the works: Gooneratne and Nandan, for instance, emphasise their biography in family history and critical works whereas Castro and Miller generally efface this aspect in their novels and critical writing.

In the context of a discussion which deals with post-colonial and multicultural perspectives, and which therefore emphasises the connections between the dialectic of politics and culture, the broadest background features of an author's life may be useful in illuminating the historical context of the discourse in which the text was created and published. This critical practice contributes to a greater attention to historical specificities and insists upon a return to the local, both of which Stephen Slemon emphasises as necessary considerations for post-colonial theory; for, as Slemon remarks, such theory is in danger of becoming "the playful operations of an academic glass-bead game" if it does not begin to

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114Burke, 36.
historicise. Arun Mukherjee has also attacked the failure of postmodern critics to recognise that all texts are "culture specific" and suggests that "when postmodernists wrench the post-colonial and non-white texts of Euro-America out of their cultural context, they are being assimilative and hegemonic." With these criticisms in mind, I have attempted to address issues of power and textual construction yet also to discuss specificities.

In the analysis to follow, I will highlight the treatment in the Asian Australian texts of the historical specificities of the Asian migrant experience in Australia, such as Dewi Anggraeni's attention to refuting the image of the Asian woman as a Filipina mail order bride, the references to the Sri Lankan indentured labourers of the nineteenth century in A Change of Skies, and the fate of the Chinese on the goldfields and the Asian Australian of the late twentieth century in Birds of Passage. The ways in which the prose of high-profile writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Salman Rushdie have influenced, by example, the style and structure of texts which address the Asian migrant experience in Australia will also be noted. A major element of the discussion will involve the changing pattern of Asian migrant texts from more simple realist models involving the model migrant to more complicated postmodern works that explore the Asian migrant as a figure of modernity and a starting point for broader discussions regarding language and representation.

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Chapter 1

British Traditions and Ironic Histories: Yasmine Gooneratne's Relative Merits, A Change of Skies and 6,000ft Death Dive

The primary texts of this chapter are Gooneratne's family biography Relative Merits: A Personal Memoir of the Bandaranaike Family of Sri Lanka (1986), which is narrated from the subject position of a migrant narrator living in Australia; 6,000ft Death Dive (1981), a book of poetry which often discusses themes related to migration; and A Change of Skies (1991), a novel about the acclimatisation of two Ceylonese to Australia. Reference will also be made to Gooneratne's two early poetry collections Word, Bird, Motif (1971) and The Lizard's Cry (1972) in order to give a sense of the development of theme and style in Gooneratne's fiction.

Gooneratne's texts draw on conservative British "high culture" literary traditions more than any of the other primary texts under discussion and in Section I of this chapter the affectionate use of British literary traditions in Gooneratne's creative writing is a focus of discussion. My argument is that in Gooneratne's early poems, the collections The Lizard's Cry and Word, Bird, Motif, the reliance on British literary styles is seldom highlighted or problematised but that in Gooneratne's two large prose works Relative Merits and A Change of Skies the problematics of the relationship between Britain and Sri Lanka and the political ramifications of the use of English literary models becomes a more thoroughly explored and conscious theme. (The name Sri Lanka will be used to denote the broad

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historical sweep of that country's experience whereas the term Ceylon will be used in referring to events specifically before the 1972 name change). The more complex discussion of the Anglophilia of the Ceylonese élite in Relative Merits and A Change of Skies has an ambivalent tone of affectionate irony which illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the coloniser and colonised élite. I shall also consider Gooneratne's writing in the context of her position as a highly educated member of the colonial élite and contend that in analysing works written in the English language by (for the most part) post-colonial writers, some consideration must be given to the patterns of access to the language and shaping effect that this may have on the representations of the Asian migrant which are being produced. The strong use of British literary traditions in Gooneratne's longer prose works, and the ambivalent tone towards British cultural traditions and imperialism familiar to a predominantly Anglo-Australian audience can also be seen to mediate the introduction of new cultural knowledge about Sri Lanka to Anglo-Australian readers.

In Section II, I suggest that the subject position of the Asian migrant can be viewed as an important element in the cultural translation of Sri Lankan cultural information to an Australian audience, and thus in the introduction of a non-threatening vision of the Asian. This section also highlights several continuities of theme and style in the presentation of the migrant experience in Gooneratne's early poems and A Change of Skies. Within the broad context of Asian migrant writing, Gooneratne's large prose works reflect the preoccupation of realist texts which address the Asian migrant experience with creating an ethnic history rather than with challenging the notion of history itself or attending to the possibilities of linguistic play. As I shall demonstrate, in A Change of Skies the depiction of the Sri Lankan migrant in Australia provides an evenhanded but essentially positive impression of individuals who have common human flaws but who are hard-working individuals, sensitive to racist jibes, keen to join
Australian society but determined to keep (amended and hybrid versions of) their own cultural beliefs. This sympathetic treatment of the South Asian migrant recalls the diligent and vulnerable Indian pioneer family in Abdullah's *The Time of the Peacock*³. Gooneratne's fictional worlds are thus essentially ordered places with a strong sense of humanist purpose: although the texts highlight the notion that history is subjective, the idea of history as fiction is not radically enforced by the form of the texts and the sense of a guiding force of timeless values regarding human nature underlies the narrative. Within the boundaries of literary realism, Gooneratne's fiction encourages a complex vision of the Asian migrant experience which raises issues pertinent to post-colonial and migrant identity, such as national and ethnic identity, the place of the Asian in Australia, and the complexity of post-colonial loyalties. In Section III, I contend that important continuities exist between the post-colonial and the migrant perspectives as represented in *Relative Merits* and *A Change of Skies* respectively, and that the transition of literary devices, such as irony and a multi-voiced narrative, between these two texts signals the potential for migrant literature to be enriched by strategies drawn from the more theorised area of post-colonial literary theory.

In considering Gooneratne's contribution to the contemporary English language literary scene in Australia, it is impossible to ignore her prolific and successful career as an academic and literary critic. In this situation, where an author's reputation as a critic precedes and is as well-known as her fiction, I believe that there is a good case for a reading position which acknowledges the modifying impact that a familiarity with a critic/author's non-fiction can have upon the reading of her writing.

Another reason for analysing Gooneratne's work as a critic is that a simplistic division between her fiction and non-fiction would fail to

acknowledge the ways in which many of her works cross these boundaries. For example, the carefully balanced "civilized" British styles and verbal wit of Augustan writers such as Pope, Johnson, Austen and others finds its place in her own literary endeavours. The most explicit example of this kind of influence in Gooneratne's work is her family history-biography-novel, Relative Merits. In addition, Gooneratne's poetry often includes elements of critical analysis, particularly with regard to literary criticism. The brief poem "Criticism" (in 6,000ft Death Dive) for instance, argues for a positive role for literary studies in human understanding:

The living tissue it divides
and questions every part
It saves an aged poem's hide
and speeds its faltering heart (24).

"Space Poets", from Word, Bird, Motif, ponders the inspirational nature of the moon in human creativity, and shares a common theme with "On an Asian Poet Fallen Amongst American Translators" (from 6,000Ft Death Dive) by deploring contemporary American academic standards in the 1970s. In such ways, the intertwining of Gooneratne's creative writing and critical writing suggests that fruitful comparisons can be made across the generic divisions between her works.

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Gooneratne's family biography Relative Merits: A Personal Memoir of the Bandaranaike Family of Sri Lanka and novel A Change of Skies entail a greater discussion of the complex loyalties of post-colonialism than her early poetry while preserving strong structural links with conservative British literary tradition. Relative Merits explores the links between Britain and Sri Lanka in its treatment of the Bandaranaikes, a wealthy and often eccentric Sinhalese family. In this text's created world, there is a tension between the existence of a social hierarchy in which British traditions are
deemed superior by the majority of the fashionable elite and the presentation of these traditions as often lacking any true local value. For this book, Gooneratne draws upon her considerable academic knowledge about the British novel, poetry and society of the early nineteenth century. The often ironic focus upon manners, the dynamics of a small privileged society and the recurrent, binding narrative of a developing relationship which will result in marriage recall dominant themes from Jane Austen's works. The similarities of Gooneratne's text with nineteenth century British literature highlight the generally enthusiastic adoption of British traditions by the Bandaranaike characters in the final phase of British colonialism in Ceylon. The narrator points to the ironic fact that she, herself, is continuing the Bandaranaike tradition of Anglophilia from her diasporic standpoint in Sydney, Australia, although in a more self-conscious fashion than her ancestor-inspired characters. In Gooneratne's academic paper "Family Histories as Post-colonial Texts" she states that the family histories of post-colonial exiles, such as her own Relative Merits, should be complex and ambiguous, should "combine comedy and tragedy, laughter and loss". She also adds that:

...it is not merely aesthetic effect that is at risk, but accuracy, the post-colonial experience being not a simple but a complex one. Paul Scott, in The Jewel in the Crown describes the long relationship of Britain and India as an embrace so long-drawn-out and so intense that it had become no longer possible for the participants in that embrace to be certain whether they hated or loved one another. The language in which that relationship is

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5I refer to the speaking voice as "the narrator" rather than "the author" or "Gooneratne" because the self in a biography involves an element of literary construction in its translation to the page. In addition, this term better reflects the possibility that the knowledge and opinions of the author may have changed since the biography was written.

described by contemporary writers is, at its best, correspondingly and appropriately ambiguous.

These comments suggest that the ambiguous nature of the Sri Lankan relationship with Britain in *Relative Merits* is part of Gooneratne's larger writing strategy for tackling post-colonial issues. The strategies of resistance to colonial discourse in Gooneratne's biography will be explored in more detail in Section III.

In Gooneratne's novel *A Change of Skies*, the Sri Lankan and British connection is explored and to some extent satirised in a principally Australian setting. *A Change of Skies* follows the fortunes of a Sri Lankan migrant couple who emigrate to Australia in the mid-1960s. In Part I, section four, of the novel, the main female character and narrator of the novel, Navarinjini, who is both wealthy and educated, discovers to her surprise that a significant body of Tamil poetry exists. Navarinjini has only ever heard her own family quote from the English Romantics and Victorians. This absence of appreciation for Sri Lankan literary culture in preference for British canonical knowledge is mildly criticised in the chapter heading of the section "Navaranjini meets a Man of Wisdom" (35). The "Man of Wisdom" refers to the librarian who enlightens Navaranjini about the existence and quality of Tamil poetry. Through exaggeration, this message is given a comic edge. There is, however, an ambivalence about the Anglicisation of Bharat and Navarinjini. In one sense, British cultural assumptions are an integral part of their personalities, like the English language with which they are so comfortable; in another sense, their knowledge of British customs is occasionally linked with a lack of knowledge about indigenous Sri Lankan cultural life.

The tone of Gooneratne's novel also introduces a pervasive ambivalence towards the British influence in Sri Lanka: in discussing the British influence upon its Sri Lankan or Ceylonese characters, *A Change of

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7 Gooneratne, "Family Histories as Post-Colonial Texts," 97.
Skies, like Relative Merits, displays a paradoxical tone of affectionate satire. This restrained form of satire characterises Gooneratne's fiction, which is sometimes whimsical and often gently ironical. However, the form of Gooneratne's larger works, which draw on a conservative British literary tradition, is not placed under much scrutiny: ultimately even Gooneratne's family biography and novel also adhere to, rather than fundamentally question, conservative British literary tradition and its realist foundations.

Gooneratne's poetry often reflects and reveals an intimate knowledge of British literary traditions but without the sense of ironic questioning which characterises her larger prose works. The poems contained in Gooneratne's two earliest books of poetry, Word, Bird, Motif (1971) and The Lizard's Cry (1972), are characterised by formal descriptions and many references to European literature and mythology. There are also scenes in Gooneratne's poetry which are set in Sri Lanka but share features with English country life. For instance, "Going Back: Koslanda, 1963" (in Word, Bird, Motif), with its rhapsodic descriptions of the natural landscape reminiscent of the early nineteenth century English Romantic poets, and its references to Austen's Pride and Prejudice ("Wickham half-glimpsed across the tennis court/ And Darcy walking underneath the limes..."), could almost be located in England, were it not for the occasional reference to lime trees, to a strongly perfumed purple flower and a saree (41). Although "Going Back: Koslanda, 1963" highlights these contrasts, many of Gooneratne's poems in these two collections do not; there is an often uncritical use of English expressions for Ceylonese scenes. The majority of Gooneratne's early poems are not located in any particular cultural tradition and have universal themes, such as the transformative nature of love, the "family tree", and the power of superstition.

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8 These collections contain poems which were originally published in other journals such as English, New Ceylon Writing, Thunapaha, Hemisphere, Outposts, Madrona and Tribune.
In "Migrant Poet" (from 6,000ft Death Dive) images drawn from English literary traditions are mingled with indigenous Sinhalese signifiers to provide symbols of home. The migrant narrator uses language drawn from the Victorian British literary tradition and Indian mythology to describe an alien Australian landscape, and the migrant's simultaneous sense of cultural loss and discovery. The narrator describes another unnamed Sri Lankan migrant's journey through Australia and observes, with a sense of reassurance, that "Others have passed this way ahead of me"(16). The narrator likens the other wanderer and herself to Vijaya, the first king of Sri Lanka, who also ventured south to an alien shore. In a description of her fellow traveller's loss of poetic resonance, a lighter note of optimism is introduced through a metaphor drawn from Victorian literary tradition: the "lost Muse" is depicted as waiting patiently "Somewhere in this enchanted woodland" for the wanderer to re-discover her, and thus recover her creative inspiration (16). In Gooneratne's poetry, an English literary form and references are interspersed with indigenous signifiers of "home", such as the use of translated, traditional Sinhalese verse, the employment of untranslated terms in an otherwise English language poem, and references to sights, places and cultural traditions in Sri Lanka. In "Migrant Poet", Sri Lankan mythology, in the form of Vijaya's travel away from his homeland to Sri Lanka, provides a strong element of an investigation into the migrant experience. This reference co-exists with images of the "lost Muse" and a regular verse scheme and end rhymes. The English literary tradition thus produces connotations of home in Gooneratne's poetry, although indigenous signifiers are also evident in this process. The effect of this rather halting imagery is the lack of a clear sense of place, and the sense of a process of development from a dependence on borrowed images from an English literary tradition to a greater reflection on the local concerns of the Sri Lankan migrant. In the novel A Change of Skies Gooneratne relinquishes the images of glades, lost Muses and
enchanted woodlands of her early poetry to forge a more sophisticated, multicultural Australian landscape.

Although Gooneratne's poetry often contains unexplored references to British literary traditions, her family history and novel are more self-conscious and ironic about the British imperial cultural project in Ceylon, and Sri Lanka. This change in the style of Gooneratne's fiction has been paralleled by her critical texts, which demonstrate a change in professional direction from the late 1960s. Early on in her academic career Gooneratne published works about eighteenth and early nineteenth century British authors, such as Alexander Pope and Jane Austen\textsuperscript{10}, but has gradually shifted her focus towards critical works and anthologies dealing with the colonial or post-colonial world. Gooneratne's more recent critical works include discussions of the writing of Leonard Woolf\textsuperscript{11}, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, and "Asia in Australia"\textsuperscript{12}. She also edited and contributed poetry to the anthology Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore\textsuperscript{13}. Although Gooneratne's fictive and critical voices have become more self-consciously post-colonial in the late 70s and 80s, the style, form and inter-textual references in her work continue to illustrate an affection for the conservative, realist British literary tradition. In a later discussion in this chapter, I will explore the strategies which Gooneratne employs in these two texts to introduce important elements of doubt about dominant discourses into her fiction: not as a revolutionary but as an ironist of manners and of ways of living.

\textsuperscript{10}Gooneratne, Jane Austen.
\textsuperscript{13}Four of Gooneratne's own poems appear in this poetry collection, including "The English Writers' Circle," "The Peace Game," "This Language, This Woman" and "Yasodhara". All four poems had also been published in Word, Bird, Motif or The Lizard's Cry. Yasmine Gooneratne, ed., Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1979).
A further illustration of the (often uninterrogated) affection for British cultural tradition in Gooneratne's early poems is the way in which these traditions are defended from American cultural attack. In the poem "Space Poets", from *Word, Bird, Motif*, an attack upon the American cultural enterprise involves the praise of British aesthetic procedures and standards. The narrator explores the American astronauts' first flight to the moon, and simultaneously deplores the wide-reaching influence of a bland American culture. This humorous poem is composed of three eight-line stanzas with irregular line lengths, and generally half-rhyme couplets. The three astronauts are gradually constructed throughout "Space Poets" as figures worthy of scorn. They are described at the end of the first stanza, for instance, as:

a band of incoherent, schoolboy brothers, triplets, circling in space, replacing Gemini (1).

By this point in the poem it has become clear that these young men are little qualified to presume to replace a star. Their heads "wag" in their space suits, their feet are clumsy and yet, to the narrator's evident disgust, they are constantly and unworthily mentioned in newspapers (1). In the second and third stanzas, heroic mythical figures, such as Endymion and Actaeon, appear and link the moon, in a common trope of the English literary tradition, to "...a Queen or a Huntress, chaste or fair,/ Phoebe..." (1). The stately Moon appears to ignore the American astronauts, perhaps offended by their simplistic descriptions of her beauty. Archaic and formal terms are similarly employed to highlight the astronauts' less than lyrical attempts at description. However, this emphasis is made with ironic humour; the exaggeratedly "poetic" nature of the language used by the narrator while these accusations are being made lends the poem an attractive air of self-conscious critique. The euphuistic style includes the use of capitalised nouns familiar to pre-nineteenth century English, for instance in references to the "Moon" and "Poet", and an occasionally old-fashioned, chivalrous
style of language, with phrases such as "should not the Moon requite ardour" (1). This high formal style is contrasted with the bathos of choppy alliterative syllables and verbs of violence:

Phoebe appears to ignore them; we see that her bare desert of dust repeatedly aborts descriptive effort by the astronauts... (1).

In "Space Poets" Gooneratne exercises her considerable knowledge of literary references and constructions drawn from eighteenth and nineteenth century England to highlight the inadequacies of contemporary American heroes; while also effecting, through her specific attacks on American language, and its infiltration into all newspapers, a stinging criticism of the dominance of American popular culture.

Another attack upon American cultural values occurs in the poem "On an Asian Poet Fallen Among American Translators", from 6,000ft Death Dive (22-3). The American cultural project is presented as superficial and barbarous:

America
empty of grace
graveyard of art
monster
living on lazar-house know-how
and hot-house pretensions...(23).

Both "On an Asian Poet Fallen Among American Translators" and, most explicitly, "Space Poets" defend British cultural space. This defence seems particularly strong in an intertextual reading which acknowledges the extent to which Gooneratne's poetry draws upon British literary traditions. The defence of the British emphasises the connection between British traditions and a Ceylonese or Sri Lankan "home". While Relative Merits and A Change of Skies do not make explicit judgements on American culture, it is worth noting that in a consideration of twentieth century Australian culture in A Change of Skies, America's global culture and its impact on Australia is not discussed. In a text which covers many of the broader features of
Australian cultural influences from overseas in the late twentieth century—
including Australia's British cultural heritage and cultural cringe and
Australia's growing relationship with Asia— the lack of a strong American
presence is a conspicuous absence.

The scathing cultural criticism of the poem "Sydney Suburbia" (in
6,000ft Death Dive) recalls the treatment of American culture in
Gooneratne's earlier poetry and foreshadows the focus on Australian society
in Gooneratne's fiction (7-8). The narrator, a newcomer and poet, attacks
the sterility of Australian suburbia and locates her frustration as a writer in
the limited imagery available in such an environment:

The poets of the South land fracture their syntax
and disable their metre
scorning to walk upright in the prosperous
offensive regularity
the world about them offers.
But I,
who long for order, pine for stability,
I who seek a plot in which to root
my lifetime's tree
can find no image richer than a conveyer-belt
and a row of cereals (8).

The criticism of Australian suburban cultural superficiality in this poem
recalls the harsh reaction to American culture in Gooneratne's early poetry.
However, "Sydney Suburbia" presents a rare exteriorisation of the poet's
sense of loss upon the Australian culture: the tone of the migrant poet
narrators in Gooneratne's poetry is more often weary and self-directed, the
loss of poetic voice is metaphorically linked with the different landscape—
as in "There Was a Country" and "Migrant Poet"—rather than with the
qualities of the Australian people or society. "Sydney Suburbia"
foreshadows the concentration on the migrant's perceptions of Australia in
the novel A Change of Skies but, as I shall demonstrate below, the tone of
social criticism in Gooneratne's novel is gently ironic, a strategy which is
linked with the novel's project of creating an essentially positive vision of the Sri Lankan migrant and history in Australia.

Gooneratne's fictional texts and criticism can be seen to bring a special affection for the English language to an Australian literary and cultural context: a central distinction between the texts is not whether a celebration of the English language, and particularly the possibilities of the conservative British literary tradition, takes place- it invariably does- but rather whether, and to what degree, this affection is presented as either uncomplicated or problematic. A number of Gooneratne's early poems and the poem "Canberra Meeting", from 6,000ft Death Dive, introduce a theme which has not been a major issue of debate in Australia- the decision to use English as a literary medium. The use of English as a medium is not often a matter of choice for writers working within the relatively small Australian publishing market. In her critical work as editor of, and contributor to, the journal New Ceylon Writing, a literary journal co-founded by Gooneratne and first published in Sri Lanka in 1970, Gooneratne has argued strongly for the important place of the English language in the future of Sri Lanka. New Ceylon Writing has been an important vehicle for encouraging young Sri Lankan English-language writers and has played a significant role in the debate about the rightful places of the three major languages- Tamil, Sinhala and English- available to the Sri Lankan writer in Sri Lankan society. The point of view which New Ceylon Writing has propounded is that English provides a vital link between Sinhala and Tamil, which have traditionally been kept apart due to racial and cultural prejudice. In a 1984 issue of the journal which focuses on the place of the English language in Sri Lanka, Gooneratne states as editor that:

It is our conviction that the writers who have contributed to this issue of New Ceylon Writing have put paid at last to the stupid and dangerous myth... that English, being part of a
"colonial inheritance", is inherently incapable of expressing an Asian- or a Sri Lankan- sensibility.

This passage illustrates the defensive atmosphere which often surrounds contemporary Sri Lankan writers who use English as a medium in their homeland. Gooneratne's article also emphasises, as do the other essays in the issue, the usefulness of the English language in the Sri Lankan context. ("An agent of unity" is a favourite phrase which is used to describe the English language). English is presented as providing a neutral ground in which Tamil and Sinhalese communities can be brought together, abolishing the difficulty in communication between these two cultural and linguistic groups. Poems such as Gooneratne's "This Language, This Woman: A Lover's Reply" and "The English Writer's Circle" in Word, Bird, Motif similarly defend the legitimacy of the literary use of the English language in post-colonial Sri Lanka (47-48; 50).

Since Gooneratne's arrival in Australia and the publication of her first volume of poetry in Australia, 6,000Ft Death Dive, the specific defence of English is no longer a primary theme in her fiction or non-fiction. The focus in Gooneratne's 6,000Ft Death Dive and A Change of Skies is upon issues of migration rather than issues of the homeland, and Relative Merits addresses the relationship between coloniser and colonised in Ceylon with a greater sense of distance and equanimity through the retrospective vision of a diasporic narrator living in Sydney. I would argue, however, that there is a strong sense of continuity between these works and Gooneratne's early poetry, just as there is between Gooneratne's early critical works on Pope and Austen and more recent critical perspectives influenced by post-colonialism, because of a continuing sense of great affection and attachment.

to the English language. In Gooneratne's criticism the celebration of the lyric possibilities of the English language also seems to be enhanced by the struggle for an intellectual space in which to use it.

The affection for the English language which issues from the post-colonial experience of the élite from a British colony has a broader significance for texts about the Asian migrant experience because many of the authors writing in this area in the English language come from post-colonial nations in which the decision to use English is a highly political, sometimes dangerous matter. The literary responses to this situation vary considerably: whereas Gooneratne and Satendra Nandan respond fondly, if occasionally ironically, to an education in eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature, other writers, such as Brian Castro, discard straightforward realist traditions in favour of linguistic play and contemporary postmodernism. It can be speculated that the personal defence of the English language and literature in a post-colonial context has made it more difficult for Gooneratne- as for Satendra Nandan, another writer addressing the Asian migrant experience in English from a post-colonial background in a former British colony- to fundamentally challenge structural dependencies on the British literary tradition in the creation of a new ethnic voice in Australia. (This is not to say that post-colonial writers are bound to such dependencies. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 2, Ee Tiang Hong produced innovative poetry in English in post-colonial Malaysia). Thus the texts of the Asian migrant experience in Australia in English- many of which are written by migrants from countries with a British colonial background such as Malaysia, Fiji, Sri Lanka- can be seen to be shaped by the politically charged arena of English literature and usage in post-colonial states.

Another influential factor which shapes the literary images of the Asian which are introduced into public discourse in Australia and is related to the patterns of authorship in the area, is the highly educated and
privileged backgrounds of many of the authors of Asian migrant fiction. In Sri Lanka, as a leading member of the Sinhalese élite, Gooneratne was a privileged member of society, and in Australia, as an academic, Gooneratne also belongs to a privileged class in Australian society. First generation Sri Lankan migrants who have published fictive works in Australia are generally well-educated professionals from the more wealthy English-educated strata of Sri Lankan society. The short story writer Chitra Fernando has qualifications in linguistics from Sri Lanka, the University of Sydney, and a PhD in linguistics from Macquarie University; Dipti Saravanamutty has graduated from the University of Sydney; the dramatist Ernest MacIntyre possesses a BA from Sri Lanka and an MA from the University of New South Wales; and Chandani Lokuge is completing a PhD at Flinders University. The similar educational and professional backgrounds of these authors have influenced to some extent the range of their representations of the Sri Lankan migrant experience in Australia. The background in tertiary education and academia that these authors share brings to mind Stephen Slemon's warning that:

the colonial subject who answers back is the product of the same ideological machinery that silences the subaltern.

Gooneratne's representations of Asian migrant experience, for instance, concentrate on the perspectives and concerns of wealthy, educated migrants. Bharat and Navarinjini, the central characters of A Change of Skies are part of the Ceylonese élite and migrate to Australia for reasons of professional advancement.

In his critical text In Theory, the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad argues that Said's notion of Orientalism ignores issues of class and gender in its

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emphasis on ethnicity and merely serves the needs of the newly developed "upwardly mobile (Asian) professionals" in the West, a group which developed due to changing immigration patterns from the late 1960s onwards. Yasmine Gooneratne and a number of writers in the area of Asian migrant fiction could be considered in a similar context. Ahmad suggests that this relatively privileged group, which "tended to come from upper classes in their home countries", entered the Humanities and the Social Sciences departments in universities and sought "narratives of oppression that would get them preferential treatment, reserved jobs, higher salaries in the social position they already occupied: namely, as middle-class professionals, mostly male." Ahmad's contention is that Said's *Orientalism* and its emphasis on the Western mythologies surrounding Asian ethnicity and the Orient provides a perfect narrative for such purposes. His generalisation about the function of academic criticism is at least partly applicable to writers who address the Asian migrant experience in Australia (and not only because of the conspicuous conjunction of author-academics who write in the area). However, I would argue, unlike Ahmad, that ethnicity is an important element of social and literary life and should be, at times, a central focus of discussion. As I shall demonstrate in this thesis, literary representations of the Asian migrant in Australia form part of a rapidly increasing field which has connections with issues of Orientalism and Australian literary nationalism and therefore adds to an understanding of Australian society and enriches Australian literature. In contrast to Ahmad, I also maintain that although it is important that a critic remains aware of the position of the relative privilege of migrant authors such as Yasmine Gooneratne- as acts of reading and writing should inevitably entail questions of politics- the contribution of the fresh perspective of these authors' texts to an understanding of the migrant

20Ahmad, 196.
and post-colonial experience should not be underestimated for reasons of authorial background and privilege.

In the present critical atmosphere which is attentive to experiences of victimisation, the temptation can be for the writer or critic to emphasise a lack of social power but Gooneratne resists this temptation and, in the family biography *Relative Merits*, places her family's social position in Ceylon as the indigenous colonial elite on the public record. The sinologist Stephen Owen has observed, as has Ahmad, the commodification of victimisation and warned of the temptations "of using one's victimization for self-interest" and "(selling) oneself abroad by what an international (Western) audience, hungry for political virtue... finds touching". *Relative Merits* illustrates the wealth and high social standing of Gooneratne's father's family in Sri Lanka, and mentions in passing some of the formidable achievements of her family in public and academic life. The biography acknowledges Gooneratne's privileged background in a critical atmosphere in which the privilege of an indigenous writer/critic can jeopardise his or her credibility as spokesperson for the Third World. This text also courageously addresses difficult questions of class affiliation and colonial complicity in a First World post-colonial context. Mixed in with details of family dynamics and personal histories, *Relative Merits* includes an analysis of the impact of British colonialism upon Sri Lanka's Sinhalese social élite. This personal memoir is an imaginative and thorough analysis of the historical traces which can haunt an individual's life; it suggests Gramsci's personal inventory which precedes truly critical thought. If Orientalism is, as Diana Brydon suggests, Said's "inventory" then I would suggest that *Relative Merits* is Gooneratne's. The mixture of literary devices, historical detail and philosophical commentary in *Relative Merits*

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seems appropriate for Gooneratne's inventory, as an academic who used to specialise in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature and as a poet.

The positive reception by Australian critics of Gooneratne's novel can, I contend, be linked with the use of British cultural and literary traditions to translate cultural difference. A review by Alison Broinowski in *The Sydney Morning Herald* praises the structure of the novel which she says:

...gives Gooneratne opportunities for outrageous satire, political comment, literary allusion and subversive innuendo 24.

In an article in the *Australian Book Review* Liam Davison also observes that:

...satire is its most obvious strength but the novel also works on other levels- partly as historical novel, partly as serious comment on the process of change which is a necessary part of migration..25.

There are many reasons for the interest in Gooneratne's novel, not the least being that it is a clever satire elegantly written. I would also suggest, however, that its success is linked to the mixture of a structure and language generally familiar to an Australian audience with elements of Sri Lankan experience. The expectations of a non-Asian majority readership has always had a strong impact upon Asian migrant literature published in Australia. Trinh Minh-ha has observed that members of a (dominant) society yearn for a fascinating exoticism and interesting Other which will not, however, "go so far as to question the foundation of their beings and makings"; they desire an authenticity which "turns out to be a product that one can buy, arrange to one's liking, and/or preserve"26. (Bhabha makes similar observations with regard to the construction of the colonised Other in

colonial texts, suggesting a limited and ultimately unthreatening difference is preferred rather than radical difference and therefore that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite"27). With regard to the appeal of migrant fiction in Australia, Fay Zwicky suggests that there seems to be:

...some kind of attraction to the notion of minority group demonstrativeness, to open displays of emotion, especially in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon environment28.

She then points out the effect which this projection of need has had upon Australian literature, concluding that when writing from the position of a member of a minority group "it is too easy to bask in the stereotype created by another's deprivation"29. The danger therefore exists that the representations of the Asian migrant which get published suit Anglo-Australian expectations of, for instance, exoticism, mystery, passion and family cohesion.

Literary works such as Gooneratne's A Change of Skies are legitimised by a non-Asian Australian readership and subjected to the gaze of a literary community which has strong ties with Britain and Europe. The British foundations of Gooneratne's characters in A Change of Skies and Relative Merits are not as threatening to an Australian readership which has grown up with British traditions and institutions. The style of Relative Merits draws upon the formal features of nineteenth century romantic fiction. Chapter 1, "A Victorian Love-Knot", deals with the development of a romantic relationship between the narrator's grandparents in a social atmosphere involving "ladies" and "gentlemen" with careful manners, accomplished young girls who play the piano beautifully, men who travel to

29Zwicky, 95.
English universities, and children with French governesses. These factors are complicated by Sinhalese surnames, and by the ironic explorations of the joy that a Sinhalese nobleman felt at being presented to the Prince of Wales. However, the exploration of Ceylon's connection with Britain results in a plethora of images which have a strong sense of familiarity for many Australian readers with a background in British literature. Christopher Koch has pointed out the British literary influences which shaped the imaginations of Australians of his generation. He describes Tasmanian winters which are laden with connections to Britain:

Snow fell in our mid-winters, which were the winters of Boys Own Paper and The House at Pooh Corner. I walked to school through London fogs. On the day that World War II broke out, the old English ladies who taught us at Clemes College were in tears. They explained to Grade Two the danger England was in, and my father's godmother thundered out "There'll Always be an England" on the piano... 30.

What I am suggesting is that a reading of Gooneratne's texts should take into consideration the mainstream non-Asian Australian readership which mediates between that different (Sri Lankan) ethnic identity and itself31. Part of the success of Gooneratne's work must be attributed to the prior knowledge of British literary structures in Australia and the ways in which these literary conventions are used in conjunction with the introduction of new knowledge about another culture. The mixture of nostalgia and wry irony with which British traditions are treated from the subject position of the Sri Lankan migrant narrator in Gooneratne's Relative Merits and passages of A Change of Skies forms another attractive point of connection for an Australian audience which shares an ambivalence towards Britain due to Australia's British settler past.

Gooneratne's early poetry draws from a conservative English literary tradition in subject matter and form but her more recent texts—6,000Ft Death Dive, A Change of Skies, and Relative Merits—also explore ideas from post-colonial and migrant theory while maintaining strong structural connections with an English literary tradition. These connections may have aided the popular success of Gooneratne's prose works in mediating the introduction of new cultural information about Ceylon/Sri Lanka to an Anglo-Australian audience with little specific knowledge of the society.

II

In discussing the mediation of cultural knowledge to an Australian audience which is for the most part unfamiliar with the specificities of the societies considered part of Asia, the adoption of the subject position of the Asian migrant can also be seen as an approach which mixes the familiarities of the migrant experience and a new perspective on Australian society with details about an unfamiliar culture. The broader migrant experience (from Britain or Europe) is a common experience in Australian literature and society, and can provide an important bridge between Orientalist notions of the Asian to a contemporary and quite different vision of the Asian as Neighbour. The migrant experience and its concerns are familiar to the majority of Australians, who possess strong ancestral bonds with the notion of migrant displacement. (Clearly Australian Aboriginals have a different perspective on this matter). David Malouf has powerfully illustrated the centrality of the migrant experience to many Australians in his introduction to a picture book called The Journeyman:

In a place like Australia... we are all migrants, all settlers: we have all experienced in our bones (that is, in the bones of our parents and grandparents) the painful business of leaving a first place and remaking our lives in a new one. The story of it continues to haunt us. It is an essential aspect of our being in a new land. Which is why every story about those who leave home and do not get back, and must start again on another shore, seems like our own story, the one that belongs to our
history, but is also our personal story and has the shape of what is deepest and most primitive in us...32.

In a recent essay, Paul Carter has similarly argued that "Australia is constitutionally a migrant society" and that the social fabric of Australian society is a characteristically migrant one33. He suggests that because of the lack of fixed meanings in Australia's multilingual post-colonial society, and the way in which the migrant uses mimicry to insinuate himself into an intolerant society, these members of Australian society exhibit an inventively baroque form of mimetic behaviour34. Carter emphasises that these mimetic ironies characterise cross-cultural discourse in contemporary Australia. Certainly, the development of inventive forms of cultural translation and the use of cultural references and literary histories has resulted in a number of experimental literary developments by authors such as Ania Walwicz, Angelo Loukakis, and Antigone Kefala. In Gooneratne's work, which is innovative within the boundaries of realism, the migrant experience provides a substantive theme which weaves throughout 6,000Ft Death Dive and A Change of Skies. Although Gooneratne's work often addresses the specifics of the Sri Lankan migrant experience, these issues often have at their foundation a sense of cultural and geographical displacement; an experience which can be viewed as relevant to many Australians because of Australia's status as a migrant society.

The discovery of the lack of a relevant descriptive language with which to describe the new country is a feature which links Gooneratne's work to similar tensions in early Australian literature, and forms an area of common ground between early Australian literature and recent writing about the Asian migrant experience. The difficulty of finding an appropriate language with which to describe an alien Australian landscape haunted the

early European settlers in this country. In the letters of Eliza Brown, for instance, there is a tension between Brown's English beliefs in what a beautiful tree constitutes and the very different landscape of her new homeland. This is evident in her aesthetic observations, such as "It is seldom we meet with a perfect tree", and "The hills are for the most part destitute of trees and generally rather a barren appearance". Occasionally Brown uses terms more suitable to an English pastoral scene than the bold colours of the Australian bush. She describes:

the romantic place upon which Mr Brown intends to lay out his fields and erect a small cottage.

A central problem outlined in Eliza Brown's journal is also evident in Gooneratne's 6,000ft Death Dive and A Change of Skies: the difficulty of a migrant narrator negotiating a personally meaningful sense of place.

A primary theme of Gooneratne's 6,000ft Death Dive is the migrant's loss of voice, a theme which also resonates with the content of Eliza Brown's diaries and many other Australian texts. In the melancholy poem "There Was A Country" a poet mourns being separated from a country, "where fine poems lay/ close to the surface...". In the new land from which s/he writes, poetic inspiration is seen as much more difficult to achieve:

Grief would need to strike so deep here, that I'd rather let creation sleep than mine the diamonds for a poet's crown.

The language derives much of its inspiration from English poetry; with the poem's hedges, opals, Muse and "poet's crown" there are few original images. The poet's "tools" of "love, anger, pity, wit" are "blunted" in the new landscape. It is acknowledged that the migrant poet's repertoire is not suitable in the new landscape but the focus is upon mourning a lost ease

36Cowan, ed., 151.
of expression rather than the acquisition of new skills. The sense of grief which springs from this experience recalls Eliza Brown's writing amongst other early Australian writing and forms a source of common ground and familiarity which eases the introduction of new cultural knowledge to the Anglo-Australian reader. The movement of Gooneratne's writing from derivative phrases to a more complex rendition of Australian landscape and society in *A Change of Skies* similarly echoes the difficult adjustments that not only many new arrivals in Australia have had to make, but that Australian writers continue to grapple with because the English language Australia has inherited is "a colonial language whose symbolic systems have been scrambled by displacement"\(^\text{37}\), which must thus be shaped by local linguistic rhythms, forms and cultural concerns in any thorough attempt to capture Australian landscape or society.

"Migrant Poet" injects a more positive note into the wandering poet's sense of loss than the mournful "There Was a Country" by anticipating cultural adaptation. "Migrant Poet" juxtaposes images of urban life- "the hammering media's brash mythology" and "Lost myths, turned rubble now beneath the new/ towering chainstore, rammed under the express-/way"- with the narrator's previous existence in an "ancient Kingdom" (17). Although the narrator, who speaks in the first person in the final two stanzas, finds the work of poetic creation ludicrous in the new land ("Create in joy, here, on Death's lip?")], the concluding sentence hints at a more positive, syncretic solution:

Another Vijaya, I venture south
here to reshape my art, refit my ship (17).

(As explained above, Vijaya is the first king of Sri Lanka who also travelled south but to settle in Sri Lanka). Notions from the literature of migration are evident in this metaphorical discussion of cultural baggage. The migrant's acceptance of new cultural and imaginative perspectives seems

possible but this is represented, as in much of Gooneratne's fiction, as requiring much hard work. The subject of the difficulty of writing in a new country, in coming to feel strongly about a place and creating a suitable descriptive language, is a theme that runs throughout Gooneratne's 6,000ft Death Dive. These affinities of theme with the diaries of early settlers and other migrant fiction, and with the experience of many Anglo-Australians, provide important starting points for the Asian migrant text to introduce areas of new cultural knowledge and diminish the perceived (Orientalist) gap between the Asian and the Australian.

A Change of Skies expands some of the ideas about migrant experience contained in the poems of 6,000ft Death Dive but, unlike the poetry collection, Gooneratne's novel focuses on Australian society in some depth in its depiction of the migrant experience. The novel investigates the notion of a migrant's loss of voice through the character of Bharat Mangala-Davasinha, a linguist and academic whose impatience to feel as though he belongs in Australian society results in comic changes to his name, appearance and choice of house. In a vignette entitled "Bharat Changes His Image", Navaranjini observes her husband's transformation: he changes his name to "Barry Mundy" so that Anglo-Australians can pronounce it with ease (and in so doing approximates the fish names of Gooneratne's other Australians). He buys a house presented as "lovable in a very Australian way", trades in his Austin for a Holden and swaps his spectacles for contact lenses (125). In the narrative "Barry Makes a Decision", Barry considers the benefits and disadvantages of the migrant experience and, significantly, he wonders:

How much time... does it take for an unfamiliar landscape to invade an individual's mind, take possession of his imagination, and change the colour not only of his words but of his soul? (280).

As in the poems of 6,000ft Death Dive, the educated narrator is convinced that a sense of familiarity with the new world will occur, and that this will
be linked with a new language with which to imagine that experience. Bharat is both impatient for this moment of linguistic freedom and wary of it because he sees it as heralding a deep change in his personality. In contrast to many of the poems of *6,000ft Death Dive*, *A Change of Skies* displays a strong sense of Australia as a multicultural landscape and uses symbols from Australian cultural mythology and experience. In Gooneratne's *6,000ft Death Dive* there is little sense of an Australian presence; there are none of the powerful national or cultural markers which affectionately arise in the descriptions of Sri Lanka.

A valuable aspect of fiction written about migrants is that it often puts onto the literary map details about cultural communities which have been ignored by the canon of mainstream literature. From the vantage point of a migrant writer, Sneja Gunew has observed:

> We have to write because they've been telling stories about us. Word has gone out but not our words...38.

In *6,000ft Death Dive*, Gooneratne introduces a number of subjects dealing with the Sri Lankan migrant experience in Australia which have been relatively untouched by Anglo-Australian writers, including the dynamics of a Sri Lankan migrant community, the impact of racism against those considered "Asian", and the loss of a native language. "Newsletter" begins with an extract from a Sri Lankan community's bulletin, which details the activities of its members (10). Almost incidental clues link these individuals; the repetition of "the island", an insider's name for Sri Lanka, and Dutch surnames provide the only indication of the common Sri Lankan heritage. The poem tentatively makes a general point about the dynamics of the migrant community. After a gossipy, flowing "extract" from the newsletter, with its many pauses but only one concluding period, the narrator interjects to comment fondly on the effects of this newspaper:

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and so the print-out goes, linking names of exiles and established immigrants, carving new niches, keeping still green the old connections, old remembrances (10).

The second, briefer stanza is more emphatic. Its sentences are shorter and more often delineated by punctuation. The first sentence of the second stanza- with its gentle rebuke to a disappointed visitor to the country of his childhood- amends the impression of the last stanza by suggesting that although connections should be maintained with the homeland, an awareness that the homeland itself is changing should also exist. Finally the narrator praises the newsletter again for "coaxing new growth from a bruised memory", for filling "the island-shaped wastes common to immigrant hearts" (10). The impression is that the quiet, shared memories of an immigrant community can, in a positive fashion, ease the sense of loss. While considering the continuities between Gooneratne's novel and 6,000ft Death Dive and other Australian migrant writing it is important to note that Gooneratne's texts attend in particular to the historical specificities of the Sri Lankan migrant community.

As the following chapters will substantiate, the creation of a positive vision of particular "Asian" migrant communities is a strong feature of writing about the Asian migrant experience, and can be linked with attempts to counteract a history of negative images of Asia, the Asian and the Asian migrant in Australia. Annette Hamilton, drawing on Said's Orientalism amongst other theoretical sources, contends that the Asian has a special place in the Australian "National Imaginary" and that an ambivalence between fear and desire has characterised the historical development of the images of the Asian in Australia39. A response to stereotypes of the Asian and the substitution of these with cultural specificities and a non-threatening sense of cultural difference is a strong

feature of writing about the Asian migrant experience. Gooneratne's creative works may be seen as a realist attempt to respond to Australian discourse about Asia by installing a positive vision of the Sri Lankan migrant in Australian society. Although *A Change of Skies* considers some of the complexities of historical discourse and teases apart notions of post-colonial loyalties and national identity, it does not strongly challenge— as the more experimental Asian migrant texts do— the connections between historicism and realism or foreground notions of language and representation. Instead *A Change of Skies* addresses Australian images about Sri Lanka, and particularly its connotations as part of Asia, and perceptions of the Sri Lankan migrant through a narrative of humanist stability which establishes strong notions of correct human and moral behaviour maintained through irony. The Asian migrant characters are shown in an egalitarian fashion to be hard-working and attractively flawed like the Anglo-Australian characters, a characterisation which diminishes the traditional imaginative distance between Asian and Australian, East and West.

The more benevolent climate for "Asian" immigrants and the greater acceptance of cultural difference which Bharat and Navarinjini's daughter Edwina experience is shown to be due in part to the contributions of previous "Asian" immigrants to Australian society like Edwina's parents. Although killed in an aeroplane crash towards the novel's end, Jean and Barry's personalities are shown to live on in Australian public discourse through their publications. After her death Jean is still referred to in popular magazines due to the success of her prototypical cookbook, and her subsequent television show on SBS, which fosters a culinary hybridity between East and West, Sri Lankan and Anglo-Australian cookery. Barry's bestselling book, his grandfather's journal of experiences in Australia in the late nineteenth century, is shown to have introduced Australians to early Sri Lankan contact with Australia, and his later documentary on Sri Lanka's
ancient cities is similarly shown to provide a rare opportunity for Australians to learn about Sri Lanka. The high profile of people like Edwina's parents and their efforts to educate the Anglo-Australian public about Sri Lanka are presented as contributing significantly to the more relaxed attitudes towards those considered "Asian" in Australia in the early 1990s. Edwina's relatively peaceful existence in Australia twenty-five or so years after her parents' arrival seems linked with their proactive behaviour as educators of the Australian public. In a preface about the author's background in A Change of Skies, Yasmine Gooneratne is identified as a Sri Lankan migrant, and the notion within the novel of the importance of a measured educational contribution which the migrant (writer) can make is therefore to some extent affirmed through the backing of this extra-textual "reality". Gooneratne's novel promotes the importance of "Asian" migrants to Australian society by emphasising the contributions of migrants to an atmosphere of social tolerance through their efforts to increase Anglo-Australian cultural knowledge and understanding, and an awareness of the realities and complexities of some of the cultures within the region known as Asia.

A Change of Skies also suggests that by virtue of the unique experience of migration, the migrant can contribute to the new homeland a special insight and understanding of modernity. However, whereas in the more experimental texts this image of the migrant is a central focus, in Gooneratne's novel, which stays generally within the conventions of literary realism, there is little indication of a connection between migrancy and the uncertainties of modernity. Gooneratne's well-meaning migrant figures form part of a stable and peaceful vision of a multicultural society rather than inhabiting positions of alienation from which to propose a radical questioning of all cultural apparatuses. The connection between migrancy and modernity has become popular in what I have defined in the Introduction as "Asian Cosmopolitan" writing: Rushdie has argued
powerfully for the broader relevance of the migrant experience by linking the migrant experience of cultural displacement with the discovery of "the provisional nature of all truths" and thus the internalisation of modernity. The linking of migrancy and modernity is a central element of Castro and Miller's postmodern novels and is reflected in the fragmented structure of these texts. In contrast, Gooneratne's novel refers only briefly to the connections between migrancy and the heightened awareness of the provisional nature of reality. In a passage titled "Barry Receives Divine Guidance", Barry speculates that migrants enjoy a liberty and certain insights that those who do not move beyond the country of their birth will, quite possibly, never understand. He describes some famous immigrant writers, and refers to the immigrant experience, as involving:

... something that goes deeper than the mind alone can reach, an awareness that everything around us is caught up in a process of profound and inexorable change, and that we are not only changing with it, but being perpetually remade (285).

Unlike Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Castro's Birds of Passage, this discovery in A Change of Skies does not provide a shaping force in the migrant narrative but merely forms part of the presentation of the heightened awareness of the migrant and further evidence of his/her contribution to Australian society. In Gooneratne's novel, Bharat's insight into a world of perpetual change and his disturbing realisation of the fabricated nature of reality, is fleeting, whereas Castro's alienated narrator Seamus O'Young in Birds of Passage is obsessed by this premise. Seamus' status as an individual in transit between categories and loyalties of Chinese/Australian, East/West, is a central element of the narrative and is shown to provide both a liberating freedom from social constraints and a disastrous sense of dispossession. The narrative of Seamus O'Young in

41See Chapter 5.
Castro’s *Birds of Passage* powerfully reflects his migrant insight through an abandonment of traditional literary forms and a sense of movement, transition, mobility and multiplicity. In contrast, *A Change of Skies* does not seek to challenge the links between historicism or realism, or encourage scrutiny of its own or other conceptual apparatuses: instead it maintains these structures in order to install a positive sense of Sri Lankan migrant history and encourage certain forms of behaviour, especially cultural tolerance, in Anglo-Australian and Sri Lankan Australian readers alike. Nevertheless, as I shall demonstrate in Section III, within the boundaries of a generally realist treatment, Gooneratne’s *A Change of Skies* encourages a complex vision of the Asian migrant experience through devices of irony and a multi-voiced narrative.

*A Change of Skies* is a sophisticated text which celebrates the immigrant but also avoids romanticising the experience of immigration. The use of ironical first person narratives is a central strategy which prevents the novel from merely replicating the chauvinism of Orientalist works by asserting an uncritical pro-immigrant stance. Sri Lankan characters are attributed with just as many faults as the Australian characters; the tendency to create sanitised stereotypes is resisted. According to the narrative stance adopted in *A Change of Skies*, the Koyako family are the worst kind of expatriates: they have pessimistic and racist expectations of Anglo-Australians, mix only with other Sri Lankan expatriates, and place unrealistic academic pressure on their children. Although they present a purist front of Sri Lankan nationalist fervour in their advocacy of Sri Lankan dress, food and etiquette, the Koyakos are eventually exposed as hypocrites. The point is made through the deft use of ironical narratives that racism is an element of all societies; members of the Sri Lankan community are not glamourised— as well as the Australian characters, the Koyakos, and Navaranjini and her family utter racist comments. This treatment of the Sri Lankan characters in the novel is an attractive feature of
the presentation of migrant characters in *A Change of Skies*: it resists the pressure from critics for writers writing about migrant minorities to endlessly create "positive role models", a pressure that is induced by the politically charged space in which migrant fiction is critiqued42.

*A Change of Skies* depicts a "civilised" society in which the cultural gap between migrant and Australian-born citizens in Australian society can be overcome peacefully by some hard work, a little understanding and a sense of humour. All of the migrant characters in *A Change of Skies* are forced to change some of their habits to fit in with the society that they have joined: in Gooneratne's fictive Australia, to pretend that this is not a practical necessity is to be a hypocrite. The most positive path for the migrant to take is presented as involving the development of cultural hybridity, and the practical alteration of some traditional rituals to new social conditions while retaining the beliefs underlying these customs. The successful manner in which Navaranjini takes on all challenges in the new culture is prefigured upon her arrival in Australia, when she creatively blends one of her few images of the new country, a male surfer from a magazine, and the reassuring figure of Arjuna, the archer from the *Mahabharata*:

... the heroic image of Arjuna-as-Surfer, rising in power against the waves of a terrifying Unknown, symbolised Australia for me on the day we arrived in Sydney, cheering me with its promise of fine weather, cloudless skies and ultimate victory (69).

To celebrate the Tamil and Sinhalese New Year, Jean dresses in the appropriate auspicious colour according to the conventions of her native country but, rather than proceeding in the completely traditional way and using an open fire, she turns her rice cooker on at the correct time.

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42This is a tendency that has also been noted in Asian American criticism and fiction. eg. Lim, 150-1.
A flexible and inventive approach to life in a new country is treated with a similarly gentle and affectionate irony when Gooneratne combines Australian and Sri Lankan systems of nomenclature in her novel. In a note at the back of her novel, Gooneratne points out that for the names of her Sri Lankan characters, she has:

...modified for narrative purposes the traditional Sinhala ge or "household" name which incorporates, preserves, and conveys essential information about its owner (327).

The names are often humorous, giving indications of the characters' personalities or motives. For the naming of her Australian characters, Gooneratne states that she draws on:

a colonial tradition of naming natives of a colonised country after animals, vegetables, or articles of food (327).

In a gently satirical fashion which is characteristic of Gooneratne's fiction, Australia is thus symbolically re-colonised. Barry's colleagues at Southern Cross University include King Fysshe, Francesca Sweetlips and Dr Groper and he changes his name to Barry Mundy. The syncretic attitude which the character Jean adopts towards Sri Lankan and Anglo-Australian traditions after she arrives in Australia may thus be seen to be reinforced by similar devices employed in the structure of the novel itself; ideas drawn from Sri Lankan and Anglo-Australian cultural and historical systems are combined to produce a double-coded, culturally hybrid system of naming.

Despite Bharat and Navarinjini's experiences of cultural dislocation and uncertainty through migrancy, the world of A Change of Skies is presented as an essentially ordered and civilised place with timeless and universal values regarding human nature and expected behaviour which are enforced by the ironic treatment of the failings of certain characters. A sociohistorical overview of Asian migrant experience between 1964 and the early 1990s is a feature of A Change of Skies but the focus is upon the decisions of the individual and the ramifications of these decisions rather
than the social dimension of behaviour and the fact that individual behaviour, and the way in which it is judged, is shaped by cultural factors. Social divisions are given little consideration: the privileged, highly educated background of the protagonists and the majority of the Anglo-Australian characters is not foregrounded and differences based on gender are not a major theme.

The rare moments of social criticism which refer to the migrant's experience in Australian society in the poems from 6,000ft Death Dive foreshadow the mild criticism and attention to moments of experience in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies. "Nambiliya (Washing the Grain)" draws upon Sri Lankan traditions, the hand processing of grain after its harvest, to create a metaphor for the "Asian" experience of migration to Australia (1). The title refers to "a rimmed earthenware bowl decorated with fine ridges on its inner surface, and used in the preparation of rice" (36). "Nambiliya " also subtly refers to the experience of migration. In an unusual use of the third person plural, cereal grains are personified as exiles, with "the home-field only a memory warm/ in the husk" (1). The pounding of the mortar, the persistent churning, tilting and washing all conjure a sense of extreme disorientation. The pain of the loss of home is stressed in the construction of the second stanza; the sense of distance from the familiar is emphasised in the repetition of "so far", with the surrounding pauses created by the insertion of two commas: "We are so far now, so far, cry the grains" (1). The brutal erasure of memories of home is also stressed, with the movement of the lines, from short to long to short, and the repetition of the word "too" directing attention to the three syllable line "that too lost". After the rough treatment of the processing of the grain- which parallels the experience of contact with a new culture- an open question remains about whether the "consumable" and "pale" substance produced is worthwhile. There is a sense of tragedy in the knowledge that the "dark grit/ trapped in the bowl's fine furrows" will be tossed thoughtlessly "out upon the wattles and dry
grass" (1). To extend this analysis, to an Australian reader, viewing the wattle as an Australian national symbol, this final verse can be read as a further analogy to the experience of the non-European migrant. The conclusion of the poem appears to be that the aspects of an individual and a culture which change through a violent exposure to life in another culture might be the most easily "consumable" but are not necessarily the most attractive; the inheritance brought from another land can remain poignantly unappreciated. In this poem, the discussion of issues of relevance to a specific Sri Lankan society is blurred with those relevant to a migrant society like Australia's. "Nambiliya " offers both a social criticism of Australian society's failure to appreciate migrant contributions, and a broader concentration on themes important to Australia as a migrant society, such as those of loss, nostalgia and belonging. In some senses "Nambiliya " neatly parallels A Change of Skies because it employs an indirect form of criticism through allegory (which may be compared with the indirect irony of A Change of Skies) and does not establish a strong political opinion directed at particular policies but rather attends to the emotions of the individual. "Nambiliya " is also unusual, however, because of the use of the third person plural, an uncommon narrative position in Gooneratne's work.

The kind of cultural hybridity advocated in A Change of Skies, and the attention to the individual experience rather than social patterns and policies are also reflected in Gooneratne's poetry collections, which mix Sri Lankan and British concerns and styles. In her poetry collections Gooneratne provides a glossary to explain terms with which a non-Sri Lankan writer may have difficulty. In the lengthy, complex verse composition "The Lizard's Cry", published in a collection of the same name in 1972, the conventions of traditional Sinhalese poetry are adhered to in English (23-33). A helpful set of notes for the non-Sinhalese reader stresses an awareness by the author of the non-Sri Lankan as a likely reader for her
work. Gooneratne explains the construction of the first twelve lines of this poem with regard to ancient Sinhalese poetic customs. She also draws upon Sri Lankan mythology and literary tradition in her poetry. These inter-textual comments promote the concept of a hybrid form of adaptation as being the preferred form of migrant conduct. That this process of exchange can be painful, however, is a common theme in Gooneratne's fiction; the development of a new cultural mythology is presented as an important and rewarding but also as a time-consuming, difficult, and very personal task.

In *A Change of Skies* the ease of the migration experience is linked for the most part to the response of the individual rather than social forces or government policies. However, the general attitudes directed towards migrants in Australian society between the mid-1960s and the early 1990s are explored to some extent and provide a limited sociohistorical perspective. The assimilationist climate of Australia in 1964, when Barry and Jean first arrive in Australia, is seen to present the Sri Lankan migrant with considerable psychological pressure to conform. Upon arrival, as noted above, Bharat becomes temporarily obsessed by the importance of his "image" as an Australian. Jean is most appalled by the family betrayal she sees in Barry's adoption of a new name:

> ...giving up Bharat seemed like a betrayal of everything he (Grandfather Edward) had stood for... (124).

This sparks, at an academic party, Jean's outburst at Professor Blackstone, the man responsible for inciting racist hatred towards Asian immigration to Australia and, indirectly, for Barry's increased sensitivity to what Anglo-Australians think of him. Blackstone declares he is speaking for many Australians by criticising Asian immigration. He states on radio that

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43*By tradition a Sinhalese poet begins a *sandesa*, 'message-poem', with a 2-line benediction (*yahagiya*) followed by a verse of 10 lines (*a dahapadasahaella*) generally of a complimentary and descriptive nature*. Yasmine Gooneratne, "Note," *The Lizard's Cry and Other Poems* (Kandy: Sithumina Press, 1972) 43.
"Asians pollute the air with the fumes of roasting meat" (121). This comment, which so offends the Hindu and vegetarian Jean, forms an indirect criticism of Geoffrey Blainey's dangerous and misleading distribution of quotes of complaints from "ordinary" Australians (one of these included a similar comment that immigrants "cook on their verandas, so the sky is filled with greasy smoke and the smell of goats' milk"44).

At least twenty-five years later, Edwina, Barry and Jean's daughter, contends with the more benign expectations of the second-generation migrant perceived as "Asian" in Australia's multicultural society. This ironically also demands a change in name: Edwina quickly learns to introduce herself as "Veena" at university, aware of the attractiveness of an exotic Indian heritage. Edwina is happy enough with the knowledge that image-promotion is important, she views it as a valuable link with her parents' experience:

...you've got to do a bit of acting when you live between two cultures. In a way, it's Mum and Dad's mutation thing all over again (316).

This description suggests significant continuities between the behaviour expected of migrants, despite new government policies. The difference for Edwina in the early 1990s is that the Asian migrant has become the favoured party in a country presented as hungry for "difference", in such mild forms as foreign food and music. Edwina feels she has considerable advantages over her friends at university, and there is little to contradict this impression. A Change of Skies seems at times dangerously close to an uncritical celebration of multiculturalism; it does not engage with the criticisms of this policy, such as Sneja Gunew's notion of multiculturalism as "the patented supplement, the addendum to Anglo-Celtic monoculturalism"45. This impression is eased, if only slightly, by the character of Edwina, who finally longs for a sense of Sri Lanka which goes beyond her

knowledge of its vulnerable place in global politics, and for a more complex perception of the Sri Lankan sense of herself to take the place of the "image" of exoticism she wears at university. Gooneratne's novel presents the Asian migrant as a valuable addition to Australian society, countering claims to the contrary in some areas of Australian popular culture, and gently criticises negative attitudes to the Asian migrant presence by concentrating on the power of the individual to create change in his or her own world rather than through overtly political statements.

The primary emphasis is upon the personal and psychological stress of the experience of immigration in *A Change of Skies*: Australia's formal migration policies are rarely tackled. There are, however, occasional references to the White Australia policy, which is mocked in Gooneratne's typically ironic humour through the comments of some Sri Lankan characters:

It's a well-known fact, you see, Baba, that Australians are afraid of the dark. They have a White Australia Policy, did you know that? (19).

Nevertheless, the framework of emphasis in the novel suggests that personal qualities have a greater effect upon the experience of migration than the policies of the current government. Some people are presented as just being more suited than others to the life of a migrant. Barry muses at some length upon this point:

... there are, transcending all the facts of gender, inheritance, race or community, two kinds of people here, people like Edward and my wife Jean on the one hand, who follow cheerfully wherever life leads them; and on the other, people like myself who ask questions at every step of the way (153).

This philosophy also forms part of a quote, written by the classical Latin poet Horace, which dramatically concludes Edward's next journal entry:

He who crosses the ocean may change the skies above him, but not the colour of his soul (167).
This notion is further emphasised through the title of the novel. In the dialogue about the experience of migration in *A Change of Skies*, the greatest emphasis is not upon government policy, or often even upon the attitudes of Australian-born citizens towards migrants, although this does receive some attention, but rather upon the psychological and personal qualities of the migrants themselves, and how these affect their experience of migration. Although Barry makes some criticism of the contemporary state of language aid available for non-English-speaking migrants, his course of defence is not to lobby government departments, but to join the system and to teach English to the new arrivals himself. Gooneratne's poetry similarly concentrates on capturing rare moments of experience rather than on making incisive political points. This focus on the personal seems unusual in an author who is involved in the post-colonial debate and recalls both Gooneratne's upbringing as it is reworked in *Relative Merits*, with its impression of a strong family tradition of humanism—a belief in the power of an individual and of timeless values concerning true human nature—and the tension in Gooneratne's recent criticism between strong humanist convictions and an attention to social discourse and power driven by references to the critical perspectives of Rushdie and Bhabha.

III

The subject of an Anglicised Sinhalese narrator coming to terms with an ambiguous cultural heritage from Ceylon, as depicted in the family biography *Relative Merits*, finds resonances in the structure and subject matter of the novel *A Change of Skies*. This comparison, I contend, highlights the common ground between texts which deal with the post-colonial experience and those which depict the migrant experience. The boundaries between the post-colonial and the migrant become blurred when

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46 Gooneratne is Director of the Post-Colonial Literatures Research Centre at Macquarie University.
47 For example, see Gooneratne, "Family Histories as Postcolonial Texts".
considering texts which are written from the subject position of a post-colonial migrant about the colonial experience, as in *Relative Merits*, or what might be termed the "post-colonial migrant" experience, as in *A Change of Skies*. The shared elements of *Relative Merits* and *A Change of Skies*—particularly their treatment of history and use of irony and the multi-voiced narrative—demonstrates a concurrence between post-colonial and migrant subject matter and the literary strategies that can be used to deal with both sets of experience.

Post-colonial literature and migrant literature share counter-discursive projects in which a minority literary discourse mounts a defence against the authority of a majority literary discourse. They therefore share the concerns and literary devices of texts of resistance. For instance, since both post-colonial and migrant experiences often involve an exposure to different languages and ways of thinking, post-colonial literature and migrant literature frequently emphasise the provisional nature of language and truth. A fascination with the connections between language and power is a related characteristic of these texts.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the controversial novel by Salman Rushdie, who migrated from India to Britain in 1961, language is figured as power:

> The real language problem: how to bend it, shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells, how to master the river of words of time of blood: about all you haven't got a clue. How hard the struggle, how inevitable the defeat... Language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so make it true.\(^{48}\)

In Rushdie's creative and critical writing there are elements of both guilt and joy in the mastering of the new language; a tension between feeling as though, as a post-colonial writer with other languages at his disposal, he has

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sold out ("A deserter... more English than, your Angrez accent wrapped around you like a flag"^{49}), and the conviction that in a post-colonial context "To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free"^{50}. As noted above, Gooneratne's large prose works treat British cultural traditions and their influence in Sri Lanka with an ambivalent tone of affectionate satire. With regard to the English language, they are at times self-consciously wary of the role of English as an imperial medium, but the pervading sense of affection for the English language and conservative British literary traditions can also temper, and at times subvert, this insight. A similar tension is evident in Gooneratne's recent criticism which addresses post-colonial literature but rather than attempting a critique of post-colonial language use focuses on the sociohistorical context of author and text in an equable style- rather than the more volatile, experimental approach of Rushdie- and often displays a strong sense of regard for the English language and British literary tradition. In an academic essay, Gooneratne describes the post-colonial suspicion of English:

In "The New Empire in Britain", Salman Rushdie... pointed out that the raw material of literature- language itself-has become stained and diseased by the colonial experience to a point at which it is very nearly unusable... Coming to the writing of fiction in these post-colonial times, I am forced, like all my contemporaries, to devise strategies which will allow me to use the stained and diseased language Rushdie describes as a medium and raw material...^{51}.

In Gooneratne's fiction, these "strategies" of resistance often involve a use of irony and a multi-voiced structure. As I shall demonstrate below, while not radically challenging the British imperial literary heritage by reflexively deconstructing the conservative literary form of realism, these strategies still challenge the authority of the dominant group by questioning their version of reality and the notion of one (imperial or national) version of history.

^{51}Gooneratne, "Family Histories as Post-Colonial Texts," 100.
In the fiction of migrant authors in Australia the English language often appears as a site of contestation and power and reflects the important social advantage that the possession of English language fluency denotes in Australian society. Sneja Gunew has discussed the effects that a loss of control over language can have:

... [it] can kill or maim mental activity; it can also foster an acute sensitivity to the ways in which languages operate, by providing a vantage point of comparison from which no language is ever to be totally "natural" or beyond question.\(^{52}\)

The failure to be fluent in the English language is linked with a sense of enormous loss in Australian migrant literature. It is often connected with power in descriptions of the migrant experience. For instance, Ania Walwicz's characteristic prose expresses the frustration and confusion of a young migrant narrator attempting to communicate. In the short story "Translate", Walwicz's narrator poignantly attempts her revenge by speaking her own garbled tongue in front of her peers:

i will show off and you see what it's like won't tell you anything you be on the out for bit nic im nie powiem nic tak jak ja wtedy what is woda drzewo maj serce bluzka palto but zegarek just sounds for buzz my mouth moving says you don't know ha allright will tell them will translate water wood may heart blouse coat shoe...\(^{53}\)

The narrator's constant straining to understand and communicate, to interpret and re-interpret, is effectively presented by the jumble of languages and grammar which gives the reader an opportunity to experience a similar difficulty in translating the narrator's thoughts. However, unlike Walwicz and Rushdie and, as I shall demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5, Alex Miller and Brian Castro, Gooneratne does not problematise language as a site of contestation through a "postmodern" challenging of the most basic


structural expectations through experimental literary devices. Gooneratne's approach is to challenge assumptions through irony, explicit discussion or a narrative structure of competing voices, which questions dominant discourses and inserts levels of ambiguity into the notion of a single, unchallengable version of events. The discourse which is subject to deconstruction in both *Relative Merits* and *A Change of Skies* is that of a dominant version of history which has excluded the voice of a particular marginal group. Gooneratne's texts and their essentially ordered worlds do not, however, take issue with the notion of the existence of history itself or question the relationship of historicism and realism as do the more experimental texts about the Asian migrant experience.

Irony is one of the literary devices which surfaces most frequently in Gooneratne's biography and novel. As D. C. Muecke observes:

> ... irony has basically a corrective function... restoring the balance when life is being taken too seriously, or, as some tragedies show, not seriously enough, stabilizing the unstable but also destabilizing the excessively stable54.

Muecke also quotes Erich Heller, who suggests that one cannot be both ironical and radical: the two states are mutually exclusive55. The privileged place of this corrective strategy in *A Change of Skies* and *Relative Merits* affirms the essentially stable structure of the works which is established in the clearly defined movement of the plots and their unreflective adherence to realism (with its essentially unproblematic presentation of the relationship between knowledge and reality). The constant use of irony also shapes the strong sense of appropriate human behaviour in the texts. Although the device evokes an ordered, stable fictional landscape rather than radical questioning, irony is also used in Gooneratne's fiction to make some powerful points regarding the complex, marginalised position of the

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55Muecke, 6.
post-colonial citizen (in *Relative Merits*) and the migrant considered Asian in Australia (in *A Change of Skies*).

In *Relative Merits* the device of irony is used to create an impression of ambiguity and doubt about the relationship between British coloniser and Ceylonese colonised. *Relative Merits* traces the history of the members of the Bandaranaike family of Ceylon, from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s. Thematic and structural features of *Relative Merits* recall Jane Austen's novels, themes which are not unexpected given Gooneratne's expertise in eighteenth and early nineteenth century fiction from Britain, and Austen in particular. However, Gooneratne introduces an additional layer of irony to her text by employing these strategies in a colonial setting. The effect is a mimetic representation of colonial beliefs and the British coloniser through the depiction of the Anglicised Bandaranaike family. Homi Bhabha has discussed the nature of mimicry as "ironic compromise"\(^56\), a strategy which disrupts the authority of colonial discourse by disclosing ideological contradiction at its centre. Bhabha proposes an element of "menace" in mimicry which "reverses 'in part' the colonial appropriation by... producing a partial vision of the colonizer's presence"\(^57\). In Gooneratne's biography the British coloniser can only be glimpsed through the representation of the mimetic colonial subject which is placed, in a deliberate challenge to imperial versions of Ceylonese history, at the centre of the narrative.

As pointed out in Section I, *Relative Merits* treats British literary and cultural traditions with an ambivalent tone of affectionate satire which gestures towards the complexity of the relationship between coloniser and the colonised élite. The narrator's exploration of her family's past

\(^{56}\)"Within that conflictual economy of colonial discourse which Edward Said describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination- the demand for identity, stasis- and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history- change, difference- mimicry represents an ironic compromise". Bhabha, 126.

\(^{57}\)Bhabha, 125-133.
frequently involves an ironic confrontation with Anglicised values. For instance, she observes that:

Until the political changes of 1956 put English accents permanently out of fashion in Ceylon, the men of our clan developed a fine collection of imported accents which, for richness and fruitiness, I cannot imagine being matched anywhere outside Britain itself. E. O. Dias Bandaranaike (whom we called "Uncle Eddie"...) sported a stylish monocle on a black silk ribbon, and was said by my father to have acquired his English accent by simply driving through Cambridge University on a fine spring afternoon (81).

The British structural features of Relative Merits also draw attention to the extent to which the Bandaranaike family, along with many of the Ceylonese élite from the 1830s to the 1950s, adopted the English language and English customs. The attachment of the Bandaranaike characters to British traditions- as evident in their Cambridge University educations, their habitual Grand Tours of Europe and their enjoyment of the lyric possibilities of the English language- makes the British literary devices in the text seem particularly fitting. The use of irony to draw attention to the relationship between the Ceylonese élite and the British coloniser does not, however, create a sense of distance between the reader and the world of Relative Merits. This is not a colonialist use of irony in JanMohamed's sense which "solidifies and reinforces the distances between the reader and the world"58. There is no sense here of a moral disapproval of the adoption of British customs by the colonised Ceylonese. Gooneratne often stresses that the adoption of the British coloniser's customs by the Ceylonese élite is connected to the strategies of the British coloniser, which capitalised upon existing cultural hierarchies. She also scrupulously outlines Ceylon's colonial history, particularly the way in which centuries of experience of colonisation, by the Portuguese and Dutch as well as the British, had

encouraged the élites to preserve traditional privilege by adopting the colonists' customs.

As an ironic observer the narrator of *Relative Merits* often questions her ancestors' Anglicised behaviour, but her own use of the British literary tradition- not only in the literary construction of her work but in numerous inter-textual references to English poets- also provides a source of ambiguity in the text. This contradiction between the ironic tone directed towards the adoption of British customs and literary allusions and the construction of the narrative highlights the notion of the partial consent of the members of a colonised country, and especially its leaders, to an imperial cultural tradition. The subject position of the narrator seems shaped by the fact that she is living in exile in Sydney and writing back from a 1980s post-colonial perspective, but that does not make her a revolutionary. As noted above, the ambivalent representation of the Sri Lankan relationship with Britain is part of Gooneratne's larger writing strategy for tackling post-colonial issues. In her academic paper "Family Histories as Post-Colonial Texts", Gooneratne states that the family histories of post-colonial exiles, such as her own *Relative Merits*, should be complex and ambiguous, they should "combine comedy and tragedy, laughter and loss" because the post-colonial experience itself is complex59. The literary strategy of irony permits a level of scepticism about certain beliefs and positions; it introduces a sense of doubt about the truth value of a dominant discourse and thus permits a new version of Sri Lankan history (in *Relative Merits*) and the Sri Lankan migrant (in *A Change of Skies*), but it does not induce a sense of radical uncertainty about belief or an especially intensive scrutiny of the ways in which narrative shapes our understanding of the world.

The device of irony also performs a key role in *A Change of Skies*. The modes of discourse in the novel include journal entries by Bharat's Grandfather Edward, letters, and monologues from the points of view of

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59Gooneratne, "Family Histories as Post-Colonial Texts," 97.
Bharat and Navarinjini primarily but also from their Australian colleagues and neighbours. The satirical treatment of Australian and Sri Lankan cultural encounters and assumptions in *A Change of Skies* often involves one of the many narrators in the text betraying a belief of which he or she is unaware. Again, this irony neither has a distancing effect between reader and world nor succumbs to simplistic manichean imagery. In a characteristically humanist fashion, Gooneratne draws links such as human frailty, pride, vanity and lack of self-knowledge between individuals who are separated by categories of East and West. Thus cultural stereotypes are presented as creating a false sense of division between human beings and the many qualities and concerns which they all share. What I wish to suggest here is that the device of irony which has been polished in a primarily post-colonial perspective in *Relative Merits* can also contribute to the marginalised migrant subject and narrative in a novel. In both texts, the device of irony is used to question the imperatives of dominant discourses.

The Orientalist cultural enterprise is shown to endure in the Australia of *A Change of Skies* and although only a mild criticism of this discourse takes place within the novel, the habitual reliance on structural irony rather than direct narrative intervention is, I contend, essential in an appreciation of the presentation of "Asians" and "Asia" within *A Change of Skies*. The problematic nature of the term "Asia" is not directly confronted but, in a subtle and non-didactic fashion, Gooneratne shows the changing understandings of the concept of "Asia" over time, and from individual to individual, through the many different perceptions of the narrators. Edwina's Anglo-Australian adopted aunt's perception of Asia is of a:

pure fantasy land... a world of Maharajas and marble palaces and magic carpets, an exotic fairytale in which even the beggars are picturesque (318).

For Edward Mangala-Davasinha, a Sinhalese aristocrat of the late nineteenth century, the concept of "Asia" does not exist; the divisions he
frequently notes between cultures and customs seem too rich to be subject to this kind of generalisation. The partially Australianised Navarinjini (Jean) and Bharat (Barry) Mangala-Davasinha often use the term "Asia", with only the occasional distinction between themselves and the "Far Easterners"; yet, when discussing the divisions within their own country they angrily debate with each other for hours and are incensed at the gross simplifications that Australian newspapers and television make about Sri Lankan society. This contrasting mixture of perceptions indicates the problematic nature of "Asia" in a subtle and often humorous fashion. The ironic techniques of Pope and Austen are employed by Gooneratne to establish order and civilization in the societies of her works. The novelist's role emerges as a corrective to social distortions and therefore a force for civilized and humane inter-cultural understanding. The authoritative use of irony in *A Change of Skies* suggests the possibility of a sane and civilized adjustment to the contemporary demands of a multi-cultural Australia.

David Carter has argued that "conventional realist fiction is out of favour with current theoretical protocols"\(^\text{60}\) and that this has hampered an appreciation of the work of Judah Waten and other authors working within the category of migrant fiction. Arun Mukherjee has also attacked the tendency in modern criticism to valorize anti-realist fiction, pointing out that the metafictions of postmodernism are becoming so familiar that they no longer draw attention to the process of realist illusion. I argue that it would be a similar error to disregard Gooneratne's fiction because she makes use of conventional literary devices such as irony and a comedy of manners. Although Gooneratne's biography and novel do not radically problematise the English language or fundamentally destabilise constructions of the nation, morality or ethnicity, these texts effectively

tackle some of the most important themes of post-colonial and migrant literature.

Both Relative Merits and A Change of Skies attempt to disrupt the notion of a dominant, homogeneous way of seeing in order to make space for a minority discourse in their target audiences of an international English-reading audience and the Australian reading public respectively. For instance, the multi-voiced nature of Gooneratne's family history and her novel challenges the self-justifying master narrative of a single history, which is a familiar source of exclusion for colonised and migrant writers. The notion of an unquestionable history can exclude the migrant text because the migrant text often speaks of cultural experiences beyond the reach of a mainstream national literature (whether that text is written in the national language or not). Similarly, in the post-colonial context, the notion of a single literary history has justified the cultural superiority of the coloniser, and as a consequence the post-colonial writer often feels the need to write back to this notion of history.

The narrative of Relative Merits is presented as involving partially remembered or imagined scenes structured around a bare minimum of detail that has been passed down from different family members or gleaned from written sources. For instance, the personality of James D'Alwis (1823-1878), the author's father's maternal grandfather, is constructed in a typically complex way. Through a mixture of family legend, a reading of D'Alwis' writings, the descriptions of his contemporaries and an old photograph the narrator draws the threads of "his" personality together and elaborates using her own (often romantic) imaginings. The cobbling together of history through various family opinions, archives, photographs, re-creations of dialogue and so on emphasises the impossibility of uncovering a definitive description of what actually happened. Even the "evidence" from the archives is thrown into question when, for instance, family lore about a particular member is added to the interpretation of transcripts from a speech
he made in Parliament. In presenting a re-creation of the atmosphere of the period from a Ceylonese perspective, *Relative Merits* helps to fill some of the silences in the archives about the Sri Lankan view of the colonial and early post-colonial period. The attention to history is a common trope of migrant writing and a particular feature of texts which address the Asian migrant experience in Australia (See Chapter 4).

The structure of *Relative Merits* draws attention to the subjective nature of history: the coexistence of different versions of the past is emphasised through a celebration of storytelling and re-telling, although the texts do not extend this principle (as does Miller's experimental novel *The Ancestor Game*) and suggest that history is composed of fictions. Although *Relative Merits* is a family biography, it does not present itself as a definitive history. The notion that the reconstruction of an historical event is a somewhat problematic affair is foregrounded through the contradictions which the bracketed punctuated breaks present to the central narrative. An instance of this type occurs in Chapter 6, when the narrator makes some harsh comments about the retirement of her father, Sammy Dias Bandaranaike. At this point, the narrator's cousin, Neil Ilangakoon, interrupts sharply and gives a different version of events:

"You are being unjust to your father here," said Neil. "Uncle Sammy left the Department of Agriculture very much as a regiment leaves the parade ground, band playing and colours high. But you have mentioned the point on which the whole question of his retirement turned. Here is the story as I have it..." (148).

Both versions of history are left open, a testament to the tangential points of view which occur when observers/storytellers differ. The tone of scepticism about the existence of a "real history" calls into question the existing records of Sri Lankan history, particularly as recorded by the British Empire, or the colonised supporters of the British Empire and gives oral history, or family anecdote, a place in it.
In *A Change of Skies*, the exploration of historical discourse plays a role of central but different importance to that of *Relative Merits*, a feature which is connected to the different purposes to which historical discourse is put in post-colonial biography and multicultural fiction. *A Change of Skies* has a rare focus upon Asian migrant experience in Australia and often refutes popular misconceptions of the Asian migrant. Through the device of the journal entries of Bharat's adventurous grandfather Edward, and the explanatory prose of Bharat himself, it is pointed out that Sri Lankan citizens arrived in Australia as indentured labourers as long ago as the late nineteenth century. Edward is an eloquent and erudite member of an aristocratic family who leaves Ceylon for Australia with a ship of indentured labourers after quarrelling with his father. The device of Grandfather Edward's journals highlights the plight of the late nineteenth century Ceylonese workers in Australia: a chapter of Ceylonese-Australian history little known to many Australians. Further, through the joint use of a historical narrative and a contemporary narrative\(^61\), which trace the late nineteenth century and late twentieth century emigration of Ceylonese/Sri Lankan migrants to Australia, *A Change of Skies* develops a sense of a tradition of racism in Australia directed towards the Asian immigrant. The juxtaposition of Edward's confrontation with the Anti-Coolie League, upon his arrival in Queensland in 1882, and Navaranjini's poignant horror in her first reading of anti-Asian graffiti in the late 1970s, stresses the continuing nature of discrimination against those considered Asian in Australia. The authority of Edward's diaries is challenged neither by the self betraying irony\(^62\) nor by the competing narratives which characterise the treatment of many other narrative positions in the text. In contrast to the treatment of the colonial history of the Sinhalese élite in *Relative Merits*, *A Change of

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\(^{61}\)See Chapter 5.

\(^{62}\)See Muecke, 10-11.
Skies preserves to a greater degree the authority of Sri Lankan migrant history.

A Change of Skies also has a more regular structure than Relative Merits, another device which creates a sense of the continuity and stability of the Asian migrant experience in Australia in the text. The multi-voiced presentation means that the impression of "what really happened" is problematised by the different styles and priorities of each narrator but Gooneratne's novel has a more clearly delineated series of narratives, which are isolated by informative subheadings. Further, in Relative Merits the narrative darts back and forth, introducing a measure of doubt into the importance of linear time, a central element of the historical narrative, whereas A Change of Skies is characterised by a chronological movement from the 1970s to the 1980s, with Edward Mangala-Davasinha's diary entries and letters providing clearly defined historical parallels. The more formal structure of A Change of Skies is an important part of its emphasis on affirming and constructing a sense of history for Sri Lankan Australians. This emphasis demands a movement away from the more playful, inventive style of a historical dialogue in the post-colonial text Relative Merits. Gooneratne's novel establishes an even greater stability and appeal to traditional historical discourse and the conservative British literary tradition than Relative Merits because of the novel's assertion of an unproblematised and positive version of ethnic history with an instructive social purpose.

The connection between A Change of Skies and Relative Merits demonstrates the contribution that can be made by post-colonial migrant authors and post-colonial literary theory to the literary expression in Australia of the experience of members of cultural minority groups. A convergence in problems of theme and structure in post-colonial and migrant texts is introduced by a similar interest in the construction of a sense of cultural identity. In both discursive positions, the writer often
grapples with the problem of constructing a new cultural identity while not replicating authoritarian or exclusionist cultural policies practised by the coloniser or the dominant culture. With regard to Gooneratne's two prose texts: Relative Merits is concerned with refuting a totalising sense of history, and opening up the colonial archives to new voices, whereas A Change of Skies satirises but also attempts to construct a more inclusive sense of history upon which to base a sense of place for Sri Lankan Australians. As a consequence of these differences in purpose, A Change of Skies does not question the authority of history and linear time as Relative Merits does. In A Change of Skies the narratives are clearly delineated, prefaced by informative sub-headings which identify the narrator and give a sense of the main action of the narrative. In contrast, the notion of linear time is questioned to some extent in Relative Merits as the narrative weaves back and forth through the events of the last two centuries. Yet in A Change of Skies the constant use of irony and the multi-voiced structure of the text remain and function rather as a set of warnings, drawing attention to the impossibility of the existence of one dominant point of view, or the absolute truth of a single voice. In both texts a crowd of voices jostle for position. Nevertheless, these texts do not attempt to transcend the traditional self and attempt to stimulate its self-effacement in employing radical structural indeterminacies. The polyphony is regulated; there are no riots; Gooneratne's approach is not to dismantle the system but to challenge it from within.
Chapter 2

The Literature of Political Exile: 
Ee Tiang Hong's Tranquerah and Nearing a Horizon, 
Sudesh Mishra's Tandava and Satendra Nandan's The Wounded Sea

This chapter will consider certain key similarities and differences between literary representations of exile and alienation in a number of the works of Sudesh Mishra, Satendra Nandan and the late Ee Tiang Hong. The central focus of this chapter is on the literary treatment of exile in the context of the developing field of images of the Asian migrant experience in Australian literature. The biography of the author and its links with the text is therefore not a primary subject of interest in the textual analysis. However, the author's biography and status— as "Indo-Fijian" or "Asian Cosmopolitan" writer, for instance— does provide an important element of a discussion of the dynamics surrounding the publication and reception of the text.

For the purposes of this chapter, an exile is defined as "someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another"1. A political exile is inspired to leave his or her homeland through an opposition to the ways in which it is governed. This definition of political exile emphasises the difference between expatriate and exile; the expatriate is not reluctant to leave but the exile, as Andrew Gurr (from a British perspective) puts it:

    is like a bird forced by chill weather at home to migrate but is always poised to fly back2.

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot also articulates the sense of coercion surrounding the exile observing, with ironic reference to the departure of the lovelorn Will Ladislaw from Dorothea and Middlemarch, that "Exiles notoriously feed much on hopes and are unlikely to stay in banishment unless obliged"\(^3\). This thesis is especially concerned with the narrative position of exile and the treatment of exile as represented in the texts under discussion. The literature of political exile generally places a greater focus upon the home society, the country of birth and upbringing, than other categories of the literature of migration. A recurrent, almost defining factor of writings about exile is a fascination with the narrator's remembered homeland, its history, culture, landscape and political changes (and sometimes religion) which arise from a sense of estrangement. A strong theme of political writing from the first person exile perspective is a sense of outrage and injustice about the conditions in the homeland. The interest in Australia as the place of exile is often of secondary importance to the political events in the homeland and the experience of exile itself.

A central contention of this thesis is that the doubly alienated position of the Asian migrant narrator and character has contributed much to Australian literature in the late twentieth century. This contention builds upon the notion that migrancy is an important subject and brings with it radically unsettling ideas. Further, within the totality of the migrant experience, the subject position of the post-colonial political exile introduces literary innovations which are linked with a fascination with the socio-political turmoils of homeland, the force of fiction as political protest and the urge to create a distinctive cultural identity. This subject position is of particular interest from an Australian perspective because it addresses issues within neighbouring countries and challenges ways of viewing Malaysia and Fiji- as in the case of many of the texts in this chapter- as part of "Asia"; in addition, these texts provoke questions relevant to Australian literary


I

Ee Tiang Hong's poetry is not well known in Australia despite the fact that he was one of Malaysia's best-known English language poets and left the country in 1975 with his family to settle in Perth, Western Australia. Like many Chinese Malaysians, Ee emigrated from Malaysia as a result of the increasing hostility by the indigenous Malay population and government towards the large Chinese Malay population, which culminated in the race riots of May 13 1969. These political changes have provided a focal point for much of Ee's poetry. In Perth, Ee lectured in Education at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (now Edith Cowan University). Between his emigration to Australia and his death in 1990, Ee published two volumes of poetry: *Myths for a Wilderness* (1977) and *Tranquerah* (1985)⁸. *Nearing a Horizon* (1993) was published posthumously and was written mainly in Western Australia. Three significant volumes of Ee Tiang Hong's poetry were assembled and published for the most part in Australia yet Ee's work remains largely unknown in the Australian literary community. This fact illustrates the tendency for writers who cross the prevailing category of national literature and its boundaries in their careers to slip between literary categories and thus the attention of literary critics. The work of writers who are well-

⁵Ee Tiang Hong, *Tranquerah* (Singapore: Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore, 1985).
known in Malaysia, and in other countries regarded as "Asian", have been more likely to suffer from a lack of recognition in Australia because of the limited knowledge about writers in these countries. With the increasing attention to "Asian" literary voices, it is to be expected that a greater number of émigré writers and their texts will be identified and valued in an Australian context. Ee Tiang Hong's poems frequently discuss the phenomenon of exile and contribute significantly to the literature of political exile. I shall be focusing on the two later volumes, Tranquerah and Nearing a Horizon because of their attention to the perspective of geographical exile and the developing representation in these two collections of Australia as the place of exile.

Many of Ee's most moving poems in Tranquerah are those which engage in the experience of the political exile: the nostalgia for a lost place, the guilt at having left and not continued to struggle for change, and the sorrow at being in an alien land which has none of the personal resonance of "home". The moment of departure alone is considered in numerous poems. In "Exile", a number of painful slights directed at a vulnerable protagonist culminate in a moment when criticism ceases- a crucial point of despair in Ee's poetry- and result in his persona's reluctant emigration:

... left one quiet evening,  
ash-grey,  
incognito,  
dirt on tarmac (26).

The point of the departure to a new land gains symbolic strength in Ee's poetry in an intertextual reading of the poems of Tranquerah. In many of these poems, the pain of an exiled narrator is emphasised through a recurring voice of loss, regret and nostalgia. For instance, in "Musing on Departure" the narrator considers another possible history, in which "the cunning of a few" were thwarted and he would not have been forced into exile:
were there but one would stand up,
straddle the bickering sectors
of our divided city,
shake them to their senses...

we could have stayed.

And none of this hysteria,
or that pillar of salt
to haunt (28).

The structural emphasis on the line "we could have stayed" echoes the longing for home and a lost way of life explored in poems such as "New Year Eve" [sic], "Malaysian Friendship" and "Heeren Street". The backward looking perspective of the exile is a central feature of Tranquerah: past times, social change in Malaysia, the symbolism of certain places are lingered over in the stoic, suffering voices of Ee's émigré narrators. The many poems which address political themes in Malaysia combine with these characteristics to give Tranquerah the priorities and perspectives of political exile.

In the poetry of Tranquerah, Australia, the place of exile, is only referred to in an incidental fashion: Perth, Western Australia, plays the Other to a Malaysian Self, often functioning as a place of contrast to Malaysia. The representations of Australia lack the resonance of the references to the Malaysian homeland. At the foot of the poem "Kuala Lumpur, May 1969", the location and date of writing are inscribed as "Perth, 1976". These notes occur in several poems and highlight the narrator's own sense of distance from the remembered place, both temporal and geographical, without offering further information about Perth itself. These brief inscriptions emphasise the exilic perspective of the narrative voice. The geographical separation from Malaysia which Australia represents in Tranquerah is also highlighted in the poem "New Year Eve" [sic], through the contrast between the narrator's lonely Australian present and the crowded joy of past celebrations in Malaysia. On New Year's Eve in Perth,
in 1983, the narrator drinks alone and looks towards the coming year without enthusiasm. The rose petals in his Western Australian garden "dribble" in the wind, reflecting his sense of dispossession, as he considers times past and the fate of friends left behind (31). The sharp, brief lines describing the narrator's current position fall away into a more lyrical rhythm in his reminiscences of past "season(s) of goodwill" (31). All thoughts of home, even the sad ones, seem imbued with energy and vigour; a contrast to the notion of another eventless year spent away from home. Australia, and more specifically, Perth, does not achieve a sense of shape in Tranquerah: it is merely figured as a place of contrast to the Malaysian homeland through which the pain of exile, of divorce from all familiar and loved, makes itself felt.

Poems of deracination compose a large section of poetry in Tranquerah but appear to a lesser extent in the later collection Nearing a Horizon. Two central themes of Tranquerah are the experience of exile from Malaysia and a disappointment or anger about political changes in Malaysia. (These themes also dominate Myths for a Wilderness but appear to a lesser extent in Nearing a Horizon). The poems of Nearing a Horizon have a lighter, less intense tone than the Tranquerah collection and are not directed as much at sociopolitical issues involving Malaysia or the pain of exile, although these continue to be strong themes. Nearing a Horizon often focuses on moments of experience, such as fishing, a business lunch and the writing of poetry. Although many of these subjects are ostensibly apolitical, poems such as "Fishing" retain the strong moral stance based on a sense of decency, tolerance and respect for others which is the starting point of much of Ee's "political" poetry. In a comparison between Ee's two poetry collections, the imaginative dominance of exile in Tranquerah is lightened in the collection Nearing a Horizon.

Whereas the poems of Tranquerah often focus on the moment of departure, a number of poems in Nearing a Horizon describe the point of
arrival in a new country and the negotiation of a sense of peace with regard to the narrator’s distance from the homeland. In "Coming To" the pain of the reluctant migrant is vividly illustrated through an analogy with a near tragic car accident and drowning:

> It was a blind corner,  
> I remember, I couldn’t think  
> to brake somehow, still less in time,  
> that moment round the bend-  
> a shock of water, overwhelming sea... (35).

Part of the horror is that the unexpected accident, the cause of exile, has occurred at all. In a new country, the narrator finds himself close to drowning:

> head just above water,  
> body vague as sponge,  
> below the knees, adrift  
> as slush, at one with (35).

The disorientating experience of a forced separation from the homeland is likened to the sense of being adrift, dazed and shocked after a near deadly accident. This analogy is also emphasised in the title of "Coming to", with its double meaning regarding the recovery of consciousness and the arrival in a new place. The process of becoming reconciled to the distance from home is presented as extremely difficult and characterised by uncertainty. In the poem "Coming to" the narrator mourns his lost country, Malaysia, "(O, Malaysia)", and, when asked by an archetypally Australian country woman if he likes life in Australia, states ambivalently:

> 'For sure. It's all right, really;  
> the family, too. They’re safe, ahead,  
> I think- we travel separately'-  
> beyond the sometime river  
> into the future (36).

The motif of the river journey is used allegorically here, as elsewhere, to show the perils, possibilities and turning points of the migrant experience.
A similarly uncertain tone dominates the poem "Done", which discusses the decision to emigrate to Australia (38-39). Despite the focus upon moments of arrival in the poems of *Nearing a Horizon*, the new country still lacks the vigour of the old one: the backward looking exilic perspective prevails. In Chapter 5, I shall illustrate the ways in which Brian Castro's migrant characters are figured as gaining a particular insight and power from a sense of the provisionality of language, culture and geography and the ways in which they carve their way into a postmodernist landscape through this provisionality. In Ee's poetry, however, which is founded upon strong humanist principles and refers to early modernist writing by Yeats and Eliot, the uncertainty of the exiled protagonists is not celebrated but mourned.

The everpresent standard of the lost, departed homeland and the ramifications of its loss inhabit many of the poems of *Nearing a Horizon*: such poems are imbued with a backward looking quality which is typical of the writing of exile. Despite their struggles to change their allegiances, to suppress the past, Ee's narrators are bound, almost physically, to their visions of a lost homeland. The narrator of "Becoming" discusses his efforts to appreciate Perth's landscape, particularly the features which differ from the everpresent standards of home. The poem opens with the lines "The similarities deceive-/ you have to look more closely", which immediately establishes a background of comparison and painful absence (37). The narrator struggles to adapt to the new country, the Australian landscape and customs but constant confrontations between present and past, here and home, conflict poignantly with the basic workings of his heart and the movements of his blood; it is implied that Malaysia is engraved deep within his body, "in every tributary of my veins" (37). In the poem "A Poet's Abode" the narrator describes his fictive refuge, in which the natural landscape combines traces of Australia and Malaysia in its flora and fauna- eucalyptus and *tembusu*, kookaburras and sparrows- are combined in "a
symposium I've been/ building over the years..." (21). Significantly, however, the narrator has not yet moved in to his hybrid refuge: he still clings to memories of Malaysia. Although the movement towards a reconciliation with the place of the exile is foreshadowed, this state is not completely achieved in the poems of Nearing a Horizon. It is my contention that Nearing a Horizon displays the strong backward focus of the exile even in the attempts of its narrators to negotiate a place for themselves in Australia. Despite the attention to moments of arrival and the references to life within the new country, the standard of the lost homeland and the ramifications of its absence inform many of the poems of Nearing a Horizon and grant them the backward looking quality of the writing of exile.

A deep sense of nostalgia for a lost, more innocent Fiji haunts Sudesh Mishra’s poetry collection Tandava and Satendra Nandan’s first prose book The Wounded Sea. The 1987 coups in Fiji were staged six months after one another. The Fijian military, under Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka forced the mostly Indo-Fijian democratically elected government out of office on the basis that the Indian minority was gaining too much political power. As the position of Indo-Fijians deteriorated, many of those who could do so left the country. Mishra’s and Nandan’s writings often address the place of Indo-Fijians in Fiji and the injustice of the military coups. Both of these writers have an Indo-Fijian background and are now academics in university English Departments in Australia, Mishra in Adelaide and Nandan in Canberra. The significance of the latter will be explored below.

Sudesh Mishra has published three collections of poetry Rahu(1987), Tandava(1992) and Memoirs of a Reluctant Traveller(1994) and a play. His play Ferringhi was performed in Fiji in 1993⁹. Although Tandava is the main subject of this analysis, the poems of Rahu will also be used to

illustrate the continuities in, and development of, Mishra's writing style and to highlight some special qualities of Tandava, a text which explores the particular subjectivity and more general experience of political exile. Mishra's first book of poems Rahu does not have the qualities of the political exile text as I have defined it: the almost exclusive concentration on the homeland, the preoccupation with politics, corruption and injustice, and the exploration of the experience of exile itself. The poems of Rahu can, however, be viewed as part of the literature of migration. Consequently, a comparison between the two collections permits an exploration not only of the distinctions between Mishra's pre-coup and post-coup writing, but also the related contrast between the literature of migration, as represented in Rahu, and the particular qualities of the literature of political exile, which can be identified in the poetry of Tandava.

Most of Mishra's poetry is located in an imaginary Fiji. There is a contrast, however, between the subject matter and style of this material in Rahu and Tandava. Nostalgic and celebratory poems about Fiji are a strong feature of the first book, Rahu, although the subject matter of these poems is tempered by the characteristic earthiness of Mishra's verse. A set of six poems in Rahu titled "In Nadi..." explores life in Fiji through the didactic use of the second person (58-63). The poems address the reader as though s/he is an insider and has firsthand experiences and memories of Fiji. The effect is an invitation to sympathise with the (male) beach-wandering Indo-Fijian character who is gradually delineated. The first poem in the "In Nadi" series confronts the notion of memory with an illustration of quirky, often unpleasant reminders of the past:

On wet days the stench of squashed toads,
skins glued to the asphalt,
assail [sic] the spaces in your memory;
you stroll the bylanes
gathering the maggots of your past
from lumps of dogshit... (58).
Finally, the subject shrugs away his cynicism and attempts a more equanimous view of the past:

    you clear the clog of camphor
    from your nasal passages
    breathing gently from memory to memory (58).

This calmer, less cynical vision of the past is expanded in the following five poems about life in Nadi, which explore the pleasures of the tropical landscape and its produce, such as banana eating in the title poem "In Nadi (3)" ("Your mouth dribbles gold/ for the rest of the afternoon"), and also addresses subjects such as the insidious nature of the serious social problem of kava drinking in Fiji. These celebratory (but not idealised) presentations of Fiji may be contrasted to the depictions of Fiji in the later text Tandava, in which the focus is almost completely on a sociopolitical commentary on Fiji.

    Much of the poetry of Rahu explores the flora and fauna of Fiji, and experiences of local life such as beachcombing or waiting for a hurricane. The narrator of "The Spotted Gecko" is prompted by a familiar envelope to remember a scene from a tropical home:

    This envelope has memory affixed to it:
    A spotted gecko that saunters casually
    Through cobwebbed attics I leave behind (8).

The subject matter of this poem is typical of Rahu because it focuses on describing a lost place and communicating a past moment\(^{10}\). Images of a sympathetic Nature predominate in this collection; crabs, gulls and palms are personified and therefore brought closer to human understanding. The tone of Rahu is recuperative and often nostalgic; there is little anger. In Tandava, however, the emphasis is upon a paradise destroyed. Exile is explored from different vantage points in numerous poems; a feature which is linked to the post-coup perspective of this collection which darkens the

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\(^{10}\) Although "The Spotted Gecko" also appears in Tandava, my point is that this poem displays the characteristic tone of Rahu rather than Tandava.
tone of the poems with recurring images of an enforced estrangement. In the poem "Feejee" a bitter Indo-Fijian exile now living in Australia considers his country's plight; in "Flight" poetry is presented as a refuge for the geographical exile; and the ironically titled poem "A Beautiful Prospect" creates an image of a society in which exile is a common, but tragic state. The landscape reflects the political and social chaos which has led to such large demographic shifts; the Fiji of Tandava is mysterious, dangerous, full of shadows, shrieks and decay, a different landscape to the more benevolent Rahu. In Rahu, the poem "Pole Vaulting" draws an analogy between migrancy and the elegant execution of a sporting manoeuvre:

...His trick resides purely
In the conjuror's ability to
Describe a ritual curve, pushing
Against the earth. First the liberating
Heave, then, a crossing of frontiers (8).

The possibility of crossing frontiers with ease would be out of place in Tandava in which all absences are invested with anger and discontent. As with Ee's poetry, the notion of exile in Mishra's work is complex, with social and political alienation from the government and broader community of the homeland interweaving with the geographical distance from the homeland.

In Mishra's first book of poems, Rahu, the poem "The Return Trip" makes connections between Australia and Fiji in a positive fashion but these options of gentle transitions and the possibility of a hybrid identity are absent in the poetry of Tandava, where reminders of the Indo-Fijian fate dominate even those few poems which address Australian subject matter. The narrator of "The Return Trip" is inspired during an aeroplane flight back to Canberra to ponder his transition from Nadi to Canberra. The contrast between the two countries is highlighted by the perceived absence of religion in the Australian context. Fiji inspires an irreverent symbolism using Hindu gods: the sun, "a solitary god with a saffron eye/ climbs from
his curdbed/ only to dip and die a turmeric death" (64). The goddess Laxmi is "a Brahmin's obsession,/ a till-job, a whore" (64). However, the narrator's opportunity in Australia "to ponder the fate of the fateless/ with a zest of religion" brought from Fiji is pictured as an ironic approach "on a soil where religion hibernates/ a marsupial having lost its sense of time" (64). Having established these fundamental cultural differences, Mishra explores the connections between two political capitals, Canberra and Nadi. At one point, in a moment of optical illusion, the narrator sees a landscape where "There is no land anywhere, just pliable planks/ of the road undulating/ upon a cinnamon sea" (65). In a symbolic moment it seems possible that Canberra and Nadi are not as far apart as they seem:

...if Nature desires I greet her illusion
I will not refrain,
for in illusion is nested the Phoenix of Truth
and in myths a moment,
a moment where I may mistake Canberra for Nadi
and eternity for death (65).

For a brief time, in the imagination, the polar opposites of Canberra and Nadi meet. In Tandava, however, the distance between Australia and Fiji seems insurmountable. The poem "The Return Trip", which appears in Rahu, would be out of place in Tandava because of the imaginative dominance of the declining political situation in Fiji in this collection of poetry. Even "Perth, December 1987", which does appear in Tandava, and ostensibly describes an Australian city, introduces a discussion about the tragic fate of Suva ("Now it resembles a brick menagerie/ where frightened animals/ Are gulaged") and likens British, American and Fijian forms of imperialism (32). In Rahu and Tandava it is possible to discern the differing perspectives and preoccupations of pre-coup and post-coup literature and also the distinctions between the literature of migration and the literature of political exile and their differing visions of home and the émigré existence.
Satendra Nandan's work develops the imagery of exile, particularly in his post-coup prose book *The Wounded Sea* (1991). In this discussion, I shall approach Nandan's ambivalently structured book as a novel rather than as a set of four discrete short stories or an autobiography. My reading focuses on the narrative qualities of Nandan's works rather than links between the author's life and the represented experience of his text because this approach reveals more about the literary structuring of the exile experience, and a guiding interest in this thesis is on producing an overview of the developing images of the Asian migrant in contemporary Australian literature. Nandan has also published two volumes of poetry, *Faces in a Village* (1976) and *Voices in the River* (1977), and numerous short stories11. An autobiography, *Relics of a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story*, is forthcoming. The central focus of this analysis will be upon *The Wounded Sea*, although some reference will be made to Nandan's poetry and short stories in illustration of the central stylistic characteristics and themes of his creative writing.

The first chapter of *The Wounded Sea* is titled "Landscape of Little Ruins". This piece begins with the disillusioned voice of a man boarding an aeroplane to leave his country as a result of racist pressure. The narrator then slips into a series of non-chronological vignettes of his idyllic village childhood in an Indo-Fijian community. These stories are occasionally shadowed by the anticipation of racial conflict and social disorder but they primarily depict and celebrate a peaceful, relaxed way of living through descriptions of attractive characters: the strong, peace-making father, the illiterate and loving grandfather, Rama the village hero, the narrator's first girlfriend and other characters reminiscent of a pastoral childhood in a small community. Strong memories recurrently recall the narrator to the

present Australian context and provide a poignant reminder of the contemporary situation in Fiji:

In Canberra, where I teach, the transplanted trees are scarlet and claret. As I see the miracle of chalk on black boards-crushed by army boots, mere pieces of chalk again in Fiji- I often hear Mr Joyce's earnest voice, reading, reading for us...

(34).

As in Ee's *Tranquerah* and *Nearing a Horizon* and Mishra's *Tandava*, images of Australia in *The Wounded Sea* appear as transient states which are incidental to the main action, and serve to illustrate an exilic perspective by emphasising the narrator's distance from the homeland. The exile's sense of loss in *The Wounded Sea* is stressed as the narrator immerses himself in tales of the memories of his childhood in Nandi; but he must always be recalled to the harsh political reality of the present and the rediscovery of his geographical exile. Periodic reminders of the narrator's status as exile occur as he moves from lengthy reminiscence to a reference to the present and then back again. The sense of dislocation and the impossibility of a complete return is heightened by the double distances of space and time. The cliché that the past is a different country is painfully true for the exiled narrator of *The Wounded Sea*. Memory and imagination enable brief forays to a lost home but these moments of return draw attention to the impossibility of a genuine homecoming.

The distance between the narrator in the novel's fictional present and his younger self, his understanding of contemporary Fiji and the idealised Fiji of the narrator's childhood, echoes the difference between the experience of exile and the years spent at "home" as the text traces the distinctions between here and there, past and present. Keya Ganguly observes in her ethnographic essay "Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood" that for the post-colonial migrant "memories of the past provide a crucial discursive terrain for
reconsolidating selfhood and identity"\textsuperscript{12}. For the migrant and exile a disjointed narrative of the past confers meaning on a present made unstable and unpredictable as a consequence of displacement enforced by post-colonial and migrant experience\textsuperscript{13}. The importance of the memories of homeland in the present of Nandan's politically exiled narrator is an element of \textit{The Wounded Sea} which highlights the uncertainty of the experience of exile and increases the intensity of his represented experience.

In Ee, Mishra and Nandan's writing, the estrangement from the homeland is characterised by outrage, sorrow and discontent. The focus on the unjust and painful nature of political exile in Ee's \textit{Nearing a Horizon} and \textit{Tranquerah}, Mishra's \textit{Tandava} and Nandan's \textit{The Wounded Sea} may be contrasted with the presentation of geographical separations and travels as entailing literary and personal benefits as a result of the fragmentary nature of migrant experience and the virtues of being between worlds which characterises the postmodern mode of recent literature about the migrant experience. In the assertion of the rights of a cultural minority against a dominant ethnic group, the primary texts in this chapter emphasise the abandonment by the dominant group of moral codes and behaviour. The construction of many texts of political protest seems to require that they present areas of moral and rhetorical certainty. Thus, in form as in content, they are structured around assertions of injustice or pleas for social change. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the humanist visions of Nandan's \textit{The Wounded Sea} and Ee Tiang Hong's \textit{Tranquerah} and \textit{Nearing a Horizon} are communicated through greatly varied forms of realism. Mishra's \textit{Tandava} displays more experimental verse forms but is also dominated by a political agenda rather than an investigation into the notions of subjectivity and meaning. Moreover it stops short of suggesting the total ambivalence of experimental prose

\textsuperscript{12}Keya Ganguly, "Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood," \textit{Cultural Studies} 1.6(1982): 27.
\textsuperscript{13}Ganguly, 30.
writing in which linguistic play dominates subject and theme. Assumptions within these texts about correct forms of behaviour and morality, characteristics of political protest verse, militate against extreme forms of radical experimental writing in which the unsettling of all subject positions can occur, and which characterise some postmodern treatments of migrancy.

This discussion has focused initially on delineating the exilic perspectives in Ee, Mishra and Nandan's texts. The discussion which follows will further explore expressions of exile in these texts with particular attention to the presentation of unique cultural voices and insights. Special attention will be given to the poignancy of notions of the exile's separation from the homeland and the ways in which rhetoric is used to develop the political messages of the texts.

II

The creative writing of Ee, Mishra and Nandan all voice the concerns of a cultural minority. In the Chinese Malay experience in Malaysia and the Indo-Fijian experience in Fiji, large migrant groups with several generations of history in their new homelands have been faced with racism from an indigenous group which has shattered their assumptions of belonging and identity. After the 1969 race riots and the declaration of a nationalist government agenda, in which an essentialist definition of the "Malay" citizen resulted in non-Malays being discriminated against, many Chinese Malays felt forced out of the country. This experience has a broad similarity to the Indo-Fijian experience in which, after the second coup of 1987, many Indo-Fijians chose to leave the country as a result of race-based pressures from the government level downwards. The articulations of political outrage, alienation, betrayal and loss of a sense of place resulting from these experiences are central to Ee's Myths for a Wilderness and
Tranquerah, Mishra's *Tandava* and Nandan's *The Wounded Sea*, as they have been for many other Chinese Malaysian and Indo-Fijian writers.

All three writers take issue with a common problem which the immigrant post-colonial writer in English must face— that is, how to reconcile the use of the language of the coloniser and, in conjunction with this problem, how to create a sense of cultural identity within a larger community which stresses mainstream rather than immigrant cultural links to create a sense of national self. The verse and prose fiction of Ee, Mishra and Nandan assert the value of minority voices which are seldom heard in Malaysia or Fiji because nationalistic policies have sidelined these immigrant communities in their single-minded interest in the cultural primacy of the indigenous community. A dual focus results from the discursive positioning of the books under discussion as texts of both political commentary and cultural resistance. Two particularly strong and intertwining elements of the representations of Chinese Malay and Indo-Fijian identity dominate Ee, Mishra and Nandan's creative writing. These are, firstly, an emphasis on the creation of a sense of a unique cultural identity which identifies the minority group (against pressures by the dominant group towards cultural homogeneity), and secondly, an emphasis on the attachment and legitimacy of the ethnic group to Malaysian or Fijian landscape and society. These themes enhance and combine with representations of the poignancy of the exile's separation from the homeland and explicit satirical and philosophical attacks to further the political projects of these texts. The sense of a deep attachment to the linguistic, cultural, and geographic specificities of the homeland lends the

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14By “mainstream” I refer to the indigenous traditions in the colonies in which “cultural imposition took place on the home ground of the colonised people and the lines between colonised and coloniser were more clearly drawn”, and the traditions of the descendants of the imperial group in settler colonies such as Australia. By settler colonies I refer to countries where “the English language and culture were transported (whether by settlers, convicts, or slave-masters) to a foreign territory where the indigenous inhabitants were either annihilated or marginalised”. Diana Brydon, “The Myths that Write Us: Decolonising the Mind,” *Commonwealth* 1.10(1987): 3.
exilic perspective of Ee, Mishra and Nandan's narrators a further poignancy and power. After exploring the development of a sense of a Chinese Malaysian and Indo-Fijian sense of place and voice in Ee, Mishra and Nandan's work, I will consider the literary devices of irony, satire and analogy and their differing roles in political protest and commentary in the texts of these three authors.

Ee's poetry articulates questions of identity which spring from the fringe location of the Chinese Peranakan¹⁵ experience. The Peranakan perspective of Ee's poetry is highlighted most clearly through its explicit philosophical and moral arguments in defence of the community against essentialist definitions of nationalism based on race. Through a number of strategies, the poems of Tranquerah and Nearing a Horizon gradually create a sense of the intimate attachment of the Peranakan to Malaysia. The emphasis on the historical connections of the Peranakan with certain places in Malaysia, the uniqueness of Peranakan culture, and the pain of individual experiences of exile create an impression of the tragedy and injustice of the forced disintegration of Peranakan communities in Malaysia¹⁶.

The poems of Tranquerah and Nearing a Horizon express a particularly Peranakan nostalgia about Malacca- a city which has strong connotations for many Chinese Malaysians- and the Chinese Malaysian community which once flourished there. Many of Ee's poems are written

¹⁵The term Peranakan means "born of the soil, native, locally-born". Anne Pakir observes that there has been a confusion about the meaning of Peranakan because it not only applies to those of Chinese background in Malaysia and Singapore but also to other people in the region. In Pakir's paper the Chinese Peranakans are simply referred to as "Peranakans" for greater brevity and because in Malaysia the numerical superiority of the Chinese Peranakans means that this group is often simply called "Peranakan". Similarly, in this chapter "Peranakan" refers to the Chinese Peranakans. Anne Pakir, "Peranakans in Plays: Cultural Record or Compelling Drama?," Perceiving Other Worlds, ed. Edwin Thumboo (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991) 386.

in the first person and from the point of view of exiled Chinese Malaysian narrators. The value of Malacca to the exiled narrators is apparent in poems such as "Heeren Street" and "Tranquerah Road" in Tranquerah, and "For Wong Lin Ken" and "Melaka" in Nearing a Horizon. In "Heeren Street" the displacement of the Baba is explored. The Babas are part of an established Chinese community in Malaysia; they are Peranakans with particularly strong historical ties to Malaysia. The Babas' ancestors settled in Malaya several generations earlier and assimilated many aspects of Malay and Western culture while retaining aspects of their own. "Heeren Street" emphasises the historical connections of this ethnic group with Malacca, particularly the hard work of their ancestors which, it is suggested, made the town wealthy and successful, and celebrates the unique culture and language of the Baba community. These factors emphasise the legitimacy of Baba presence in Malaysia and the injustice of their marginalisation. "Heeren Street" opens with a description of a Malaccan street which has become silent and unkempt; it harks nostalgically back to the glory of the Babas and their days of trading power and privilege in Malacca during British rule:

Here in the good old days
the Babas paved
a legend on the landscape,
and sang their part-
God save the King-
in trembling voices... (51).

There is a strong sense of a connection with, and affection for, the history of Malacca in the narrator's comments about Malacca's prime during the "heyday of Company and Empire" (51). A tone of sorrow dominates the description of the dusty and diminished "ancestral houses" and the decline of the streets themselves, which were once "...golden,/ paved with grit,/ and the commitment of our fathers" (53, 54). The attachment to this
mythical/historical Malacca, the culmination of generations of hard work, and an ancestral association with the city informs the narrator's sadness about, and criticism of, the social marginalisation of the Babas and the concomitant rewriting of Malaccan history. The narrator is, however, quietly confident that another history of Malacca will be re-inscribed in the future and the Baba restored to a place of respect ("There will another day, another hand to write") (57).

A deep attachment to Malaysia in a more general sense is emphasised in "Heeren Street" through the historical connection with Malacca. Malaysia is "this golden peninsula"; like the narrator's memories of Malacca, Malaysia is "golden", rich with memories, nostalgia and the potential for greatness (51). The country merely requires the energy of a new generation to "blaze another myth/ across the teasing wilderness" (51). The exiled Chinese Malaysian narrators of Ee's poems display a strong sense of Malaysian "place"; their expressions of profound sorrow and outrage at their separation from Malaysia illustrate the powerful and established ties between the Peranakan community and the Malaysian landscape. These are the responses of individuals who consider themselves true citizens of Malaysia but have been cruelly disinherited. The quiet, sincere tones of Ee's narrators prompt an evaluation of the human impact of essentialist definitions of Malaysian nationalism and its consequences. It is perhaps their determined citizenship which most characterises Ee's narrators. A familiar voice in Tranquerah and Nearing a Horizon is that of the lone individual who speaks out against official policy with a tone of profound concern. This Peranakan voice- the determined, moral citizen with an urgency inspired by an affection for his (Ee's narrators are generally male) society- asserts perhaps most effectively the right of the Peranakan to claim Malaysia as "home".

A central theme of Ee's poetry- the injustice of the enforced dislocation of a community from its home- is emphasised through the
establishment of the legitimacy of the Peranakan's place in Malaysia. As well as a sense of historical and ancestral connection with Malacca, which results in a strong attachment to the town, there is an appreciation for the local Baba culture in poems such as "Heeren Street" from Tranquerah. In section seven of this lengthy poem, local Chinese Malaysians speak of recent changes to their community:

Wawa chai no live here
long time already
live in Kelebang.
His sons and daughters married already
live in Bukit Balu and all the four corners...
True, world is upside down,
confused, everything not sure (54-55).

Section seven of "Heeren Street" forms a celebration of the linguistic uniqueness of Peranakan and Baba culture: it is written in a characteristic form of Peranakan English and includes a four-line segment of Baba dialect, a form of Bazaar Malay. Varieties of Peranakan dress, food, and language (Baba Malay is a dialect of Malay which derives from Hokkien and English) borrow from Malay sources but in its rites and rituals the community follows old Chinese traditions. Through the poetic use of untranslated terms from Baba Malay and local linguistic characteristics of Peranakan English, Ee emphasises the diversity and uniqueness of local customs and history. The attention to capturing the cadences and colloquial colour of Peranakan English is one of the most striking elements of Ee's poetry. This linguistic celebration of a unique culture stresses the tragedy of the disintegration of the Peranakan way of life. The descriptions and familiarity of Ee's exiled narrators with the history, landscape and linguistic variety of Malaysia also affirm that individuals of Chinese ethnic descent should be regarded as full citizens of Malaysia.

Pakir, 386.
The imaginative presence of China is not a strong feature of either *Tranquerah* or *Nearing a Horizon*: both texts are more concerned with the priorities of political exile fiction, the contemporary fate of the Peranakan community and its struggle to assert its legitimacy within Malaysia. The establishment of a sense of a Chinese Malay cultural identity which accentuates its roots in Malaysia and its unique hybridity appears of greater concern than emphasising a cultural connection with China. A rare reference to the Chinese cultural heritage of the Peranakan occurs in the poem "Monkey: An Episode" in *Tranquerah*. In this poem, a well-known literary text from the ancestral homeland provides a potent signifier of ethnicity and a starting point for the exploration of the treatment of the diasporic Chinese community within contemporary Malaysia. The character, Monkey, from the famous Chinese allegorical novel by Wu Ch'eng-En has become degraded and lost his irreverent satiric powers:

Crucibled
in oppressive bronze bell,
emaciated,
all butemasculated
your fabled genius
(bag of tricks?),
what's left of you?
we agonise... (44).

The trapped Monkey is a symbol of the fate of the Chinese people in Malaysia. Although a number of "Small monkeys" could help Monkey escape, they are petty, foolish and self-centred creatures "who choose to see/ nothing, hear nothing, say nothing" (44). This depiction of witnesses of injustice who do not intervene is a common theme of Ee's poetry. Such acts of injustice and immorality and veiled references to Malaysian political events provide the central focus of Ee's poetry rather than diasporic tensions and the cultivation of a sense of connection with China. The identity of the homeland is never in doubt: Ee's poems constantly refer to Malaysia as a primary source of meaning, identity and mythic resonance.
Sudesh Mishra's two poetry collections contain a conscious attempt to foster an Indo-Fijian voice: cultural and geographical signifiers of the Indo-Fijian community are often stressed. In **Rahu** a sense of affinity with the landscape begins in illustrations of the qualities of the land, particularly animal and plant life. The six part panegyrical "Littoral" describes, as the title suggests, various aspects of life by the sea shore. These include observations during a walk by the sea ("III: Strolling") and descriptions of sea life ("VI. Conch" and "IV: Balloonfish"). An emphasis on features of the natural landscape as signifiers of a Fijian perspective is developed further in **Tandava**. The sense of a geographical placement in the South Pacific is filled out in **Tandava** through a recurring ocean and island imagery of the tropics: drownings, shipwrecks, fish, waves, coral, polyps, coracles and archipelagos appear throughout this collection. In the poem "Solid Forms" the narrator considers the life of the famous artist Auguste Rodin in a typically irreverent style:

> Remembering the sharp erotic moods  
> Of August Rodin, much-beleaguered Frenchman  
> Who wasted semen-keen Paris evenings  
> On a stoned Balzac... (20).

As is so often the case in the poems of **Tandava** (as illustrated above) "Solid Forms" eventually addresses the post-coup chaos in Fiji and the shift in focus is heralded by the imagery of the Pacific:

> ...the breeze  
> Is still winterish, a few polyp-stars gulp... (20).

This nature imagery does not have the celebratory tone of the "Littoral" poems in **Rahu** but instead reflects a deep violence in the culture of the South Pacific:

> Cook, for all his sagacity, was unable to grasp  
> The razor-logic of the tropics, the coral-twigs  
> That rudely disembowelled his **Endeavour** (20).
The narrative voice warns of imminent disaster, and painful death hidden even behind the coral's deceptive beauty. A tone of tragi-comedy begins to dominate the poem as the narrator considers the surprise which Cook and his contemporaries ("Drake, Bligh, Bougainville") might feel in viewing the Fiji of the late twentieth century:

Would that all could journey to these hilariously
Confused archipelagoes of the eighties,
Where half-baked natives fight chauvinism
With chauvinism, perusing the New Testament
Through the sights of an old imperial gun... (20).

As noted above, the poems of Tandava return again and again to the violence in Fiji and particularly to the fate of the Indo-Fijian. Tandava also contains a rich imagery of Fiji that is drawn from marine metaphors and has specific connotations of the tropics. This terminology creates a sense of Fijian place and an insider's subjectivity, and heightens the poignancy of the separation of the exiled narrators and characters from Fiji.

The poems of Tandava make use of Hindu mythology which, combined with references to the history of Indian indentured labourers, creates a particularly Indo-Fijian perspective. The title of Tandava refers to Shiva's dance of destruction\(^\text{18}\) and introduces a Hindu heritage which is often referred to as a primary source of mythology in Mishra's poetry. The irreverent use of Hindu religious references in the poetic imagery of Rahu creates a sense of a particularly Indo-Fijian perspective. Indian religious mythology is vested with diasporic ambivalence: it is both a source of potent symbolism and of restriction because of its association with the authority of India over the emerging inventive traditions, literary and religious, of a diasporic Indo-Fijian community. In "Confessions of a Would-Be Brahmin" the narrator comically admits to the gods that he has committed a series of blasphemous acts:

18\(^{(}\text{Mishra})\text{ introduced 'Tandava' as Shiva's dance of destruction, a dance that is usually performed in graveyards and cemeteries". Louise Carbines, "The Dance of the Outsider," Age Saturday Extra 11 Jul. 1992: 9.\)
O Shiva O Parvati O Durga
I have sinned.  
I have used my right hand to explore cracks  
Other than that of sculptures.  
I have picked my nose with Cow-Eaters... (Rahu, 34).

This poem articulates a resentment of Indian perceptions of Indo-Fijians but also a residual desire for recognition from the "true" India, the metropolitan centre:

O Shiva O Parvati O Durga
Though I have crossed the kala pani  
And lost caste  
Forgive me my trespass (Rahu, 34).

The kala pani are the "dark waters" between India and Fiji which the Indo-Fijian indentured labourers viewed with dread19. Through its defiant, disrespectful voice, this poem challenges the authority of "India" as the source of notions of "Indianness" and highlights the ambivalence, as well as the resistance, of diasporic Indian attitudes towards the ancestral homeland. The ambivalent, often comic, use of Hindu religious references is a recurring feature of the imagery of Rahu but not a common characteristic of Tandava, the more serious, post-coup collection.

Although a single comic poem "Indian-Australian Association: Annual General Meeting" in Tandava highlights the ambivalent relationship between the Indian diaspora and its symbolic homeland, Hindu imagery is not a central part of the poems of Tandava. In "Indian-Australian Association: Annual General Meeting" the conflicts within the Association are comically discussed. While the South India faction attacks the North, East India abuses West and the Sikhs opt out entirely "The Fijians sit tight and contemplate/ The wine, the women, the guffawing clock" (65). The Indo-Fijians are presented as distanced from the embattled regional and religious factions of India, which results in both insecurity and

an attractive, down-to-earth playfulness. The conflict between the Indian communities from India is shown to be full of pretension; the Indo-Fijians' idle focus on much more basic issues—alcohol, the opposite sex, the passing time—is presented as more attractively earthy and pragmatic. At the same time, the position of the Indo-Fijian members appears uncertain. The Fijians must "sit tight"; the conflict between Indian groups may be presented as ludicrous but the Fijians still cannot enter a debate based on traditional divisions in India and thus their claim to a position within the Indian-Australian Association, and within the "true" India, is also under question. However, in Mishra's Tandava, as in Ee's two poetry collections, the relationship of diaspora to its centre is not a central issue. The focus is rather upon the concerns of political exile and upon the fate of the contemporary Indo-Fijian community in Fiji. In Tandava, Hindu religious imagery is used as a signifier of ethnic belonging rather than to query diasporic relations, and Hindu gods are the subjects of serious supplication rather than comic relief. The attention in Tandava is more clearly upon the unequal encounter between the Fijian majority and the Indo-Fijian ethnic minority rather than the power relationship between the diasporic Indo-Fijian community and India.

Tropical nature imagery and Hindu religious references create the sense of an Indo-Fijian voice in Mishra's Tandava, and this is enhanced by references to the historical experience of the Indo-Fijian community in Fiji. The Indian indentured labourers—Girmit20 history and the Girmitya21—provide a common theme of discussion and a pervasive symbolism. Terms like "coolumber" (white overseer) and "arkathis" (recruiter's agents) recur throughout the collection with an even greater frequency than in Rahu, along with numerous references to cane, canefields, sugarfields and the

20"Girmit" is a vernacular variant of the word 'agreement'- the agreement that the Indian indentured workers had with the British authorities who transported them to Fiji to work in the sugar plantations. Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., introduction, Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992) xi.
21The Girmityas were labourers who signed the Girmit. Nelson, xi.
smell of burning cane, which signal the poems as speaking for an Indo-Fijian perspective by referring to the beginnings of the Indian community in Fiji. Mishra's poem "Haunted Lines" makes an intertextual reference to an autobiographical piece "The Story of the Haunted Line" by a Girmit man named Totaram Sanadhya22, which provides a rare historical glimpse into the experience of the Indian indentured labourer in Fiji. The narrator of Mishra's poem is moved by Sanadhya's privations and compares the fragile sense of identity of contemporary Indo-Fijians with the distinguished martyrdom of the Girmitya:

The ratoon inscribed our presence,
The salty runes of Polynesia
Had seeped into our shlokas,
Alchemizing the Vedic Soul.
Less than parody, we exist
In movie classifieds, read by
Amitabh Bachchan and Rekha,
Cutting a swathe of fudgy songs,
While the new coolumber doles out
The beggar's ration to Sanadhya... (41).

The mention of the ratoon, a new shoot which springs from a root of sugar cane, provides a typical reference in Tandava to the history of the Girmitya23. In this passage Mishra also explores, with the scathing satire he usually devotes to political commentary, the contemporary dilution of the pain and power of the Girmitya heritage with the saccharine of Indian popular cinema and music. In "Dear Syd" and "A Well" the narrators feel compelled by dreams of their ancestors' lives to visit the farming land and cane plantations, a return which often torments them with the knowledge of the physical and mental pain of the Girmitya. The Girmitya's suffering is presented as weighing heavily on the Indo-Fijian consciousness, but it also

provides a sense of unique cultural identity in a world in which familiar signposts of belonging, such as national identity, are being placed under pressure. In Mishra's depictions of a society in which a brutal military government enforces the claims of an indigenous community to special privileges, it seems an essential imaginative task to emphasise the unity and legitimacy of the Indo-Fijian presence in Fiji.

An interesting theme which is developed in Mishra's poetry is that the repetitive experience of exile- from the Girmitya experience to that of the political exile from Fiji- has shaped the doubly displaced Indo-Fijian community in a unique way. The notion of the recurring experience of exile as a defining characteristic of an ethnic group is explored most clearly in Mishra's poetry and occasionally implied in Ee's writing. A tradition of exile is established in an Australian setting by narrators or characters who have been exiled from an already émigré community. In Mishra's Rahu and Tandava an exploration of the similarities between generations of exiles is undertaken as the experience of the Girmit men and women is linked to that of the present day Indo-Fijian exile. "In Nadi (5)" the determination of the Girmityas to gain recognition as a community through hard work in the canefields is set against a different, modern image:

Succeeding generations, bereft of vision,  
on lonely days angle for the post,  
playing Narcissus over a barren pool (62).

In the poem "Solid Forms" the Indo-Fijian appears as an eternal traveller, between India, Fiji, colonial metropoles, even time in "these hilariously/ Confused archipelagoes of the eighties" (21). In Memoirs of a Reluctant Traveller(1994), Mishra's third poetry collection, the voice of an Indo-Fijian narrator travelling through India and its neighbouring countries also raises questions of the Indo-Fijian as an eternal exile. However, there is no sense of detachment and easy mobility in this travel which is often associated with
the postmodern mode: India retains its particular imaginative dominance as the centre to which the diasporic Indo-Fijian feels compelled to return. Mishra’s poetry thus contributes to an international literature of diaspora. Other writers in this thesis who also contribute to this field of literature include Satendra Nandan, Ee Tiang Hong and Yasmine Gooneratne.

In Mishra’s poetry, the experience of exile is not represented as becoming easier because of the cultural precedent of exile in the community; the cultural disruption and instability of exile never becomes a cause for celebration. The indentured labourers reciting the Gita for comfort in “A New Season” (in Tandava), are paralleled by the Australian-based narrators of Mishra’s poems who rework Indian mythology in contemporary, often political themes to combat a similar sense of loss. The bereft tone of the Girmitya’s querying “Was this now home? I” is echoed in numerous poems which explore a contemporary estrangement from Fiji (69). In the poem “Feejee” the Australian-based narrator poignantly asks:

Who shall render our world meaningful?
Define our dispossession? Like primates
Sharing gutterals in a brittle cave,
We strive for articulation, shaping
Each vowel from the stiff bone of language.
(Tandava, 17).

The experience of loss of the familiar, the inability to speak meaningfully about a land because it is deprived of the resonance of home, these are presented as hardships which each exile must overcome. The tone of political poetry endures: there is no joy in exile and its uncertainty. This approach to the uncertainty of exile is also established in the form of Mishra’s poetry, which works against notions of plurality, provisionality and contradiction through the strong voices of its narrators, the imagery of binary oppositions of the fairytale, and the creation of a homogeneous, if occasionally self-questioning, Indo-Fijian voice. Nevertheless, in comparison with Ee’s stark analogies and careful, striking clarity of expression, Mishra’s writing style is more playful and experimental: it often uses exaggeration and caricature, and verges on a celebration of word-
spinning in its baroque use of rare or archaic (English) words and a rich imagery of the tropics.

In Ee's poetry there is also a recognition of exile as a central experience in the history and imaginative lives of a particular immigrant ethnic group: the exile from China to Malaysia and the exile from Malaysia to Australia is presented as having some similarity. As in Mishra's writing, this sense of regular disruption and unsettlement is a painful rather than invigorating process. The narrator of "Tranquerah Road" returns to his childhood neighbourhood, tracing the fragments of colonialism throughout the area: from a remnant of a Portuguese settlement, to the Tranquerah English School, to memories of singing Japanese songs and finally Independence. A group of childhood friends, with English, Malay, Indian, and Chinese names, is now scattered:

    dispossessed,
    the gang disintegrated,
    playmates, peers,
    the separate ways
    out of a neighbourhood
    (Tranquerah, 62).

This is the record of a childhood home completely broken and the sorrow of an exiled community:

    The road remains
    for those who are left,
    a fragment for us exiled,
    unacknowledged generation,
    a long, frayed chapter,
    poor adjunct of Heeren Street.
    But only it, there, here
    not some remote village in China
    once upon a time
    was all the earth and sea and sky
    and rainbow, golden dream
    we owned,

    and were compelled to leave (66).
The memory of an enforced separation from home is linked in the closing
lines of "Tranquerah Road" to a previous generation's loss of its home in
China. The implication is that, like the memory of China and its absence,
the separation from Malaysia will reverberate for several generations. As in
Mishra's poetry, the disruption of cultural and national loyalties does not
become the positive feature sometimes implied by postmodernist modes of
writing; the consistent sorrow of Ee's exiled narrators and their
(unproblematised) longing for their place of origin is linked to the humanist
vision and realist form of Ee's poetry.

Vijay Mishra has emphasised the significance of the "Girmit ideology" in Indo-Fijian literature and particularly the unique nature of this
ideology, which is formed from "the special conjunction of a fragment of
India and a Pacific culture of a different social order." He has also
observed that amongst Fiji's best-known writers, Satendra Nandan and
Sudesh Mishra "are the writers who have been most acutely conscious of
the weight of the Girmit experience..." The image of the Girmitya is
strong in Nandan's early poetry in Faces in a Village (1979). The description
on the back cover of this book explains that "these poems attempt to create a
new awareness of these uprooted, transplanted men and women...". In the
poem "My Father's Son", for instance, the narrator poignantly remembers
his father's comments about his experience as an indentured labourer. In
The Wounded Sea the Girmityas' experience of labour is mediated for the
present generation by the Indian epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana,
which the labourers brought with them in oral form. These legends are
presented as bestowing meaning on the Girmitya's experience of exile and
thereby a measure of solace. The narrator's illiterate labourer grandfather
has "a reservoir of gripping tales from the Ramayana", and explains his own
exile from India to his grandson in terms of these stories:

24 Vijay Mishra, 2.
25 Vijay Mishra, 5.
"Exile, betu, is common. Valmiki wrote about Ram's exile, so that we could bear ours. That's how I have lived here, chodou!". His voice faltered (16).

The figure of Ram provides a heroic image and precedent for the diasporic Indian in need of comfort. The narrator's young self continues this tradition by applying the mythology of the Ramayana to his own life when justifying his love for a married woman. The older narrator explains the importance of the Indian epics to the Indo-Fijian people:

We lived by such stories, our ancient epics- first our grandparents, then our mothers and fathers, now our political leaders. Our fate in Fiji had echoes of the Ramayana: exile; suffering; separation; battles but no return (88).

Thus Nandan's prose, like Mishra's poetry, links the Indo-Fijian community through the recurrent experience of exile but with a greater imaginative reference to the Indian epics. Further, in Nandan's The Wounded Sea Indian epics play an essential role in perpetuating connections between Indo-Fijians and India, and form part of what is presented as a unique, hybrid tradition within Fiji which mingles the experience of indentured labourers and Indian tradition.

A temporal perspective of Indo-Fijian ties to the land and the rites of passage of suffering endured in Fiji are an essential element of the establishment of the Indo-Fijian's claim to a place in post-colonial Fiji in The Wounded Sea. A quotation which prefaces Nandan's novel and also concludes his short story "Enigma of Exile: A Passage, A Death", stresses the ways in which membership of a country can be earned, as well as being a function of an individual's place of birth:

A man's destination is not his destiny.  
Every country is home to one man  
And exile to another. Where a man dies bravely  
At one with his destiny, that soil is his.  
Let his village remember  

T. S. Eliot
"To the Indians Who Died in Africa".

The notion that the experience of dying in a new land can result in an intimate, spiritual connection with the new place is metaphorically expanded in the final pages of The Wounded Sea when the narrator briefly shifts his focus to the present day. In these final passages, it is suggested that through forms of suffering and loss the migrant can claim a legitimate place in a society in which s/he was not born:

It is true, perhaps, that a country never belongs to one unless one is prepared to die for it. But there are so many ways of dying (169).

In Chapter 3, "The Day of the Colonel", an American character, who is presented as perceptive, suggests ways of coming to belong to a country:

"The best way of knowing a country is through its land; or loving a woman; or through its literature" (113).

The legitimacy of the Indo-Fijians' claim to a place in Fiji is affirmed in The Wounded Sea through an exploration of alternative ways of belonging to a land that are set against the notion of exclusive rights of indigenous possession. The attachment of a minority ethnic group to a country through its ties to the landscape (often forged over one or more generations) is also a strong theme of Ee and Mishra's work, and is similarly combined with the celebration of the unique qualities of the ethnic group to reject the notion that only the indigenous people have cultural authenticity and a legitimate claim to the landscape.

The attempt to assert equal status with an indigenous population from a migrant subject position can, when combined with the insights of the subject position of exile, lead to new perspectives on issues of indigeneity, land ownership and migrancy, ideas which are relevant to Australian society. For instance, Nandan and Ee both explore sympathetically the fate of Vietnamese refugees26. Ee also questions the

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whole idea of ownership of land in his poem "Ownership and Control" in Tranquerah:

A thing isn't yours to keep, or occupy, gloat over,
just because you found it- rock, animal, tree,
land, strip of water, you name it.

It isn't more yours to tinker at, perpetuate on
parchment or stone, summon a parliament,
call out party henchmen, paid mob, police, army,
or people's court, to defend it (33).

The poem concludes with an assertion that property should be available to all:

The law that's becoming is equal,
above all men and nations;
its anthem marches in the hearts of all who need-
to live, each his own way, to love, to give (33).

Issues of indigeneity and land ownership are important in an Australia still attempting to come to terms with the ramifications of the High Court's 1992 Mabo decision. These fictional pieces from political exiles living in Australia illustrate that within Australia there are already writers of serious literature who have considerable international experience in representing these issues. These authors have a new perspective to contribute to a thorough analysis of "Australian" literary perceptions of indigeneity and colonisation.

Despite the consideration of questions of indigeneity, migration and colonisation in the texts under discussion in this chapter, it is only in Sudesh Mishra's Tandava that explicit connections are made between the experience of the post-colonial "Asian" migrant in Australia and the Australian Aboriginal. This may be contrasted to contemporary Asian American literature which, Elaine Kim has observed, often displays "a feeling of kinship with other nonwhite Americans, especially blacks and
Native Americans, who frequently appear in the literature. It is possible to speculate that the power of the Black civil rights movement and its literature made an attractive point of entry for Asian Americans and their writing whereas the inspiration for Asian migrant experience writing in Australia has been more strongly influenced by (European) Multicultural writing. This notion is lent some credence by the supportive role of Multicultural presses, anthologies and small magazines in the careers of Asian Cosmopolitan writers. In Mishra's poem "Black Swans in Ballarat", the Indo-Fijian narrator feels a strong sympathy for Aboriginal Australians which is influenced by the shared experiences of colonialism and racism. An aggressive white tramp directs racist abuse towards the narrator, and the narrator muses on issues of racism and colonialism as he watches a group of black swans:

What history is this, unmarked by the slaver's staff,  
we watch sailing across the vague municipal lake?  
A sheaf of time free from human failings,  
free from the fault-lines in our nature clamouring  
for the obverse, the scapegoat of our inadequacies.  
So we watch- colonizer and colonized... (54-55).

The use of Australian fauna and landscape- the black swans and municipal lake- as symbols of elements of a society is a common literary device in Mishra's poetry. Nature often provides an allegorical or metaphorical point of connection with human society for narrators who are estranged from the human world by their sense of political outrage, injustice and alienation. In the Australian context of "Black Swans in Ballarat", this sense of alienation is linked with Australian racist hostility. However, the narrator also reveals a deeper connection with the margins of Australian society through his sense of fellowship with the indigenous people of Australia. Mishra enters the arena of Black writing in several poems in Rahu and Tandava by

highlighting the vulnerable social position of the coloured individual in Australian society. (In an intertextual reading, if the narrator is taken to be Indo-Fijian, like so many of Tandava's narrators, the narrator's sympathy and fellow feeling for the Australian Aboriginal people has an even greater complexity, because the domination of the newcomers by the indigenous group in Fiji is reversed in the Australian context). The imagery of Aboriginal people, in which Australian Aboriginals are figured as fellow subjects of colonialism, may be a perspective that is seen increasingly within Australian literature as more post-colonial migrants and their children explore the heritage of the colonised. However, as demonstrated by the absence of this trope in Ee and Nandan's work, amongst others in this thesis, the connection between Aboriginal and Asian experience has yet to be explored in detail.

The four texts under discussion create a sense of an attractive and unique Chinese Malaysian or Indo-Fijian culture and community and thus emphasise the legitimacy of the claim of these ethnic minorities to a place within Malaysia or Fiji and the tragedy of the disintegration of these communities under hostile governments. With their often haunting images of individuals forced by exclusionist nationalist convictions from a place considered home, Ee, Mishra and Nandan's texts also encourage an examination of Australian attitudes towards minority groups. The methods which they use to emphasise cultural loyalty may perhaps be drawn upon by other writers addressing this subject in an Australian context. These texts introduce new perspectives on the post-colonial exile and the experience of a migrant minority, and contribute a discussion of ideas relevant to contemporary Australian society with innovative styles developed under a range of literary traditions and political conditions. A central element of this chapter has been the tracing of some of the ways in which Ee, Mishra and Nandan express a sense of Chinese Malaysian or Indo-Fijian identity in their verse and prose. A more intense assertion of the importance of these
cultural minorities takes place in the criticism of the exclusionist political policies of the indigenous group which will be considered below.

III

Written within a Malaysian political system and social atmosphere in which dissent was treated harshly, Ee's poetry makes use of the instruments of the oppressed in his use of allegory, allusion, irony and humour. These features of his writing continue in the volumes of poetry published after his emigration to Australia. Some of the most powerful of Ee's poems centre on a single analogy which links an everyday occurrence to political oppression. This is a feature of "Jalan Kilang", in Tranquerah, in which the narrator is a driver who fails to stop and help people huddled from the rain under a bus stop and is linked to all complicit people who fail to aid the less fortunate (32). The driver feels guilty because he realises that he should help but fails to act. He looks away and the windscreen wipers help to distract his gaze:

I stare ahead,
keep my eyes on the road,
off the huddled mass,
water and mist pressing
on my car windscreen,
the wipers sweeping continually,
to fend off their intrusion (32).

The "pressing" crowd, the "huddled mass", the constant threat of nature's intrusion and the narrator's guilty conscience hint at an underlying scene more desperate and dangerous than simply shielding from the rain (32). The final line of the final verse ends on the infinitive " to run" which disrupts the rhythm set up in the rest of the poem and completes the impression of a political analogy:

I keep thinking
of the men and women
in their now distant silence,
waiting, wavering,
wondering when
the rain will stop;
or if they should start
to run (32).

The phrase "in their now distant silence" draws on two images of a
temporal distance and geographical distance; it is possible to read this phrase
in an intertextual fashion, in the context of the exile's sorrow at having left
friends and family at home and sense of guilt at not sharing their suffering
(32).

Other powerful analogies in Tranquerah exhibit Ee's skill with this
form of extended metaphor. "Malaise", for instance, links twin
observations of the Malaysian fruit durian and the tree tembusu with the
decline of Malaysian society (12). On one level "Disinherited" presents an
exploration of the humiliation of an individual who has been disinherited
by his father and his position of filial importance rejected by a series of
professionals ("professor, lawyer, doctor") (25). The narrator is:

too embarrassed to seek involvement
lest our trustees grudged,
took umbrage at our possible stake (25).

In another reading, this poem expresses "the anxiety, disbelief, dismay"
involved in the discovery of the non-Malay minorities that they are no
longer seen as part of the national family (25). Ee balances these possible
interpretations carefully, finally ending on a phrase which suggests the
more complex national analogy. The professionals leave "...deciding to let
our patriarch lie/ as they thought fit" (25). In these final two lines the
double meaning of "lie" is stressed- the leader has not been telling the truth
and has not changed his mind- and the decision of the élite of society not to
challenge this decision is presented as a matter of deep concern. Such poems present the writing of verse as an act of quiet but definite subversion.

One of the common features of the structure of Ee's poetry is its satiric treatment of the way governments or institutions function and the drawing of the readers' attention to corruption and internal contradictions. The poems "Ministry of Information", "Fire in Kampung Aman Sentosa", and "Nospeak" attack circular truths, bureaucratic longwindedness and the corruption of government institutions. The first three verses of "Ministry of Information" discuss the contents of three bulletins that purport to explain a rowdy public incident in which political supporters provoked other parties and their supporters. In this poem Ee satirically engages with the Malaysian government's dismissal of the behaviour of the political parties, and their supporters, which sparked the May 13 1969 riots through their provocative behaviour. The first bulletin of the ironically named "Ministry of Information" blames political opportunists for the notorious incident, the second suggests the Triads and other secret societies were responsible, and the third accuses communists. After extensive, time-consuming and wasteful government deliberation on the matter the subject is, ironically, banned from public discussion:

Other statements followed,
and more considered
green paper,
blue paper,
white paper,
and a final paper that banned
any public discussion of the subject (9).

"Nospeak" deals ironically with an "(unmentionable) country" in which "it's against the law to speak/ about certain things" (10). In a witty verse which describes censorship and the justifications surrounding it, Ee describes a situation where:
Everyone is free, however,
to suggest ways and means
to improve these very things...

but the fundamental status of these policies cannot be questioned because they are sacred; as a result "it's against the law/ to speak against the things" (10). Ironically the poem which discusses censorship is itself censored. Although it is not permitted to name the subject of its discussion, the poem still manages to make important satirical points, an achievement which emphasises the diversity of literary expression and the resilience of poets. Ee's poetry ranges from sophisticated commentary on the political system to more straightforward protest verse.

A sense of betrayal is strong in both Ee's and Mishra's poetry, as it is in Nandan's fiction. Ee's post-1969 work and Mishra's post-1987 work exhibit manifestations of disappointment in the governing of a particular society and images of uncertainty and betrayal. In Tandava this disturbance is often expressed in images drawn from gothic nightmare: the Fiji of Tandava is populated by "usurping louts"29, "cowardly shadows"30, "dark casuists"31, "the demagoge heart"32; nature can be ugly, shrieking, afraid. Mishra's form of expression in Tandava is significantly different from the expressions of outrage and alienation in Ee's poetry. The dramatic style and dark, angry tone of Tandava with its crowded, threatening imagery is a sharp contrast to the realism of Ee's verse, with his often fearful narrators speaking in criticism of corruption in quiet and bitter disappointment, or the starkly framed poem built upon a single, striking analogy illustrating sociopolitical breakdown.

Despite basic differences in approach, Mishra's Tandava and Ee's Tranquerah both depend heavily on satire, often the language of the outsider. Ee comically illustrates the inept and illogical processes of a

29"Feejee," 14
30"Feejee," 16.
31"Opium-Eater," 29.
32"Detainee," 22.
corrupt government and his courageous narrators evoke indignation against a system in which people are afraid to speak. Mishra's poems often attack the new system of government and draw upon comic descriptions which diminish through ridicule and exaggeration the figures of the Colonel and his soldiers. These characters refer, of course, to the Fijian leader and supporters of the military coup of 1987 which ousted the elected government. In "Detainee" the imprisoned school teacher narrator grapples with the difficult knowledge that one of his pupils is now his prison captor. This poem also includes a caricature of the broader political picture beyond the prison walls:

Outside bars and inside reefs a witless
Barracuda grinds its teeth. All around
Toady fish applaud. From the sixth row seeps
The dregs of a song: *I did it my way* (22).

The mixture of serious commentary and mocking description is characteristic of Mishra's work which deals with Fiji. However, Mishra's poetry displays a strong sense of affection for the home country which tempers its criticism; a feature shared by Ee's poems on Malaysia, as expressed in "Portuguese Hamlet, Malacca" or "Tranquerah Road". Mishra's narrators occasionally launch invective against the sociopolitical situation in their native Fiji but this is placed in the context of a strong sense of affection for, and belonging to, the land. In the fifteen part poem "Feejee" the critical descriptions of the country and its people ("the fiddling egos of this piddling archipelago") are offset by expressions of loyalty to Girmitya history and descriptions of the pain of exile (10). This is the weary abuse given to a place well-known and loved despite its shortcomings; it is an insider's perspective.

A strong interest in Australian affairs and society is rare in the writing of political exile set in Australia because of the strong backward

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33 *Myths for a Wilderness*, 2-3; *Tranquerah*, 33.
focus on issues of homeland. However, the few poems by Ee and Mishra which do focus on Australian society exhibit a satirical and perceptive eye for local characteristics. The poetic strategies which powerfully challenge political corruption and persecution in a Malaysian or Fijian context also sharply identify and explore areas of national concern when directed towards Australia. Mishra's *Tandava* is a collection which displays considerable skill in capturing the national vernacular. In "He Walks the Country on New Year's Day: A Galah's Eye View" Mishra satirises the attitude towards poets in Australian society and mocks an overly serious poet, along with those who might take him seriously, using a blend of Australian invective and colloquialism which demonstrates a fine ear for Australian dialogue (64). In "Perth", a poem in *Nearing a Horizon* which also explores characteristics of Australian society, Ee Tiang Hong explores an Australian city's structure and with it the emphasis on the individual in Australian society:

> The city has no centre, focal landmark,  
no Place de la Concorde, Padang Merdeka, Tien An Men,  
no particular square, terrace, public park.

> On important days citizens do not converge,  
as elsewhere, for a common purpose- they feel  
no urge to (there's no compulsion) (40).

The contrast between Padang Merdeka, a Malaysian meeting place, and the absence of such a centre in an Australian city becomes a meditation in this poem on the qualities of Perth. The strong sense of Malaysia is not completely absent even in this verse, which is ostensibly about another country. The sense of affection for Malaysia, and Malacca in particular, in Ee's verse seems partly transferred to the treatment of another peoples' home city, Perth, whose differences from Malacca are treated ambiguously. The absence of strong community feeling in Perth is weighed against the lack of "compulsion" to gather in one place, a term which has connotations
of force. The tone includes both sympathy and an affectionate irony. What I am suggesting here is that the transferrence of literary devices and socio-political insights from the literature of political exile, in which the narrator speaks back to the homeland, to the subject position of the ethnic outsider writing about Australian society can lead to perceptive satirical verse about Australian society.

The element of political protest in Ee's and Mishra's poetry often involves the assumption and occasionally explicit discussion of the notion that fiction has a role in political and social life. In Mishra's *Tandava*, the role of irony is discussed as an instrument of the oppressed. The poem "Irnony" is highlighted by its position as the first poem in *Tandava* and by being the only fully italicised verse (9). The narrator considers irony a dangerous yet often intangible instrument; it carries the threat of imprisonment yet the narrator is playful with it:

For now, I shall be content to deploy
This compass, cause laughter or raise hackles,
And scare the freckles off politicians

And prigs (9).

Satiric poetry and the local voices of the marginalised which speak through it are presented as an antidote to the misuse of political power:

Something sees us through all the delirium.
Perhaps the lava in the prose of Swift,
Or a pirogue lilting on thin rice-paper
("The Opium Eater", 29).

In Ee Tiang Hong's "A Poem", in *Tranquerah*, the narrator compares poems to human beings, making the point that whereas humans can be intimidated into silence, the poem can always be trusted to speak (24). In Ee's characteristically pared-down style the final verse concludes with a note of hope:

A poem will, for sure,
surpass the fiat
of a mean creed,  
the bully's posture (24).

A strong element of Ee Tiang Hong's poetry is its quietly urgent moral stance, the conviction that perhaps the intellectual in particular but also every individual must speak out and take part in public debate. This is the subject matter of many of Ee's poems and a number of the narrators of his poems castigate themselves for not speaking out enough. As well as the explicit discussion about the role of poetry in politics, the emphasis on satire, and the use of irony and analogy for political commentary introduces the notion of poetry as a political tool and the idea that the poet has a moral responsibility to confront injustice.

Similarly, in Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* the notion that literature can be a powerful tool for individual and social change is expressed in passages from the text as well as in its structure. In the fourth chapter of the book, the members of the democratically elected Fijian Parliament are held captive by the army and their greatest reassurance comes from "a prayer or an episode from literature or from a religious text" (152). At this point the narrator also expresses his faith in the power of education and literature:

...at great moments of crisis, momentous or personal, individuals and communities may derive strength from their literature, mythology, religious thought and art... it is difficult to measure the depths that a line of poetry can stir and touch (151).

This philosophy about the power of literature pervades *The Wounded Sea* from the presentation of indentured Indian labourers and their children, who are haunted by the mythological figures of Indian epics, to the occasional recollection by the narrator of quotes from the English literary tradition to frame his experience. Wordsworth is a favourite reference and fosters the Romantic sense of place fostered in the novel. A feature of the literature of political exile is, as exemplified in Nandan's book, a conviction

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that literature can be a mediating political force which shapes, however subtly, the real world.

The concept that fiction has a purpose and that that purpose can be a moral one is a perspective seldom touched upon in contemporary Australian literary criticism. These convictions are not attractive to the predominantly post-structuralist perspective of Australian literary critics or First World critics in general. In a recent collection of essays on post-colonial writing, Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin point out that the tendency of Western criticism is to discuss the literary or social "text" within a set of philosophical questions based upon the cultural and historical experience of postmodern Anglo-American cultures. In their view, the post-structuralist refutation of the referent can result in a dismissal of literary qualities which include "the basic survival strategies of subordinated and colonised peoples." Slemon and Tiffin quote Craig Tapping to explain this point further:

"the new literatures... are generated from cultures for whom such terms as 'authority' and 'truth' are empirically urgent in their demands. Land claims, racial survival, cultural revival: all these demand an understanding of and response to the very concepts and structures which post-structuralist academicians refute in language games, few of which recognize the political struggles of real people outside such discursive frontiers."

For Australian literature studies to thoroughly analyse the work of political exile writers who write in English and to draw literary philosophies from post-colonial countries which are characterised by political repression and turmoil, an understanding of the cultural and historical specificities of these countries will be necessary. Such texts exhibit literary traditions which have developed in response to specific cultural and political traditions, and these

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36Slemon and Tiffin, xi.
social contexts will often lend a different meaning to notions, for instance, of the political possibilities of literature, the poet as public intellectual, the idea that poetry and morality are intertwined and that, in some political and cultural contexts, linguistic certainty and realist stability can be an attractive and, in some senses, enabling political approach. My point here is that on one level the form of the works under discussion must be considered in light of their positioning as works of overt political protest and not merely as linguistic artifacts. Nevertheless, as I shall illustrate below with regard to Satendra Nandan's *The Wounded Sea*, although in the literature of political exile the stability and certainty of meaning available in the realist text with humanist assumptions can be linked to the text's political agenda, this form can be limiting in its capacity to depict a politically complex society.

Mishra and Nandan's texts discuss similar political themes but their success varies considerably, a factor which is linked to the Wordsworthian style of romanticism which informs the presentation of Fiji in *The Wounded Sea*. Nandan's novel tackles the same subject as Mishra's *Tandava*- both texts address in a critical fashion the political situation in Fiji and its effect on the Indo-Fijian community- but I contend that there is a significant difference between the concluding effect of the two texts and that Mishra's work is ultimately more politically complex.

The two Fijian coups of 1987 have had a profound shaping effect on Satendra Nandan's recent fiction, overtaking the emphasis on the Girmit experience in his writing. Many of Nandan's recent short stories have focused on the ramifications of the coups and the illegitimate rule of the Rabuka military government in Fiji. For instance, "The Day of the Colonel"\(^\text{38}\) isolates the character Gautam Gounder (who also appears in the *The Wounded Sea*), and explores his vanity, his confusions about his Indian inheritance, his weaknesses for adultery and wealth, and finally his role in what is presented as a tragic and thoughtless interference in government. In

addition, the short story "Enigma of Exile: a Passage, a Death" traces the events of the 1987 coup in a realistic autobiographical style. The structure of the *Wounded Sea* is directed towards the crisis, the ultimate moment of betrayal which the coup represents. The initial two chapters are structured around the life of the young narrator and composed for the most part of vignettes of idyllic village life which give a sense of the possibilities of the Indo-Fijian community and the value of the people who will suffer from a race-based military takeover. Although the British Romantic outlook is a powerful force in this text, Nandan also dramatically and humourously reveals the dirt, poverty and low expectations of the Indo-Fijian villagers. The numerous accounts of adultery in the village indicate that at the primary level of the relationship between the sexes social order is breaking down, an occurrence which hints in the humanistic world of *The Wounded Sea* at broader social disintegration. "The Night of the Mongrels", the fourth and final chapter in *The Wounded Sea*, is a realistic, semi-autobiographical account of the first coup, in which soldiers appear in Parliament, the Coalition government is imprisoned and the narrator and his family reluctantly leave the country. The use of military force to remove the government is the concluding moment of tragedy and regret at which the entire structure of the text is directed. *The Wounded Sea* thus establishes the familiar fictional construction of an idyllic rural scene and a happy childhood which is then tragically broken by the interference of political corruption and military power.

*The Wounded Sea* and *Tandava* share qualities of the fable in their depiction of the political crisis in Fiji but, in my view, the poems of *Tandava* move beyond the binary oppositions of the fairytale whereas *The Wounded Sea* does not. In Nandan's novel a childhood idyll is broken by the figure of the evil Colonel and innocence is destroyed. (At the same time, the Indo-

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Fijians are not presented as heroic— their actions, and inaction, can be farcical). *Tandava* makes use of the gothic imagery of the Grimm's fairytale to highlight the horror and disbelief with which the narrators react to the political changes in their country. However, Mishra's Fiji is ultimately a complex place, where all individuals are implicated in the unrest which led to the coup itself. The poem "Detainee" asks if the teacher narrator could have done more to prevent his pupil becoming a guard; in "Feejee" the narrator can be furious with self-disgust as well as with false leaders. Whereas in *The Wounded Sea* the narrator's tone is occasionally indignant but rarely self-directed, the narrators of *Tandava* can be furious with self anger. Further, the separation of the first three sections of Nandan's novel from the final documentary-style, political section has the effect of representing pre-coup Fiji as an apolitical idyll, with little sense of a background to the coup. Like a childhood monster, the Colonel springs without warning into a sunny, informal paradise; there is little discussion of the relations between Indo-Fijians and Fijians which created the conditions for a coup to occur; there is no sense of a larger political process. The book's impact is thus fragmented. Both Nandan and Mishra's works contain sharp attacks on recent disruptive political events in Fiji but the complexity with which Fiji is represented differs significantly.

To some extent, the primary texts under discussion all promote visions of Chinese Malaysian and Indo-Fijian communities as diverse, dynamic societies and implicitly reject the Orientalist vision of Western discourse common in the history of Australian representations of "Asia" in the arts, which often simplifies countries of "the region" as part of a monocultural "Asia"\textsuperscript{40}. Ee, Mishra and Nandan's texts reveal, to varying degrees, divisions within Malaysia and Fiji, including conflict between immigrant and indigene, local political power struggles and tensions in the

experience of colonial rule and its ramifications upon the present. However, unlike Ee and Mishra's poetry collections, Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* does not substantially challenge an Australian reading public's notion of a tourist Orient which is unhampered by the harsh realities of political dissent. The idealised presentation of the pre-coup Indo-Fijian way of life as an apolitical pastoral paradise dominates the presentation of Fiji in Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* and has similarities with some popular Western notions of the South Pacific.

Mishra's *Tandava* specifically takes issue with the notion of the South Pacific as an idyllic tourist destination, a stereotype of the area which continues despite military conflict. This stereotype builds on the mythology of the South Pacific in Australian fiction included early romance and adventure fiction projected onto a South Pacific island background by writers such as Maslyn Williams, Keith Pickard and Desmond O'Grady and kiap (patrol officer) novels which celebrate the kiap system in Papua New Guinea and stress the horror of the cannibal society which preceded it. Between 1965 and 1985 Australian images of Asia, including the South Pacific, were being reassessed. However, idealizations of the Pacific took the place of tales of horror, cannibalism and sensual exoticism for Australians in the 1970s and early 1980s as the public image became what Nicholas Thomas describes as "the tourist cliché... small islands, lagoons and sun-soaked paradises inhabited by generous and welcoming islanders." These ideas built upon earlier literary images of the "South Seas" and persevered despite the Fiji coups, the Bougainville war, parliamentary

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44 Broinowski, 23-25.
45 Broinowski, 176.
struggles in Vanuatu and violence in Caledonia. Nicholas Thomas argues that the tendency remains in contemporary Australian fiction to figure island nations as resorts and to provide only notional observations of politics, a factor which is motivated in the late twentieth century by the distancing effect of postmodern irony. Ironically, the politically motivated realist text of The Wounded Sea has the same effect through its intention to sympathetically emphasise the disastrous effect of Fiji's military regime and the plight of the Indo-Fijian in Fiji.

The concept of Fiji as tourist destination and idyllic paradise is a trope which is often overturned in the poems of Mishra's Tandava whereas in Nandan's The Wounded Sea the image of (pre-coup) Fiji as paradise is seldom problematised, except for occasional indications of the isolation of Indo-Fijians from the rest of the population. In Mishra's poetry the term "brochure" denotes the perception of Fiji as a tropical tourist paradise, and is aligned with other misconceptions of the tragically dislocated expectations of the European educated Indo-Fijian. References to brochures, and to the pleasures of the tropics, lagoons and oceans, often recur in Tandava but the expectations of easy pleasure which travel brochures and the tropics often hold for the Australian reader are always shattered by details of a harsh and historically complex sociopolitical reality. Mishra's text challenges Australian impressions of Asia as apolitical and the South Pacific as tourist paradise and gives an often neglected and complex vision of the insider to the images of these nations in Australian literature. Nandan's pre-coup Fiji is sunny, apolitical and village oriented but it is also earthy, and includes detail about the Girmit experience from an Indo-Fijian perspective. Nevertheless, although the voice of the narrator introduces a retrospective warning of political conflict in Nandan's The Wounded Sea, there is no sense of a gradually building political and ethnic conflict within the

47 Thomas, 265.
48 Thomas, 276.
narrator's Indo-Fijian village. The Western stereotype of the South Pacific as peaceful tourist paradise is used to highlight the tragedy of the Fijian coup of 1987 to a Western audience. The disruption of this peaceful vision is part of the political project of the text, the condemnation of the treatment of Indo-Fijians in Fiji, but the result is a tacit approval for an Orientalist style of imagining the South Pacific.

The readership of all four texts under discussion is an issue of particular significance because of their positioning as works of political protest. The forms and styles of Ee's, Mishra's and Nandan's works are particularly attuned to the forces of audience expectation and communication because of the privileged position of the political messages of these texts. A central interest of the political exile text is in effecting change by reaching a large or powerful audience but also by evoking pathos through the plight of exiled or displaced individuals. The attention to reaching a wide audience outside the native country with a message which is as clear as possible is a matter of urgency in these texts and this radically shapes their subject matter and form. The medium of the English language and the genre used are of particular significance because these characteristics have a strong impact on the size of the readership of fictional texts in Malaysia and Fiji.

The fact that Ee's principal genre was poetry, apart from his educational writings, made his writing marginal to a Malaysian readership. An acknowledgement of the small following of poetry in Malaysia occurs in several of Ee's poems. "Epilogue", the final poem of Tranquerah, observes philosophically that the prospective audience of a poet is small:

All these may well come to nothing, and all the hopes.

50 In Malaysia poetry, whether in Bahasa or English is a marginal activity and has a small readership. Koh, 133.
The tone here is resigned, even pragmatic. But the modest claims seem deceptive in an intertextual reading because Ee's narrators continue to speak out through the poetic medium, often discussing the purpose of poetry and addressing the need for social and political change. The fact that the English language is the medium of these poems has also reduced the size of a potential Malaysian audience. Since Malaysian Independence from the British Commonwealth, English has become a fringe language in Malaysia, subordinate to Bahasa Malay and fostered as a second language for participation in the global economic system. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim argues that despite its small reading public the English language is an important mode of expression for Malaysian minority writers. Lim suggests, with regard to Malaysian novels written in English that:

> English is an ethnic-neutral instrument whose international character counters a national-language/cultural dominance to express fragmentations resulting from exclusions and suppressions... minorities delegitimised by national-language processes use the former colonial language's "otherness" to give themselves a voice and an identity\(^{51}\).

In the context of government policy which declared *Satu Negara, Satu Bangsa, Satu Bahasa* (One Nation, One Race, One Language), to write in English rather than Malay, as Ee Tiang Hong did in the 1960s and 1970s, was to run the risk of accusations of national disloyalty but also to enjoy a greater freedom of expression to create a unique sense of Chinese Malay identity and advocacy. As an English language poet and later exile, Ee's poetry reached only a limited English language, mainly Chinese, audience in Malaysia, a readership which was no doubt further restricted by the challenging political nature of his subject matter. However, through its

\(^{51}\) Lim, 87.
subject matter and literary devices Ee's poetry also attempts to target a particularly Malaysian audience.

Although the use of the English language and the genre of poetry reduced the accessibility of Ee's writing for many Malaysians or Chinese Malaysians, Ee's writing style works against this restriction by implicitly rejecting notions that reading and writing poetry in English is an élitist, anti-nationalist pursuit. Ee's poems are unusually direct and unadorned, with few similes and metaphors. Further, Ee's poetry often uses local voices and colloquialisms to present the injustice shown in Malaysia to non-Malay minority groups and its ramifications on the Peranakan in particular. The explorations of local Malaysian subject matter in unprepossessing language and the use of familiar Peranakan voices have the effect of making Ee's poetry more accessible to those Malaysians of any ethnicity who can read English. Ee's skill with translating the rhythm of Peranakan English on to the page is evident in poems such as "Mr. Tan, Recounting a Friends Conversation":

If you can't beat them,  
join them, lah, he thought,  
what to do?  
Or else, somehow or other,  
lose all- job, face, everything (Tranquerah, 17).

As a consequence, Ee's poems have an unusual and characteristic syntax which occasionally omits the definite article and transforms nouns into verbs ["Till time to leave, go home, return to family..." ("Shepherd’s Inn, Petaling Java", Tranquerah, 18)]. Although the audience of Ee's poetry is affected by its genre and medium, the effectiveness of its political message to its target audience is enhanced by the cultivation of a down-to-earth tone and a specifically Malaysian sense of place in subject matter and linguistic signification.

For the Indo-Fijian writer who addresses political themes in English, restrictions on the size of the domestic audience and the urge to seek
international attention leads to the development of characteristic writing styles and subject matter. To be a fiction writer in Fiji is a rare and recent development. It was not until the 1970s that Indo-Fijians began to write poetry in English, a move which began with academics associated with the University of the South Pacific, including Satendra Nandan. Nandan was the first published poet and novelist in Fiji. With regard to the reception of verse in Fiji, Sudesh Mishra observed in a 1992 interview that "Nobody really reads poetry in Fiji." Mishra's poems comically highlight the marginal position of the poet through their ironically abusive descriptions of poets and the process of writing poetry (which is ironically described as "poofterish word-mongering"). The ironic focus on the apparent worthlessness of poets and poetry in Mishra's poetry may be linked to the fragile position of verse in Fiji. The severely limited readership in Fiji also means that the Fijian-based author writing in English must attempt to reach an international audience and publish overseas. The situation is further exacerbated in the tiny field of Indo-Fijian literature, with the position of the writer made even more precarious in Fiji by a political situation which forces political authors into exile and international (often Australian) publication. In Indo-Fijian texts of political exile, the shaping presence of a global English speaking audience is even greater because their project has often been the encouragement of international intervention in Fiji's political life. The fact that the post-coup texts The Wounded Sea and Tandava have been published in Australia, and call into question the

54Carbines, 9.
55eg. "This one fancies himself a bard- I mean
Look at the way he claws at his nascent
Paunch before kneeling (O sensitively!)
To ponder a thistle..."
position of Australia as a political and economic power centre in the South Pacific, directly affects the form of these texts.

In Mishra's poetry the spectre of the international audience is constantly, ironically present: perhaps a feature encouraged by the necessarily international audience for English writers from Fiji. The narrators are haunted by the possibility of pronouncing a cliché, apologise for alliteration and subject matter, begin with titles which warn not to expect too much in poetic technique or conclude with a list of errata. In directing the work of Tandava to an Australian audience, it is possible that Mishra is haunted by the possibility of "mis-speaking", a significant concern of many migrant writers, and the similar experience of heightened self scrutiny inspired by the post-colonial subject position. However, given the ease with which Mishra slips into the Australian vernacular and subject matter when he chooses, it is more likely that this self-consciousness may be a deliberate affectation to highlight the already intertwined nature of politics and language in his poetry. As a trickster with language, Mishra avoids type-casting. The attention to rhythm and the resurrection of unusual terms in English speak against the dismissal of the English language. The possibilities of language, the joys of wordplay, and the power of verse are celebrated in Rahu and Tandava.

Nandan's The Wounded Sea is a more soberly realist work than Mishra's Tandava and carefully describes Hindi customs as it does political machinations for the benefit of an Australian audience. The use of British literary models in Nandan's text recalls the settled, civilised setting of Yasmine Gooneratne's Relative Merits and A Change of Skies. Nandan's text also uses British literary modes familiar to an Australian reader to mediate new cultural information about "Asia". In The Wounded Sea, a

58 "O Hannah!," Tandava, 26.
59 "Confessions of a Poetaster from Fiji," Rahu, 1
60 "Epistle," Tandava, 35.
romance-inspired pastoral tradition informs the description of the Indo-Fijian village in which the first three chapters of the book are centred. The use of English literary quotations by the narrator provides a further point of entry for the Australian reader and aids the illustration of the power of Indian epics in the lives of the Indo-Fijian characters. Unfortunately, though, the use of binary oppositions—such as the contrast between light and dark, pre-coup and post-coup, good rulers (the democratically elected MPs) and bad rulers (the Colonel)—to create a clear sense of the potential and value of a peaceful Fiji leads to a clear political commentary but hampers rather than enables a political message by sacrificing complexity for clarity.

The Indo-Fijian political text directed towards an Australian audience has a sense of political immediacy because of Australia's position as a power centre for the countries of the South Pacific: to reach the Australian public could result in a change in Australian foreign policy which could influence the political situation in Fiji. Australia's influence in Fiji is stressed in the reportage style fourth chapter of The Wounded Sea. The Fijian army is shown to be "worried" by Australia's and New Zealand's possible reactions to the coup, and the hopes of the imprisoned Coalition government also rest with Fiji's democratic neighbours ("anything could happen with the Labor governments of Australia and New Zealand—our fraternal colleagues, or so we believed...") (145). Through the fictional medium of The Wounded Sea the issue of Australian responsibility for ensuring democracy in the South Pacific is also emphasised. The narrator comments that the Girmityas and their descendants will experience:

... another hundred years of servitude. And this, during the last decade of the twentieth century, with the quiet knowledge of the countries of the region—including those for whom freedom is a living thing (169).

In contrast, the poems of Ee Tiang Hong were published in Singapore, Hawaii and Australia but directed to readers in his native country and a
broader international audience. Australia is never figured as central in Ee's poetry but rather as a place far removed from the political turmoil of the Malaysian homeland. Visions of Perth and the Swan river are linked instead with the frustrations of distance, ideological and physical, from the homeland, and later in *Nearing a Horizon*, with a kind of peace drawn from this same distance.

With regard to the small group of writers who contribute to Indo-Fijian literature in English, Sudesh Mishra, Satendra Nandan and Som Prakash are now living in Australia, and Raymond Pillai lives and writes in New Zealand. Prakash has published a number of short stories and poems, including the short story "An Act of Love"\(^{61}\), in which Ramakrishna, an Indo-Fijian, recalls a tense relationship with two friends in Fiji and the involvement of his Australian girlfriend. Prakash's poem "A Diasporic Twist"\(^{62}\) is dedicated to Sudesh Mishra and traverses similar territory to Mishra's writing, poignantly exploring issues of exile, departure, race relations, the Girmit legacy and the role of poetry. In Vijay Mishra's autobiographical short story "Ni Sa Moce/Salaam Fiji"\(^{63}\), the narrator recalls an enforced departure from Fiji in his youth, his father's death and his brief, painful return to a country riven by racial aggression. This high frequency of Indo-Fijian writers who address political themes while living in Australia may be partly explained by Nandan's reason for choosing to undertake postgraduate study in Australia, because of his conviction that:

> Australia would be of vital importance to the future of Fiji and the fate of the people of the South Pacific\(^{64}\).

In post-colonial literary studies Australian literature is often viewed as the product of a settler colony but the writing of the increasing number of Indo-Fijian political exiles publishing within this country insist that Australians look more closely at their country's historical role as an imperial power in

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Fiji and Papua New Guinea and its contemporary role in the neo-colonial politics of the South Pacific.

The political nature of Nandan and Mishra's exilic texts is often echoed in the authors' public roles as academics and fiction writers, a fact which challenges the Australian public's perception of the boundaries of these roles. Satendra Nandan was a Minister in the short-lived Bavadra Coalition Government of Fiji and has received a doctorate in literature from the Australian National University. In 1987, after the second coup, he moved with his family to Canberra in 1987, where he now teaches in the Faculty of Communication at the University of Canberra. Sudesh Mishra came to Australia from Fiji to study in 1978, when he was fifteen years old. He later completed a B.A. at the University of New South Wales and a doctorate on modernism in Indian poetry in English at Flinders University. Mishra has lectured at the University of Suva in Fiji but recently returned to Australia to teach in the English Department at Flinders University. Both Nandan and Mishra are highly educated and are currently academics in English Departments in Australia. In their roles as academics as well as in their creative writing, these individuals promote a greater knowledge about the crisis of Indo-Fijian community.

Satendra Nandan provides political commentary on Fiji not only through his fiction but also through his position as fiction writer, and literary critic. In speeches and interviews given in his capacity as a fiction writer Nandan often refers to the Indo-Fijian experience in Fiji and his own experience of exile. Nandan is also the founding president of the Canberra chapter of PEN, the international writers' organisation, which he sees as useful in exerting international pressure on the military government in Fiji:

...I think that by forming PEN here we will be able to talk to people here in Foreign Affairs, in Parliament and in the media,

and make them aware of the terrible things that are being done in Fiji...66.

In his literary criticism he often focuses on the interface between literature and politics in a Fijian context and also refers to personal experience in his presentations at conferences and contributions to literary journals. In "Nationalism and Literature"67, for instance, the specific experience of the Indo-Fijian is considered with relation to questions of exile, the importance of naming, the need for minorities to possess a literary voice, indigenous racism and nationalism. The paper concludes that literature should not be used to forge national identity but rather to subvert nationalism and imaginatively construct a more positive notion called "nationism", which is "a more enlightened concept of belonging to a place, physical and spiritual68.

At the European Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies Nandan presented a paper which traced the historical experience of the Indian indentured labourers in Fiji, perceptions of literary images of the South Pacific in Western literature, and a characteristically personal account of the contemporary situation for Indian Fijians and Indian Fijian writers69. Nandan therefore uses his positions as academic and fiction writer in Australia to speak a political message, actions which extend the expectations of the academic and the writer in Australia into the political sphere. Nandan would perhaps wish to challenge the prevailing notion that, as Simon During puts it, "one cannot be simultaneously a good traditional academic and a modern intellectual"70. During argues that the role of the modern intellectual is possible through the discursive practice of the movement and counter-movement from reading to reason, in which the play of language the play of reading and reason are balanced against each other. However, according to During the modern intellectual, according

66Hefner, 22.
68Nandan, "Nationalism and Literature," 62.
uses "his or her own ability to recognise and resist limits, imaginary images, apparatuses of power and control etc., relies on the skill with which s/he uses reading to stop the dominance of reason, and reason to forestall the specificity and groundlessness of reading"\textsuperscript{71}. Nandan's stylistically conservative realism does not highlight these ambiguities in his fiction and neither does his humanist criticism.

Sudesh Mishra also highlights the injustices occurring in Fiji through his roles as an academic and author. In "Reading Fiji: The Discourse of Vulagism" Mishra introduces the concept \textit{vulagi} (guest or foreigner or stranger) which he maintains is periodically invoked in texts by empowered groups in Fiji to characterise the Indo-Fijian as the threatening Other and therefore to maintain power dominance\textsuperscript{72}. In interviews about his fiction Mishra has taken the opportunity to discuss indigenous racism in Fiji within a global perspective and the lack of political representation for the Indo-Fijian population in Fiji\textsuperscript{73}. By speaking of personal experiences in academic and newspaper interviews Nandan and Mishra could be seen to risk being the subjects of identity politics, that is, having their texts judged by how close or far the authors themselves are perceived to be positioned from the Indo-Fijian culture by presenting themselves as having privileged knowledge through personal experience\textsuperscript{74}. This introduction of the sovereign subject as guarantor of the authenticity places a heavy burden of authenticity upon the fictional texts of these authors and may exacerbate a common preconception amongst Australian readers that texts by "migrant" authors are predominantly autobiographical, even when strong fictional elements are also involved.

\textsuperscript{71}During, 379-380.
\textsuperscript{73}Carbines, 9.
The perspective of Ee's *Nearing a Horizon* and *Tranquerah*, Mishra's *Tandava* and Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* as texts of the literature of political exile lends insight into the personal experience of exile, the interweaving strategies of writing with a political agenda, the roles that writers and academics can play in politics, and the literary methods of establishing and sustaining a sense of community identity, a preoccupation which has shadowed many migrant communities in the post-colonial world. In many ways the literature of political exile explores the crises of the migrant in a heightened form— the cultural and emotional dislocation, prejudice in the new country, conflict between first and second generations—but the focus of the fictional texts of political exile is often directed towards issues concerning the lost country rather than Australian society. Thus in Ee's, Mishra's and Nandan's writing, ethnic cultural identity and sociopolitical change in Malaysia or Fiji are the primary subjects of discussion and are addressed with the insider's tone of deep affection. The political machinations within Malaysia and Fiji are depicted with a greater degree of complexity in Ee and Mishra's texts than Nandan's *The Wounded Sea*. When these texts do discuss elements of Australian society, they sometimes employ piercing satire and observations honed in a tradition of protest literature.

Taken together, *Nearing a Horizon, Tranquerah, Tandava* and *The Wounded Sea* establish visions of nations riven by the conflict between indigenous and migrant groups, by questions of indigenous versus migrant authority and notions of ethnic and racial essentialism. As we have seen, the voices of the Ee, Mishra and Nandan's very different exiled narrators introduce questions about multiple loyalties and displacement, the possibility of a tradition of exile and the meaning of "home". These texts engage in political debate and statements and assumptions about injustice, morality and expected behaviour from the perspective of a secular humanism. To this extent, and despite their great formal difference, their
fascination with the larger philosophical implications of exile foreshadows the focus on the philosophical depths which migrancy invokes in Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game* and Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China*.
A powerful theme in Beth Yahp's short stories, such as "Beth Yahp"1, "Kuala Lumpur Story"2 and "In 1969"3 is the fate of the Peranakan in Malaysia and the traumatic experience of displacement and exile. Yahp's tales are often told through the first person voices of young women and the eyes of migrant daughters. From these vantage points, Yahp's short stories explore the workings of cultural loyalty and its connection with kinship relations and the mysterious longings which can be created by migrancy and exile and echo for several generations. The poetry of Ee Tiang Hong explores similar themes, as illustrated in Chapter 2, but Yahp's work is characterised by a particular fascination with female kin relations and the stories of Chinese Malaysian women. Yahp's distinctive writing style is also very different from Ee's simple, direct and unadorned verse: Yahp's prose builds upon many interweaving layers of rich metaphors drawn from mythology and oral tales to create a fantastical landscape. Yahp's work is strongly influenced by Australian (particularly feminist) literary discourses. The intersections between gender and race, the effect of exile upon the family, and the influence of kin and family history upon an individual's identity are recurrent and interweaving concerns.

Anggraeni's fiction shares with Yahp's writing a focus on female culture and in particular the position of the Asian woman in Australia. Although a number of well-known Indonesian-born writers have

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emigrated to Australia and continued to publish in Bahasa Indonesia, Anggraeni is one of the few Indonesian writers who has published a prolific amount of fiction in English in Australia and is perhaps the only Indonesian woman writer to do so. (Other Indonesian migrant writers include Abdullah Idrus, Achdiat Karta Mihardja, Nuim Mahmud Khaiyath, Subiago Sastrowardjo and Jimmy Sadeli but they have written and published principally in Bahasa Indonesia⁴). The sparsity of Indonesian migrant women's stories in an Australian literary context may help to explain the strong level of advocacy for Indonesian migrant women in Anggraeni's writing. Anggraeni's writing style is realistic with occasional overt discussions of crises in Indonesian and Indonesian Australian society and experience. The differences in form between Yahp's and Anggraeni's texts are linked to central assumptions about the nature of oppression and the social role of literature, and have a strong impact on the degree of success with which the texts manage to question and deconstruct the social construction of "woman", and especially Australian stereotypes of "the Asian woman". Whereas Anggraeni's texts are documentary style, realist works which appeal to the binary structuration of traditional gender stereotypes and Orientalist representations, Yahp's more experimental fiction questions such assumptions and makes complex links between gender, race and colonialism. Further, I contend that the form of the texts—Anggraeni's style of realism and Yahp's use of fantasy modes—is linked to their modes of publication and their varying degrees of critical and

⁴Sneja Gunew, Loló Houbein, Alexandra Karakostas-Seda and Jan Mahyuddin, eds., A Bibliography of Australian Multicultural Writers (Geelong: Centre for Studies in Literary Education, 1992) 107-108; Achdiat Karta Mihardja is an important literary figure within Indonesia. Teeuw has described Achdiat's influential first novel Atheis (The Atheist) as "the first post-war novel of real interest... The old theme of the conflict between old and new, between traditional society and modern culture is presented here in an entirely new way". A. Teeuw, Modern Indonesian Literature (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967) 202-206. Achdiat received literary awards in Indonesia in 1957 and 1970. He was a Senior Lecturer in Indonesian at the ANU in Canberra from 1961 until his retirement. Gunew et al., 173; Gunew et al., 130-131; Muhammed Haji Salleh, Tradition and Change in Contemporary Malay-Indonesian Poetry (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1977) 61-62; Gunew et al., 209.
publishing success: the extent to which Yahp's and Anggraeni's writing interacts with contemporary Australian intellectual debates and represents a style of Asian female difference which is appealing to late twentieth century Australian society has influenced the public response to the texts. The discussion moves from a comparison of the representations of female kin and the supernatural in Yahp's and Anggraeni's writing in Section I, to the treatment of the intersections of gender and race and the social construction of the Asian woman in Australia in Section II. Section III considers Yahp's and Anggraeni's texts in the context of the recent blooming of Asian women's stories in Australia and other Western societies.

The primary texts of this chapter are Beth Yahp's novel *The Crocodile Fury* and a number of her short stories, including "Kuala Lumpur Story", "Houses, Sisters, Cities", "In 1969" and "Beth Yahp". These works will be compared with Dewi Anggraeni's two novels *The Root of All Evil* and *Parallel Forces*, the three short stories contained in the collection *Stories of Indian Pacific*, the short story "Mal Tombée" and, briefly, the poem "A Foreigner in East Gippsland". Unlike the above texts, which directly address the experience of the Asian Australian migrant, often through the protagonist or first person narrator, the plot and characters of Yahp's novel and the short story "In 1969" do not explicitly address the fate of the Asian Australian migrant. The inclusion of these two texts in this discussion therefore requires explanation.

*The Crocodile Fury* is concerned with tales of female culture and bonds between female relatives as seen from the perspective of a young

9Dewi Anggraeni, *Stories of Indian Pacific* (Eltham North: Indra, 1992)
woman. The tropical setting is an unnamed Southeast Asian society and the central characters have at least a partly Chinese heritage, thus encouraging allegorical associations with Malaysia but also with other post-colonial Southeast Asian societies. The novel draws strength from recent developments in Australian feminist theory and literature as well as making use of oral storytelling methods, the structure of Chinese ghost stories and Chinese and Malay symbolism. My contention here is that because *The Crocodile Fury* "writes back" to a particularly Australian construction of the Asian woman—drawing on the preoccupations of Australian feminist writing in its form and subject matter, if in a Southeast Asian setting—it may productively be read as a text which addresses in part the experience of the Asian Australian migrant.

Beth Yahp's short story "In 1969" is included in this discussion because the migrant voice and concerns of the narrator suggest an Australian vantage point. "In 1969" addresses the subject of the race riots in Malaysia and its effect on the Chinese population and its children through the voice of a young woman recalling her mother's experiences in those years. Although the narrative perspective is not explicitly highlighted as that of the migrant in Australia, there are indications that this could be the case, including the migrant's fascination with the moment of departure, the deeds of the parent, and the memories of the first homeland from early childhood. Further, the careful explanation of political context and the narrator's use of colloquial language suggests an Australian perspective and presumed Australian audience. "Kuala Lumpur Story", "Houses, Sisters, Cities" and "Beth Yahp", the other short stories to be discussed below, are less contentious inclusions in this chapter because they directly address aspects of the Chinese Malaysian expatriate experience.
The discourses of feminism provide a point of departure for Beth Yahp's and Dewi Anggraeni's fiction. Both authors' works make use of a revisionist tradition of feminist literary criticism, in the sense that they question "the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures particularly as they relate to the position of women in society". These texts also demonstrate an interaction between feminist theory and narrative practice, which Paulina Palmer has also observed in contemporary women's fiction in America. The lives of women are often set at centre stage in Yahp's and Anggraeni's texts; the notion of women's culture provides a central point of interest. This attention to women's experience is founded upon a conviction that women's stories have been neglected by a literary tradition dominated by male writers and male preoccupations and that women's stories should be recorded to give a woman-centred perspective to literature. A move towards a woman-centred perspective, in which female experience is the major focus of study, has been operating in the feminist movement since the mid-1970s and has been debated by feminist theorists such as Gerda Lerner, Adrienne Rich and Susan Griffin. In the past two decades this focus has also been a growing feature of Australian writing by women. Dorothy Johnston's Tunnel Vision, Sara Dowse's West Block, Kate Grenville's Bearded Ladies and Joan Makes History, Drusilla Modjeska's Poppy, and many more texts by Australian women writers, highlight the female experience, although this subject matter is dealt with in diverse ways. Not only the subject matter of Yahp's and Anggraeni's fiction but also their publication in anthologies and presses which explore female experience- such as Beyond the Echo, Heroines: A Contemporary Anthology.

14Hester Eisenstein, Contemporary Feminist Thought (London: Unwin, 1984) 47.
of Australian Women Writers and Women's Redress Press\textsuperscript{15} suggest that these texts may be productively read in the context of an Australian literature which is increasingly seeking to recover female perspectives. However, in a comparison between the works under discussion, Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* and other post-1988 prose travel a step further than Anggraeni's novels in challenging restrictive notions of femininity.

Yahp's fiction often focuses upon a group of female relatives and their relationships with each other. "Kuala Lumpur Story" was published in 1987 and was Yahp's first published work to have a female Chinese Malaysian narrator and to explore the relationships between members of a maternal line, both common features of Yahp's more recent works. The narrator of this text is a young woman who is intrigued by her grandmother's life story, and particularly by the family rumour of her secret lover from China. The young narrator's prose record of her grandmother's life describes hardships which span hunger in China, a harsh voyage to Malaysia to marry an unseen bridegroom and the cruelty of Japanese soldiers during the occupation of Malaya. The prose is realistic and the plot development is linear. "Kuala Lumpur Story" has a more conservative and realist style than Yahp's later tales of Chinese Malaysian women and their experiences which include details of Chinese and Malay symbols, traditions and magic and involve experimental literary techniques partly based on an oral storytelling tradition. The focus on the "insider" experience of Chinese Malay culture and on female experience in "Kuala Lumpur Story" , however, is echoed in much of Yahp's post-1988 work and forms part of a thematic concentration on female identity. In the late 1980s, Yahp experimented not only with the realist, autobiographical style of "Kuala Lumpur Story" but with science fiction in her short story "Dreamers", science fiction/horror in "The Other Room", and a fairy tale spoof in "The

Goblin Tale"\textsuperscript{16}. The stylistic qualities of Yahp's post-1988 fantastical, sometimes gothic works—such as "Houses, Sisters, Cities", "In 1969", The Crocodile Fury, and "Beth Yahp"—indicates a melding of style and form drawn from a number of genres and brought together to form a characteristic prose style.

An investigation of the notion of "sisters" and "sisterhood" is a particular aspect of the fascination with female kin relationships in Yahp's more recent fiction. In the long short story "Houses, Sisters, Cities" the narrator recalls her relationship with one of her sisters. Through a stream of consciousness style of expression the narrator describes shared childhood intimacies, contemporary reunions and tensions between jealousy and loyalty which result from parental comparisons. She also muses on the distances, both emotional and spatial, which now separate herself and her sister and how swiftly these can be overcome in crisis. Memory itself is represented as fictional, flexible and subject to wishful thinking. The narrator's idyllic picture of two sisters playing at a fountain is exposed as a pleasant fiction:

In fact the girls making magic at the water fountain, balancing those styrofoam beads on that crest of water, were another pair of sisters, not us. In school my sister and I went our separate ways. We came home to schoolwork and television, frenetic talk at the dinner table, a whispered one [sic] late into the night... The other pair of sisters were girls from my class... (60).

In what can be seen as a postmodern emphasis, the notion of objective truth is cast into doubt: dreams, the obfuscations of imperfect memory and the workings of the imagination create a sense of uncertainty, a questioning of one individual's perception of history as objective truth. Yet the reality of such dreams and imaginings for the narrator is never in doubt.

Despite its primacy within "Houses, Sisters, Cities", the bond between women does not become idealised because of the tension and complexity which are introduced into these relationships. The narrator's ambiguity of feeling towards her sister is sketched, as is her changing relationship with her mother over time- from childhood and adolescence to expatriate adulthood- through a range of intimacies, angers and distances. Beneath the multi-layered nature of the narrative itself- references to childhood experiences of moving house, school, going to the market place, powerful visions of events in the life of the mother, shared moments with a sister- an emphasis on the subjectivity of memory and personal history underlies the narrative and hints at a myriad of sources of inspiration and resonance which can be gleaned from literary considerations of female relationships within the family.

Sisterly relationships between other types of female relatives and distinctions between the sisters from different families are often blurred in "Houses, Sisters, Cities"; all female relationships seem to be based on the notion of "sister". The cruel older cousins of the narrator's mother are referred to at various times as sisters, as if they have replaced the mother's biological sisters whom she was forced to leave behind in Bangkok when she moved to live with her aunt in Kuala Lumpur. At times, the mother also shares a union of sisterhood with her daughters:

We three sat cross-legged with our knees touching, mandala-shaped on the cool cement, with Lego blocks between us or an ark of plastic animals and my mother's head bent as low as ours, her brow as creased with concentration, her ear cupped to a game of whispers if that was the game. For a moment we were three sisters... (45).

The many sets of sisters referred to in "Houses, Sisters, Cities" seem interchangeable, an impression enhanced by the lack of personal names; the sisterly relationship appears as a large category, with its members sharing features and experiences which can be extended to include many
relationships between women. In the longer work, *The Crocodile Fury*, the
namelessness of the characters—such as Grandmother, the bully, the rich
man, and the lover—hints at their archetypal nature and, as I will show later,
creates the quality of a post-colonial fable. Similarly, the generalisation
between sisters in "Houses, Sisters, Cities" forms part of a broader stylistic
element of Yahp's prose which suggests universal similarities between
human cultures and relationships but which, through its playful, apparently
wayward, eclectic form, its darting movement and celebration of the belief
in the supernatural, hints at powerful connections within families which
can (perhaps should) be viewed as a contemporary form of magic. The more
general emphasis on family relationships and memory in "Houses, Sisters,
Cities" and the way in which identity is shaped by kinship relations and
family histories is a frequent point of fascination in Yahp's fiction and is
also reflected in the title and selections of *Family Pictures* (1994) 17, an
anthology of short stories which Yahp edited and contributed to with the
short story "The Photo, 1955" 18. Family history is presented as a vast source
of inspiration and resonance from which the individual can cultivate her
personal sense of identity and vision of the self.

The interest in female kin relationships is carried further in the
novel *The Crocodile Fury* and the short story "Beth Yahp" through an
exploration of the power dynamics between generations of women. A
central part of the action of the novel is the way in which the three
generations of family members—the narrator, her mother and adopted
grandmother—assert themselves and negotiate authority and alliances in
relation to each other. The narrator's bid to gain independence from her
Grandmother's steely control and also to travel a different path from that of
her passive Christian mother is at the centre of this struggle. (The narrator's
grandmother is referred to as Grandmother throughout *The Crocodile
Fury*). The construction of the narrator's self is presented as tangled with

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the influences of three generations: her Grandmother, her mother and her closest friend, the (unnamed) bully. Grandmother's great knowledge base, her ghost lore, her stories, and her fierce tiger glare are all qualities which her granddaughter both desires and mocks. They ensure her obedience until she enters her fourteenth year and a new stage of a woman's life cycle, an event which changes their relationship forever by altering the power structure at its centre. The tales of the mother about the mysterious King Crocodile are set against those of the Grandmother as both attempt to persuade the young narrator to adopt their way of thinking about the world. The short story "Beth Yahp" also explores the power struggles between generations. (Contrary to the implication of the title, this short story is not autobiographical but one of a number of pieces of writing investigating the notion of "homeland" in an anthology of the same name19). The narrator is an old woman who dispenses advice to her grandchildren when they return from Australia to Kuala Lumpur to attend the funeral of her husband. Like the Grandmother of The Crocodile Fury this character speaks with an authority drawn from hardship and experience and with the imperative tone of parenthood. She tests her authority over her children in a rigorous system of funeral rituals for her dead husband and, like Grandmother, she can hardly imagine her influence waning. The focus of Yahp's prose is most often, however, upon the perspectives of young women and their reactions to sisters, mothers, and grandmothers. A central interest of these texts is the dynamics of power throughout the maternal line, which generates images of a special kind of women's community and a variation on the concept of the matriarchal, feminist collectivity.

In Yahp's fiction, Chinese Malaysian women are often presented as becoming powerful in a special way, even possessing supernatural strengths, because of the accumulated experience of the maternal line: the shared experience of multiple oppression, past and present, and a tradition of

storytelling. Stories and storytelling are central to the lives of the women characters. The narrator of "Houses, Sisters, Cities" describes shared time together, going to the market and telling stories in the spare moments between domestic duties:

My mother's stories filled the quiet hour of completed housework before the evening meal had to be prepared... During the monsoon season we huddled in the darkened house, the sound of her stories forever entangled with rain against slatted glass. Like her smell we could recognise her voice anywhere, anytime (45).

The oral stories assert the strength of the maternal line for Yahp's (often Chinese Malaysian) narrators. Autobiographical events frequently provide the basis for the tales: for instance, the grandmother's life in "Kuala Lumpur Story", the narrator's mother's rendering of the horrors of the race riots in "In 1969", and a number of the Grandmother's stories in The Crocodile Fury which also hold secrets of magic. These maternal stories transmit a knowledge and lessons in discipline which are shown to provide female children with a special resilience. In The Crocodile Fury the narrator learns about important ghost information through her grandmother's tales and she is taught the invaluable defence of the tiger glare. The narrative incorporates some of the traditions of the Chinese ghost story: ghosts are well accepted and therefore, in contrast to Western traditions of the supernatural, the central questions that arise from the tale are ethical rather than concerned with the nature and existence of the apparition20. Further, in The Crocodile Fury the supernatural is a dominant element, whereas in ghost stories from the West the real and the supernatural can seldom be reconciled21. The articulation of the ghost tale and heroic ghost chasing

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21 McCraw, 35.
adventures is something the narrator is shown to learn from Grandmother and highlights the nature of the narrative as a learned process.

The notion of a special relation between women is fostered by the presentation of storytelling as an area of special feminine togetherness, which binds the women of a family together through the shared experience of the telling of the story, the special knowledge of the story itself, the values it presents and the gift of being the storyteller to the next generation. The important role of oral storytelling within the maternal tradition in Yahp's novel recalls Trinh T. Minh-ha's comments on this subject in Woman, Native, Other:

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. Pleasure in the copy, pleasure in the reproduction. No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly...22.

The non-chronological movement of Yahp's prose, which often touches on a scene and then returns to embellish and re-embellish numerous times, emphasises the joyous repetition of the familiar tale, the affirmation of tradition, in which her narrators take part through their rendering of moments from their mothers', their sisters', and their own lives.

The narrative structure of Yahp's prose captures some of the narrative rhythm of the oral tale. In Yahp's short story "Beth Yahp" and The Crocodile Fury in particular, qualities of oral literature and oral traditions are evident in the repetitions, rhetorical parallelisms, the narrator's use of the imperative, exclamations, abrupt transitions, folk tales, proverbs, recollections, dreams and interpolated stories. In this respect, Yahp's work bears some similarities to African American fiction23. More

appositely, however, Yahp's fiction draws upon some of the Chinese
traditions of oral storytelling which influence Maxine Hong Kingston's
fiction: the mother is the family teller of tales, storytelling is important to
both characters and plot, and there are repetitions of the same lesson rather
than the traditional unity of a Western plot with a single hero and
chronological time span\textsuperscript{24}. Yahp's prose writings often stress-through their
subject matter and their structure- the importance of shared time and shared
autobiographical tales as features which link generations of women and
provide a cumulative sense of frustration (through an intergenerational
communication of oppression) and a strong maternal tradition which
encourages exceptional, sometimes supernatural, strength and powers.

In "Beth Yahp" the role of storytelling, and thus the traditional role
of the grandmother as storyteller, is presented as having a new significance
in the land of migration because it is only through stories that the
authenticity of the homeland, China, can be obtained. The short story
begins with the lines:

\begin{quote}
Listen. I will describe what it takes to get to the homeland. I
will describe what you will need. The homeland is the place of
the grandmother's stories. It is the place where the many
stories meet...(215).
\end{quote}

In an imperative tone the Chinese Malaysian grandmother narrator speaks
in a monologue to her grandchildren who have arrived recently in Kuala
Lumpur from Australia for her husband's funeral. She fills in the gaps of
their knowledge about her husband, uncomfortable domestic details, some
of which they know. His addiction to gambling, his temper, his charm, his
laziness and irresponsibility are all outlined as, in the background, the
funeral lanterns burn and funeral rituals take place. The death of the
narrator's husband is both poignant- in the light of the details of their

\textsuperscript{24}Linda Ching Sledge, "Oral Tradition in Kingston's China Men," Redefining American
Literary History, eds. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward (New York: The MLA of
America, 1990) 151.
courtship and his quirks and unique qualities—and a matter of bitter victory:
the narrator's voice carries a note of triumph that she has survived her lazy
spouse despite a life of relentless work and disappointment:

These feet are no larger than the old man's hand, which he
sometimes used to shape his stories. Yet they have walked
further than all the stories, they have walked around and
around him as he talked, doing the things that needed to be
done. These old feet still have their strength... (220).

In this tale, Yahp's focus is once more upon the hardships a woman has
endured and her resilience. The short story also explores the effects of exile
upon the family and the heightened importance of the grandmother as the
storyteller in this context. The grandmother narrator is empowered by her
migrant children's uncertainty of their identity in their Australian setting:
the elderly woman has a special power as the familial centre of authority
about "homeland", a notion which is presented as important for the
creation of her children's and grandchildren's immigrant identity.
Although her grandchildren are four generations removed from China via
Malaysia and Australia, the narrator asserts to them with impatience:

Of course the homeland is China, when you are Chinese. Even
through four generations of travellers, going further and
further, never going back, you can still feel its tug... When
Chinese people die we go to the courts of hell for judgement,
we go to the underworld, which is under China... (222).

It is only through the grandmother, who holds the traditional position of
family storyteller, that the children of exiles can affirm their connection to
China. The notion of the woman as storyteller, and the value of stories, is a
theme which recurs throughout Yahp's writing and in the short story "Beth
Yahp" combines powerfully with the impact of migrancy upon feminine
power within the family.

Yahp's (predominantly) Chinese Malaysian female characters
transgress what are presented as restrictive codes of feminine behaviour.
They are often spirited, independent, stubborn, resilient women; they are
angry, they hate and they are full of pride. In "Houses, Sisters, Cities" a daughter speaks of moments of supernatural anger from her usually mild mother:

She stalked the house wrapped in a cloud both black and wordless that shivered knives and forks in their drawers and skittered the kettle across the stove (63).

Yahp's female characters are also proud, as demonstrated in the following passage from "Houses, Sisters, Cities":

My mother was famous for that disdainful toss of the head. For wicked pride that meant she was never grateful, and a habit of clamping her mouth tight. Or turning her face away when a concession was finally made (63).

The supernatural is presented as linked with such transgressions of traditional expectations of the passive feminine: magic is connected with the subversion and power of anger drawn from years of oppression. The struggle between the hill spirits and the sea ghosts is even described in terms of a battle between women, the Grandmother and the mysterious lover. As Ni Weihong has observed in a review of The Crocodile Fury, the rivalry between the hill spirits versus the sea spirits in "age-old Chinese sayings" is skilfully interwoven in the novel with the conflict between the Grandmother, with her affinity with the hill spirits, and the mysterious lover, who is a devious sea ghost25. (In The Crocodile Fury, as I shall demonstrate in Section II, the powerful fury of the Grandmother and the narrator is located not only in their femininity but also in their position as colonised subjects). Yahp's vivid depictions of female characters praise women who have the strength to move beyond the roles or behaviour expected of them. Her texts therefore have an analogical relevance for all women.

The focus upon women's voices and women's concerns in Yahp's prose may be read as a counterbalance to the now infamous male gaze. However Yahp's texts, in particular The Crocodile Fury, deftly avoid the trap of reverse discrimination by gesturing towards a male mythology which, it is hinted, could equal the feminine experience if it were the subject of direct attention in the text. Despite the concentration of literary attention upon a matriarchal, all-female three generation family in The Crocodile Fury, the male characters in The Crocodile Fury- the Old Priest, the Lizard Boy who becomes King Crocodile, the rich man- are all presented as having a power and mystery which can be effectively tapped when the gaze of the narrator rests upon them. The predominant emphasis of the novel is upon female experience and relationships, but a strong impression remains that male-centred tales have their own depth and resonance. Further, in the short story "Beth Yahp" there is a strong sense that should the focus be shifted, a fascinating tale could be told from the perspective of the deceased grandfather.

Like Yahp's prose works, Anggraeni's novels The Root of All Evil and Parallel Forces have at the centre of their plot structure an interest in the relationships between female kin, and Anggraeni's second novel Parallel Forces also contains a symbolic connection between the feminine and the supernatural. The narrators of Parallel Forces are two French-Indonesian female twins, Amyrra and Amyrta. Amyrra's and Amyrta's relationships with each other and with their psychic French mother, Claudine, provide a central interest in the plot. The Prologue and the first chapter of this novel set up the expectation that Amyrra, the twin with psychic powers, may be the reincarnation of Ken Dedes, a figure from

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26In the first half of the novel ("BABAK I") Amyrta is the first person narrator, the second half of the novel ("BABAK II: Amyrra's story") is narrated by Amyrta, and the concluding chapter (BABAK III) is again narrated by Amyrta. "Babak" is an Indonesian word meaning a stage or phase. An alternative definition is "skinned and bruised". The double meaning of "babak" recalls both the theme of predestination in the text and the personal trauma of the central protagonists. John M. Echols and Hassan Shadily, An Indonesian-English Dictionary 3rd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989).
Javanese legend who was the queen of Majapahit. The focal area of tension in the novel is whether Amyrra's life will mimic the tragic experiences of Ken Dedes'. Although a tragic ending does eventuate, it is unclear whether Amyrra's experiences illustrate the existence of reincarnation or merely the effect which an individual's belief in predestination can have upon his or her life.

The relationships between the two narrators and their mother is an important area of exploration in the discussion of reincarnation and the supernatural in Parallel Forces. The concept of a maternal line of supernatural gifts is explored. In the first half of the book, "Babak I", the narrator, the non-psychic sister Amyrta, describes her sister's unusual mental powers:

> When we were old enough to understand, our mother told us that at birth, Amyrra had been enveloped in a thin film of mucous membrane. When she told our paternal grandmother, she was told that the child was gifted with the sixth sense. I learned at a very young age that Amyrra had a mental power that made you think you had to be grateful that she chose to play with you, and you were not worthy enough to refuse (3).

The relationship between paternal grandmother, mother and daughters is strengthened by the shared experience of psychic powers and/or a belief in these powers. The area of the supernatural is presented as a female domain. It is a female seer from an Indonesian village who informs Amyrra that she is the reincarnation of Ken Dedes and speaks sympathetically with Claudine, Amyrra and Amyrta about incarnations. Amyrra's paternal grandmother gives her some further advice after this event. The psychic sphere appears as a feminine area of power, rather as in Yahp's The Crocodile Fury. However in Parallel Forces this inclination towards the supernatural is linked with a sensitivity traditionally associated with femininity²⁷ rather

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²⁷Hélène Cixous argues in "Le Rire de la Méduse" (1975) that binary oppositions (such as activity/passivity, intelligible/sensitive, man/woman) structure the phallocentric system and have considerable psychic force. Cited in Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inscribing Femininity:
than the powerful dark anger which Yahp's female characters, such as the
Grandmother of *The Crocodile Fury* and the grandmother of "Beth Yahp",
draw upon in moments of bitterness and frustration. As the differing
treatments of the supernatural illustrate, Yahp's prose exhibits a greater
intensity and broader emotional range than Anggraeni's fiction.

*Parallel Forces* also forecloses the notion of male magic whereas in
Yahp's novel the possibilities for a male magic is left open; a distinction
which suggests a greater awareness of the ideological complexities of gender
issues in Yahp's fiction. The male characters in *Parallel Forces*, regardless of
their cultural background, are presented as empiricists- unwilling to accept
the possibility of telepathy or reincarnation, or any occurrences which
cannot be explained through scientific logic and rationality. Winston,
Amyrra's Anglo-Ceylonese husband, is unsympathetic about her traumatic
connection with the Ken Dedes legend or her psychic experiences, although
the latter are often substantiated, and he merely refers her to a medical
doctor. He is a man of meagre ethics and no social commitment, a feature
which seems linked to his lack of belief in the supernatural. Amyrta's
future husband, Les, a civil engineer and an Anglo-Australian, is also
depicted as an individual with little imagination. Amyrta observes:

> My friendship with Les opened the door to the definite world
  of construction. It seemed so concrete and so intolerant of
  variation. Everything had to be calculated beforehand. I felt
  repelled and attracted at the same time (100).

The classic binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity are employed
in *Parallel Forces* without interrogation: the "masculine" quality of
reasoning and the "feminine" characteristic of intuition shape the difference
(and thus attraction) between the sexes. In a simplistic fashion, the male
world of *Parallel Forces* is presented as limited to visible concerns and
empirical evidence and lacking richness and meaningful communication.

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French Theories of the Feminine," *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, New
As Amyrra and Amyrta enter adulthood, Hardoyo, their father becomes increasingly irrelevant to their lives and remains steadfastly unsympathetic to the concept of reincarnation despite growing evidence to the contrary. Even the Irish Australian Sean Devlin, the possible reincarnation of Ken Dedes' lover and thus the male character most likely to possess praiseworthy masculine qualities, describes his attraction to Amyrra as an obsession, employing the terms of the individual and psychology rather than concepts of fate and destiny. In Parallel Forces, women find no comfort or lasting connection with men- a fact that is linked in Anggraeni's novel with masculine deficiencies- and turn instead to the strength and loyalty of female kin. This approach contrasts markedly with The Crocodile Fury's more complex representation of sexual politics, where male characters such as the Lizard Boy also bring a mythology to the narrative. Ironically, despite the praise of imaginative thought through its connection with feminine qualities, Parallel Forces supports through its realist narrative and lack of metaphor or linguistic experimentation a reliance on the realist and factual which has been constructed as "masculine" and fatally flawed within the novel. The structure of the text thus works against its explicit message.

The particular focus of Anggraeni's first novel The Root of all Evil, and a common theme in Anggraeni's work to date, is the position of women in Indonesian society. In The Root of all Evil the narrator, Komala, returns in 1983 from a nine year expatriation in Melbourne to her home city of Jakarta. Komala discovers many unwelcome changes, such as increased traffic, the destruction of a favourite street, the proliferation of multi-storey buildings, and a destructiveness she had not previously noticed in the relationships between men and women. Many elements of female experience are discussed in this novel. On one level, Komala's relationship with her mother and her father underscores the text. Initially she feels closer to her father than her mother and perceives her mother as a woman who is too insensitive and greedy to understand her husband's apparently
fine sense of ethics. This perception is gradually broken down as Komala unearths, in the final pages of the novel, her father's adulterous affair and her mother's distress at discovering this relationship. Prior to this revelation, the unfortunate effects of male adultery on women have been illustrated through the characters of Nurse Mira and Narsih; many women in Anggraeni's Jakarta are subjected to the pain of having adulterous husbands. Even educated, privileged women are shown to suffer a humiliating dependence on men: Komala's close friend Narsih must stay with an emotionally cruel and estranged husband because of the poor status of divorced women in Indonesian society. From her own middle-class position in urban Indonesian society, Komala feels a strong sympathy for poor women who are forced to attract a rich man to gain some financial security. After a prostitute is maimed by a jealous wife, Komala attempts to seek financial compensation on the victim's behalf but fails. The Root of all Evil explores the place of Indonesian women within Indonesian society in the early 1980s and shows them to be in an unequal position of power in relation to men. Yet the picture is not a merely schematic one. There are generational differences, for example, which also vary according to individual outlook and experience.

As Komala becomes reacquainted with her home city, entering into numerous dialogues with old friends and new ones, she discovers a city riven by corruption and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. Although Komala cannot fully accept her mother's belief that women are "the root of all evil", she is increasingly saddened by evidence of the acquisitiveness of some women and the lack of fellowship between women. For the devout Catholic narrator, monetary greed ultimately appears to be a more convincing source of evil: the phrase "the root of all evil" is drawn from a biblical reference to the words of the apostle Paul ("the love of
money is the root of all evils", 1 Tim 6: 10 )28. Like Parallel Forces, The Root of All Evil is written in a style of journalistic realism with few descriptive passages and a strong element of educational content about social and sexual divisions within contemporary Jakarta. The social analysis is pitched at an introductory level: the detail about Jakartan society and the status of women does not rely on a high level of existing knowledge from the Australian reader.

The Root of All Evil, like many of Anggraeni’s texts, is placed in a middle-class Christian context for the benefit of a broad Australian audience, and the presentation of a gentle, non-threatening Indonesian female narrator forms part of this narrative direction. Komala is a devout Catholic and comes from a reasonably wealthy background with the privilege of higher education. Anggraeni’s narrators are typically female, middle-class, Javanese and Christian29: their emigration from Java to Australia is eased considerably by their middle-class Christian values, a fact which is seldom discussed in texts which are primarily concerned with the ramifications of sexual and/or ethnic difference. Komala, like many of Anggraeni’s Indonesian narrators and central characters, communicates in a global language of the urban middle-class; her judgement is often put beyond question: she is conscientious, sensitive and sincere, although capable of making the odd moral error. Anggraeni’s prose makes few grammatical distinctions in dialogue to indicate differences in language and therefore belief between Australian and Indonesian characters. In The Root of All Evil the narrator’s family communicates in Bahasa Indonesia but there is little departure from a dialogue based on Standard English aside from the very occasional untranslated term, the odd (wholesome) Australian-derived

29eg. the partly European, highly educated Catholic Amyrta and her non-Catholic sister Amyrra in Parallel Forces and the Javanese school teacher Aryani in "Uncertain Step". An exception is the narrator of the short story "Mal Tombée" (see below).
colloquialism (eg. "Gosh", "God" and "Gee") or an abbreviated word to indicate an informal verbal exchange. Unlike Claire Holt's translation of Mochtar Lubis' *Twilight in Djakarta*, there is little attempt to capture the unique flavour and rhythm of Jakartan speech.

The absence of distinctions between the dialogue of Australian and Indonesian characters presents an impression in Anggraeeni's texts of an Indonesia which has many similarities to the beliefs, values and language of middle-class Australia. This presentation of Indonesia direct its principal appeal to an Australian audience which knows little about Indonesian culture. It also addresses the misconception that Indonesians (and "Asians" generally) in Australia challenge, and even threaten, the social cohesion of Australian society because of the marked difference of their cultural and religious beliefs from those of the rest of the population. Hassan and Tan's statistical survey of Asian migrants questioned this assumption through the discovery that over half of all Asian migrants (which excluded, in their definition, West and Middle Eastern groups) were, with the exception of the Vietnamese, mainly English speakers and Christian. The *Root of all Evil* challenges the misconception of a necessary gulf of "difference" by advancing an Indonesian narrator who has many characteristics associated with the typical Australian rather than a citizen from the developing world: Komala is Christian with middle-class values and a democratic, social welfare ethic. Komala also experiences many of the discomforts of the Australian tourist, in Jakarta, for instance, she is uncomfortable with the humidity, the pollution, the sweet drinks and the sometimes presumptuous attitude towards domestic servants. In these respects she seems "Australianised". Further, as a caring, sensitive mother-of-two Komala presents a familiar representation of traditional Western notions of

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femininity and thus provides an unthreatening mediation of Indonesian culture for an Australian audience. The character of Komala, like many of Anggraeni's protagonists, is an Indonesian with positive qualities who projects an appealingly imitative image to the Australian middle-class and thus counters essentialist notions of the Indonesian as Other. However, by emphasising the similarity between the Indonesian and the Anglo-Australian, The Root of All Evil projects an overly simplified Indonesia: subduing the representation of cultural and linguistic traits and eliding regional differences within Indonesia. As in Anggraeni's exploration of sexual politics, the presentation of Australia and Indonesia relies on binary oppositions and uninterrogated stereotypes to enforce the political message of her texts. In contrast, the fantastical form of Yahp's writing explores the muddy areas between categories and thus, as I shall discuss in more detail below, provides a more satisfyingly complex exploration of the interactions between race and gender.

Anggraeni's novel also appeals to an Australian audience by drawing on a continuity with Australian literary and cultural representations of Indonesia. The perspective of a largely unreflexive narrator who shares many of the views and responses of an Anglo-Australian expatriate is a central element of this representation of Indonesia and recalls to some extent the similarly unreflexive expatriate perspectives about Asia developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s in novels such as Bruce Grant's Cherry Bloom, Christopher Koch's The Year of Living Dangerously and Blanche d'Alpuget's Monkeys in the Dark. The detached perspective of the expatriate narrator Komala colours the social analysis of sexual politics within Indonesian society in The Root of all Evil. For the non-Asian reader, the effect of the separation of the narrative self, Komala, from the beliefs and customs of the Indonesian affirms mainstream Anglo-Australian perspectives: the narrative self does not take on a position of an
Asian) ethnic identity, which could provide a more interrogative, shifting and unstable dimension.  

The novel also depicts a traditional Australian (mis)representation of Indonesia as "Asia". The detached perspective of the expatriate narrator in The Root of All Evil aids the kind of binary structuration of exoticism and Other displayed, for instance, in Blanche d'Alpuget's Monkeys in the Dark in which Indonesia is presented as dark, sensual and immoral. Indeed, d'Alpuget writes approvingly on the back cover of Anggraeni's novel about the nightmare world of Jakarta represented in The Root of All Evil: "the ambiguous, threatening dream-world of one of earth's most wounding cities: contemporary Jakarta... this modern Hades". Anggraeni's text is dominated by dialogue and highlights the corruption of public and private lives in Jakarta. The few descriptive passages emphasise the pollution, characterless urban development and headlong rush of the traffic in Jakarta. In Komala's favourite street, Jalan Jambu Monyet, she observes that "Cold, multiple storeyed buildings were (now) dominating the scene" and is horrified by the regular occurrence of traffic accidents in which even children are knocked down (20).

Anggraeni's depiction of Jakarta is of a city which remorselessly exploits the most vulnerable, particularly women, and this representation is achieved most powerfully through the focus on the behaviour of Jakarta's people rather than descriptions of its landscape. Robyn Fallick observes that in The Root of All Evil Jakarta is uncritically represented as "threatening-corrupt, cruel and hypocritical", in a manner similar to that of Australian representations of Indonesia in recent Australian works such as Kenneth Bullock's Pelandok, Roland Perry's Blood is a Stranger, Rory Barnes and James Birrell's Water from the Moon and Glenda Adams' Games of the

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The attention to the social causes of estrangement between men and women in *The Root of All Evil* and the interest in the complex details of Indonesian society highlights an informative and less stereotypical "Asia". However, the unproblematised moral outrage and naivety of the narrator in the face of poverty and sexism, and the dark imagery of Jakartan society, reflect a representation of Indonesia which strongly suggests the influence of Australian Orientalist literary perspectives about Southeast Asia. Although the worthy middle-class morality of Komala is shattered at the conclusion of *The Root of All Evil*—when she experiences crisis with the knowledge of her father's ethical collapse and her own adulterous one night stand with an ex-boyfriend— the final effect of this concluding plot device is that Komala's breakdown seems linked to the overarching atmosphere of amorality which is shown to infect modern Jakarta. The detached narrative perspective in *The Root of All Evil* and the representation of Jakarta as a place of nightmare, the home of the repressed evils of the subconscious, means that although the novel attends in subject matter to the trials of women in contemporary Jakarta, this theme is undermined by an oversimplified methodology of binary oppositions (men/women, dark/light, Jakarta/Australia). As I shall argue in more detail below, the non-reflexive simplicity of Anggraeni's prose is reflected in its treatment of the intersections of race and gender and is based on assumptions about the educative role of literature.

II

The treatment of exile and migrancy in Yahp's and Anggraeni's writings is fractured by the complexities of race and gender and the texts therefore address a recent development in feminist discourse: the

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consideration of the division of gender identity and experience through racism\textsuperscript{33}. As Chilla Bulbeck has pointed out:

Before writing "men" or "he", many writers now pause to assure themselves that it is indeed men that are under discussion. Similarly we can no longer write "women" or "she" without asking ourselves whether we speak of all women, or merely women like ourselves... The transformation of feminism in the 1980s means that race must now be considered as always worth knowing and telling\textsuperscript{34}.

The construction of theoretical approaches to difference is a challenge which continues to confront feminism in the 1990s; an increasing subject of attention for feminism is "how racial difference is constructed through gender, how racism divides gender identity and experience, and how class is shaped by gender and race"\textsuperscript{35}. Yahp's and Anggraeni's texts are concerned with precisely these issues in their treatment of the experience of the Asian migrant woman, although I shall contend that Yahp's prose work deals much more effectively with the refutation of Australian misconceptions about Asian women and the complexities of the interaction between gender, race and class.

Both Yahp and Anggraeni engage with the representation of the Asian woman in Australia, an area which has a substantial and pervasive Orientalist legacy. In his book \textit{Orientalism} Edward Said established the erotic as "a remarkably persistent motif" in Western attitudes to the Orient, arguing that "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies..."\textsuperscript{36}. In Orientalist discourse, the Asian woman often appeared as a potent symbol of the exotic, erotic Orient: a place of rampant sexuality. As

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33}Verena Stolcke, "Is Sex to Gender As Race is to Ethnicity?," \textit{Gendered Anthropology}, ed. Theresa del Valle (London: Routledge, 1993) 18.
\item \textsuperscript{34}Chilla Bulbeck, "Third World Women: Dialogues with Western Feminism," \textit{Meanjin} 51.2(1992): 319.
\item \textsuperscript{35}Stolcke, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{36}Edward W. Said, \textit{Orientalism} (Penguin: London, 1991) 188.
\end{itemize}
Robin Gerster has observed with regard to male travel writing, "One of the most potent imperialist mythologies" was of:

the Orient as a female realm begging for the benefit of Western (i.e. male) penetration and mastery. Passive but irrational, sensual and indolent, Asia needed controlling and organising— for its own good. In Australia, as in many Western societies, Asian women have thus provided potent symbols of an erotic, exotic Asia, and have been constructed as "exotic sex objects imbued with an innate understanding of how to please, serve, and titillate". To differing degrees— and through different literary strategies which are linked to Anggraeni's journalistic realism and Yahp's use of fantasy modes— Yahp and Anggraeni challenge this representation of the submissive, entirely sensual Asian woman.

In an interview for *The Coming Out Show* in 1993, Yahp spoke about the Australian stereotype of the passive Asian woman:

A lot of women that I knew when I was growing up and friends who are still living in Malaysia are strong, stroppy outspoken women so that I don't think that the stereotype is right. I mean there are women that are demure and, you know, quiet and sort of bullyable but that's true of every culture. The characters (of mother and Grandmother in *The Crocodile Fury*) I guess are a conglomerate of a lot of women that I admire, and I really wanted to write strong women because I was sick of that stereotype of weak, Asian, quiet women... Yahp perceives her fiction as addressing the stereotype of the Asian woman and establishing an alternative vision of the Chinese Malaysian woman. My reading of Yahp's texts also suggests that they write against the grain of the expectations of Asian women in Australian society. The Chinese

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38 Lim refers in this quote to the construction of the Asian woman in America, but this description is equally applicable to Australian society. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Assaying the Gold: Or, Contesting the Ground of Asian American Literature," *New Literary History* 24(1993): 89.
Malaysian female characters in Yahp's texts are powerful, assertive women who dominate plots with their stories and their voices. The transgressive nature of Yahp's female characters has, as noted above, an analogical relevance for all women, but it can also be seen to counter stereotypes of the Asian woman in particular.

As I shall demonstrate below, Yahp's novel *The Crocodile Fury* creates a complex vision of an alternative world which engages with some of the primary misconceptions contained in the social construction of the Asian woman in contemporary Australian society. As with Sam Watson's novel *The Kadaitcha Sung* or Kate Grenville's *Joan Makes History*, which through the construction of alternative worlds highlight the marginalisation of Aboriginal and women's discourses respectively in Australian society, *The Crocodile Fury* constructs an alternative world based loosely on traditions drawn from the Chinese Malay community in Malaysia in order to highlight the marginalisation of the voices of Asian women. Through this device *The Crocodile Fury* challenges popular stereotypes in Australian society, such as the passive Asian woman and the related notion of the patriarchal Asian family.

Yahp's recent fiction depicts female characters who draw on a maternal tradition of strong women and useful traditions in Chinese Malay culture to construct a powerful image of Peranakan women. This representation is a striking element of *The Crocodile Fury* but because of the unspecified identity of the setting (an unnamed Southeast Asian country), the novel also invokes more general questions regarding Australian images of the Asian woman. In Yahp's novel the narrator inhabits a world dominated by women. She lives with her meek mother and fierce grandmother; she goes to school at a convent and her imagination is haunted by the image of "the lover", a beautiful woman who is both a historical figure and a sea ghost. Such metamorphoses are common in this novel. Stories and magic form an integral part of the world of the narrator.
of *The Crocodile Fury*. The narrator's Grandmother, who grew up as a domestic servant, is an expert in the arena of magic, storytelling and secrets, one of the few areas in which women can wield social influence:

Grandmother and the brothel keeper were the only two women on their street with free time in the afternoons, the only two perfectly comfortable in each other's company, because of their current cycle of existence: their privileged lot. They were thrown together because they were outside women, outside the rules and restrictions binding ordinary women (168).

In post-colonial times the Grandmother's position has waned; she is no longer in demand for curses and exorcisms of ghosts. However, her capacity for anger still sets her apart and she draws on Chinese cultural beliefs, such as the importance of one's reputation, to support her anger. Grandmother is an unapologetic and often angry woman, "a believer in the value of retaliation" and the importance of preserving her reputation:

"Why be like a mouse, always afraid to make a noise?" Grandmother demands. "If someone insults you, or does you harm, you must insult or harm them back double, otherwise you lose face" (189).

Her assertive tiger glare demonstrates her exceptional power:

When Grandmother shows her tiger face even the fiercest demon would run shrieking (56).

These descriptions illustrate a cultural base for a tradition of strong women which draws on Chinese Malay traditions. The superstitions and ghost stories illustrated in *The Crocodile Fury* are taken from oral stories and nine texts about Malay and Chinese beliefs, the latter of which are referenced in the novel's "Acknowledgements"40. The female characters of Yahp's novel thus draw on notions of "face", the importance of feminine magical powers

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and storytelling traditions to assert themselves. By employing traditional Chinese and Malay beliefs in the area of feminine assertion and in creating such courageous, transgressive "Asian" women (in The Crocodile Fury the cultural background is never specified within the text) the Australian notion of Asian women as "sexually exotic, passive and used to male domination" is contradicted in Yahp's novel.

Yahp's novel also lends an illuminating cross-cultural perspective to notions of female madness, encouraging a broader perspective and suggesting that a powerful anger may lie behind traditional Western notions of feminine hysteria. Behaviour which is dismissively viewed as hysteria within traditional Western thought is interpreted within the narrator's non-Western system of reasoning and belief as a sign of supernatural powers. When Grandmother was a young servant in a rich man's mansion, she frightened and impressed her colleagues with her hysterical behaviour:

Grandmother's angry face was a dark and purplish red. Her angry eyes narrowed to slits the other servants saw glinting out of the dark. Her fits of temper shuddered her whole body, they loosened her joints so she looked dislocated, turned her eyes in their sockets so her glare was a chalky shine. Grandmother's glare sent shivers wherever it darted. Her hands reached for any object to be hurled in any direction, her legs shot here and there in a frenzied swirl.

Take her away," the rich man ordered, staring at Grandmother. "The girl's hysterical."

In those days everyone was nervous of offending Grandmother...(146).

The rich (white) man employs the derogatory connections made between hysteria and excessive feminine emotion and irrationality in Australian and other principally Western societies but this narrative suggests an alternative representation, of female "madness" as evidence of the supernatural. Instead of the helplessness associated with the hysterical female of Western

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41 Jan Pettman, Living in the Margins: Racism, Sexism and Feminism in Australia (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992) 73.
medicine\textsuperscript{42}, identical physical symptoms are taken to indicate a ferocious and mysterious power. The \textit{Crocodile Fury} thus emphasises to a predominantly Australian audience the social specificity of gender expectations. The representation of female madness within Yahp's novel asserts the transgressive image of the strong Southeast Asian woman who can be empowered by her social oppression and frustration into a chilling supernatural rage.

The \textit{Crocodile Fury} further challenges an Australian preconception of the patriarchal Asian family, with its submissive female members, by directing its attention at powerful female characters and a matriarchal family. The \textit{Crocodile Fury} engages with contemporary Australian discourse about "Asia" by addressing the stereotypical notion that "Asian" families are excessively patriarchal and "traditional", a notion which has been advanced by feminist theorists\textsuperscript{43}. This idea of family is challenged by the development of an alternative representation: the matriarchal unit placed within a Southeast Asian community; the development of a family dynamic composed of three generations of women. The prose style echoes the complexity of the transgressive family structure through its own unique composition: melding the inspiration of the Chinese ghost story, the rhythm of the oral tale, and the transgression of a number of Western literary genres. The emphasis on the relationships between female kin can be read as a reworking of the concept of family because it introduces a revolutionary matriarchal unit within a patriarchal social whole (leading to an attractive, feminist skewing of Kate Millet's theory of family\textsuperscript{44}). An oblique comment on Australian society may be implied by the fact that this reversal of norms occurs beyond Western society.


\textsuperscript{43}Petman, 64.

\textsuperscript{44}Millet suggests that the family is "a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole". Cited in Palmer, 71.
The representation of an alternative culture in *The Crocodile Fury* includes a prose style and structure which captures a framework of values drawn from Chinese, Malay, Australian and fictional sources and emphasises for its principally Australian audience the cultural specificity of belief and narratives about Asia and Asians by engaging with longstanding Orientalist beliefs such as the stereotype of the passive Asian woman and the patriarchal Asian family. Yahp's novel thus addresses issues of relevance to Australian feminist writing and enters the complex and still under-theorised region of race and gender difference. The text's experimental prose style accentuates the importance of acknowledging and developing alternative ways of perceiving the world in the process of imagining productive social change. In the description of an alternative world which is neither Australia nor Malaysia but inspired by elements of each, *The Crocodile Fury* crosses genres of fable, myth, magical realism, oral tradition, gothic romance and fantasy. The novel's playful and eclectic form- the inventive literary form, incorporation of feminist and post-colonial intellectual debates and superstitions and beliefs from Australian, Malay and Chinese sources- emphasises the virtues of hybridity and the insights that may be gained from cross cultural literary work. However, the emphasis on difference in *The Crocodile Fury*- the overt use of Chinese and Malay superstitions, mythology and rich symbolism- functions to obscure the "Australian" features of the text, particularly the way in which the text writes back to Australian social preconceptions and concerns. The danger is that to an Australian audience hungry for an "authentic" insider's perspective of "Asia", Yahp's novel may be read as Chinese Malaysian beliefs in an English translation. *The Crocodile Fury* firmly rejects notions of Asian female passivity but to some extent endorses the existence of a generalised region such as Asia (whose separate communities and nations need not be specified), a place of exotic cultures brimming with colourful superstitions and exotic beliefs in the supernatural.
The approach of Dewi Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces*, "A Foreigner in East Gippsland", "Mal Tombée", and "Uncertain Step" to the Asian Australian female experience is markedly different from the creation of an alternative world in Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury*: the emphasis in Anggraeni's prose is on the creation of positive Indonesian characters and a social realist illustration of socio-political assumptions which place Indonesian women in a vulnerable position in Australian society. In Anggraeni's "Uncertain Step" the narrator is characteristic of Anggraeni's writing: Aryani is a thoughtful, educated, middle-class woman. Despite her Indonesian looks and her excellent English, Aryani must grapple with (ignorant) Australian preconceptions that she is a Filipina mail order bride because she appears "Asian" and is married to an Australian man. Upon discovering this assumption "she is quietly disappointed" but she has learned "resilience" and patiently wins over her suspicious sister-in-law and most other people she meets (138-139). Aryani then encounters the offensive assumption from a stranger that she is desperate for menial work and "feels continuously condescended to" in her meetings with other Australians (154). This presentation of an "Asian" woman's experience in Australia recalls Mitsuye Yamada's comments about her experiences as an Asian woman at academic conferences, where she felt she had:

... to start from scratch each time, as if she were "speaking to a brand new audience of people who had never known an Asian Pacific woman who is other than the passive, sweet, etc., stereotype of the 'Oriental' woman".

Aryani's exasperation with the stereotypical expectations made about her, and the widespread nature of these expectations, are reflected in Yamada's observations. To complicate the situation, Aryani's husband has difficulty in accepting an independent wife, a factor which has led to the break-up of his first marriage, and which has perhaps influenced his decision to marry

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46Minh-ha, 83.
an "Asian" woman whom he sees as "girlish" and in need of being looked after. With admirable, even angelic, patience and the advice of her husband's sister, Aryani overcomes her husband's prejudices and even manages to achieve some success as a writer. Despite her hard work in overcoming stereotypes of Asian women, Aryani is subjected once again to these assumptions when a lecherous male producer treats her as exotic, obedient and sensual. The story concludes soon after this scene. Aryani is horrified by the experience, and it is hinted that the memory of this encounter will be a constant source of humiliation for her, but it is emphasised that due to her concerted efforts she now has the support of her sister-in-law and other friends to sustain her.

"Uncertain Step" has a strong didactic edge as it describes in realistic prose the difficulties facing Asian women in Australia and the ways in which this initial hostility can gradually be overcome. Like many of Anggraeni's short stories, "Uncertain Step" contains little imagery and the representations of Australians are carefully balanced to give a sense of a broad range of individuals, not all of them unaware of the stereotypical nature of popular beliefs about Asian women. Anggraeni's engagement with the social construction of the "Asian" woman in Australian society through the creation of positive Indonesian characters and a careful explanation of social realities is very different from Yahp's fiction, which returns to Malaysia and to a tradition of strong women to emphasise the inadequacy of stereotypical notions of "Asian" women.

Although Anggraeni's Indonesian women protagonists are most often educated, middle-class characters who courageously battle against racism and sexism, and thus present a familiar figure of migrant literature- the non-threatening, morally impeccable model migrant- the protagonist of her story "Mal Tombée" and the narrator of the poem "A Foreigner in East Gippsland" are presented as silent, suffering victims of Australian misconceptions about Asian women. The female narrators of Anggraeni's
short stories and novels are often exasperated but seldom cowed by the perceptions of "Asian" women in Australian society and the way this affects their lives. The central character of "Mal Tombée" and the narrator of the poem "A Foreigner in East Gippsland" are, however, presented as unusually vulnerable protagonists.

In "Mal Tombée", Maryati nervously arrives at a party organised by an Australian-Indonesian friendship group. She has only recently married Trevor, an Anglo-Australian, and arrived in Australia. Much of the short story describes the cultural misconceptions which distance Maryati from her husband, and ultimately both of them from his friends and family. Maryati's shyness, loneliness, lack of education and unremitting homesickness for Java suggest that her situation will not improve. This impression is enhanced by the fact that at the Australian-Indonesian party Maryati finally meets the "white man" fluent in Javanese, whom she had met in Indonesia only once but who fathered her child (123). Like Maryati, he is newly married, and Maryati is distraught that she has met him again only now, after they are both married. Maryati has had a hard-working and difficult life and it is hinted that her emigration to Australia has not improved her circumstances. The narrator of this short story is unusual when compared to the female protagonists of Anggraeni's novels and most of her other short stories, because Maryati is a member of the Indonesian working class; she is illiterate, impoverished and has a poor grasp of the English language. The documentary style prose of "Mal Tombée" meticulously outlines many of the difficulties of the uneducated migrant woman arriving in Australia through the regular interleaving of Maryati's experiences at the party with brief passages regarding her personal history and life in Indonesia. The short story reveals that for the uneducated Asian migrant woman who marries an Australian man for financial security, the benefits do not always outweigh the suffering which occurs through the estrangement from "home". Ironically, even as Australian stereotypes
plague Maryati, she is also guilty of such misconceptions: she married Trevor with the expectation that all white men were as sexually adept as her first white lover. "Mal Tombée" highlights the particular suffering of the uneducated Asian woman in Australian society who is subject to loneliness, cultural misunderstandings, and has few opportunities for independence; Maryati has, as the story's title suggests, fallen badly. The positive Indonesian female character who, it is emphasised, has few differences in education and assumptions from middle-class Australia and who characterises Anggraeni's fiction, is thus replaced in "Mal Tombée" by the utterly resourceless, uneducated female victim of the displacement of migration and cultural misunderstandings. Here, as elsewhere, the presentation of vulnerable Indonesian women in Anggraeni's fiction is incorporated in the social realist form of her texts and stands in stark contrast to the supernaturally powerful, fierce Chinese Malaysian women in Yahp's fiction.

A stereotype about Asian women which comes under particular attack in Anggraeni's fiction is the image of the late twentieth century phenomenon of the Filipina "mail order bride". The thoughtless cruelty of the assumption that all women of "Asian" appearance are mail order brides forms a specific subject of focus in Anggraeni's poem "A Foreigner in East Gippsland" and the short story "Uncertain Step". Jan Pettman has observed that the tourist and marriage sex trade is one dimension of the internationalisation of labour, and that the Filipina bride is an element of the sex trade which has become increasingly visible in Australia in the late twentieth century47. "A Foreigner in East Gippsland" and "Uncertain Step" discuss this recent development in representations of "Asian" women in Australian society. The texts focus in particular upon the effect of these images on the already traumatic migration experience of "Asian" women.

\[47\text{Pettman, 73.}\]
The psychological effect of the assumption that all "Asian" women are Filipina brides is explored in the poem "A Foreigner in East Gippsland". In this verse, the narrator is assumed to be a Filipina bride and is imaged as a commodity by a local pub owner:

... the proprietor looks at me
you Filipina? he asks
no. I'm not. I answer
I walk away, he asks my husband
good, married to a woman from Asia?
I've got one, coming from the Philippines
next week, she'll be here
I need a woman, he adds (4).

This humiliating confrontation is swiftly followed by the traumatised narrator's confusion between past and present; contemporary Australian scenes are replaced by memories of Indonesian landscapes. The narrator descends into a complete detachment from reality as she begins to feel like "a curio" and distinctions between past and present, Bali and East Gippsland, continue to blur:

the rainforests, the humidity
melt the barrier of time and place
leaving me in limbo (5).

The trauma which Australian (mis)representations of "Asia" by Australians can cause women perceived as "Asian" are poignantly illustrated. The poem reflects the potential psychological consequences of these derogatory images, which have been observed to "make these women more visible" and have meant, according to Pettman:

... that quite young women have to face systematic intrusions, innuendos and approaches in public places, and that their mothers and others who care for them experience a chronic indirect assault and fearfulness on their account which can permeate their lives48.

48Pettman, 73.
In the brief verse sketch, "A Foreigner in East Gippsland", the cumulative effect of the dislocation of migration and the impact of being considered an Asian woman leads the protagonist to a descent into insanity. Further, in a scene from the novel Parallel Forces, Amyrta is taken for a Filipina by her future husband's sister-in-law, a condescending blonde named Maureen. The experience of being mistaken for a Filipina briefly tumbles even the self-confident Amyrta into a moment of doubt about her place in Australia; she wonders:

How could I insist on being Australian when each time I move out of my circle of friends I am reminded that I am something else? How do I have to look or behave, what do I have to do to be accepted as an Australian? (102).

Such questions are briefly introduced in Parallel Forces but are never fully resolved. Although momentarily shaken by the experience, Amyrta can finally respond with laughter from her more secure position as a long-term migrant with an established career. Nevertheless, in this brief scene, as in "A Foreigner from Gippsland", the reader is invited to consider the plight of the Asian woman in Australia and the exclusive nature of unspoken definitions of the "typical" (white, male) Australian.

The informative style of "Mai Tombée", "A Foreigner in East Gippsland" and "Uncertain Step", which present a conscientious development of the difficulties "Asian" women face in Australia, is echoed in Anggraeni's other fictional works. The explicit discussion of cultural stereotypes and political sympathies takes place through narrative comment and dialogue between characters and addresses such topics as the fight of the Kanaks of New Caledonia for Independence from France49, Australian perceptions of Bali which fail to recognise the cultural and political complexity of Balinese society or the impact of tourism upon the island50, and an assertion that the 1966 attacks on members of the Indonesian

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49Anggraeni, "To Drown a Cat," Stories of Indian Pacific, 1-96.
50Anggraeni, "Crossroads," Stories of Indian Pacific, 183-265.
Communist Party were too harsh\textsuperscript{51}. Much of Anggraeni's fictional work makes political and informative statements about inequities and injustices in Australian and Indonesian society, with special emphasis on the experience of the Indonesian woman in Australia. In a critical piece titled "Irritations", Anggraeni asserts that her fiction is directed towards the "unconscious racist" who, she contends, can be reached by the "non-threatening manner of 'educating'" which literature provides\textsuperscript{52}. This aim implies a philosophy which is demonstrated in her fictional texts: that a bigot is socialised into a racist culture, and that an educational style of literature can overcome this misinformation\textsuperscript{53}. However, the emphasis on reaching the broadest audience possible with a message of maximum clarity means that the texts do not address more complex and fundamental notions such as the ideology of racism, which is built upon a complex system of social relations and a long history\textsuperscript{54}. Anggraeni's prose takes few risks: the celebration of multiplicity, the joys of reader subjectivity and ideological complexity are eschewed in preference for a narrative coherence which is linked to a specific sociopolitical purpose.

The Indonesian literary background to Anggraeni's works provides an insight into the literary philosophies of her fiction, which contain assumptions and strategies largely unfashionable in the Australian literary scene. In an interview, Anggraeni observed that Ajip Rosidi and W. S. Rendra, two famous Indonesian poets published in Bahasa Indonesia, were

\textsuperscript{51}In the short story "Crossroads" (from \textit{Stories of Indian Pacific}), the attractive, intelligent character Wayan poignantly describes her father's death and her family's subsequent disintegration as a result of the 1966 post-coup killings of communists. These are depicted as senseless "massacres" (224-225). In \textit{Parallel Forces}, the case for the supporters of LEKRA, the communist party, is presented as a freedom of speech issue. The narrators' parents compassionately return to Indonesia to support their friends who have been taken into custody as a result of their political allegiances.


\textsuperscript{53}Pettman refers to this perspective on racism as the "prejudice model", and argues that it is flawed because it "dramatically underestimates the politics and power of racism" (57-58). See Pettman, 55-59.

\textsuperscript{54}Pettman, 57.
two of her favourite Indonesian language poets\textsuperscript{55}. Themes within Anggraeni's short fiction recall descriptions of the poetry of Ajip Rosidi and W. S. Rendra. Like Rosidi, Anggraeni's texts focus on the city, city dwellers, and the relationship with the desa (the "land of origin"), all with a "mixture of light-hearted humour and sober realism"\textsuperscript{56}. Rendra's poetry stresses the fate of the victims and underdogs and family life, key features also of Anggraeni's work\textsuperscript{57}. In the short story "Crossroads" Anggraeni offers a tribute to Rendra through the character of the charismatic poet Nyoman Sumadri, whose background parallels Rendra's biography. Sumadri, like Rendra, has studied drama for four years in America and fulfills the roles of poet, actor, socio-political commentator and public personality in Indonesia\textsuperscript{58}. Anggraeni's fiction also tends to bypass physical setting and this also has been observed as a quality of Indonesian literature\textsuperscript{59}. Anggraeni's principal literary allegiance seems to be towards a low-keyed social realism which, as Paul Tickell has observed, has a high status in Indonesia but which does not radically challenge prevailing social ideologies\textsuperscript{60}. A glimpse of Anggraeni's work in the context of Indonesian literature provides an illustration of the literary influences which a migrant author writing in English can bring across cultures and languages.

Whereas Anggraeni's texts focus on a thorough depiction and scrupulous isolation of social evils, Yahp's prose writings, through their playful form, suggest more complex intersections between the experience of

\textsuperscript{55}Lesley Harbon, "Interview: Dewi Anggraeni, Writer 'In Two Cultures'," \textit{Pelangi} 2.5(1989): 16.
\textsuperscript{56}Teeuw, 236-239.
\textsuperscript{57}Teeuw, 232.
\textsuperscript{60}Tickell argues that realism in Indonesian literature has historically been supported by the early, colonially sponsored literature and more recently by political repression which has favoured realism rather than radical literary expression. Paul Tickell, "Writing the Past: The Limits of Realism in Contemporary Indonesian Literature," \textit{Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia: Essays in Interpretation}, ed. R. M. Roskies, Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 91, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1993) 258-259.
sexist and racist oppression and thereby draw attention to issues of discourse and ideology. Yahp's use of fantasy modes in her fiction communicates some complexities of the interaction between gender, race, class and colonial experience for the Asian woman in contrast to the often simplistic social messages of Anggraeni's prose. Yahp's short stories "Houses, Sisters, Cities" and "In 1969" and the novel *The Crocodile Fury* illustrate the power of dominant ideologies and the psychological plight of those citizens who are not permitted to speak; the frustration of individuals who cannot voice their opinions or their outrage. Through the figure of the Asian (often Chinese Malaysian) woman, Yahp explores the interactions between different forms of oppression and the varied experience of vulnerable groups, the existence of different sets of belief systems, the power of dominant discourses, the frustration and suffering of marginalised groups and their endlessly creative forms of resistance.

Although there is a celebration of the shared time within the household and the intimacy it creates between female kin in Yahp's "Houses, Sisters, Cities", the expectations of women's roles which structure this lifestyle are also represented as destructive. The recurring image of the narrator's "secret life, that eggshell shape" is connected to an anger about the pressure of expectations for women in her native Malaysia:

> In Kuala Lumpur my secret life was a fury I did not know the words for, and so used any old words. Even in Sydney they sometimes came out too sharp. In Sydney I can name the fury, but never take it back. I can put *We want every chance for you* and *Nowadays girls are the same as boys* alongside entrance exams passed with distinctions and perfect scores, and still end up with those years of being reduced to nothing, neither ability nor talent nor conversation, nothing but my sex and the likelihood of the neighbours talking: the sum of what it was to be a girl (71).

In "Houses, Sisters, Cities", the experience of expatriation is presented as providing a relief in expression; a sentiment which is also articulated, as
shown in Chapter 2, in the texts of Ee, Mishra and Nandan. However, Yahp's expatriate narrator voices a release from self-censorship of a female writer who cannot find the words to speak her frustration. Although the experience of the closeness of female relatives fostered by the clear division of sex roles is represented as a pleasurable one in "Houses, Sisters, Cities", the related exclusion from the public sphere is a source of enormous frustration for the narrator. The narrator's resentment about being confined to the domestic realm breaks out in futile ways which merely damage the woman closest to her, her mother:

In Kuala Lumpur my life was novels read completely at random, it was stories written, then slipped under a mattress, it was a mouth filled with eggshells so I could hardly speak. One wrong word and shards were spilling across the kitchen, pinning my mother to the counter with her shoulders sagged and tears trickling into the cut onions and carrots and beans (71).

The frustration and related wordlessness of the woman in a patriarchal society, as evoked here, is a strong theme of Yahp's work and is linked in "Houses, Cities, Sisters" with the specific experience of being a woman in Malaysia. As I shall demonstrate, however, with regard to Yahp's "In 1969" and The Crocodile Fury, the lack of access to expression and a public voice is also linked in Yahp's writing to forms of oppression other than gender discrimination, such as race, class and colonialism.

The metaphor of "wordlessness", an inexpressible frustration linked to an exclusion from power, is shown to cross the boundaries of sexual and racial discrimination and colonialism in the powerful short story "In 1969". In this text, perhaps Yahp's most moving piece of short fiction, a daughter relates her mother's experiences during the race riots in Malaysia and the harsh details of her life leading up to and beyond that moment. The story contains lingering descriptions of the narrator's mother's thoughts and sensations as she hides in terror in a ditch:
My mother heard no sound. There was only this beating of her heart and she squeezed and pushed and breathed in the familiar smells like a charm. Silent armies marched past her but she saw no faces, only the swinging of their fists (466).

The narrator's tone is one of horror, anger, indignation: against a newspaper overseas which reports coldly and neutrally the horrific assault on her mother in a six line paragraph; against the father who deserted them; against the poverty which led to her mother's prostitution; and against the racial violence upon the Chinese in Malaysia which is seen to have its origins in the imperial policies of the British colonists. "In 1969" places these actions within the context of colonial policies, stressing that the division between classes is far greater than the division between races:

In 1969 the government juggled between propagating the idea of a united Malaysia, regardless of race, and redressing the economic imbalance between the races: giving the Malays a greater share of the country's wealth. Special privileges based on colour and name. Not class, or poverty. My mother laughed harshly. In her village, everyone had struggled together (473).

The short story emphasises the influence of class divisions and colonial policy, suggesting that very little will ever change for the poor. The specificities of the experience of the Chinese Malay woman is of particular concern in this text: the interrelatedness of colonialism, indigenous racism, class structure and the power relationships between men and women create a tragic intersection of oppression.

Just as the narrator of "Houses, Cities, Sisters" experiences a wordless rage at her position as a woman in Malaysia, the response of the mother of "In 1969" to her experience as a Chinese victim of racial violence in Malaysia is a voiceless anger and restlessness which is transmitted to her infant daughter:

In an intertextual reading of "Houses, Cities, Sisters" and "In 1969", the experiences of racial violence and gender oppression share a language of violence—references to knives, blood, and fury, and the connection with supernatural strengths drawn from anger and resentment—and stem from the similar experience of social marginalisation and a pressure to remain silent. The effects of such pressures on the oppressed members of a society are also expressed in the desire of Yahp's Chinese Malaysian women narrators who live in Australia to explain themselves and their special situations: to tell their own stories to their daughters, and so to construct alternative histories. Such communications across generations mean that the stored memories of suffering and anger can provide a potent source of power. The exclusion of some individuals from a place from which their stories can be heard is thus presented in Yahp's fiction as shaping a vast, dangerous frustration and provides a central part of a commentary on the effects of exclusionist ideologies, particularly racist or sexist ideologies. "In 1969" concludes with the image of a wounded woman giving birth in a ditch, and the powerful image of both mother and female baby screaming for help; an image of pain which is linked with a sense of rage at the injustice of all oppression. Significantly, however, the focus returns firmly to a particularly female pain, the female body and the power of the maternal line: a primary theme in Yahp's fiction.

The Crocodile Fury similarly evokes a complex society in which multiple sources of oppression interweave. The exploration of the intersection of racism, sexism and colonialism is a significant feature of The Crocodile Fury. In this complex novel, the notion of ideology is the subject of exploration, and the result is a more radical social analysis than that which occurs in Anggraeni's texts. The potential for difference between human value systems is illustrated in The Crocodile Fury through the cross-cultural comparison of the belief structures of the Chinese Malaysian Grandmother and the Catholic nuns at the convent school. The
Grandmother's belief in ghosts, rituals to ward off demons and other traditional disciplines and the importance of her reputation form important structures in her perception of life. In contrast, the Christian nuns preach hard work, humility and patience in waiting for a more blessed afterlife; however, they do not necessarily follow their own instructions. The intersection of colonialism, gender and religious belief is also explored through the figures of the nuns. The nuns from the narrator's convent are the contemporary representatives of the colonial system within The Crocodile Fury. They introduce lessons of a feminine passivity and fear of men, lessons which are portrayed as repressive and linked to the machine of empire. Christianity is shown to instill a dangerous complacency in the face of exploitation and a disintegration of traditional feminine assertiveness through a doctrine of humility. When the narrator's mother becomes a Christian her belief in the power of the badluck demon, a local belief which has dogged her life, vanishes but she also loses an attractive aura of traditional pride, of "scolding the fight into people: of fighting to win" and her sense of historical identity becomes tragically lost as her culture's stories lose their relevance (246). Further, the narrator of The Crocodile Fury shares the supernatural rage of the Chinese Malaysian women characters in Yahp's short stories which has its source in their experience of multiple forms of oppression. In Yahp's novel, the figure of the crocodile symbolises anger, and "the crocodile fury" is the pent up rage of injustice which eventually bursts forth with adulthood:

My crocodile is not one for cursing. His is a fury that starts out slow, that boils and bubbles, and hitches its back against the weight of all the jokes and jibes, the petty slights and discriminations accumulated over the years; all the back-bitings, jealousies and injustices involved in the scramble for favour, the aches of being owned body and soul. The gatherings at the barb-wired gates to sniff at foreign cakes and

61"After my mother became a Christian the Christian future swallowed the alleys and passages of her life's stories as soon as they were lived. The Christian future gulped down my mother's past..."(274).
sweetmeats while the city markets sweat only their rancid smells... When the crocodile fury hits there's a wild urge to run. The in-between time is over, the child shed, the young woman assumed. Everything, the view out the window, the ground, the air, the world, is irrevocably changed. The patterns are rearranged... (324).

As this passage demonstrates, the connections between the transition from child to young woman and the change of perspective this brings is linked in *The Crocodile Fury* with a sense of injustice and rage drawn from numerous inseparable experiences, as a woman, as a colonised subject, and as a poor woman. Yahp's novel thus presents an image of the interweaving of issues of the discourses of imperialism, religion and sexism; the irreducible complexities of social patterns and forces which can impact upon the colonised woman.

*The Crocodile Fury* is a multi-layered text which, in linking patriarchal beliefs and the structures of imperialism, depicts optimistic instances of resistance by a marginal group to the belief systems of a dominant society. The bully's refusal to become a meek "convent girl" despite her constant punishment by the nuns is an example of one of many scenes of resistance by the (female) colonised subjects:

> The nuns say the bully's way is not the way to tell a story. Convent girls must learn to do it properly... Convent girls must speak plainly and clearly until they get to the end. They must remember that the last word is not the true end. Every story has a meaning which can be applied to the lives of convent girls. Only when they see this meaning does the story end (40).

Given the privileged place of traditional storytelling in this novel, as in Yahp's other texts, the creative divergence of the character of the bully from the nuns' structure of storytelling to an indigenous oral storytelling tradition forms a challenge to the authority of the nuns. The bully's comic inability to keep to the nuns' rules of storytelling epitomises her refusal to reject her traditional culture. Further, the relationship between the rich man, a palm plantation owner and symbol of white colonial authority, and
his Eurasian dark-haired mistress (referred to as "the lover") provides an analogy for the workings of colonialism and sexual politics. The narrator and her Grandmother re-shape the lover in their stories from a position of ostensible subservience into a powerful role as a devious sea ghost. A central element of *The Crocodile Fury* is its depiction of numerous acts of resistance and courage, such as the diminishing of the imperial authority through comic moments and ridicule and the exertion of supernatural power, by poor, female, colonised subjects rendered voiceless in official colonial history.

Resistance to dominant ideologies also permeates the narrator’s chosen form of expression in *The Crocodile Fury*. Incorporating her new knowledge of Christianity with her existing knowledge of ghost-lore, the young narrator emerges with a vital conglomerate of beliefs which, ironically, is also a mimicry of the authority of the nuns, who function as representatives of empire. The choice that the narrator must make between loyalty to her Grandmother or the lover, a tension which stretches throughout the novel, involves a symbolic exploration of post-coloniality and the relationship between coloniser and colonised. The combative relationship between the grandmother and the lover is linked in a typically complex fashion with differing responses to colonialism, the workings of patriarchal authority and the enduring mythological struggles for power between the hill spirits and the sea ghosts (the grandmother has allegiances with the hill spirits and the lover is shown to be a manipulative and powerful sea ghost). The Grandmother regards the figures of colonial power- the nuns and the rich man- with an ambivalence that embraces respect, dependence, resentment and covetousness. In one sense she hankers for the sensations of her childhood spent as a favourite servant in a colonial household; she felt then that "complete freedom was belonging, body and soul, and she had it", although this freedom came at the cost of an unquestioning obedience to the wishes of the rich (white) man (52). In her
old age, Grandmother continues to seek the power and wealth associated with the coloniser; her plan is to discover the secrets of Christianity by sending her granddaughter to infiltrate a convent and master the magic of books and reading. The narrator explains her role in her grandmother's plan:

When I was born I fell into my grandmother's hands like a long awaited gift. Like the heavy brass key needed to set the rich man's clockwork toys in motion, to start his miniature railway rattling on its track spread over half a room... (309).

In contrast, however, the lover is shown to maintain her freedom and independence; she never submits to the confines of the rich man's mansion:

The rich man crooned at the lover, Lily, Lily, but she was never kind. She never looked at him kindly. She stared through him, she turned her face to the wall (252).

Eventually the lover escapes, and the besotted rich man follows her into the jungle and dies soon afterwards. Significantly, when the narrator reaches her full adult supernatural powers she adopts the lover's outlook rather than that of her grandmother: she chooses rebellion, independence and a thirst for freedom over safety and belonging. The mystery of the narrator's patches of scaly skin and her dreams which brought her closer to the lover are drawn together in the final pages of the novel in which the narrator metamorphoses into the lover and becomes that which her grandmother most fears, a sea demon. As a sea ghost she is shown to have immense power which far supersedes her grandmother's dwindling supernatural powers. The narrator rejects her Grandmother's notion of freedom and with it the desire to fully enter the colonial, rich man's world and to discover through this strategy the secrets of the nuns, the wealth of the white coloniser and the mysterious power of Christianity to draw in followers. The narrator's dash towards the ocean and "the East" in the final chapter- her renunciation of contact with Western life- is a symbolic choice:
the narrator seems to represent an idealised, post-colonial generation which can assert a freedom and new identity that is completely separate from the forces of a colonial empire. Nevertheless, the Grandmother's teachings are also shown to shape the narrator's attractive defiance; she has not lost all connection with indigenous traditions or family ties.

On another level, and Yahp's text is full of such complexities, the way in which the narrator embraces the sea demon in the final pages suggests a rejection of the dichotomy of Self and Other which is often linked with exclusionist discourses such as racism, sexism and colonialism. The narrator adopts wholeheartedly the values of the creature which Grandmother most fears and which she has constructed as the opposite of the narrator and symbolic of everything evil. The narrator becomes her "Other". The concluding scene of the novel can thus be viewed as a rejection of one of the fundamental sources of Western simplifications about Asia: the binary opposition; the structural foundation of the destructive dichotomies of Self/Other, East/West, and coloniser/colonised. Yahp's novel questions the notion of ideological oppression, resistance to it, and the overlapping complexity between ideologies of cultural difference, gender and colonialism. In contrast, Anggraeni's fiction looks towards a broader audience and tackles instead the process of educating middle-class Australia about the difficulties confronting Indonesian women in Australia and contemporary Indonesian society.

III

Yahp's and Anggraeni's literary texts may be read productively within the context of an international flourishing of Asian women's stories in literature and film. The development of a market of Asian women's literature has been represented by the popular appeal of Amy Tan's novels in America, Joy Kogawa's fiction in Canada, and Jung Chang's internationally bestselling autobiography-family biography *Wild Swans*. 
The *Joy Luck Club*, a film based on Amy Tan's novel of the same name and directed by Wayne Wang, was also released recently (in 1994), along with Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth* (which presents a Vietnamese woman's story, including her migration to America), Vietnamese French director Tran Anh Hung's *The Scent of the Green Papaya* (which focuses on a young woman growing up in Vietnam and was filmed entirely in France) and Gurinder Chadha's 1995 film of Indian-English women living in Britain, *Bhaji on the Beach*. Like much of Yahp's and Anggraeni's fiction, these texts all refer in different ways to the Asian migrant experience in "the West" and use this starting point to ask questions about cross-cultural and gender negotiation, liminality and the creation of identity.

In an Australian context, the international recognition of Asian women's stories has lent a glamour to the subject which has been absent from the popular perception of migrant women's fiction or migrant fiction generally. As Sneja Gunew points out, migrant fiction in Australia is often viewed as a subject of interest for sociologists or oral historians rather than for literary critics because migrant texts tend to be perceived as transparent sociology. Gunew observes that the playful and reflexive fiction of Ania Walwicz and Rosa Cappiello has often been undervalued or unacknowledged because it does not fit into preconceptions of a realist, autobiographical migrant fiction. However, the international fascination with Asian female stories in the late twentieth century, and Australia's economically linked desire for the "authentic" insider's perspective of Asia, has led to a more appreciative critical appraisal of tales about Asian migrant women in Australia along with inevitable (and sometimes inappropriate) comparisons with the texts of Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston.

The differing critical responses to, and commercial interest in, Yahp's and Anggraeni's fiction can be linked with the literary context and in

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63Gunew, xii.
particular the prevailing code for imaging Asian female difference in First World literature. In the 1990s, Yahp's induction into the public eye as one of the foremost young Australian (women) writers has been evident in the publication of her work in respected anthologies rather than small presses and magazines. This was reinforced in 1995 by her appointment as writer-in-residence at the University of Western Australia. The inclusion of the short story "Houses, Cities, Sisters" in the collection *Sisters*, which contains short prose pieces by such established writers as Elizabeth Jolley, Helen Garner and Dorothy Hewett, and Yahp's role as editor and contributor to the anthology *Family Pictures* (with stories by David Malouf, Tom Flood and Anna Maria Dell'oso amongst others) has established Yahp's credibility in the mainstream Australian literary scene. In contrast, Anggraeni's novels and short story collection have been and continue to be published by Indra Publishing, a company she and her husband, Ian Fraser, developed for this purpose. My contention here is that the relative success of Yahp's and Anggraeni's fiction in an Australian publishing context may be linked with the ways in which Yahp's work taps into the imaging of Asian female difference in the context of international (especially North American) literature and films.

The differences between Australian reviewers' responses to Yahp's novel and Anggraeni's two novels illuminate some of the expectations of Australian readers about the coding of "Asian" female difference, expectations which can also be set within the international cultural context of the First World. Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* won the 1993 Victorian Premier's Prize for First Fiction and the Ethnic Affairs Commission Award. Australian reviews of Yahp's novel were extremely positive. Leon Trainor in the *Weekend Australian* praised its originality and observed that "You accept the validity of this miraculously different world from the first
The Australian Book Review quoted a two-thirds of a page extract from the novel and Liam Davison described it as:

a wonderful first novel; wonderfully written and full of wonders. It's rich with magic, secrets, dragons, curses, ghosts and, most importantly, stories.

These reviews emphasise the attractiveness of difference to the Western literary palate through their praise of the detail about superstitions and curses, the emphasis on the narrator's world view being attractively different from ours (the readers), and the recurring exploration of "the power of stories" and oral traditions. The response by the general public has been equally impressive: The Crocodile Fury's first print-run was almost entirely sold into bookstores, an unusual success for a first novel. In contrast to the effusive responses to Yahp's first novel, Dewi Anggraeni's three long prose works have not been widely reviewed. Yahp's prose has similarities with Maxine Hong Kingston's "Chinese American" fiction, particularly The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, in its use of the oral tradition and its exploration of the relationship between female kin of a Chinese migrant background through the voices of fierce women. Yahp has also stated in an interview with The Straits Times that she was "influenced greatly" by Kingston's writing. In Anggraeni's novels, the non-reflexive, documentary style of these texts and their tendency to elide difference between Indonesian and Australian, means that they do not place themselves within the literary landscape of rich symbolism, mythology, fierce women and deconstruction which

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66"The narrator writes from the viewpoint of the Chinese and Malay people and they see the world very differently from us." Trainor, 7.
67Davison, 15.
powerfully mark Kingston's, Yahp's and to a lesser extent, as I will shortly show, Simone Lazaroo's texts. Thus one explanation for the greater popularity of Yahp's as opposed to Anggraeni's writing style may be the extent to which Yahp's work resonates with a growing international trend of Asian (primarily Chinese) women's stories in English.

Other novels about Asian migrant women published in Australia in the early 1990s have drawn inspiration from Kingston's literary approach, including Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting To Be Made* (1994), Lillian Ng's novel *Silver Sister* (1994) and Arlene Chai's *The Last Time I Saw Mother* (1995). The growing number of novels in this area indicates a developing publishing niche and the popularity of certain kinds of imaging of the Asian woman which draw, in part, on North American literary precedents. Like Yahp and Kingston, Ng and Chai focus on Chinese or partly Chinese female characters whereas Lazaroo's text focuses on the confusing effects of a Malaccan "Christao Eurasian" heritage (via Singapore) on a young, female migrant to Australia. Lazaroo's *The World Waiting To Be Made*, an autobiographical fiction which is in part based on the author's experience of her family's migration from Singapore to Perth, has similarities with Kingston's prose. In an interview, Lazaroo has stated that her novel was particularly influenced by Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and it certainly shares that text's fascination with dreams and the construction of history and personal identity. Lazaroo's novel also explores themes of migration, Eurasian identity and a mixed verbal culture of Malay, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch. It has received two literary prizes: the T. A. G. Hungerford Award for 1993, and the WA Premier's Book Award for fiction in 1995. The literary influence of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is

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72 Lillian Ng, *Silver Sister* (Port Melbourne: Mandarin, 1994).
74 "The Christao are descended from those Malaccans with both Portuguese and Malay blood...". Lazaroo, 18.
being thus demonstrated in the Australian literary scene in the 1990s and may continue: its coding of Asian female difference in a First World context has proven attractive to young women writers, such as Lazaroo and Yahp, who address Asian female experience in an Australian context. The international critical acclaim of Maxine Hong Kingston's texts has provided a source of inspiration for writers addressing the Asian female migrant experience in Australia, and its popularity may well have expanded the expectations in publishing houses of the appeal of "migrant" fiction about Asian women.

The publication of Lillian Ng's novel Silver Sister and Arlene Chai's The Last Time I Saw Mother also heralds the developing Australian fascination with Asian Australian women's stories. The narrator of Ng's Silver Sister, Ah Pah, has had a harsh peasant upbringing when she joins a "sisterhood" in China, a cooperative of unmarriagable working women which grants some financial independence. Ah Pah eventually travels to Canton, Hong Kong, Singapore and finally Sydney, from where she narrates her life story. The text is centred on a woman's perspective, insights into sexual politics in China, the life of the female domestic servant and, again, a fascination with superstitions and cultural traditions. (Silver Sister is marred, however, by the unconvincing voice of Ah Pah who, although she is an illiterate domestic servant, speaks in an educated tone with often complex language and adapts inappropriately swiftly to middle-class Australia.) The central narrator of Arlene Chai's The Last Time I Saw Mother is Caridad, a Filipina of Chinese background now living in Sydney, who returns to the Philippines to uncover a mystery hidden in her family's past. The novel is divided into the first person narratives of three women from the same family- Caridad, her mother Thelma, and her aunt Emma- and moves back and forth between past and present, Manila and Sydney. The female perspectives of a family history in Chai's novel are set against the the sociopolitical history of the Philippines from Japanese occupation to
the fall of the Marcos regime. Although Chai's novel is promoted on its cover as "A beautiful and unforgettable novel in the tradition of Amy Tan", several reviewers have taken issue with this generous description. The attention to family secrets, female narrators and a hybrid Chinese community are the novel's links with Tan's work but the use of Tan's name for promotion reflects the power of successful Asian American novelists to create a publishing niche in an Australian context.

Another reason for the comparative popularity of Yahp's imaging of Asian women may be that the literary strategies of The Crocodile Fury, unlike Anggraeni's uninterrogated realism, fit deftly into several prevailing literary discourses. In The Crocodile Fury, for instance, the cultural difference of the "Asian woman" is coded in ways of indicating difference which are familiar to the Australian reviewer; its experimental technique and subject matter not only gesture strongly towards the developing field of Asian migrant women's stories but also recall the strategies of feminism and post-colonialism. The Crocodile Fury's structural employment of the traditions of the Chinese oral tale coincides with strategies employed by contemporary postmodern literature, including a disruption of linearity and the emphasis on a multiplicity of tales and beliefs. In this context, Yahp's prose can be read as operating within the tradition of Cixous' écriture féminine77. The emphasis on a female tradition of storytelling, the relationships between female kin and a style of textuality which is shifting and diaphonous supports this theory. The Crocodile Fury also engages with the form and concerns of post-colonial literature and criticism, with its emphasis on ideologies of cultural difference and empire, the investigation of the pattern of binary structuring that underlies all patterns of conquest

77See Showalter, 15.
and domination\textsuperscript{78}, and its Chinese Malaysian women narrators, who assert their cultural identity in the context of a world wrought by multiple oppression, mass migration, cultural change and distances. Yahp's texts thus share with Hong Kingston's \textit{The Woman Warrior}, and other texts in this emerging genre, an inventive appeal to a range of discourses which is absent in Anggraeni's journalistic realism. As stated above, however, the form of Yahp's and Anggraeni's texts is linked to an appeal to very different audiences: Yahp's texts are directed towards an intellectual élite, whereas Anggraeni's texts address a broader field of middle-class Australians (who have not, as yet, started buying her books in significant numbers).

A further, perhaps paramount appeal in Yahp's prose for a predominantly Anglo-Australian audience is its emphasis on cultural difference. The privileged place of difference in Yahp's texts is manifested in a lingering attention to the description of lush scenery, Malay and Chinese superstitions, and the role of traditional storytelling. The sense of foreignness is enhanced by the unusual, earthy, assertive and sometimes theatrical representations of femininity. In contrast, Anggraeni's texts tend to elide the distinction between Indonesian and Australian. There are dangers in both approaches. However, in the cultural context of the First World the fascination with Asian female experience is intimately linked with the depiction of cultural difference. Trinh Minh-ha warns about the self-serving expectations of Otherness which a First World audience can seek when it views the "doubly othered" story of an Asian woman:

\begin{quote}
We come to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us \textit{what we can't have} and to divert us from the monotony of sameness\textsuperscript{79}.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{79}Minh-ha, 88.
If the stories of Asian women are merely fulfilling a need for "difference" for First World countries like Australia, then Yahp's emphasis on difference would not assert a marginalised identity but might rather serve certain needs of the dominant society. The "doubly othered" voice of the Asian woman, her authenticity placed beyond doubt, and the role of this narrative as a temporary stimulant to a jaded Western palate, recalls Salman Rushdie's warnings about "the bogey of Authenticity... the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism". The contemporary Western desire for the (doubly) authentic difference of the Asian woman can thus be tentatively linked with the Orientalist image of the Asian woman as the exotic, erotic symbol of the Orient. It seems likely that the contemporary desire for the difference of the Asian woman in Australia and other Western societies may be a lingering aspect of Orientalist tradition.

The notion of a self-serving thirst in Anglo-Australia for certain kinds of difference has implications for other elements of Yahp's fiction as the literature of migration. In her caustic volume of critical essays The Lyre in the Pawnshop Fay Zwicky suggests with regard to the Australian reception of texts about the migrant experience that:

... there does seem to be some kind of attraction to the notion of minority group demonstrativeness, to open displays of emotion, especially in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon environment.

The special appeal of a sense of greater family cohesion and the powerful tensions of the extended family has particular relevance for Yahp's family-centred texts. Perhaps Yahp's close families articulate a need within the Australian community for a more expressive bond, just as the strong, supernatural women characters in her texts fulfil an attractive role for feminist readers. The danger is that the nostalgia of multiculturalism could

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80 Minh-ha, 88.
become overwhelming and lead to an overemphasis on cultural difference to the detriment of local cultural specificities. The contemporary fascination in the Australian literary scene with texts set entirely in other cultural landscapes may reflect a development of this kind of nostalgia. Yahp's much-praised novel is set in a Chinese Malaysian landscape and the winning novels of The Australian/Vogel Literary Awards for 1992 and 1993, Fotini Epanomitis' The Mule's Foal and Helen Demidenko's The Hand That Signed the Paper are set in Greece and the Ukraine respectively. The potent appeal of cultural difference to a Western audience, expressed on an international scale by the appeal of post-colonial literature and the expectations of a predominantly non-Asian readership is, however, in constant tension with the alternative pressure (heretofore the stronger pressure) for migrant Australians and their children to develop a sense of a more homogenous cultural identity. The considerable differences in style and form between Yahp's and Anggraeni's texts reflect some of the complex tensions and cross-currents of the developing area of Asian Australian migrant women's stories; a field in which the contested ground of racial and gender difference is complicated by an Orientalist tradition of images of Asia in Australia, particular expectations of migrant (women's) literature and the global fascination in English language literature with Asian women's stories.
Chapter 4

History and Authenticity:
Don'o Kim’s The Chinaman (1984) and Alex Miller’s The Ancestor Game (1992)

This chapter focuses on the ways in which literary and historical spaces are created for Asian Australians in the representations of Australia in Don'o Kim’s The Chinaman (1984)¹ and Alex Miller’s The Ancestor Game (1992)². The Ancestor Game and The Chinaman explore the lives of "Asian" men who are living in Australia. The English-born narrator of The Ancestor Game pieces together the story of Lang Tzu, his Chinese-born painter friend who moved to Australia when he was ten. The Chinaman focuses on the experiences of Joe, a Japanese tertiary student living in Australia. Like many migrant texts, novels about the Asian migrant experience in Australia often have as a central theme the claiming of a connection through history between a migrant community and the Australian culture and landscape. This chapter will explore the ways in which ancestral origins and history are used to emphasise a claim of belonging to an Australian landscape, particularly through the device of the historical narrative. It will examine the ways in which these texts suggest a migrant mapping of Australia through an ancestral genealogy and the diaries of ancestors, in The Ancestor Game, and through a geographical familiarity with Australian landmarks and the cultural site of the Great Barrier Reef in The Chinaman. I would also suggest that the contemporary fascination with the history of Asian migrant occupation, as demonstrated through the device of the historical narrative, is linked to the unique features of Asian migration experience and imaging within contemporary

¹Don'o Kim, The Chinaman (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1984).
Australia, in particular the perception of the Asian migrant as a temporary sojourner with few cultural or personal ties with Australian society. The historical narrative in these two novels forms part of a broader scheme to disrupt conventional history. The efficacy of the historical narrative in challenging received history is linked to the form of the texts, a feature which will be explored in Section II, and to shifting trends in the field of Asian migrant literature and its strengthening engagement with the discourse of historicism.

Before entering into a discussion about the function of the historical narrative and related issues, the inclusion of Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game* within this chapter requires explanation. *The Ancestor Game* is unusual amongst texts about the Asian migrant experience because it was not written by an individual of "Asian" background but by an English-born migrant in Australia; yet it is centrally concerned with the experience of an Asian migrant in Australia, his background and the ways in which he becomes reconciled to his position in Australia, as well as with more general issues regarding migrancy. *The Ancestor Game* is thus treated as a primary text for reasons of subject matter rather than authorial ethnicity. The inclusion of *The Ancestor Game* in this thesis highlights the debate about identity politics and asks the question: does the ethnicity of the author have any bearing on the "authenticity" of a text?

Within this chapter, the comparison between Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*, a text written by an English migrant and Don'o Kim's *The Chinaman*, which was written by a Korean, introduces questions which challenge certain notions of authorial authenticity. If white writers should not discuss Asian experience, should Don'o Kim, a Korean, be criticised for writing a Japanese protagonist? In the judging of the 1993 Miles Franklin Award, should Brian Castro's *After China* (which made the shortlist) have won instead of *The Ancestor Game* because it was written by a man who is partly Chinese? To what extent do one's ethnic origins influence the
legitimacy of one's writing about certain subjects? Although the recently developed area of Asian migrant writing has not yet been subjected to these kinds of queries, similar questions have been considered in Australian literary criticism with regard to Aboriginal writing, and Helen Demidenko/Darville's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1995). For instance, Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra argue that no-go zones for writers are dangerous; that writers and literary theorists must balance the guilt of writing over the guilt of silence. On the other hand, Patrick Wolfe's reply to Hodge and Mishra contends that white theorists need to "stop fabricating Aboriginal voices in order to admit them" because:

Leaving an extra-textual space beyond the colonizing academy is a prerequisite for dialogue.

Although such debates have generally criticised the allegedly imperialist literary academy, they are in some senses applicable to the writing of fiction as well. The issue of whether non-Aboriginal groups should create films about Aboriginal people, and whether they should be funded by the Australian Film Commission, has also been the subject of heated discussion on Radio National's *Late Night Live*. The conclusion of many of the participants on this program was that non-Aboriginals should be given the freedom to choose their own subject matter but that they should obtain as much Aboriginal input as possible throughout the whole film making process. This approach recognises the dangers which attend a critical emphasis on authorial ethnicity and the authentic voice, but affirms the importance of the involvement of minority groups in the production of cultural meanings.

The notion of an "authentic" voice is vulnerable to essentialist oversimplification and generally fails to acknowledge the role of the

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individual imagination and of learning. As Daiva Stasiulis observes, proscriptions of the "authentic voice":

...(discredit) the artistic process, which, as Trinh (1991: 232) writes, requires that boundaries be ceaselessly called to question, undermined, modified and re-inscribed.6

By questioning the processes of history in his novel and by performing extensive research which involved travelling to China, Alex Miller seems to fit Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's vision of the author who "earns the right to criticize":

... you begin to investigate what it is that silences you, rather than take this very deterministic position- since my skin colour is this, since my sex is this, I cannot speak... (As a bourgeois white male) you will of course not speak in the same way about the Third World material, but if you make it your task not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programmes of study, but also at the same time through a historical critique of your position as the investigating person, then you will see that you have earned the right to criticize, and you will be heard...7

Miller also uses the device of the mediating narrator to good effect, a device which JanMohamed asserts as important in keeping to "the mentality of the conqueror" and therefore admitting the impossibility of completely escaping one's own cultural background and entering another.8 Robert Drewe has used this technique in his novels A Cry in the Jungle Bar, which is set in "Asia", and The Savage Crows, which explores Aboriginal history in Tasmania from the point of view of Stephen Crisp, a white historian who becomes obsessed with the fate of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Arguments about and methods of approaching issues of cultural authenticity, authorial

ethnicity and cultural appropriation will be of increasing importance as Australia's writers begin to tap further into the vast diversity of cultural backgrounds of Australians in the 1990s. Perhaps Australia will follow Canada's 1992 lead by finding the appropriation of voices of migrant and indigenous experience a volatile area of academic debate. It also seems possible (to follow up the above parallel between Drewe's *The Savage Crows* and Miller's *The Ancestor Game*) that devices and methodologies used by non-Aboriginal writers and critics to deal with Aboriginal stories and cultural difference, may be used by non-Asians to present the Asian migrant experience in literature and literary criticism. Of course, the same reciprocal "rights" should exist for Asian-born writers to represent Anglo-Australian experience.

I

The historical narrative is a common feature of novels about the Asian migrant experience and its chief function is to provide important points of contrast to the contemporary narrative of the Asian Australian experience. Typically, an historical narrative parallels the experiences of a contemporary Asian migrant protagonist with the experiences of a previous Asian migrant to Australia. Such "probes" into history may appear as excerpts from a diary or travel book (usually written by an ancestor of the contemporary narrator) and/or in the imaginative musings of a contemporary narrator. As I shall demonstrate in more detail below, the device of the historical narrative is a central element in the structuring of 

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9The Canadian debate about cultural appropriation began to gain momentum after Rudy Wiebe, "the distinguished white, Mennonite writer and University of Alberta professor," accused W. P. Kinsella of appropriating Canadian Indian history in his prose and suggested that Kinsella was not "entitled to imagine nor imaginatively to portray, aspects of human experience which he had not directly engaged in". Some writers of colour were assisted by the Canada Council to support Wiebe's position. Eventually, at a general meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada, a motion was passed which "resolutely (affirmed) the writer's freedom of thought and expression, while it condemned 'cultural misappropriation'". Roger Burford Mason, "Letter from Canada: Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?," *PN Review* Sept./Oct. (1992): 7-8.
Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Don'o Kim's *The Chinaman*, Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* and Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*. In *The Chinaman*, the historical narrative takes the form of passages from an autobiographical book about a Korean man's travels through Australia which Joe, a Japanese man studying in Australia, reads periodically. The italicised form of these passages separates them from the main text and composes a distinct narrative. The historical narrative within *The Chinaman* contributes significantly to the gradual identification and then deconstruction of a cultural tradition of racism towards Asians in Australia. More generally, the historical narrative may be linked with a central concern of texts which address the Asian migrant experience: a presentation of Asian migrants in Australia which engages with the discourse of historicism to refute the stereotype of the Asian as Other and as a perpetual foreigner, images which have been popular in the history of Australian literary representations of Asia and Asian migrants. After establishing some of the literary and social contexts of Kim's novel, I shall consider the ways in which the historical narrative provides an extra dimension to the major themes of the text.

*The Chinaman* is Don'o Kim's third and most recently published novel and shares the strong concern with social justice and morality which characterises Kim's other novels. The focus in this chapter is upon Kim's novels but Kim has also written a play *The Bell*, which was based on a Korean folktale and published in *Outrider 90*, and a number of libretti, including the concert aria "My Name is Tian". Other libretti by Kim include "Coal River" (a choral narrative of the Hunter River), an oratorio titled "Death of Captain Cook" and "The Cycle of Love" (a song cycle based on Sijo). Kim worked in conjunction with composer Anne Boyd to create

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11 Gunew et al., 132.
the literary content of the opera\textsuperscript{12}. Kim's novels share with the narrative of
the libretti a reliance on dialogue and the actions of characters for an insight
into personal motivation; they also have little interpretive narrative
comment and simple landscape descriptions. Kim's first novel, also titled
\textit{My Name is Tian}(1968)\textsuperscript{13}, traces the social ramifications of the conflict
between the American military and communists in Vietnam in the
depiction of the fate of Tian, a young Vietnamese boy. In Kim's novel, there
are no easy answers or strict dividing lines between Democrats and
Communists, Americans or their supporters and the Viet Cong. Tian is
drawn into both sides of the conflict at various times, and sympathetic and
unsympathetic characters are ranged on both sides of the political field,
emphasising the complex nature of the conflict and the difficulty of the
moral choices of the individual. Kim's second novel \textit{Password: A Political
Intrigue}(1974)\textsuperscript{14} is set in the 1940s and much of the action takes place in
Tartaria, a fictional country between Russia and China. The Tokyo based
narrator, a Chinese military strategist called Noh, is approached by the
current ruler of Tartaria to protect the country against military threats from
rebel groups with Russian and Chinese allegiances. The details of Noh's
arrival and activities in Tartaria are interspersed with passages describing
the espionage and the long decision-making process which led him to
current ruler of Tartaria. A strong emphasis is placed on the difficult moral decision which
preceded Noh's arrival in Tartaria: should he travel to Tartaria and attempt
to save its innocent people even though he would put himself in
considerable danger? Kim's imperfect protagonists are often confronted by
such moral dilemmas which are "discussed" in the novels, and their
positions at the intersection of complex historical and socio-political forces
can either cripple them or galvanise them into action, often of a mock-
heroic kind.

\textsuperscript{12}Gunew et al., 132.
\textsuperscript{13}Don'o Kim, \textit{My Name is Tian} (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1968).
\textsuperscript{14}Don'o Kim, \textit{Password: A Political Intrigue} (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974).
The Chinaman also considers the fate of an individual caught in a situation of almost unbearable tension: the position of an individual of Asian appearance in an Australia still coming to terms with the abandonment of the White Australia policy. Kim's characteristically flawed protagonist is Jobu (Joe), a sensitive postgraduate student from Japan who is studying English literature in Australia. Joe is a long-term visitor to Australia and experiences difficulties of identity and belonging which are related to specifically Asian migrant experience. Much of the action of the novel is confined to the decks of the "Quovadis", a millionaire's leisure boat on which Joe aims to take a restful working holiday, but instead finds himself tormented by questions of identity, belonging and Australian racism towards those considered Asian. The "Quovadis" is significantly named: referring to the Latin tag "quo vadis?" ("whither goest thou?") from the Gospel of St John. The biblical symbolism within Kim's novel contains a dark irony: there is little Christian goodwill amongst people and no sense of a guiding force of either good or evil. As C. A. Runcie observes, the characters of The Chinaman are "Hi-Tech hedonists in an earthly paradise, presided over by a spurious god, the taciturn, indifferent Sydney millionaire Godfrey". In Kim's complex parable, which echoes the tone of social warning in his previous novels, the worship of capital in the modern world takes the place of a source of spiritual inspiration; many characters are plagued by uncertainty and a lack of any strong allegiances and loyalties to

17Kim's concern with spiritual matters and the demise of the transcendental point of origin recalls Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, in which Iqbal Chaudhary, the expatriate Bangladeshi narrator, returns to Bangladesh after a nine year absence and struggles with his role as a migrant between First and Third Worlds, and East and West. Iqbal must choose between "the cosiness of belonging" or "the agony of free thinking and freedom of choice"; between a period of greater certainty and what is known as modernity; between religious faith and scepticism (249). Ultimately Iqbal decides that because he is an East-West migrant, "a composite of lifestyles and rituals", he has a strong scepticism of cultural and spiritual beliefs, and consequently he can "never blindly follow" (249). The conflict between Islam and Christianity is used to explore the oppositional relationship between East and West, which is depicted as having its roots in the ancient Crusades. Adib Khan, Seasonal Adjustments (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994).
ideals or compassion for other people. The postmodern demise of the transcendental point of origin is a subject of concern within Kim's text. The sometimes bungling, sensitive protagonist, Joe, never reaches beyond his position as a potential hero; this character is shaped by a postmodern world in which the authority of the hero appears unattainable. However, the humanist importance of the actions, decisions, reasoning and intrinsic value of the individual are subjects of close scrutiny, even in the postmodern world of *The Chinaman*, because of the insight which these qualities give to the psychological complexities of an individual's life.

*The Chinaman* is also, at least in part, a parable about the racial divisions and hostilities within Australian society and their potentially disastrous effects upon the future of Australia. The use of a boat as a principal setting recalls such varying texts as Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* and Nicholas Hasluck's novel *Quarantine*, which also employ the metaphor of the seafaring craft and its crew to ask the question "where to?". The tiny, confined community of four aboard the "Quovadis" promotes the potential for conflict and tension in this microcosm of Australian society and sets the stage for a dramatic denouement. As in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the experience of "a strange place" in *The Chinaman* can result in a "reprieve from the self" and the assertion of repressed angers or qualities of unusual personal strength (30-31). Kim's novel swiftly and effectively establishes a setting of considerable tension and significance, highlighting the complex moral choices and challenges which confront Joe and his fellow crew members, and also poses broader questions concerning the fate of Australia as a nation and, more generally, that of modern, industrialised society.

Apart from Joe there are three other passengers on the "Quovadis": Godfrey, the owner of the boat, Vic, Godfrey's friend and wealthy real estate agent, and Beatrice, Vic's girlfriend. Joe is particularly disturbed by the erratic behaviour of Vic, who is an expert sailor, an influential businessman
and considerably older than himself. Joe is made vulnerable by a number of factors: he hovers between the role of employee and passenger, he is younger and less certain of himself than Vic, he is not an experienced sailor and, most damningly for Vic, he is perceived as Asian. The tension upon the boat increases as Vic tests Joe's patience with his sly insults about "orientals", and the Japanese in particular, and becomes irrationally angry with Joe's sailing errors. Many assumptions which have been made in Australia about Japan since the Second World War are raised through the comments made by the character Vic. For instance, he pontificates to Joe that the Japanese make commercial invasions into Australia which are of no benefit to Australians, and that Japanese goods are of a poor quality. Vic also asserts the benefits of British imperialism over Chinese or Japanese imperialism by smugly remarking on what a disaster Australian society would have been if Australia had been colonised by a nation from Southeast Asia. Through focusing on the reactions and trepidation of Joe, Kim emphasises the human suffering which can result from Australian preconceptions about Asia and Asians. Joe concludes, after a series of confrontations in which he has been as pacifying as possible, that "Vic's inconsistency was Vic's lack of consideration for him" (78). Vic plays with Joe's fears and feelings of being an outsider. His occasional, unexpectedly kind gestures- he makes Joe a cup of coffee and he occasionally apologises for his behaviour- merely confuse Joe and make the next attack more difficult to understand. A central exploration in this text is the manifestation of Australian racism towards Asians and the effects which it can have on the individual perceived as Other.

Vic's racist antagonism towards Joe is a central part of the "thriller" element of The Chinaman and also creates a tense atmosphere familiar in Kim's novels: the protagonist is pushed to the limits of endurance and his reactions, or lack of action, are explored. Although much of the novel is centred on the exchange of dialogue (as in drama or opera) and there are few
external narrative comments, the occasional, simple narrative description contributes to an impression that Joe is increasingly apprehensive and afraid. Suspense is developed when Joe becomes highly sensitive to Vic's location on the boat; even when reading in his bunk, Joe is aware of Vic's movements on the deck:

Vic must have returned to the rear deck after a swim. Joe could hear him jump up and down shaking off the salt water (81).

In the following chapter, Joe "baits his hook" to begin fishing and it is implied that this action provides a metaphoric parallel with Vic's behaviour towards Joe (82). This connection between fishing and bullying ironically recalls Christ's reputation as a "fisher of men" and thus questions the legitimacy of Vic's behaviour. Such parallels and juxtapositions between scenes are common strategies of Kim's unadorned prose, which encourages a philosophical questioning and analysis of the behaviour of characters.

In *The Chinaman*, racism is linked with a power struggle and competition between men. As well as enduring Vic's taunts, Joe must contend with the attacks of others on his sense of belonging which are inspired by his Asian appearance. Joe is accused by a coastguard of being an illegal Taiwanese diver and only narrowly escapes arrest when Beatrice vouches for him, a scene which emphasises Joe's dependence on the protection of others. The name "Beatrice" may allude to Dante's similarly idealised female figure in the *Inferno*. Beatrice is cast as a perceptive, caring individual who gives reassurance and support to all of the three men on the boat when they are experiencing different crises. She is the only passenger to defend Joe from Vic's inflammatory remarks. In contrast, the character of Godfrey observes Joe's suffering but fails to intervene to protect Joe from Vic's verbal assaults. Godfrey appears as a Pontius Pilate figure who recognises an injustice and has the opportunity and the power to intervene, but chooses not to do so. In this way he contributes to an enduring interest
in Don'o Kim’s texts: the culpability of the individual who fails to act. Racism is presented as a male trait linked to masculine competition. The effect of this connection and the absence of character development of any other female characters is that women are idealised and men seem to be the locus for all bigotry. The construction of gender in The Chinaman adds to the sense of inevitability of a potential confrontation between Vic and Joe, when Joe will assert his right to "join the men".

The historical narrative of The Chinaman expands the exploration of white Australian racism and its effects upon the victim of racism by establishing an historical perspective. During his most lonely moments Joe reads passages from The Death of a Princeling, a book by Mr Lee, a Korean traveller who recorded his experiences in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. As noted above, the italicised form of these passages separates them from the main text and results in the creation of a distinct historical narrative. The comparison of historical narrative and contemporary narrative fosters the notion of a cultural tradition of Australian hostility towards Asia. There are significant parallels between scenes from Lee's life in Australia and Joe's experiences. In one such scene, Lee must deal with his sense of isolation as a solitary motorist in the Outback when he cannot defend himself against the bigoted conspiracy of a greedy mechanic and a corrupt policeman. This passage echoes Joe's own sense of isolation upon the "Quovadis", where he increasingly feels set apart from the other passengers as an "oriental". The similarity between Joe's and Lee's experiences highlight the historical nature of Australian hostility towards Asia and its continuing force in interpersonal relationships.

The entrenched language of racism in Australian culture is also a subject of discussion in The Chinaman and is effected through the comparison between the contemporary and historical narratives. For instance, Joe is an uneasy spectator in the following exchange between a Coastguard and a fisherman:
"How's your fishing?"
"Not so good, mate."
"Why, you didn't kill a Chinaman, did you?" (131).

The old Australian saying "I must have killed a Chinaman" was once commonly given as an explanation of any bad luck\(^\text{18}\). However, to a reader sensitised by Joe's increasing uneasiness and the parallel experiences of the Korean writer of *The Death of a Princeling*, this colloquialism illustrates how racism towards those considered Asian has been long accepted and entrenched in Australian language. As Hodge and Mishra note in *The Dark Side of the Dream*, "Language carries the traces of its social use, in grooves that organise and constrain expression and thought itself"\(^\text{19}\). The lack of appreciation by the Australian characters for the complexities of "Asia" is comically highlighted throughout *The Chinaman* by the terminology the white Australians use to refer to Lee and Joe. Joe is Japanese but is variously described as "oriental", a "Chinaman" and "Taiwanese". Lee, the Korean narrator in the historical narrative, is also referred to as a "Chinaman", and a "Chinaman" is the name of a species of fish. A sense of a longstanding hostility and suspicion directed by Australians towards Asia and encoded in such uses of language is therefore established through the continuities between the historical narrative of Lee's autobiographical book and Joe's experience in contemporary Australia.

The historical narrative of *The Chinaman* also provides a satiric commentary on Australian attitudes to Asia by emphasising the different reactions to racism between "Chinamen" and therefore the imprecision of the category itself. The title of the novel is ironical; it directs attention to the multiple contrasting possibilities in the category of "the Chinaman". In a comparison between Lee and Joe, which the structure of the double

\(^{18}\)G. A. Wilkes, ed., *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1985) 93. In one tale in Castro's *After China*, a distraught white character, Cec, finds similar maxims running through his mind ("Rub a Chinaman for luck. Run one over and you're finished") when he "discovers" a partly Chinese baby (59).

narrative encourages, it is clear that these two characters have entirely different personalities and have considerable differences in cultural background. Their approaches to life in Australia and to Australian racism are strikingly different, a contrast which it is hinted may be linked to Joe's Japanese origin and Lee's Korean background. Joe is more cautious than Lee and takes fewer risks with his personal safety. His philosophy is summed up in an exchange with Dean, his psychologist friend, in which Dean tries to persuade Joe to remain on the "Quovadis" despite the possible danger. Joe's reply is that "I'm not trying to be big, I'm trying to last" (69). Joe is careful not to risk offending anyone. In justifying his decision not to ask a woman to dance, because he might potentially anger "someone", he seems to be protecting himself from a particularly male attack. His explanation is:

"I'm going to keep my corner. I want to finish this trip in peace; I survive by my cowardice" (119).

There are some hints that this conduct may be linked, in part, to Joe's Japanese background, which has given him a very polite manner. In contrast, Lee declares his inflammatory ideals on television, declaring that Western leaders sanction violence and therefore that the West's power should be undermined. He attacks the system of national identification, distinctions between East and West and emphasises the importance of the world of the imagination and of high ideals (113). These opinions outrage Lee's Australian interviewer and audience. It is difficult to imagine Lee accepting the advice, as Joe does, to put up with the experience of racism in order to enjoy a rare opportunity to view the Great Barrier Reef. Lee's idealism and his final tragic statement, through suicide, stands in strong contrast to Joe's quiet determination to survive. It is only through the remorseless pressure of negative expectations of him that Joe also commits a dangerous act by refusing to escape by helicopter and staying on board to bring the damaged "Quovadis" back to port. The category of Asian/Oriental/Chinaman applied to both Joe and Lee is thus challenged by
their separation through time and their different values, ideologies and behaviour. The sole similarity between the two perceived "Chinamen" is a self-fulfilling one linked with the impact of racist categories: both characters are driven through the social isolation of racism to uncharacteristic and desperate acts. The historical narrative of the Asian migrant experience and its similarities and contrasts with the contemporary narrative is thus a strong feature of Don'o Kim's novel and enables a more thorough exploration of central features of Australian imaging of Asia and its effects upon the individual of Asian appearance in Australia.

The device of the historical narrative is a central strategy not only of Don'o Kim's *The Chinaman* but also Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* and Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*. In *A Change of Skies* the changing Sri Lankan migrant experience in Australia over the last century is traced through three life spans, through the journal entries of Bharat's Grandfather Edward, the monologues of Bharat and Navarinjini in assimilationist Australia, and later their daughter Edwina's experience of multicultural Australia in the early 1990s. Castro's *Birds of Passage* intersperses the narrative voice of Seamus O'Young, the alienated, Australian-born, partly Chinese narrator, with material from the diaries of his distant ancestor, Shan, who migrated to Australia during the goldrush, and Seamus' fantastical musings about Shan's life. Miller's *The Ancestor Game* also includes several histories of Chinese experience in Australia from the starting point of the mostly fictional ancestral histories of Lang Tzu as embroidered by Lang's migrant friend Steven Muir. Miller's novel returns, for instance, to the 1850s to uncover a possible history of Feng One, the great-grandfather of Lang. The regular occurrence of the historical narrative in these texts can be linked with their subject matter: a sympathetic and comprehensive portrayal of the Asian migrant experience in Australia.
The historical narrative operates as a corrective to a series of interwoven popular images in Australian literature and society about the characteristics of the "typical" Australian citizen and the notion of the Asian as Other and as a perpetual foreigner. The popularity of the historical narrative in texts about the Asian migrant experience is linked to the precarious position of those considered Asian in Australia in the late twentieth century. Asian migrants are particularly vulnerable as a visible minority who belong to small, relatively recently established migrant communities. The lack of a substantial ethnic history in Australia, or a widespread knowledge of that history, means that Asian figures can easily be exoticised; a factor which the above texts often work against.

The literary fascination in recent texts with developing historical connections between modern migrants and earlier migrants to Australia may be linked to a desire to impart the authenticity of history to the imaging of the Asian presence in Australia by emphasising longevity of contact and a continuity of migration. The historical narrative thus questions the construction of the definitions of "Australian" and "Asian" by addressing the perception amongst an Australian audience that Asians have little traditional connection with Australian historical or cultural life except when figured as the Other. The focus on the historical detail of Asian migrant experience and its connections with the present also establishes the foundation for potent expressions of a unique, hybrid, partly Australian cultural identity for a particular ethnic group. A related point of interest also addressed through the device of the historical narrative is the treatment of Asian migrants by white Australian society, a common subject in recent texts about the Asian migrant experience. The process of the development of Australian racism towards a particular migrant group often contributes to a sense of a unique migrant history which can distinguish a community
from other migrant groups and mainstream Australian society. The emphasis on the distinctive qualities of a particular ethnic group addresses the lack of mainstream knowledge in Australia about the specificities of cultural and ethnic groups often referred to as "Asian". The historical narrative thus plays a dominant role in establishing a literary place for the Asian in Australian society, the questioning of entrenched literary and popular representations of the Asian as Other, and the attempt to introduce to the Australian psyche a basic awareness of Sri Lankan/Chinese/"Asian" histories and connections with Australia. However, as shall be demonstrated below, the extent to which the historical narrative achieves its goal of displacing mainstream stereotypes about Asia is linked with the formal structure of each text and its intrinsic attitude towards history and the notion of origin.

As in Don'o Kim's *The Chinaman*, Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game* is concerned with the social environment and psychology of the migrant, particularly the Asian migrant, in Australian society, and the historical narrative is central to this exploration. The emphasis in Miller's novel is, however, on the process of the development of migrant fictions which are loosely based on the personal voices and details of family history. *The Ancestor Game* is Miller's third novel, and was preceded by *The Tivington Nott* (1989), in which a young city boy from London begins work on a farm in Wiltshire and finds parallels between his own isolation and vulnerability as an outsider and the hunted deer (the Nott); and *Watching the Climbers on the Mountain* (1988), in which a hard-working young Englishman arrives on an isolated Queensland cattle station in the tense height of summer. In *The Ancestor Game*, Miller explores once again

20 The role of a literary emphasis on unique historical experience and suffering in shaping a sense of a cohesive ethnic community is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the Indo-Fijian perspective of Satendra Nandan's and Sudesh Mishra's texts discussed in Chapter 2.
22 Alex Miller, *Watching the Climbers on the Mountain* (Sydney: Pan, 1988).
notions of tribalism, group loyalties and the experience of being a displaced and vulnerable outsider.

The narrator of The Ancestor Game is Steven Muir, an English migrant with a mixed Irish and Scottish heritage who becomes fascinated by the lineage and life of Lang Tzu, a Chinese painter, who teaches at the same high school. Lang emigrated from China to Australia when he was ten years old and is haunted by the terms of his exile, his childhood experiences in China and his current sensation of displacement. With Lang's eclectic guidance and the inspiration of paintings, diaries and even a beautiful tea cup, Steven fashions a series of fictions based on Lang's life. He explores the personality and beliefs of Lang's friend and mentor, the thoughtful German doctor August Spiess, and of Lang's relatives, including his courageous mother, his gentle and artistic maternal grandfather, his paternal great-grandfather, who found his first fortune in New South Wales, and that great-grandfather's literary daughter, Victoria Feng. This text is full of cultural crossings, of migrants and the children of migrants whose lives are dominated by "otherworlds". Gertrude Spiess comments on her connection to her father's homeland:

I haven't been. I don't intend to go. But all the same I love it! she said with passion. I love everything about it. I can't be critical about Germany (104).

The sentiments of this passage are echoed by Victoria Feng's connection to China, her father's country, and shared by Lang, who left China as a child of ten and therefore sees the land as a source of tantalising mystery. A central theme of this novel is the unreconciled yearning by the child migrant, or the child of migrants, for the imaginary country of the homeland. This is presented as providing a source of tremendous mythical and artistic force but also a sense of isolation for those who feel torn between two cultural traditions. For Miller's migrant characters, the creation of a coherent story about their personal and family histories is vital for their sense of self: the
factual nature of these stories is not represented as being as important as the appeal and validity which they have for the displaced individual.

A common function of the historical narrative is the creation of a sense of legitimacy and belonging between the Asian migrant protagonist and Australian society and this is often effected, as in The Ancestor Game, through the representation in the historical narrative of ancestral contact with an earlier period in Australia. A sense of belonging to Australia is claimed by Steven and Lang in The Ancestor Game through a conglomerate of stories about family members; Australia is made familiar, even home-like, because it provides the backdrop to a section of Lang's family history. A genealogy of ancestors and their stories gradually populate the Australian landscape. Feng One, Lang's great-grandfather, works as a shepherd on Ballarat Station in the 1850s and makes friends with his fellow outcasts, the class-conscious Irishman Patrick Nunan and Dorset, the displaced Aboriginal youth who was brought up in England. Feng finds gold in Australia, he marries Patrick's daughter and has a family in Melbourne. The life of Victoria Feng, Feng One's daughter, is also explored: her childhood impressions of her father, fascination with China, sense of difference from her Irish Australian mother, and finally her realisation that her vision of China from Melbourne is more valuable to her than the reality of China ("How should I imagine China if I were to visit it? It's not visiting I care about. It's not China but the imagining that interests me", 289). Lang is shown by the narrator to be connected to Australia through ancestral historical fictions which cast a sense of legitimacy on his presence in Australia. The claiming through storytelling of an ancestral connection of the protagonist with the Australian landscape and society is a strong feature of texts about the Asian migrant experience. The device of the historical narrative has been used elsewhere to present the written record of an ancestor of the contemporary narrator, as in the journal of Bharat's Grandfather Edward in A Change of Skies and the writing of Seamus
O'Young's ancestor Shan in *Birds of Passage*. In these texts, the contemporary narrator comes to a conviction (usually) of his claim to a place in Australia through the reading of the stories of an ancestor who has written himself into the Australian history and landscape.

Whereas an important (and self-conscious) element of the historical narrative in *The Ancestor Game* is the creation of a sense of an established historical connection between Australian society and a specific ethnic community, *The Chinaman* claims an Asian connection with Australia through alternative, symbolic means. In Kim's novel, the protagonist maps the landscape through travel and observation. His geographical knowledge becomes a symbol of his connection with the land. Although *The Ancestor Game* creates an atmosphere which is full of language, the voices of ancestors and the tension between the desire for both connection and distance from family tradition, the isolated protagonist of *The Chinaman* seldom speaks his innermost thoughts and does not refer to his family throughout his trip upon the "Quovadis". Joe does not claim a sense of belonging to the landscape through language and storytelling, or attempt to map the area he travels with the genealogy of ancestry. The historical narrative of the autobiographical book *The Death of a Princeling* is not written by an ancestor, or even by a fellow Japanese. Joe's silence about his personal opinions seems similar to the silence of the explorer of a new land: he has few words to describe his experience. This silence is also linked to Joe's feeling of oppression. He is perhaps too isolated for the possibility of storytelling: it is difficult to sustain a mythology of one, especially without a sympathetic and creative social group. (In *The Ancestor Game* Lang requires the support of two other hybrid souls, Steven and Gertrude, in this process.) The historical narrative of *The Chinaman* is also unusual because

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23The voices of the individuals in these historical narratives are all male, perhaps a reflection of the predominantly masculine Asian populations in nineteenth century Australia as well as of a continuing tendency towards the perceived legitimacy of "history" over "herstory".
it is set relatively late, in the 1950s to 1960s, whereas in other Asian migrant novels— including Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* and Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*— the historical narrative (or narratives) centres on the earliest of Asian migrants, such as gold diggers or indentured labourers. The distinctiveness of the historical narrative in *The Chinaman* may be related to the general function of the historical narrative which does not provide an (earlier) source of connection to the landscape through (family) history but rather through alternative, symbolic means.

The authenticity of connection between the Asian migrant and the Australian society and landscape is emphasised in *The Chinaman* through the contemporary protagonist Joe's growing empathy with the physical landscape and his geographical positioning. Joe's gradual orientation to the Australian cultural and physical landscape is symbolised by a geographical awareness. His "positioning" of himself is demonstrated during his solo navigation of the "Quovadis" at the conclusion of the novel. His knowledge and understanding of the geographical area is symbolised by the reasoning which leads him to find a sheltered beach in which to anchor the "Quovadis" and his recognition of an important landmark called "Devil's Thumb" which directs him towards his final destination. Again, the journey is represented as personal allegory. As Paul Carter points out with regard to the explorer narrative generally, elements of which *The Chinaman* emulates, geographical intuition can be a unique and personal feature which shapes an individual's identity:

...geographical knowledge was personal knowledge and, in the naming and description of places, it was possible to intimate the very ground of one's own identity.

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24 For instance, the characters of Edward, the Sinhalese aristocrat in disguise as an indentured labourer, in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and Shan, the Chinese gold digger, in Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage*.

It is this intuition which Joe, an inexperienced explorer and a loner, is starting to develop.

Joe is placed in the tradition of Captain Cook, one of the most famous cultural icons of white Australian history. A connection is drawn between Cook's written records of his journeys, which did not contain many personal comments, and Joe's silence about his personal opinions aboard the "Quovadis". Both "explorers" are presented as feeling the lack of an authority to speak in the unusual, foreign location of Australia. Joe's developing appreciation of the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef also seems linked to a greater appreciation of the differences of the Australian landscape and the connection between the Australian landscape and people. Joe learns from the landscape by careful observation. His initial responses to Australian oceanic landscapes involve an impression of alienness which gradually turns to an aesthetic attraction:

At first the water struck him with an eerie sense. It was not because of anything it might hide below the surface but because of the clarity, the visibility, the sudden sight he had never thought he was capable of. He could see, penetrating thirty, forty feet deep, all the way down to where the corals basked in the sun, flowering in every colour that the sun could bring out—the blossoms, the branches, the stumps and the whole trees and the forest in the winding valleys... (72).

This appreciation of a piece of nature, which is preceded by amazement at its unusual features, is echoed in Lee's description of the gradual way in which he comes to appreciate the beauty of the Australian gum tree. Lee makes an observation about an Australian tendency to cultural paranoia and even xenophobia when looking "East" by drawing a parallel from the gum tree, observing that "The Australian didn't venture afield, content in the dry coarse soil" (80). Joe comes to more general conclusions about human nature through his observation of the life of the ocean. He views coral as a coloniser, and sees the pisonia and the tern in the parasitic relationship of

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26Kim's fascination with Cook is also highlighted in the subject of his oratorio "Death of Captain Cook". Gunew et al., 132.
racist and object of racism. By the conclusion of *The Chinaman*, Joe has made a claim to the Australian landscape through his appreciation of its attractions, his connections between landscape and people and a geographical understanding of the area.

The "Quovadis", in a parody of Cook's "The Endeavour", becomes lodged on the Great Barrier Reef but there is little heroism or teamwork as all the crew except Joe abandon the ship, confident in the powers of the coastguard and the insurance company. Unlike the apparently heroic sailor of history books, James Cook, Joe bungles in his attempt to save the "Quovadis": he destroys the interior in an attempt to work the engines and the boat sinks before reaching shore. Nevertheless, Joe's personal flaws seem less to blame than the fact that he inhabits a post-heroic age\(^\text{27}\). Like *The Ancestor Game*, Kim's novel claims the country through a process of mapping; it exhibits the familiar features of Asian migrant fiction's desire to establish an authenticity of connection between Asian migrant characters and Australia. However it installs the markers of personal travel and experience of the natural world rather than the imaginative placement of ancestral fictions.

II

Although Kim's *The Chinaman*, Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Castro's *Birds of Passage* and Miller's *The Ancestor Game* share the device of the historical narrative, the final function of this literary strategy as an interrogation of mainstream history regarding the position of the Asian Australian varies considerably between these texts. A common tension in migrant fiction is between the desire to disrupt received Australian history, with its emphasis on Anglo-Saxon experience, and the desire to employ the authority of historical contact in constructing a sense of ethnic identity and

belonging for an ethnic group. This ambivalence towards history is familiar to minority groups which resist the power of a cultural centre. For instance, Helen Tiffin has argued with regard to the post-colonial novel that the foundations of the new world colony rest on the corruptions of the old and therefore the post-colonial desire to dismantle received or imposed authority relies on the structures of the imperial system. The particular urgency to resolve this tension regarding the notion of history in texts about the Asian migrant experience is, as I have tried to illustrate, related to the particularly vulnerable symbolic and sociological position of contemporary Asian migrant communities in Australia.

In the following discussion I make use of the term "historicism" to refer to the assumptions and standards underlying traditional historical discourse, such as the valorisation of coherence and linear continuity and the acceptance of notions such as the theory of origin, the unmediated historical text and the objectivity of the historian. In contrast "New Historicism", as practised by Stephen Greenblatt amongst others, is "'new' because it eschews the univocal assumptions of historical coherence in the 'old' historicist claim". Another New Historicist, Hayden White, also challenges the foundations of traditional historical discourse by examining the qualities of history as narrative. The attempted resolution of the ambivalence towards ("old") historicism in Asian migrant texts often occurs in the creation of a unique migrant history, which is maintained through the use of unusual devices that create a space for the construction of a sense of cultural identity at the margins of traditional historical discourse. For instance, the devices of the personal voices of family (alive or dead) in a

historical narrative and the collection of unusual fragments from a cultural past, such as the folktale, provide potent sources of cultural authenticity and historical reference while maintaining a distance from the tainted evidence of official documentation and formal archival material assembled by a dominant, Anglo-Australian cultural group.

A common strategy of texts about the Asian migrant experience is the use of personal voices of family and autobiography to foster a sense of cultural authenticity. The voice of an ancestor of the modern narrator often provides the historical narrative and is rendered in the first person, which draws on the popularity of the autobiographical voice in migrant writing and its ethnographic authority. In Gooneratne's long prose works *A Change of Skies* and *Relative Merits*, the emphasis on the sphere of the family, the workings of the household and domestic life and habits provides an unusual insight into cultural traditions and a historical moment. In a disruption of the structure of traditional historical discourse, the dominant voice of the narrator in Yasmine Gooneratne's family history *Relative Merits* is interrupted and occasionally challenged by the competing voices of different relatives, all certain that their story is the correct version of "what actually happened" (See Chapter 1). These voices are, however, maintained under order by a dominant and mostly unreflexive narrator. Through the voices of personal experience and family history, texts such as *Relative Merits* and *A Change of Skies* move away to some extent from the authority of traditional historical discourse and thus theories of origin, but do not make a radical departure from the realist genre. The contribution of the voices of family and an exploration of ethnic history through ancestry also occurs in Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*, through the randomly discovered and speculative histories which Steven Muir invents, and the voice of the gold digger Shan in Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage*. However, as I shall discuss below, these two novels manage to move beyond the creation of a space on the margins of history to a more profound
interrogation of received versions of the past by rejecting historicism and to some extent realism.

Within the strategies of the realist genre, texts about the Asian migrant experience draw on a combination of cultural signifiers to create a sense of ethnic authenticity while injecting a note of suspicion into the official documentation and supposed objectivity of traditional historiography. A pastiche of cultural and personal signifiers drawn from the protagonist's homeland creates a "history" which makes use of elements that have been ignored by conventional historical discourse. For instance, Relative Merits employs photographs, popular songs, letters, folktales and nursery rhymes to foster a sense of the social atmosphere for the Sinhalese élite in Ceylon from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s. The folktale is one of the most popular of these devices, which are drawn from the edges of historical reference to establish a sense of cultural authenticity and tradition.

Folktales and mythology contribute to the rewriting of history in Yahp's The Crocodile Fury, Anggraeni's Parallel Forces, Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made and form the basis of Don'o Kim's play "The Bell". In Gooneratne's novel, A Change of Skies, the migrant protagonists maintain connections with Sri Lanka through the telling of folktales, and the collection of traditional recipes, as well as the recuperation of Grandfather Edward's journey to Australia and his experiences in the early nineteenth century. The adaptability and air of universality of the folktale are this device's most appealing features for translation to an Australian audience. Hayden White has observed the transcultural potentiality of the

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31Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family is a Canadian example of the family history genre which is also narrated by a Sri Lankan migrant. The narrator explores the Ceylon of his parents' youth and makes use of excerpts from journals, voices of different relatives who were there, the lyrics of songs and title of films of the period. The central text is in the varied modes of poetry, travel diary, prose memoir and photographs. Michael Ondaatje, Running in the Family (Pan: London, 1982).
narrative\textsuperscript{32}, but the folktale is perhaps the mode most readily translated across cultural boundaries due to its internationally recognisable form, its communication of a moral or social message through narrative and emphasis on common human failings. For instance, although derived from a Korean folktale, Kim's play "The Bell" has cross-cultural appeal because of the familiarity of the characters and the dynamic of relationships which occur in any society; its central characters are a naïve, idealistic young man and a wise prostitute. In a classic tale of the underdog against the system the prostitute must convince the young bureaucrat of the church that the sacrifice of her baby will not bring peace. Within the context of the genre of the novel, the folktale appears as a fragment which, with many other remnants from the homeland and from the Australian experience, conjures up a distinct sense of historical and cultural place. The folktale is a prose narrative which is often underrated because of its association as a form for women and children but can become, in the context of the fictional life of a migrant, an "authentic" remnant of home and a potent symbol of cultural difference. The folktale as a cultural signifier also has, as noted above, the important quality in texts about the Asian migrant experience of being easily translatable to the Australian reader. The challenge to the form of conventional historical discourse through the folktale opens a space at the edges of the historical narrative for cultural minorities which have often been excluded from traditional Australian historical or literary discourse. Nevertheless, in creating a position at the edges of literature and history, the use of the device of the folktale (or the personal voices of the family) can also result in the temptation to appeal to the source and authority of these grand narratives.

In texts which are less dependent upon the techniques and outlook of realism, such as Miller's \textit{The Ancestor Game} and Castro's \textit{Birds of Passage}, the creation of a space for an ethnic history at the margins of

\textsuperscript{32}White, \textit{The Content of the Form}, 1.
traditional historical discourse is presented as a subject of concern for the
migrant characters, but these texts are also concerned with historiography
and challenge fundamental principles of historical discourse. A central
assumption in these texts, which is shared by the New Historicist Hayden
White, is that history must be considered as narrative, that to some extent
all history is fiction, and thus "that there is no way to get past texts in order
to apprehend 'real history' directly"33. (In White's The Content of Form, he
contends that historical discourse is composed of "historical stories" rather
than factual accounts, and that historicism attempts to deny its nature as
narrative but is exposed by its reliance on the qualities of coherence and
meaning that narrative can supply in advancing appealing versions of "the
real")34. In Miller's and Castro's relatively self-conscious texts, the
problematisation of the notion of the existence of objective history results in
a questioning of the authority of the discipline of history, casting even the
notion of ethnic history into the realm of a necessary fiction. These texts, as
I shall illustrate below and in Chapter 5 (with regard especially to Brian
Castro's Birds of Passage), attempt to unseat the collusion of historicism and
realism by bringing into question the notion of the transcendental subject,
particularly the grand narratives of History (and thus linear time) and
Literature35. The historical legitimacy of an ethnic history is dismissed in
Castro's and Miller's texts by the suggestion that all histories are always
ambivalent, multiplicitous and problematic. As illustrated below, this
perspective is achieved in The Ancestor Game through a combination of the

33The quote is Said's paraphrase of Hayden White's arguments in Hayden White,
Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe (Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins UP, 1973), and Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism
34White, The Content of the Form, 1-25.
35Bhabha adopts Foucault's connection between historicism and realism, and suggests that to
conceive of the the subject of difference (for Bhabha's purposes, the colonial subject) requires
the rejection of the collusion between historicism and realism by the abandonment of the
notion of the origin of writing as linear time consciousness. Homi Bhabha, "Representation
and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," The Theory of
Reading, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Sussex: Harvester, 1984) 98.
explicit philosophical discussion of Miller's migrant characters and their imaginative life and the formal qualities of the text.

In *The Ancestor Game* the difficult ground of migrancy and its connection with history is highlighted and traced through the character Lang Tzu and his relationship with the writer Steven Muir. This exploration of history in a postmodern world also initiates an exploration into the condition of modernity, specifically the struggles of the individual to come to terms with an existence in which the notion of the point of origin has been dismantled. A quote from Søren Kierkegaard which prefaces *The Ancestor Game* flags the interwoven discussion of history and modernity which is developed as a major theme in the novel:

Our age has lost all the substantial categories of family, state and race. It must leave the individual entirely to himself, so that in a stricter sense he becomes his own creator.

In Miller's novel the migrant is inspired by the fragmented nature of migrant life to embark on an analysis of many social categories, including those of family, state and race.

The character of Lang exhibits the most thoroughly displaced and divided life; he is the archetypal migrant. He is presented as having, even as a child, a particularly dimorphic nature and existence. After witnessing Lang's breech birth, Spiess predicts that this child will, like himself, be a wanderer and "one day embark upon his restless search for a homeland" (116). Spiess' greatest concern is that Lang will be an eternal traveller. Lang's dimorphism is hinted at by his physical appearance: his eyes look in different directions, towards both East and West; he appears Janus-faced. Further, during his childhood Lang's time is divided between two parents and two cultural traditions:

...Lang existed in two distinct forms... In Hangzhou he wore Chinese clothes and spoke Mandarin and was forbidden by his mother to do otherwise; and in Shanghai he wore European
clothes and spoke English and was forbidden by his father to do otherwise (166).

As an adult, Lang seeks a place for himself as a Chinese man in Australia. Although August Spiess reassures Lang that "dimorphism was more a divine gift than an impediment of life", a conviction that Spiess finds true for himself in finding "exile... the only tolerable condition", Lang has difficulty in fully accepting this postmodern perspective (264). The narrator, Steven Muir, takes on the role that the character of August Spiess played in Lang's childhood by creating a (more thoroughly documented) interstice for Lang between mother/father, China/Australia, East/West, fiction/fact; on one level, The Ancestor Game is Steven's record of the process by which he comes to write Lang's homeland. A central element of the characterisation of the protagonists of The Ancestor Game is the emphasis on the importance of history to the individual, and in particular to the migrant. Further, it is suggested through Lang's dimorphism and fascination with the past, that the process of coming to terms with the multiplicity of history also involves a reconciliation with the uncertain cultural loyalties of a postmodern world and the demise of the transcendental point of origin (in History as in other grand narratives). Thus migrancy, postmodernism and history are presented as having a dense and complex relationship. This area is explored in considerable depth in The Ancestor Game through the postmodern style of a fragmented family history composed of personal fictions and its emphasis on divided loyalties and instability, which the displaced Lang can eventually accept as relevant for himself.

The personal and family "history", or rather histories, which Steven Muir creates for Lang and which dominate The Ancestor Game are composed of a number of non-chronological and overlapping tales which begin from different starting points and speak in voices of similar power. These histories are fragmented tales with strong fictional components, multiplicitous beginnings and subjectivities, and a repeated emphasis on
the mediated nature of reality in historical and literary texts. The numerous voices and starting points of history and, by implication, literature in *The Ancestor Game* recall Said's argument, expressed in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, that the most positive kind of beginning is that which eschews continuity and, in contrast to the closure and domination of the notion of origin, is "very much a creature of the mind, very much a bristling paradox"36. Said emphasises the power of the beginning "as the first point in a given continuity" which has "exemplary strength equally in history, in politics and in intellectual discipline" and is particularly relevant to literature because "man [sic] uses language to establish continuity, as well as to formulate concepts, by exploiting the ability of language to indicate (actually, to assert) the existence of continuity and concept alongside dispersion and particularity"37. The separate historical narratives of *The Ancestor Game* appear to conform to Said's sense of a liberating "beginning": each provides a new starting point and often a new subjectivity. Further, the continuities which flow from a beginning are challenged by the ways in which the narratives are combined: they are not subject to a linearity of time which enforces a continuity and coherence on both history and realism. Perhaps most significantly, the historical narratives are also presented as having a momentum and reality beyond that of their creator: even before Steven Muir begins the process of imagining and recording his perception of Lang's family history, the tales of Lien, Feng and Lang's other relatives appear to insert themselves between the records of Steven's early encounters with Lang. The boundaries of authorial creation are challenged as the stories are presented as existing beyond the reach and dominance of linear time, the most powerful source

36Said defines a beginning as "a consciously intentional, productive activity... (and) whereas an origin centrally dominates what derives from it, the beginning (especially the modern beginning), encourages nonlinear development, a logic giving rise to the sort of multileveled coherence of dispersion we find in Freud's text, in the texts of modern writers, or in Foucault's archaeological investigations"(372-373). Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, 76-7.

of coherence in history and literary realism\textsuperscript{38}. Miller's text does not depict history as a "genealogical sequence"- which Said refers to disparagingly as "mechanical, linear, a weak and unattractive process"\textsuperscript{39}- but rather recalls Foucault's enabling definition of genealogy as a complex form of history which, in Gary Gutting's reading, "(undermines) grand narratives of inevitable progress by tracing the origins of practices and institutions from a congeries of contingent 'petty causes'"\textsuperscript{40}. The Ancestor Game thus introduces a debate about historiography through the collective structure and the internal workings of its historical narratives: the rich and seemingly random combination of historical narratives forms a labyrinth of stories that introduces a sense of chance and discontinuity by touching on many events and, with equal force, mingling officially documented "facts" and the idiosyncracies and personal lives of individuals.

Another fundamental way in which The Ancestor Game challenges historicism is through its emphasis on the material and historical construction of the narrative: a central theme of Miller's novel is the impact of individual values, beliefs and knowledge on historical and fictional narratives. This emphasis may be contrasted to the concerns of the discourses of historicism and realism which do not consider historical and ideological determinants and therefore, according to Homi Bhabha, remain "unmediated and universal because the unity of tradition lies in an absolute presence- a moment of transcendent originality"\textsuperscript{41}. In The Ancestor Game the liberating qualities of fiction itself are celebrated. For the perceptive, significantly named character August Spiess, the expansion of possibilities which fiction allows is far preferable to the finite limitations suggested by traditional historical discourse. In his diary Spiess records a period of depression in which he feels that:

\textsuperscript{38}Bhabha connects history and realism with the coherence of linear time. Bhabha, 96-97.
\textsuperscript{39}Said, Beginnings, 351.
\textsuperscript{41}Bhabha, 97.
I am a being without meaning. I am set aside from the great project (266).

Spiess' liberation from such feelings of meaninglessness is connected to his discovery of the virtues of subjectivity and the fictional nature of history:

The true facts of history, then, what are these? What can they possibly be? Before I walk along the esplanade this morning on my way to drink coffee and to read newspapers, I must insist that all histories are nothing more than mere fictions. In that case, however, and how much less palatable this possibility is to me, might not all our wonderful fictions be nothing more than mere histories? (266).

Spiess finds the expansiveness of fiction more reassuringly inclusive than that of history and in this sense he seems very much like one of many of Miller's Australians: hybrid souls in the process of imagining a new reality. The fragmentation and freedom of the imaginative world and fictional language is celebrated. This lack of ideological closure is presented as leading to many benefits. For instance, the notion that Australia is a place still being imagined has a significant effect on the attitude towards migrant groups; it suggests that Australian nationhood can be constantly amended to include new voices. Indeed, in *The Ancestor Game*, Australia is figured as the quintessential migrant society; a place whose residents all inhabit uncertain areas of identity and belonging. August Spiess' description of Australia to the young Lang highlights the special nature of Australian society:

You are unnamed and must therefore go unrecognised in China. You are literally un-familiar here. But in Australia, which I believe is a kind of phantom country lying invisibly somewhere between the West and the East, you may find a few of your own displaced and hybrid kin for you (260).

This interpretation seems affirmed by the way in which Lang comes together in a friendship trio with Steven and Gertrude to assemble the "historical fiction" of his internal homeland.
A subject of enduring fascination and exploration within The Ancestor Game which highlights again the mediation of all narratives is the relationship of the narrator, Steven Muir, to the subject/s of his writing. The "subjectivity" of the writer is a central theme within Miller's novel and a point of interest which traditional historical discourse denies\(^42\). During the process of tailoring Lang’s history, Steven acknowledges echoes of himself in Lang’s story, as its writer and as a fellow migrant, and finds a place for himself in the Australia which he composes for Lang. The narrator’s creation of a fictional homeland for Lang, and for himself, involves a melding of history and imaginative narrative; it is through this process that the displaced characters in the book, which include many of Lang’s ancestors who look to Australia or China imaginatively, find a place where a life on the margins can be shared by others caught between two worlds. Thus, a central and ironic discussion within The Ancestor Game is the mediated reality of literature and history: the importance of the subjectivity of the writer and the construction of historical and fictional narratives. Miller’s novel explores and rejects the unmediated and universal practices of historicism and realism through its emphasis on the material and historical construction of historiographic fiction, and therefore challenges the foundations of literary realism and historicist discourse. This self-reflexive procedure provides a radical challenge to the notion of the point of origin and presses deeper into the surrounding concerns of history and literature than the creation of a space for an ethnic history within or beside mainstream histories.

The Ancestor Game fundamentally questions the notion of the point of origin by tracing the collusion of History and Literature, of historicism and realism, and emphasising the pleasures of fragments, interdisciplinary crossings and the mediated nature of all narratives. The Ancestor Game and, as I shall go on to demonstrate in Chapter 5, Castro’s

\(^{42}\)Bhabha discusses this characteristic of historical discourse. Bhabha, 93-122.
Birds of Passage, Pomeroy and After China all illustrate the most recent developments in texts which address the Asian migrant experience in Australia. In recent texts there has been a movement away from a straight realist discussion and a presentation of a society which is a reflection of the real (though with positive stereotypes of migrants and specific migrant communities) towards a more intense questioning of the construction of history and the abandonment of realism for an emphasis on language and conceptual apparatus. This movement has clear connections with the literary trend towards a postmodern style and outlook in societies influenced by Anglo-American trends. Miller's and Castro's experimental novels introduce questions about authenticity, historiography, and the distinctions between history and literature. They suggest that a scepticism about theories of origin can be liberating because it opens the way for re-imagining potentiality rather than a reliance on restrictive historicist records of the past. The 1990s imagery of the Asian Australian migrant is thus of an individual with a modern uncertainty, whose subject position encourages, through its instability, a sensitive vantage point for a discussion of the problems of modernity. Fiction about the Asian migrant experience has moved from local and national specificities to the realm of global assertions; a form which paradoxically also reflects a greater confidence about an Australian sense of place and, more specifically, the significance of the Asian migrant experience.
Chapter 5

A Postmodern and Transnational Asian Australian Migrant Identity: Brian Castro's Birds of Passage, Pomeroy, After China and Drift.

Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* (1983)\(^1\) was the first contemporary Australian novel to discuss the "Asian" migrant experience in Australia in the first person. *Birds of Passage* was the joint winner of *The Australian* /Vogel Literary Award\(^2\) in 1982 and began Castro's successful writing career as a novelist. *Pomeroy* (1990)\(^3\), a detective fiction, was less critically acclaimed. It is set partly in Australia and partly in Hong Kong with a Portuguese-Chinese Australian narrator. *Double-Wolf* (1991)\(^4\), Castro's third novel, which focuses on Freud's famous patient, the Wolf Man, was the winner of the *Age* Fiction Prize and two Victorian Premier's Awards. In *Double-Wolf*, Castro made the difficult transition from a discussion of the Chinese experience in Australia, a subject area to which he had become linked in public perception because of his partly Chinese background, to an accomplished, and often irreverent, evocation of the disturbed Wolf Man and his relationship with Freud. *After China* (1992)\(^5\), Castro's fourth novel, is a love story between a Chinese migrant, You Bok Mun, and an unnamed Australian woman who is dying. It focuses on the stories they tell one another, particularly You's tales of China, and is set in an Australian coastal town. *After China* was awarded the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction at the 1993 Victorian Premier's Awards. The courageous

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\(^2\)The Award is open to literary works by writers under thirty-five years of age.


venture of the recently released *Drift* (1994) into an exploration of Aboriginal and settler history in Tasmania and post-coloniality and identity politics has also been widely reviewed and critically acclaimed. The acceptance of Brian Castro as a novelist of merit in the Australian literary scene has recently been emphasised not only by the number of awards his work has received, but also by the numerous references made to his work in articles in journals such as the *Australian Book Review* and *Australian-Canadian Studies*. In 1995 he took up successive appointments as writer-in-residence at Hong Kong University and as Writing Fellow at Canberra's universities. Much of the publicity surrounding Castro's work has been linked with the perception of Castro himself as an exemplar of the "Asian" migrant experience. I will follow a different approach and focus on Castro's textual representations of this experience.

Castro's first and fourth novels, *Birds of Passage* and *After China*, focus principally on the lives of Chinese migrants and their descendants in Australia. This chapter will discuss these two texts in the most detail because of their attention to the migrant experience and Chinese Australian identity. However, some reference will be made also to *Pomeroy*, which does not foreground these issues but presents them as a background to the complex cultural allegiances of the Portuguese Chinese narrator, Jaime Pomeroy, who spent his childhood in Hong Kong and went to boarding school in Australia. Castro's fifth novel *Drift* will also be discussed with reference to its continuities and disparities with *Birds of Passage* and *After China*.

As stated in the Introduction, migrant writing in an Australian literary context has often been cast as untextualised prose of more interest to

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sociologists or oral historians than literary theorists. Another stereotype which has hampered migrant writing has been the notion that texts about the migrant experience are parochially ethnic in content and unimaginative in form and therefore have a limited appeal restricted to a cultural minority. In 1983 Brian Castro’s *Birds of Passage* claimed a broader vista for writing about the migrant experience by proposing the Asian Australian as a cosmopolitan figure and employing the international resonance of modern literary theory. As I shall demonstrate below, Brian Castro’s novels have in some senses revolutionised Australian writing about the migrant experience by encouraging a more expansive scope. The transnational style of postmodern literary devices, intertextuality and wide-ranging geographical reference encourage broader readings of Castro’s work than the biographical and sociological emphasis which pervades many critical responses to fiction written on migrant themes by migrant authors. In the following discussion the term “transnational” is used to emphasise the refutation in Castro’s work of the category of the nation. Castro’s prose does not deny the historical importance of the nation but rather seeks to extend and therefore profoundly challenge the boundaries and legitimacy of this social construct. For this reason, “transnational” is chosen here to describe Castro’s approach, and in particular for its meaning “extending beyond national boundaries”. The prefix “trans-” also provides connotations of transcending, and moving across and beyond, and thus appropriately reflects the fascination with mobility in Castro’s work, with regard to both the geographical place of the individual and the linguistic movement within the text.

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8 Sneja Gunew makes this point in *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1994) xii.
Ommundsen observes that the broader cultural enterprise of postmodernism may be productively regarded as an epistemological crisis which has touched the Western world since the Second World War\textsuperscript{10}. This crisis entails a disturbing recognition of the provisional and fabricated nature of all cultural and social structures and has ramifications for all aspects of contemporary life\textsuperscript{11}. In a literary context, the unifying force of the artist’s subjective vision which characterises the literary mode of modernism is displaced in a postmodern mode by a suspicion of grand narratives and the celebration of heterogeneity\textsuperscript{12}. In a critical piece in \textit{Meanjin} Castro explores these notions, stating that writing in the late twentieth century "seeks liberation from the mythic, the cultish, the communal and cosy" because "(to) write is to be unsettling; the home is porous with worms, the myths are unemployable, the real has been deconstructed"\textsuperscript{13}. Castro's non-fiction pieces are forays into philosophical discussions of literary theory which are firmly placed in personal experience and characterised by an emphasis on the celebration of uncertainty and the destruction of myth. In "Heterotopias: Writing and Location" Castro states with regard to \textit{Birds of Passage}:

I was not interested in utopias, which is what any new nation wants to create. I was interested in \textit{heterotopias}, which are disturbing, and which, as Foucault said "dissolve our myths and sterilize the comforting lyricism of our sentences"\textsuperscript{14}.

As I shall illustrate below, in \textit{Birds of Passage} and \textit{After China} the myth of the nation provides a primary deconstructive focus. Castro's creative writing interrogates humanistic certainties and challenges grand narratives

\textsuperscript{10}Wenche Ommundsen, \textit{Metafictions?: Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts} (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1991) 82.

\textsuperscript{11}Ommundsen, \textit{Metafictions?}, 82.


\textsuperscript{14}Brian Castro, "Heterotopias: Writing and Location," Paper presented at the 1994 Chinese Australian Studies Association Conference in Guangzhou, China, 2. This paper has been published in \textit{ALS} 17.2(1995): 178-182.
through the crossing of geographical/intellectual/generic boundaries and
the highlighting of the process of narrative construction in history and in
fiction. The emphasis on textuality and textual playfulness through
linguistic games and formalist experimentation in Castro's work celebrates
the signification of plurality and attacks modes of writing which assert
positive truth claims. Castro thus draws on the literary philosophies of
Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault both in the
larger literary structure and devices of his novels and in metafictive
discussions of literary theory and artistic postmodernism. In his fiction
Castro uses "postmodern" literary techniques and arguments to present the
Asian Australian as an individual who inhabits the point of intersection
between different cultures and languages and who thus possesses a subject
position of particular perception as well as vulnerability. A consideration of
the perceived divisions between the Asian and (white) Australian in
Australian society forms a starting point in Castro's fiction for an analysis of
the category of the nation and the Orientalist division between East and
West. These notions may be linked with a broader theme of Castro's
novels: an interrogation of large social and linguistic categories.

The use of the term "postmodernism" to describe Castro's writing
requires further qualification because Castro's novels also often draw
powerful images and subjects from modernism, from the social and
historical movement which grew out of the second half of the nineteenth
century and the first half of the twentieth century\textsuperscript{15}, and particularly from
the writings of Kafka and Joyce. The coexistence in Castro's fiction of the
modernist hero and images of the metropolis within a postmodern style
with elements of metafiction, suggests a more complex form of
postmodernism than an ahistorical style which divorces itself from literary
precedents and which can be set in an easy opposition to modernism.

\textsuperscript{15}This definition of modernism is based on Raymond Williams' definition. Raymond
Williams, "Modernism and the Metropolis," \textit{Literature in the Modern World: Essays and
Castro's literary postmodernism is self-conscious, and clearly not ahistorical; it constantly gestures to its debts to Kafka and Joyce and focuses on such modernist images as the metropolis and its representative citizen, the alienated urbanite who makes a virtue of what Raymond Williams has termed "the miscellaneity of the metropolis"\textsuperscript{16}. In light of Castro's texts, my definition of postmodernism does not assert a simple distinction between the literary categories of modernism and postmodernism but rather aligns itself with Linda Hutcheon's contention that:

... the constant complaint that postmodernism is either ahistorical or, if it uses history, that it does so in a naive and nostalgic way, just will not stand up in the light of actual novels... What postmodernism does, as its very name suggests, is confront and contest any modernist discarding or recuperating of the past in the name of the future. It suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present... It does not deny the existence of the past; it does question whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains\textsuperscript{17}.

In Hutcheon's view, the notion of a binary opposition between modernism and postmodernism is a false dichotomy, and the assumption that a postmodernist text is necessarily ahistorical is also invalid. With regard to Castro's novels, these texts frequently foreground intertextual links and, as part of this process, often make lively references to, and uses of, modernist literary precedents while sustaining a constant interrogation of language, words, narrative and surrounding debates. This approach, along with the attention to real historical situations, seems consonant with the style of the postmodern for which Hutcheon argues: the primary emphasis is not the rejection of the notion of history but rather upon exploring the ways in which narrative shapes our understanding of the world.

\textsuperscript{16}Williams, 165.
\textsuperscript{17}Linda Hutcheon, \textit{A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction} (New York: Routledge, 1988) 19-20
The first section of this chapter will substantiate and explore in more detail the transnational perspective of Castro's novels Birds of Passage and After China. The second section of this chapter will discuss the ways in which Castro's novels may be viewed as political, in the broadest sense. In this section I will use Linda Hutcheon's notion of historiographic metafiction\(^\text{18}\) to explore the ways in which Castro's novels to differing degrees maintain a self-consciousness about their literary heritage but also reconnect the readers to the world outside the page through an attention to "the forms and contents of the past"\(^\text{19}\). This section will focus on the relationship between Castro's novel Drift and Castro's novels Birds of Passage and After China. In the third section, I shall return to the notion of the transnational text and place Castro's writing in the global context of the international Asian Cosmopolitan text.

I

A central contention of this chapter is that Castro's Birds of Passage and After China situate Chinese migrant characters in a transnational context, within a global model as postmodern individuals, and thus distance themselves from the potentially parochial and highly specific experience of the Chinese migrant in Australia. A significant feature of Brian Castro's fiction is its avoidance of closure and its scrupulous attempts to refuse all totalising myths, all grand narratives, in the theoretical tradition of Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault. Castro's Birds of Passage and After China explore notions of the cultural crossings of the migrant and questions of nation and nationalism concomitantly with self-conscious explorations of the construction of historical and literary narratives. The nation and related questions of Australian nationhood and

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\(^{19}\) Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 5, 232.
nationalism provide a potent area of discussion in Castro's fiction, particularly in *Birds of Passage*, and are invariably cast as sources of dangerous certainties. These novels challenge the category of the nation and make a virtue of border raids across national, cultural, intellectual and literary boundaries. The Asian Australian migrant protagonist is represented in this context as a cosmopolitan figure plagued by a self-doubt born of an intensified experience of modernity; an individual whose fragmented perspective is communicated through the devices associated with postmodernism. As I shall demonstrate below, Castro's texts refute the notion of a parochial migrant literature by establishing a transnational philosophy which suggests that the nation can be a restrictive social and intellectual category, and that a more liberating perspective would move beyond the acceptance of national boundaries to a cosmopolitan perspective which promotes connections between, and highlights the paradoxes within, the (Australian) nation.

*Birds of Passage* and *After China* explore the place of the individual of Asian appearance in Australian society. The protagonist of *Birds of Passage* is Seamus O'Young, an orphan born in Australia with an Irish name, blue eyes and Chinese features. Seamus is haunted by his sense of difference from those around him and particularly his status as an "ABC", an Australian-born Chinese:

Yes. ABC. I am a refugee, an exile. My heart and my head are in the wrong places. There was no country to which I came, and there is none to which I can return. I do not speak Chinese, but I am learning it. At the Institute where I attend classes they think I am a little strange. I believe my real name is Sham Oh Yung, but I am unable to find any records of my past. I am a truly stateless person. When I go to Chinatown I feel at one with the people, but then the strange tones of their language only serve to isolate me (11).

As this passage demonstrates, Seamus is even uncertain about his name, one of the most important markers of self. He is constantly interrogated
about this basic fact of his identity by fellow Australians, an experience that makes him feel distraught and isolated; he often feels labelled as a foreigner. Seamus displays an ironic self-deprecation- and touch of humour- in describing himself as a "sham" (11). This pun highlights the vulnerable position of Seamus as an individual who must pretend or feign to be entirely Irish or entirely Chinese in a society which cannot cope with the intermeshing of racial categories. Birds of Passage is full of such puns which demonstrate and celebrate the multiplicity of possible connections and exchanges between all categories, thoughts and ideas. The effects of Seamus' isolation as "a truly stateless person" are presented as ambiguous (11). Although this experience causes him suffering- his neuroticism, paranoia and premature ageing are all connected to his alienation from Australian society- it also grants him a rare position of insight with regard to the socially imposed categories of race and nation, (Anglo-) Australian and Asian Other.

The contemporary perspective of the Asian Australian in Birds of Passage is presented as having strong parallels with the vulnerable identities and mixed cultural and geographical ties which many twentieth century individuals encounter. This special way of looking at the world has what might be described as a postmodern emphasis; it recognises the provisionality of culture, and the fabricated nature of all cultural and social structures. Seamus' unusual outlook is shown to be connected with the problems of modernity. As Seamus attempts to decide whether to seek stability in a search for origins or to celebrate the many uncertainties of his life, he draws upon ideas from contemporary literary theory. On one level, Seamus' search for meaning can be seen as a movement from the ideals of structuralism to those of post-structuralism. Seamus' crisis of identity sends him on a difficult path in which he becomes obsessed by the contents of a text, the autobiographical writings of Shan, a Chinese migrant who sought

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20 Ommundsen, *Metafictions*, 82.
adventure and fortune in the Australian goldfields in the late nineteenth
century. Seamus' submersion in the life of an author, Shan, and his
concomitant denial of his own self is symbolised by the premature aging of
his body. In a climactic scene in Chapter 4, Seamus' attachment to Shan's
identity becomes so strong that the personal pronouns of the two characters
become confused. Finally, however, reader and writer are wrenched apart
and Shan catches a frightening glimpse of his reader:

He had seen his reader: a wriggling, blind, white-haired man
spawned by the future on a river bank (104).

Seamus' dangerous dependence on the authority of the writer is thus
broken and, in the next chapter, Seamus sheds all restrictions of origin, the
authority of both author and reader, and discovers a metaphorical ocean of
possibility where he becomes united "with the human stream of which he
had never been a part" (208). In this scene Castro plays once again with
notions of authorship, subjectivity and plurality. The symbolic ocean
recalls, in an intertextual reference characteristic of Castro's prose, Barthes'
description in On Racine (which draws on Nietzsche's The Joyful Wisdom)
of the ocean as text21. When liberated from the restriction of the author,
Barthes writes, the text becomes an "open sea" of significations22.

The notion of the unified and coherent subject is an important area
of investigation in Birds of Passage and, as a result, more general questions
are raised regarding the validity of any totalising or homogenizing system23,
including that of the nation and nationalism. The interest in notions that
are central to contemporary literary theory is a common characteristic of
Birds of Passage, as it is in all of Castro's novels. In Castro's first novel, post-
structuralist literary concepts are used to explore the crisis of identity of the

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Sean Burke, The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes,
23Hutcheon, following Foucault, connects the investigation of the unified and coherent subject
with a more general questioning of any totalizing or homogenizing system. Hutcheon,
"Circling the Downspout of Empire," 12.
character Seamus O'Young, whose experiences of cultural alienation and displacement have meant, to use Salman Rushdie's phrase, that he has had modernism forced upon him. Seamus' insight into the provisional nature of all truths is derived from his position at a point of intersection between categories and definitions of the Australian and the Asian. The fact that these broad social categories cannot accommodate him is shown to lead him to ask questions about the nature of categories and human certainties and, ultimately, the fundamental human category of the self. As I shall later demonstrate with regard to Birds of Passage, the crisis of Seamus O'Young is specifically linked to his condition as an Australian-born Chinese in an Australia which harbours a tradition of hostility towards Asia.

The social isolation of You Bok Mun, the Chinese Australian migrant protagonist of After China is also presented as granting him a particular insight into the issues of modernity. You, like Seamus O'Young, grapples with major psychological and moral preoccupations of the modern world. He exchanges stories with an unnamed, red-haired Australian woman writer who is dying, probably of cancer. You's tales of courtly China, of insatiable Taoist philosophers and perceptive concubines, and of his own experiences in Maoist China, Paris and New York, counter not only the fears of the dying woman but also seem a response to a traumatic and uncertain century in which mass migration is frequent and an individual can have many cultural allegiances. The emphasis on storytelling, narrative construction and linguistic games in the text highlights the notion that there can be no broad certainties, no comforting hierarchies or even generalised fictions. Like the narrators of Castro's other novels, Birds of Passage, Pomeroy, Double-Wolf and Drift, You delights in wordplay: puns, enigmatic statements and aphorisms. Through a discussion of You's many

24"...those of use who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us". Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 (London: Granta, 1991) 12-13.
names and identities in an Australian context, the layers of multiple meanings in this text, its jouissance, are self-consciously highlighted:

"Hey you!" they shouted, and turned on the arc lights. Yes, that was his name. You. You Bok Mun. Broadly speaking, his name meant he was well read. Narrowly speaking, he was just You. Everyman. Or sometimes, just Old China. Touch him for luck. People here gave him an arboreal relation: Yew. He had them planted alongside the hotel. Conifers with elastic wood to withstand the wind... "Hey you!" His solitude interrupted. The loneliness of the long distance migrant (7).

The multiple meanings of You's name include "Bookman", a pun on the literariness of the novel, and are expanded further into Chinese significations: in Chinese "You" is both a surname and a form of humble scholarly self-introduction by an author meaning "foolish" or "fool" ("yu")25. (Such linguistic double codings in a language other than English are a common device in texts about the Asian migrant experience and proffer a sense of subversive inclusion for a cultural minority group). The names of the central characters of After China also provide a linguistic game which sports with notions of subjectivity and metafiction: the narrator's name "You" implies that the nameless writer could be the reader ("I"), encouraging the reader to reconsider the writer's (Castro's) role in the construction of meaning in the narrative.

You is an articulate, highly educated architect who is most at home in Parisian cafés discussing existentialism and seducing young French women; he is a rebel in Maoist China and a misfit in an Australian office. He speaks confidently in the language of artistic postmodernism and proffers tales to the woman writer which are drawn from China, New York, London and Paris. In a world of unprecedented international travel, You moves between nations in a geographical and imaginative sense, and this perspective seems to give him, like Seamus, particular insights about human social constructs, including the nation and nationalism, which seem

dangerously static in their application. Castro uses the figure of the migrant rather as Rushdie has described it, as "the central or defining figure of the twentieth century". In Castro's presentation, the Asian migrant is a cosmopolitan social outsider with a transnational significance as a representative figure of modernity. He (Castro's protagonists are usually male) speaks confidently with the literary voice and preoccupations of artistic postmodernism, a mode which is linked with late twentieth century capitalism, and his cross-cultural experience is presented as lending him a special wisdom about cultural mythologies and scepticism about totalising myths.

Castro's wanderer narrators have uncertain national allegiances which are, to some extent, badges of freedom from what is represented as the restrictive nature of national definitions. Seamus is unable to feel authentically Chinese or Australian as an Australian-born Chinese. You inhabits a world of mobility and transition, he continues to travel the globe through his stories and, as the title suggests, is in some senses suspended between his physical place in Australia and his central imaginative source, China. In Pomeroy, the narrator has ties with both Hong Kong and Australia but feels at home in neither country. This sense of isolation confronts Pomeroy when, with a fellow journalist, he breaks into the house of his employer, the mysterious Stella Wong:

I wanted to say I'd been there before, like Huck Finn; been in an alien apartment, just like the Van Ecks', just like all the alien houses I'd lived in all my life, all the places that belonged to others, all the countries that I'd felt uncomfortable in, displaced, disowned, in transit in and out of people's lives (55).

Similarly, the two major narrators of Double-Wolf- Sergei Wespe, a Russian exile who lives in Vienna, and Artie Catacomb, an American who meets Sergei in Vienna and ends his days in the Blue Mountains- are

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geographically displaced and exhibit a recurrent sense of uncertainty, inauthenticity and loss. The narrators of *Birds of Passage* and *After China* have hybrid cultural identities and multiple national allegiances; they question the legitimacy of divisions between nations and regions, particularly China and Australia, East and West, and in doing so assert that all of these are imagined communities. Their postmodern preoccupations with the affirmation of difference, reality as construction and playful invention support the border crossing of a transnational perspective.

Castro’s Asian Australian narrators are cosmopolitan rather than exotic figures who combine the discourses of postmodern preoccupation and Australian colloquialism. Instead of the traditional, perhaps Orientalist, emphasis on Chinese formality in presentations of Chinese experience, in *After China* You's Chinese wife writes to tell him that her life "is a big bore" and the scientist Me Liao scatters her language with the colloquialism "Sure" (48). Even "You", the protagonist's name, has no ceremony attached to it. This approach may be contrasted to the deliberate "othering" of the Chinese protagonist which takes place in many texts dealing with "Asia" in Australia and for a Western audience generally. In Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* (discussed in Chapter 3), for instance, the distinctiveness of the ethnic Chinese in Malaysia is regularly emphasised through the exclamation "Aiya!" which prefaces much dialogue. Capitalised pronouns are also employed as a traditional literary marker of the Peranakan. For instance, the narrator's mother is addressed as "Useless". A stylistic extension of this principle means that the characters' full names are never mentioned, they are referred to instead with an air of familiarity as: the bully, Grandmother, Mother, the lover, the rich man and so on. The effect of this device is to establish a sense of cultural difference from the Anglo-Australian norms of the majority of the novel's readers, but this strategy also adds to the sense of the exotic already established in *The Crocodile Fury* through numerous references to tropical landscape and the supernatural.
Although You employs exotica in his stories of ancient China, the intellectualism of the enigmatic Chinese philosophers in You’s tales is often comically exposed by the bodily starting point of their great discoveries, a desire for greater sexual potency or the seduction of an uninterested wife, and the humiliations which result from these obsessions. The text’s own use of the connotations of ancient China is thus comically highlighted. The self-reflexive regard of the text acknowledges the hazards and the exotic pleasures in representations of Chinese cultural difference and places Castro’s novels in a far more complex category than Dewi Anggraeni’s prose, for instance, which eschews the exotic by eliding all distinctions between Indonesia and Australia with little self-consciousness or irony. The treatment of Asia and the Asian in *Birds of Passage* and *After China* draws, in a sophisticated and self-conscious fashion, comparisons between national communities rather than emphasising the cultural difference between China and Australia.

In *After China* and *Birds of Passage* a transnational perspective is also assumed, in part, through the strong structural criticisms of the social movement of nationalism and of the sociopolitical concept of the nation itself. The deconstruction of nationalism occurs most thoroughly in Castro’s first book, *Birds of Passage*. A primary interest in *Birds of Passage* is the exploration, and rejection, of certain forms of Australian nationalism. The character of Clancy in *Birds of Passage* can be seen as a symbol of masculine Australian nationalism developed in the nineteenth century: he is a survivor of the Eureka Stockade and bears the name of Paterson’s romantic Hero of the Outback. Through this character, and his interactions with others, the image of the Australian hero is explored and the notion of a tradition of Australian egalitarianism is questioned. Clancy is presented as a not particularly bright or analytical individual who directs his anger about the failure of the Eureka Stockade towards the Chinese gold diggers. In a comic scene in Chapter 3, Clancy gives a benevolent speech to Shan
explaining his utopian vision of a future society, "A pastoral paradise without greed or fear", which would be based on a brotherhood that makes no distinctions between race or religion (155). The absence of any mention of the position of women in this supposedly ideal, egalitarian society is a significant absence which serves to highlight the predominantly male foundations of nineteenth and early twentieth century expressions of Australian nationalism. The structure of this scene is also important. Even as Clancy articulates his wishes for a pastoral paradise in which there are no divisions of power, he is overcome by a desire for political power, to be speaking in front of a crowd of (presumably white) men who nod in approval to his words. Further, there is no sense of a real dialogue taking place: Shan is intimidated, he speaks in pidgin English to protect himself through the anonymity of the stereotype of the "Chinaman", and he grips his shovel in case Clancy should move to attack him. Clancy seems unaware of the unequal exchange of opinions which is occurring between himself and Shan. This symbolic scene suggests that the historical source of the Australian discourse of egalitarianism was unequal in terms of gender and race. Although the novel proposes a faint possibility of genuine communication between Shan and Clancy, the Chinese and the Irishman, in an Australian context, the authorial commentary suggests that the surrounding social atmosphere prevents it:

Centuries of human history had sparked one small covenant in the souls of two men for a brief moment. The wind prevented the spark from catching (158).

Clancy later attempts to kill Shan for becoming Mary O'Young's lover. The brief connection between the two men is lost and Clancy's dream of a peaceful pastoral paradise is broken. As is typical in Castro's prose fiction, a number of factors seem to be at work: linguistic misunderstandings, competition for economic resources (in this case gold), and an unequal positioning of power. Perhaps most significantly, however, an egalitarian
style of nationalism seems beyond reach. Nationalism is presented as emerging from the same foundations as racism, thus endorsing critiques of Australian nationalism since the 1970s, such as Humphrey McQueen's in *A New Britannia*\(^*\)\(^2\). Clancy's inarticulate urge for a nationalist outcome, which he remembers as motivating him at the Eureka Stockade, is based on "the kind of feeling that inspired mobs" (111). This nationalist motivation is also the initial reason for his hostility towards the Chinese. The novel suggests that the structures which give rise to nationalism also underly racism.

In the contemporary Australia of *Birds of Passage* a racial and ethnic essentialism prevails: a white Anglo-Saxon (preferably male) appearance is a prerequisite of "Australianness". Solely because of his Chinese appearance Seamus is required to undergo a reading test for a university scholarship. This knowledge makes Seamus sick with fear, he is comically overwhelmed by the essentialist assumption of inherent "Chineseness" beneath the requirement to undergo a reading test:

I felt sick, my stomach was knotted and I wanted to vomit. Why would they want to give me a reading test? Would the words jumble themselves before my eyes? Would I spout an incomprehensible stream of Chinese? Would the Pentecostal Spirit descend upon me and make me speak in tongues? (80).

In *Birds of Passage*, a national self-definition centred on exclusive notions of race and ethnicity is presented as dangerously restrictive. The desire to categorise individuals through nationality also appears as fundamentally damaging. Seamus observes that:

People are always very curious about nationality. They will go to great lengths to pigeonhole someone. They think this knowledge gives them power (11).

This belief system is shown to have psychologically hazardous effects upon those who fit into more than one category of nation. The Australian-born

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Chinese, Seamus is represented as being in a state of cultural limbo and social rejection. His mental instability is linked with the fact that he does not fit neatly into any of the prevailing categories of race, nation, or ethnic group. The psychological turmoil of the individual of Asian appearance in Australia suggests that a society should not place such importance on clearly defined origins, that this habit of categorisation can cause great damage.

In *Birds of Passage* particular emphasis is laid on the tendency for the nation to be defined through ethnic identity. Castro's first novel emphasises and seems to endorse a view of the nation which is shared by some recent multicultural theory, which contends that ethnic identity and its "shared history, traditions, culture and language" are central to the definition of the nation, and that the concept of the nation must therefore be regarded with suspicion. However, the legitimacy of race and ethnicity for the individual is presented as a more complicated and undecided matter in Castro's novel. Seamus' increasing dependence on Shan's journal illustrates his sense of abandonment in contemporary Australian society. Significantly, the yellow papers of Shan's journal bear a striking resemblance to Seamus' passport but Shan's papers are far more valuable to Seamus' sense of self and identity than the static physical description recorded in his official identification which labels him "Australian". The validity of race for the individual is not completely excluded in *Birds of Passage*. Seamus is shown to draw a sense of legitimacy from feeling Chinese and learning more about his ancestor Shan. Further, Seamus starts to develop a taste for sweet and sour food and mysteriously begins to recite Ancient Chinese poetry. In Brian Castro's fiction the issues of racial and ethnic identity are complex areas for which there are no easy answers.

*After China* also promotes a transnational perspective but takes a different approach to issues of nationalism from *Birds of Passage*: it is less

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concerned with the discourse of nationalism or its effects in Australia and focuses instead on the intersections that can be made across cultures. *After China* depicts national communities which are in a state of flux and which experience constant exchanges across national borders, thus disputing the status of the nation as a discrete community and therefore as a legitimate social construct. The novel frequently draws connections between characters from different cultures and the philosophies of different countries, a strategy which emphasises the intersections and often fluid boundaries between nations. For instance, eclectic connections are made between Kafka and Tao throughout *After China*. The notion of the prolongation of desire and the related fear of the passing of time draws a connection across the divisions between Kafka and Tao, Czechoslovakia and China, West and East. You suggests that Kafka's letters to his fiancée Felice were "like office memos" because they were "a prolongation of desire and the suspension of time", something which is also emphasised in this novel as fundamental to the Taoist philosophy of China (63). The influential concept of the deferral of pleasure in You's description of Chinese society is symbolised by the recurring description of sexual intercourse without male ejaculation. In one of You's autobiographical stories, he also asserts that Kafka "was filled with animal fear, and his heart was attempting to slow down time", a notion which is located in Kafka's fiction (110). The theme of slowing down time is repeatedly connected through references to Kafka and Taoism with the notion of the deferral of pleasure and the parallel pleasures of sex and reading. The eclectic links between Kafka and Taoism in *After China* illustrate the possible connections which can be made across accepted divisions of culture, nation, and the East/West divide. In the novel *Double-Wolf*, as in *After China*, Castro seems to delight in transgressing accepted disciplinary and geographical boundaries such as history, psychology and literature as well as national boundaries between Europe and Australia, Vienna and Katoomba. Crossing traditional intellectual and geographical
boundaries is a common feature of Castro's novels and it contributes in *After China* to an emphasis on the need to transcend the social and intellectual dominance of "the nation".

The traditional divisions between national and intellectual categories are further challenged in *After China* through a system of reference which links You's architectural designs and Japanese architecture with Kafka and Taoism. The concern in Kafka's writing with the relentless progression of time, a focus on the temporal which is shared with Taoism, is related quite bizarrely, to the theories of a group of Japanese architects. The workings of Kafka's stomach, through enzymes and metabolizing, are linked with his fear of buildings and the progression of time. In the Afterword, the concept of "metabolising" surfaces once again, in a description of a school of young Japanese architects who proposed what they called *Metabolist* architecture in the 1960s. This was a "real" school of modern architecture that was developed by young Japanese designers in 1960 who aimed to "(create) a dynamic environment that could live and grow by discarding its outdated parts and regenerating newer, more viable elements". An amended version of this philosophy is outlined in the Afterword of *After China*, in which it is explained that Metabolist architecture attempted "the integration of constant change into a design" through the regular demolition and reconstruction of the buildings (145). You adopts the Metabolist philosophy towards rebuilding after his hotel slides into the sea, an incident which coincides with the death of his red-haired lover. You is unexpectedly pleased by the destruction of his hotel; the process of rebuilding has a resonance for him which translates easily into a postmodern delight in movement, change, and fragmentation. The irreverent connections between Kafka's stomach and You's Japanese-inspired architectural designs in *After China* operate on several different

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levels of meaning. In one sense, the connections in *After China* between stomachs, literature, metabolism, and constant change emphasise the universal experience of human beings as animals with bodies which age and decay over time. In another sense, these apparently incongruous connections form part of a theme of intersections across accepted boundaries: the disciplinary boundaries of literature, philosophy, medicine and architecture, and national boundaries across Czechoslovakia, Japan, China and Australia, amongst others. However, the connection between Kafka's stomach and a little-known group of Japanese architects is also comically incongruous. Castro's work often has puns and ridiculous scenes which warn the reader not to take the text too seriously.

*After China* displays a more optimistic vision of the position of the Asian migrant in Australian society than *Birds of Passage* because it presents ways in which the intimacy between artists can foster cross-cultural communication, exchange and understanding. In *After China* the presentation of the relationship between the woman writer and You suggests that the liberating force of the study of language and narrative can form a common ground between cultures and thereby break down artificial barriers between nations. Unlike Shan, the Chinese migrant of the goldfields in *Birds of Passage*, the Chinese migrant narrator of *After China* is not a complete outcast in Australian society. Although You is a social outsider to some extent, You and the unnamed woman writer have, unlike Shan and the Irish prostitute Mary O'Young, strong points of intersection across the differences in their cultural backgrounds. You and the writer have life experiences in common: their daughters' names have the same meaning, serenity, and their fathers are both fishermen. They are both fascinated by the universal experience of the movement of time; their discussions revolve around related issues of brevity, duration, infinite deferral, and mobility. These two characters meet on the transnational ground of postmodern intellectuals. The discursive practice of
postmodernism, which aims to fundamentally question notions of unity, origin and hierarchy, seems an appropriate vehicle for enabling transnational individuals to speak to one another. However, as is always the case in Castro's self-conscious prose, and as I shall shortly demonstrate, the text's own structural assumptions of the privileged place of postmodernism are also placed under question. As Hutcheon points out in her definition of postmodernism, the simultaneous endorsement and criticism of the postmodern literary mode is a definitive feature of the inherently contradictory and paradoxical postmodern novel. The questioning of a number of postmodern concepts and an attention to, rather than complete dismissal of, literary precedents is also a feature of Castro's non-fiction. In the article "Lesions", for instance, Castro expresses a reservation about the artistic implications of "(critical) self-reflexivity" which he suggests "falls into the black hole of finally saying nothing beyond the agenda of the self". In this article, humanism is not completely condemned for having "lost its way and contributed to the wreck of Western culture" but is identified as having "brought a tiny moment in which art became autonomous and individuation redemptive". Castro's non-fiction as well as his creative writing is characterised by an investigative spirit which explores many sides to a question.

Although the redhaired writer and You share the language of artistic postmodernism, they disagree on certain central points, and these conflicts of belief articulate a suspicion as well as endorsement of the postmodern which is echoed elsewhere in the text. You's beliefs initially embody some of the extremes of architectural postmodernism. His perspective is symbolised by the hotel which he has designed, an intricate glassy construction perched on the headland. The hotel has no central focus point, it has "no enclosed courtyards, no circles, no centres of comforting squares"

30Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 123, 222.
Furthermore, it has a sense of incompleteness, with ramps leading nowhere and a ballroom opening onto a cliff edge. These are all factors which You considers inspiring, declaring that his building is constructed upon a concept of endless surprise. Significantly, the female writer considers his hotel "sad" and unattractive (15). You ostensibly desires infinite deferral and multiplicity, but through her death and through her stories, the redhaired writer presents You with "the gift of the present moment" (143). She introduces questions which articulate reservations about his vision of the world, such as: Is eternal movement really desirable, or can it lead to a lack of appreciation of the present moment? Can postmodernism and its outcomes become, like the writer's description of You's hotel, "vulgar, functional" with "no heart"? The death of this author ironically disrupts the notion of eternal deferral. Despite their differences in opinion, however, You and the writer ("I"?) manage to overcome cultural differences and converse through the self-reflexive discourse of twentieth century artistic postmodernism with its connotations (however illusory) of a global language. As I shall demonstrate below, After China also poses some reservations about the abandonment of the notion of individual subjectivity and a fondness for the metropolis; and in doing so asserts an allegiance with modernism and acknowledgement of historical precedents which is often apparent in Castro's writing.

The literary mode of postmodernism has often been accused of elitism but in creating a sense of a postmodern transnational language in Birds of Passage and After China, the impression of postmodern techniques as a particularly Western preserve is carefully refuted through a linking of these devices with "Eastern" cultural sources. Kumkum Sangari and

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33Sangari warns of the dangers of the institutional and international authoritative of postmodernism: its tendency "to universalize its epistemological preoccupations" and "the postmodern preoccupation with the crisis of meaning (which) is not everyone's crisis (even in the West)"; and which disempowers the nation as an enabling idea. Kumkum Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible," Cultural Critique 7(1987): 183-184.
Arun Mukherjee amongst other theorists have argued powerfully that the crisis of representation, upon which the literary mode of postmodernism is based, is located in a particular historical moment of Western societies. Sangari argues that postmodernist criticism denies Third World writers and critics academic legitimacy and alienates them from literary criticism, thus shoring up the power and centrality of Western critics. Castro's writing is guided by postmodernist inspiration and structurally informed by a Western literary tradition. However, in After China the postmodern notion that meaning is unstable and that change dominates life and text is rejected as a solely Western discovery. The character of You is shown to have uncovered elements of this philosophy in Chinese history and Taoism, and thereby it is suggested that these discoveries also have their sources in the cultures of China and Japan. The linking of contemporary literary theory to China recalls Nicholas Jose's argument that, as a result of the privileging of the written sign, "Chinese culture has been acquainted with the techniques and strategies of deconstruction for centuries". The inclusion of a revolutionary Japanese postmodernist form of architecture is also significant. Both "East" and "West" are shown to share elements of postmodern discovery, recalling Barthes' argument that postmodernist techniques are not necessarily the product of a particular late twentieth century society but that "there may be 'text' (what I would call 'postmodernist devices') in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts". The suggestion in After China is that the prevailing transnational philosophy of the text may be reached, as the redhaired writer and You demonstrate in their conversations and their backgrounds, from different cultural vantage points. This notion

34Mukherjee argues that what "may seem postmodernist and new to cultural outsiders may seem quite ordinary and traditional to those from within the culture". Arun Mukherjee, "Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?," WLWE 30.2(1990): 4.
claims a broader relevance for the discoveries of postmodernism than just Western society.

*Birds of Passage* and *After China* question the validity of national and regional boundaries and other totalizing concepts, but the novels stop short of endorsing an extreme postmodern position by preserving the humanist ideal of the individual, and asserting their debt to literary predecessors by foregrounding two icons of modernism, the modernist anti-hero and the metropolis. The language of postmodernism, with its interest in the crisis of representation and the endless possibilities of language, is both explicitly discussed and celebrated by Castro's narrators. However, in *After China, Birds of Passage* and *Pomeroy*, the notion of the individual is never completely deconstructed. Castro's work generally has one or two dominant narrators— the narrators Seamus/Shan, You, and Pomeroy provide points of authority— and although other voices speak, the strong voices of these narrators do not permit a radical postmodernist fragmentation. Seamus and You are both swept into symbolic Barthesian oceans in the final scenes of each book, and both are shown to experience a sense of linguistic possibility and the manoeuvring of time through wordplay. Neither of them drowns, the experience is not deadly, nor do they remain in the current forever. Their identities remain individual; the subjectivity of a central protagonist remains, and therefore the potential for the "hero" survives. Seamus, You and Pomeroy are, in some senses, heroes: they are representatives of modern existence who possess a particular insight and struggle courageously against considerable social odds. These three characters are embodiments of plurality but also display some of the qualities of modernist heroes: they inhabit Kafkaesque cities which are dark, squalid and have little hope; they lead lonely, sometimes destructive lives and, to differing degrees, they are alienated from the mainstream of society. For instance, the hardbitten investigative journalist Jaime Pomeroy inhabits a bleak, drug-ridden urban world and much of the novel is set in
one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities, Hong Kong. (Indeed, it can be speculated that Castro's provenance in Hong Kong has influenced the fascination with the metropolis in his work). Despite brief friendships with colleagues at work, Pomeroy remains a cynical loner, betrayed by his cousin-lover who he feels is the only person who can understand him.

Castro's isolated, artistic protagonists recall Raymond Williams' descriptions of the modernist text as an "intense, singular narrative of unsettlement, homelessness, solitude and impoverished independence: the lonely writer gazing down on the unknowable city from his shabby apartment"37. (Williams' definition of modernism is of a movement created in the "new and specific location of the artists and intellectuals... the metropolis of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century"38). In Castro's texts, the tall, tanned, laconic Australian bushman is replaced by tentative, verbally sophisticated, migrant urbanites. Seamus, You and Pomeroy are alienated, eclectic individuals who question the basic tenet of heroism, the existence of subjectivity. They introduce transnational connections and habitually interrogate themselves and their society with comic devices and puns which suggest that their narratives, like all subject positions, should not earnestly be assumed to be fixed or final. By employing central icons of modernism, the figure of the alienated hero (which implies the preservation of individual subjectivity) and the metropolis, Castro's novels assert their relatedness to the literary tradition of Kafka, Joyce and Proust. The establishment of literary connections and intertextual references to a modernist tradition, and the references to real historical events and personages in Castro's novels means that they cannot be labelled as ahistorical texts functioning in some free-floating postmodernist zone. They acknowledge their origins in the early twentieth century traditions of literary modernism even as they explore

37Williams, 169.
38Williams, 164.
postmodern possibilities. Moreover, they draw on knowledge of specific locations and historical understanding. The treatment of history in Castro's novels and its implications will be discussed in more detail in Section II.

Castro's novels importantly insert a level of reservation about the abandonment of all stable meaning: yet the individual subject is preserved as a point of organisation and the texts are, to differing degrees, composed of an eclectic but also elliptical construction rather than a complete riot of references. The construction of Castro's texts, although often playful and with elements of metafiction, does not create an anarchic sense of complete disorder in order to undermine all positions of authority. The novels maintain a complex textuality in which waves of references are returned to, embellished, dropped and then later re-established throughout the work. Castro has aptly described this element of his writing as "fugal":

I write in a kind of fugal way and I'm a great admirer of Bach. It's this sort of counterpoint and that sense of voices chasing each other and yet able to come back to the point of origin... There's a purity about it, when the obvious thing to say is that it's a confusion39.

Thus, although Castro's novels delight in a broad field of linguistic play and the destabilising of constructions such as that of the nation, some level of order remains. An important element of what I have termed the philosophy of transnationalism in Castro's novels is the presentation of a postmodern language as a force for communication which can surmount the restriction of national boundaries.

If the concept of stable meaning is to be thoroughly investigated and the totalizing narrative identified and treated with appropriate scepticism, then it would be contradictory for a novel to assert the absolute truth of its own assumptions. The interrogation of certain elements of postmodernism in Castro's novels is one method by which these texts question their own

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narrative practice and highlight their nature as literary constructions. The metafictive process is also used to examine other foundational assumptions. *Birds of Passage*, for instance, explores the generic boundaries between literature and history, fiction and non-fiction, and also questions broader concepts such as that of linear time. While incorporating historical details, Castro's first novel does not comply with the traditional features of the historical novel and its unconventional qualities highlight its construction as narrative. Excerpts from Seamus' and Shan's narratives are alternated in the text, suggesting the separation of past and present. However, as Seamus learns more about Shan's life, his own life becomes mysteriously caught up in the events of the late nineteenth century, and the two life experiences seem to overlap. Shan and Seamus, the contemporary and historical narrators of Castro's novel, actually meet and thus confound the expectations of the traditional historical novel and even challenge the notion of linear time. Reader and text, the past and the present, become intertwined. Seamus' and Shan's meeting is foreshadowed by other crossings between the narrative of the past and that of the present. The contemporary character, Fitzpatrick (the lover of Seamus' foster mother, Edna) seems at one point to be the nineteenth century character Clancy. When Edna travels to Hong Kong to trace Seamus' family history, her brief love affair there parallels Mary O'Young's experience with Shan in the 1880s. The parallels and intersections between historical and contemporary life in *Birds of Passage* promotes the concept of powerful connections between events perceived as "past" and those of the present, and suggests a more complex organisation of events than the notion of linear time. Linear time, and with this the traditional chronological plot sequence, is thus imaginatively reviewed, explored and challenged through a series of juxtapositions, coincidences and parallels. These challenges to foundational concepts regarding divisions between literature and history, the construction of the historical novel, and the notion of linear time challenge
accepted literary hierarchies of order and, evoking a similar suspicion of totalizing concepts, reinforce the philosophy of transnationalism in Castro's fiction. The prevalence of the metafictive regard in Birds of Passage is comically highlighted through the personality disorders of the narrator; Seamus is self-obsessed, a keen masturbator plagued by hypochondria and occasional thoughts of suicide. Indeed, Castro's novels are characterised by such farcically unstable and neurotic narrators. As Ommundsen points out, metafiction has been (unfairly) associated with acts of self-gratification and self-destruction because of the tendency to associate certain actions, such as masturbation or suicide, with reflexivity\(^\text{40}\). The device of the neurotic narrator in Birds of Passage, as in Castro's other novels, may thus be seen to perform a comic and reflexive function by lampooning and highlighting the privileged place of the metafictive moment in the text.

The workings of narrative and language are a thematic priority in Castro's novels; they are the subject of overt discussion and stylistic emphasis. A primary focus of Birds of Passage is on Seamus' reaction as a reader to a set of historical documents, Shan's autobiographical writings. In Chapter 1, Seamus considers his responsibility as a reader:

...why do I feel such an anxiety about the influence of this style, such a sense of guilt as I carry his (Shan's) writing around with me, the yellow pages already worn to the thinness of butterfly wings? ...It is possible that these shards of the past have invested me with a responsibility for another life, demanding that I write honestly. But how can I when my mind is already dislocated by so many illusions, illusions that have sprung from my self-imposed solitude... (5).

This passage highlights the numerous possible readings of a particular text and the problematic relationship between reader and text. It also draws attention to an ongoing theme in the novel: the transformative connection between reader and writer and its fundamental similarities with the relationship between historian and subject. In Castro's Birds of Passage, the

\(^{40}\text{Ommundsen, Metafictions?, 18-19.}\)
investigation of Chinese Australian history is characterised by an interest in history as narrative process. A foregrounding and celebration of textuality dominates the novel. *Birds of Passage* explores issues relating to speech, silence, language, words, and writing through dialogue, Seamus' musings (eg. "Gradually what I read would congeal in my head and certain sentences and phrases would recur, fixing and prescribing my behaviour according to the positioning of the words", 140), and through the contrast of characters such as the mute Mrs Bernhard and the wordy Seamus. Language and narrative construction is therefore a central area of exploration in *Birds of Passage*, as it is in much of Castro's fiction.

*After China* shares with *Birds of Passage* a metafictive preoccupation with language and narrative construction, and displays a fascination with the process of storytelling. Further, in both novels the crossing of national boundaries is supported by the fragmented style of the narrative which privileges the indeterminate and textual playfulness and opposes totalization. In *After China* the story appears to have multiple functions: it can be used to seduce, to shape connections across cultural and national barriers, to imaginatively combine autobiography and social history in order to create a sense of personal identity, and to provide comfort to a dying woman by seeming to manipulate time. Castro's third novel also shares the allegorical references to literary theory which are featured in *Birds of Passage*. *After China* opens with an irreverent vignette about the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu, author of the *Tao Te Ching*, the fundamental text of philosophical and religious Taoism which is composed of wise and pithy maxims. In *After China* Lao-tzu's prodigious output of aphorisms is comically linked with his sexual prowess:

> The venerable philosopher, reputed to be a hundred and eighty years old, had already surpassed becoming an Immortal. Ten partners in the hour before midnight. Almost twelve hundred

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Lao-tzu is convinced that through a careful balancing of yin and yang essences, through "sexual relations with many different women as often as possible without emission", that "Time will... be suspended and exorcised" (1). The connections between sex, death and writing are a source of humorous exploration but serious emphasis in After China. The suggestion is that writing and language can provide insight through parallels into the most significant human experiences. To his horror, the famous philosopher finds himself suddenly impotent and unable to develop a new aphorism, despite experimenting with various sexual positions. He demands an explanation of his young female partner:

"Who are you?" he demanded. "Why have you robbed me of everything I cherish?"

Her face was flushed.

She looked at him steadily and then said very softly: "I am the book you intend to write, the intention of which is jade resplendent. But writing is not jade."

Lao-tzu blinked. He had not expected a woman to speak this way.

"What is it then?" he asked, irritated.

"It is transience, smallness, and the dying of many deaths."

She sighed and fixed him with her splendid eyes (2-3).

This passage suggests that Lao-tzu's perception of his work as possessing the eternal perfection of "jade resplendent" is, like his desire for immortality, deeply misguided. Although Lao-tzu has sought to create a definitive text in his "future magnum opus", the implication is that writing does not have the permanence of jade and the stability of the transcendental point of origin; rather, it is composed of smaller statements which are provisional and limited ("transience, smallness") but which together may form a potentially eternal momentum of meaning ("the dying of many deaths"). The emblematic first chapter of After China can thus be seen to encourage a
particular reading of the novel which incorporates an understanding of the provisionality of the text and the ways in which meaning can be passed along indefinitely through textuality and intertextuality.

Although language is presented as providing liberation in After China, if the notion of an ultimate meaning can be abandoned, this enabling process is made finite by death. The fluidity of literature and life through the process of re-reading and re-writing, or re-invention, is confronted in Castro's novels by the concluding mystery of death. These interactive preoccupations of his creative writing have been outlined by Castro in a non-fiction piece:

I am troubled by the most important and probably the only issue facing every single human being: the inevitability of the moment of death and silence. But at the same time I feel immensely soothed by the consistency of self-invention42.

By linking sex, death and the story, a series of connections made numerous times throughout After China, Castro relates language and narrative to the most pressing of human concerns. A fascination with how the narrative works is thus at the centre of After China as it is in Birds of Passage: language and narrative are presented as being implicated in the most fundamental of human experiences, the sex drive and the knowledge of mortality.

A central fascination in Castro's novels is with the power of intertextuality: a notion which provides a further emphasis on the border crossing theme of these texts. Non-chronological snatches of You's life experiences and family history are interspersed with other fanciful tales based on historical events (such as the discovery of gunpowder and the naming of Macau) and historical personages, including several famous courtesans, a poet, and an emperor from ancient Chinese history. These stories are usually narrated by You, the protagonist, although the occasional tale is told by the redhaired writer about her Australian childhood. The

42 Castro, "Lesions," 60.
numerous tales of After China appear interlinked and inspired by one another, engaged in a potentially infinite dialogue made finite by the irrefutability of her death. After the redhaired writer describes her youthful love affair with a middle-aged Chinese neighbour, You feels he needs to respond to this- "You worked his jaw. Her story needed a counter"- with a story of his own (78). He embarks on a story about Yu Hsuan-chi, the famous courtesan, who falls disastrously in love with the poet Wen T'ing Yun. You also reacts to the redhaired writer's tale of the abandoned child discovered in a rubbish dump with his own tale of the Lady Wu, who had the Emperor's pubescent son "killed and buried in a pit outside the palace" (127). The redhaired writer is provoked by You's tale to explain her own story further. You is also motivated by elements of his own stories towards new topics. Thus each story of After China is presented as being located in elements from a previous story: inspired by an intertextual moment. This technique of interlinked stories has a long tradition in Western literature, going back to Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales and Boccaccio's The Decameron. Given the privileged place of linguistic play and the exploration of language in After China, the interlocking series of stories which seem, in theory, to proceed forever might be seen to be a metaphorical extension of the Barthesian notion of linguistic play: meaning is passed along indefinitely from one word (or in this case, story) to another. However, in Castro's text this dialogue is interrupted when the redhaired writer dies. As Wenche Ommundsen has noted, in Castro's novels "the death of the author is both real and metaphorical"43.

The stylistic emphasis on plurality and heterogeneity within Birds of Passage and After China is crucial to the promotion of a transnational vision within these texts. Multiple meanings are praised and highlighted through puns and intertextual references, and accepted literary forms and philosophical assumptions are self-consciously interrogated to open the

field of linguistic play. Brian Castro contends in his paper "Heterotopias: Writing and Location" that literature can "be unsettling" and can encourage a philosophy of "transition":

I want to be someone else, somewhere else, in order to see myself. We seldom have this sentence in our literatures. Its shifting nuances, its dynamism, its projections, threaten the establishment of a simple connection between place and identity. This polarisation which makes one either an insider or an outsider is what I have called in the past, the unfortunate bifurcation of the cultural mind. Challenging that, it seems to me, is the very crux of writing as a vocation. I am keen to see that Australia, in its self-involvement in seeking a definable and immutable identity, will also discover the temporariness and transitoriness of all cherished theories...44.

The idea that literature can be "unsettling" and the emphasis on "the temporariness and transitoriness of all cherished theories" suggests that literature can both usefully identify and expose totalizing myths and binary oppositions and, as a necessary part of this process, also self-reflexively examine its own conceptual assumptions and practices45. The focus of Castro's fiction on breaking down accepted boundaries between nations, and between East and West, is appropriately reflected in the privileging of notions of uncertainty, transition, and the self-conscious devices of metafiction (such as are found, also, in the writing of Borges, Calvino and Peter Carey's The Illywhacker). Castro's novels celebrate the notion that meaning is passed along indefinitely through textuality and intertextuality and the potential for the text to be, in Barthes' words, "paradoxical", "plural" and "radically symbolic" because "its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular it can cut across the work, across several works)"46. The verbal texture of these two novels can thus be seen to contribute to a questioning of the notion of the nation through a privileging of the deconstruction of all totalizing concepts and the notion of plurality.

The notion of endless movement, transition and "cutting across" are highlighted in a linguistic emphasis in *Birds of Passage* and *After China* and are appropriately focussed in the figures of the migrant narrators.

The transnational philosophy of *Birds of Passage* and *After China* is thus expressed principally through: cosmopolitan migrant narrators, based in Australia, who act as potent symbols of modernity and thus reach across national boundaries; the linguistic deconstruction of the nation and nationalism within the texts, particularly in *Birds of Passage*; the emphasis on crossing traditional borders between intellectual and national borders and the liberation that it can bring; a self-reflexive perspective which examines its own narrative practice and thus seeks to avoid the creation of its own totalizing myth; and the textual emphasis on the joys of a necessarily self-reflexive celebration of plurality. The presentation of the Asian migrant within a transnational context is a central reason for the critical appeal of Castro's fiction in the 1980s and 1990s: it sketches a broader arena for writing about the migrant experience, and encourages, through its audacious and complex textuality, a literary reading rather than the type of biographical or sociological reading which has pervaded most critical interpretations of (Asian) Australian migrant writing.

II

References to history, including national histories, family history and historiography, provide a common theme in contemporary representations of the Asian Australian migrant experience. In Castro's novels the place of historical reference is theoretically charged because of the pervasive use of devices associated with postmodernism. Postmodern writing has been criticised by theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton for being apolitical and eschewing vital links with history. My contention is that Castro's writing is not only clever and witty fiction, but in

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47I make this point recurrently throughout this thesis, but especially in Chapters 1 and 4.
some senses both historical and political, and that these qualities are intertwined in a distinctive way. Castro's use of the reflexive mode can be seen to have an element of political involvement through its metafictive qualities because, as Wenche Ommundsen points out, "by calling attention to its own process of mediation and construction, the reflexive text points to the cultural and ideological codes which inform the construct we call 'reality'"\textsuperscript{48}. However, more importantly for my purposes, Castro's novels can also be viewed as "political" in the sense that they move to some extent beyond the political qualities of reflexive techniques to a greater awareness of extra-textual realities, often through a system of historical reference and parody.

Linda Hutcheon's description of the postmodern novel as "historiographic metafiction", a form that is "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political"\textsuperscript{49} will be used to describe and substantiate the ways in which Castro's novels, which can be accurately described as postmodern in technique, have a political meaning which relies on both self-reflexive elements and historical reference. After a discussion of the ways in which Castro's \textit{Birds of Passage} and \textit{Drift} may be considered as historiographic metafiction, and therefore in some senses political and historical, I shall briefly explore the ways in which Castro's novels enter what Homi Bhabha calls the "theoretically innovative, and politically crucial" area of the interstitial perspective through the subject position of the Asian migrant\textsuperscript{50}. I will then consider the post-colonial concerns in Castro's fifth novel \textit{Drift} in which a stronger sense of political agency is developed. Although Hutcheon argues that the postmodern novel has political qualities, she also usefully distinguishes it, in her essay "Circling the Downspout of Empire", from feminist and post-colonial writings which

\textsuperscript{48}Ommundsen, \textit{Metafictions?}, 86.
\textsuperscript{49}Hutcheon, \textit{A Poetics of Postmodernism}, 4.
\textsuperscript{50}Homi Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (London: Routledge, 1994) 1.
have overt political agendas\textsuperscript{51}. I shall draw on Hutcheon's distinctions between the post-colonial and the postmodern to discuss the continuities and departures between Drift and the postmodern Birds of Passage and After China. The ways in which Castro uses a post-colonial theoretical framework to reimagine the dilemmas of colonial experience in Drift will be explored, as will the implications of Castro's accomplished movement from Asian migrant to Aboriginal experience and the potential for exchange between the two discursive areas.

The foregrounding of intertextual and modernist links and the use of historical events and personages in Castro's novels provide a historical context in these works. Castro's novels recall Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction as:

...those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages: The French Lieutenant's Woman, Midnight's Children, Ragtime, Legs, G., Famous Last Words. In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative- be it in literature, history, or theory- that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic meta fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past\textsuperscript{52}.

Hutcheon refers to the "fundamentally contradictory" or "inherently paradoxical" nature of the postmodern text, which "both install(s) and subvert(s) prevailing (artistic and ideological) norms" by inscribing historical discourse but also undermining it through self-reflexive structures and a parodic and ironic use of history\textsuperscript{53}. Postmodern culture, in this sense, does not deny history or our dominant, liberal humanist culture: it acknowledges that it is implicated in that which it seeks to criticise and

\textsuperscript{51}Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 167-189.
\textsuperscript{52}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 6.
\textsuperscript{53}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 123, 222.
therefore attempts to problematise rather than implode dominant cultural notions\textsuperscript{54}. In exploring issues surrounding postmodernism, Lyotard explains that whereas modernism contends that it is:

...possible and necessary to break with tradition and to begin a new way of living and thinking. Today (as postmodernists) we can presume that this "breaking" is, rather, a manner of forgetting or repressing the past. That's to say of repeating it. Not overcoming it\textsuperscript{55}.

Parody is seen as an appropriate form for a postmodern enterprise which is both critical and complicitous because parody, Hutcheon suggests, is "a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing that which it seeks to describe"\textsuperscript{56}.

In historiographic metafiction, the historical references are used reflexively because of the continuous "overtly metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs"\textsuperscript{57} and devices such as parody and irony. Thus, in Hutcheon's words:

\begin{quote}
(the) intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction... offers a sense of the presence of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces- be they literary or historical\textsuperscript{58}.
\end{quote}

In Hutcheon's definition of the postmodern novel, the text focuses on narrative construction, textual mediation and "the inadequacies of totalizing systems and of fixed institutionalized boundaries" rather than asserting that there is no history or no reality beyond the page\textsuperscript{59}. As "historiographic metafiction" then, Castro's novels may be seen to move beyond what Patricia Waugh has termed the "aesthetically radical" quality of a postmodern text- which, through reflexive devices, promotes a scepticism and recognition of cultural conventions\textsuperscript{60} to situate the text

\textsuperscript{54}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, xiii.
\textsuperscript{56}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 23.
\textsuperscript{57}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 124-125.
\textsuperscript{58}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 125.
\textsuperscript{59}Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism, 224.
\textsuperscript{60}Ommundsen, Metafictions?, 86
within a broader discursive context through parodic and ironic historical references.

The historical content and degree of narrative organisation in Castro's novels is unlike Jameson's notion of pastiche as ""the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion"". In Castro's novels (as in his non-fiction) numerous intertextual allusions affectionately acknowledge the inspiration of literary predecessors and indicate further areas of interest for the reader. In *Birds of Passage*, for example, references to Roland Barthes and Patrick White are wittily (or cleverly) interspersed; in *After China* references to Kafka and his writing prevail, and there are also references to non-fiction authors and texts such Lao-tzu and his *Tao Te Ching*. Further, the treatment of modernism in *After China* is more complex than the indiscriminate use of style and reference which Jameson attributes to the postmodern text. As I have indicated earlier, this novel does not simplistically reject all elements of modernist writing or ignore its influence on the postmodern form. *After China* questions notions associated with modernism, such as the unity of the single artistic vision, but also acknowledges the historical influence of the modernist text on the structure and content of the novel itself. The treatment of modernism in *After China* thus recalls Hutcheon's description of historiographic metafiction as a paradoxical literary mode with a "contradictory relationship to liberal humanist culture" which it seeks to "(contest) from within its own assumptions".

A further illustration of the double-edged relationship with modernism expressed in Castro's novels is the refusal to posit what Lyotard calls a master narrative, such as art or myth, to explain the past and the simultaneous recognition that the desire for stability, permanence and a vision beyond the provisional is a common human need. As in Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction, Castro's novels

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suggest "that such systems are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary; but this does not make them any the less illusory"\textsuperscript{63}. The appeal of a consolatory modernist notion of a master narrative forms a central theme in \textit{After China}, in which many figures, across cultures and across time, are shown to seek permanence and stability. The character of Lao-tzu seeks certainty in writing, in his plans for completing a definitive text of aphorisms, and in immortality. The redhaired writer also seeks to attain stability through You's oral stories and the ways in which they seem to extend time; and it is suggested that Kafka too was terrified by the passing of time and the constant change which this indicates. Even the character of You discovers to his dismay that despite his philosophy of architectural postmodernism, he has been seeking permanence in a search for "home" (132). The characters of \textit{After China} seek the reassurance of eternal stability in numerous forms but are inevitably thrust away from attaining this goal. The conclusion of the novel - the death of the redhaired writer, the destruction of You's hotel and his adoption of her growing daughter - asserts the pervasive message in this novel of constant change and uncertainty, of fluid identities and multiple readings. The process of realising this uncertainty and impermanence is presented as a liberating beginning, from which other important understandings can be gained. As Ommundsen suggests with regard to Castro's novels, "paradoxically, control can be attained only if one is prepared to relinquish authority"\textsuperscript{64}. These texts imply that the cycle of desire, loss and glimpses of understanding of the fragmented nature of reality may be enacted again and again; the desire for control and stability, a final reading, is shown to be difficult to relinquish. In Castro's \textit{After China} writing, literature, and narrative are shown to embody this most important of discoveries about the nature of the universe. A mixture of metafictive strategies, intertextual references and explicit and

\textsuperscript{63}Hutcheon, \textit{A Poetics of Postmodernism}, 6.

\textsuperscript{64}Ommundsen, "After Castro, Post Multiculturalism?," 56.
allegorical references to debates from contemporary literary theory, assist in the presentation of the past as an important influence upon the present. This is illustrated most powerfully by the sympathetic as well as critical treatment of modernist traditions in this recognisably postmodernist text. Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China* can be productively read, then, as having the paradoxical nature of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction, which does not deny in any simplistic fashion the impact of previous modes of thought but instead acknowledges the Derridean insight that it is impossible to transcend that which you contest.

History is also introduced in Castro's novels through the use of historical characters and events. The past is treated in an ironic or parodic rather than nostalgic fashion, features which Hutcheon has highlighted as an important element of the postmodern novel. In *Birds of Passage*, for instance, the references to the Eureka Stockade and the figure of the Irish gold digger Clancy highlight the nascent national pride of the 1880s which is presented, contrary to white Australian cultural mythology, as far from egalitarian and based on the sometimes violent exclusion of the Chinese amongst other ethnic groups. The climactic scene in which Shan is chased by a bloodthirsty Clancy, and the two narrators, Seamus and Shan, briefly meet, is set in Lambing Flat in July 1861: the time of the infamous anti-Chinese riot in which European and Australian diggers attacked Chinese prospectors. Further, in a metafictive coincidence, the extra-textual renaming of the town from Lambing Flat to "Young" is linked with the character Mary Young and thus, ironically, her part-Chinese descendant, Seamus. The references to historical events in *Birds of Passage* are beset by coincidences, incongruities and interruptions, by parallels with contemporary Australia, and references to language and subjectivity. The impression given is of a rethinking of history as a human construct: the

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65 Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 170-181.
workings of narrative are foregrounded, and the separation of history and literature is brought under question.

*After China* similarly approaches historical events in a parodic mode which both incorporates and questions notions of history and encourages a critical rather than nostalgic gaze towards the past, and thus the hermeneutics of the present. Historical figures such as Lao-tzu, the famous Chinese philosopher, are treated with scepticism in *After China*; the legendary stature of the author of the *Tao Te Ching* is overturned with earthy humour. The exotic connotations of ancient Chinese history in a Western context, and thus the titillating qualities of You's tales about emperors and concubines, are highlighted through You's observations about the seductive power of these tales for Western women. These representations, along with the many metafictive devices of the text, encourage an attention to the critical perspectives used to interpret and code the events of the past and thus also the ways in which we understand the present. The attitude towards history in Castro's postmodern novels recalls Linda Hutcheon's discussion of the relationship between postmodernism and history in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*[^67]. Hutcheon states that:

... in arguing that *history* does not exist except as text, (postmodernism) does not stupidly and "gleefully" deny that the *past* existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. We cannot know the past except through its texts, its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*. Even the institutions of the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense as social texts. And postmodern novels... teach us about both this fact and its consequences[^68].

Castro's *After China* and *Birds of Passage* may therefore be seen not as ahistorical pastiches of language styles and historical reference, but rather as complex postmodern prose which foregrounds the constructed nature of

[^67]: Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 16.
language and its effects and makes extra-textual connections through historical references; and in so doing encourages a critical attention to the encoding of the past and thus the interpretive models of the present.

The narrative force of the alienated Asian migrant and transnational perspective in Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China* can also be seen to have a political quality in the sense of an interrogatory and innovative challenging of dominant values. In Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, he argues that "the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and... (to focus) on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" is "theoretically innovative, and politically crucial"69. Bhabha contends that:

> It is in the emergence of interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference- that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed "in-between", or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)?70.

The Asian migrant protagonists of Castro's novels are caught between nations and the East/West divide; they are hybrid and restless figures. They inhabit the "interstitial passage between fixed identification", which Bhabha praises as an area of insight and political empowerment71. Bhabha suggests that being "between fixed identifications... opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy"72. As illustrated in Section I, in *Birds of Passage* Castro probes such connections between race, ethnicity, and youth and in the process of investigating notions of selfhood, nation and identity argues for a flexible, inventive transnational approach towards imagined communities. The exploration of cultural difference and adventurous movement beyond boundaries are also discussed in Castro's non-fiction piece "Lesions", in

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69Bhabha, 1.
70Bhabha, 1.
71Bhabha, 1.
72Bhabha, 4.
which he suggests that "...the future of Australia lies in boldness, in experiment and lateral thinking, in relinquishing uniformity in order to make way for a self-confident and distinctive pluralism". In Castro's novels, to differing degrees, the subject position of the border dweller, which Bhabha praises in The Location of Culture, forms the basis for an interrogation of literary and social mythologies.

Although Hutcheon argues that the postmodern novel can produce an element of political questioning through the combined effects of reflexive strategies and an historical dimension in The Poetics of Postmodernism, she has also established, in essays such as "Circling the Downspout of Empire", a distinction between the ambivalent politics of the postmodern text and the overtly political works of post-colonial and feminist literature. My contention, which I will now proceed to develop, is that Castro's fifth novel, Drift, contains the paradoxical use of metafictional devices and historical references which characterise Birds of Passage and After China as historiographic metafiction, but that it also goes beyond them in its greater degree of historical reference and its concern with the survival strategies of subordinated and colonised peoples. Drift exhibits a stronger attention to extra-textual reality and social and political dynamics than Castro's previous novels: its revisioning of early Aboriginal and white contact is located in an attention to imperial powerplay in the Australian settler colony. For these reasons, Castro's fifth novel invites a reading of it as a "post-colonial" text. Postmodernism and post-colonialism share important thematic concerns, including history and marginality, and discursive strategies, although these shared devices are often put to different uses. As I shall demonstrate, there are continuities as well as differences between Drift and Castro's Birds of Passage, Pomeroy and After China.

73Castro, "Lesions," 68.
74Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 169. The notion that the transition from postmodernism to post-colonialism is not a vast leap in content and form is argued a number of times in the introduction and essays of Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, eds., Past the Last Post: Theorising Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) vii-xvi.
Drift shares an element of social commentary with Birds of Passage in its depiction of the anxiety and alienation of a visible minority in Australian society. The foregrounding of sociopolitical issues is not such a strong feature of Double-Wolf, Pomeroy or After China. Although Pomeroy exhibits a political undertone, its subject is class rather than racial division; the narrator has a deep and justified cynicism towards the greedy machinations of the wealthy and the hungry desire for money of the poor. Jaime Pomeroy's sense of betrayal has numerous strands; his isolation begins with the cocaine death of his French Indochinese mother and his exile to an Australian boarding school. In Australia, Pomeroy stays in the houses of rich friends during his holidays from school and observes the ways in which these families make use of him, as a sexual object and as evidence of their charity. It is in the houses of these friends, as well as in the alleys of Hong Kong, that Pomeroy develops his affinity for the poor and the underworld and a desire to expose the corruption of the wealthy. While operating as an investigative journalist for "the biggest scandal sheet in the Far East", Pomeroy is propelled by his suspicion of the rich to expose the drug empire of the dangerous magnate Stanford Ward (68). In Birds of Passage the element of social commentary is more pronounced, with the prioritisation of Anglo-Australian attitudes towards Asia and race. In the context of Castro's previous novels, then, Drift uncovers areas of social injustice, an activity which is also undertaken in Birds of Passage, and to a lesser extent through the class-sensitive gaze of the narrator of Pomeroy and the treatment of the Cultural Revolution in After China. However, Drift introduces issues of imperial powerplay which Castro has never before addressed in such depth.

Drift expresses a post-colonial interest in asserting and affirming an alienated subjectivity and dismantling a received authority of history75. The novel is structurally bound by the narratives of an English writer, B. S.

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75See Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 168.
Johnson, and a half-caste Aboriginal Tasmanian, Thomas McGann. These narrators speak from Britain and Tasmania in an unspecified time in the late twentieth century, perhaps the 1980s, and various historical pieces are dispersed throughout the novel in the third person and set in colonial Tasmania in the early nineteenth century. The name B. S. Johnson is given two interpretations: according to Thomas McGann's Preface, B. S. Johnson stands for Bryan Stanley Johnson, but in Johnson's autobiographical novel Buried Although, which forms one section of Drift, the narrator is introduced as Byron Shelley Johnson. Like the Romantic poets Byron and Shelley, Castro's narrator is an adventurer who (although not a Romantic) challenges social conventions and dies young. On one level, this association is a linguistic and literary pun, on another, it is part of a continuing problematisation of the distinction between fiction and reality. The latter issue is further complicated by the actual existence of a writer named B. S. Johnson, whose half-page quote composes the first section of Drift and forms the entry point for a sympathetic discussion about English colonisation and the Tasmanian Aboriginals. In "real life" Bryan Stanley Johnson was a little-known British author who was a novelist, poet and dramatist and wrote highly experimental novels which focused on his own life and the nature of the novel. He committed suicide at the age of forty. Johnson wrote the first volume of a planned trilogy but died before beginning Buried Although and Amongst Those Left Are You, which are the titles of the second and third sections of Castro's novel. The character Johnson develops an obsession with Tasmania and the history of the McGann family through the letters of one of his readers, Emma McGann, Thomas' sister. The novel is divided into descriptions of Johnson's life in England, his imaginings of the McGann family history, his encounter with

77Wynne-Davies, 638.
78Brian Castro, "Lesions," 66
contemporary Tasmania and, after his death, Thomas McGann's completion of Johnson's trilogy of novels. In suggesting that Drift is, in some ways, a post-colonial text, I refer especially to its political agenda, which links the contemporary crisis of Australian Aboriginal people with dispossession and focuses in a retrospective vision of settler Australia on acts of colonial resistance by convicts and Aborigines. Drift may therefore be viewed as a post-colonial novel because it explores the survival strategies of subordinated and colonised peoples, and the impossibility of retrieving (historical) truth, as well as attending to the notions of history as text and related issues of representation.

An important thematic similarity between Drift and Castro's After China and Birds of Passage is their concern with the notion of marginalisation. A central interest in Drift is the tension between the dominant group and subordinate group; the struggle to reject the position of the subordinate and the continuing process of reaction against (and bolstering of) an existing inequitable system. Johnson's world of inner voices includes that of Sperm McGann, a wood-carving convict who sets aside his gentle art after feeling his trust in authority betrayed by an upper-class woman he had admired, and a priest. In a device typical of Castro's writing, this experience of betrayal is related to the workings of language. McGann silently ponders that love is "somethin' you feel what the upper classes alone can say" (72). Whereas in Birds of Passage and After China the vicissitudes and slipperiness of language are a guiding focus, in Drift the restriction of articulacy to a particular group provides a powerful illustration of the nature of social power divisions. McGann's newly found view of his social position leads him to decide:

79Diana Brydon has employed this distinction between the uses of history to distinguish the the post-colonial from the postmodern text. Diana Brydon, "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy," Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Moderism, eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 168-201.

80The name "Sperm" is a pun perhaps on this character's domineering, macho behaviour which seems linked with the values of imperialism and its notions of hierarchy.
...that he would have to weave his own image in the darkness of this world. Fatherless, motherless, to forever perform a corrective to the corrections of authority. Which was tryin' always to silence those who really needed to speak (76).

The italics emphasise an edited version of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known phrase and highlight Castro's precisely signalled move into the post-colonial arena which this text represents. Although McGann's initial desire is to "correct" authority, he eventually creates a similarly inequitable system. His idealistic view of "the peace of islands and the natural order", which is inspired by indigenous New Zealand and Australian lifestyles, is shaped by his recently acquired knowledge about French imperial warfare; his dreams of a new society are "peppered with the grapeshot of the Napoleonic enterprise, missions of conquest and skilful dominion" (76-77). McGann becomes a seal hunter and then begins a breakaway colony of brutish white men and kidnapped Aboriginal women, including Wore and her sisters. McGann's transformation from a gentle youth to a driven man is treated sympathetically; it seems tragically inevitable that he becomes an imperious member of the dominant group in his new society.

Drift also illustrates strategies of resistance amongst a colonised people. Wore, the Aboriginal woman cruelly kidnapped and enslaved by McGann the sealer, manages to assert her independence from McGann by killing their unnatural children at birth. Meanwhile, her sisters slowly poison another sealer. Together, they resist the plans of McGann and his followers to create a grand colony by exercising the limited power they have over their own bodies and the domestic realm. In the contemporary Tasmania of Drift, the only possible form of resistance for Aboriginal people seems to be the act of self-destruction. Aboriginal suffering is written upon the body: Emma McGann is mute, Thomas McGann is a crippled albino.81

81 In this text, as in many of Castro's texts, the most sympathetic narrators have mental and physical scars which highlight their absorbing and passionate imaginations and their social powerlessness. Johnson is a neurotic with vertigo, subject to seizures, a fear of flying and an absorption with suicide, which he eventually fulfils. It is perhaps this vulnerability that leads Johnson to sympathise with the traumatised Aboriginal community.
The Aboriginal characters' physical problems are related to social dysfunction, and provide potent symbols of suffering. Thomas McGann's crippled hand with its solitary finger simultaneously represents his isolation and suffering in mainstream Australian society and, in a comic fashion, his courageous gestures of defiance against the same society. Drift thus explores two areas of post-colonial theorising: the ambiguous role of citizens of the settler colony and the alienated subjectivity of colonised people. The focus on the notion of marginalization, and attention to a group perceived as the Other, is also a feature of Castro's previous novels but these novels reject totalizing and hegemonic forces in a more general fashion, whereas Drift is specifically concerned with the dynamics of centre and Other in the Australian colonial experience.

The parodic treatment of history provides a strategic continuity between Drift and Castro's previous fiction. In Drift the parodic treatment of white Australian history has an aim which has been commended by most post-colonial theorists: the debunking of the history of the coloniser through parody. For instance, George Robinson, the man who is perceived by white Australia to have "saved" Aboriginal women from the sealers is exposed as "a whitewash" who "existed to temper everyone's guilt" (130). George Robinson also appears as a character in Robert Drewe's The Savage Crows(1976) and Mudrooroo's Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World(1983). Whereas Drewe's treatment of Robinson is ironic, and Mudrooroo's is contemptuously satiric, Castro's approach is essentially ludic. In a comic scene of B. S. Johnson's imagining in Drift, an irritable, gonorrhoeal Robinson lands on a beach where the offending sealers live, pokes himself in the eye with his ridiculous penis gourd (which symbolises his notion of himself as "the Great White Father"), tacks a notice to a hut asking that "Native Women... be returned to the Authorities at the earliest convenience", and leaves (135). The ineffectual notice is promptly eaten by an illiterate sealer and Johnson's representation as a self-important,
lazy individual with little real concern for the kidnapped Aboriginal women is comically confirmed. As this scene indicates, the lively style of Castro's *After China* and *Birds of Passage* - the linguistic puns, comic historical scenes and metafictive devices which praise the liberation of language and social categories - is also a feature of *Drift*. Castro's fifth novel thus demonstrates a continuing attention to a broader philosophy of marginalisation through its strong structural endorsement of plurality and heterogeneity. The treatment of George Robinson also contains a strong element of parody and is characteristic of the presentation of white Australian colonialists in the text.

The irreverent treatment of history in *Drift* recalls Castro's novels *Birds of Passage* and *After China*, but in *Drift* it has a different strategic goal in that it is used to mock imperial authority. Hutcheon argues that parody is a device familiar to both postmodernism and post-colonialism because of their "strong shared concern with the notion of marginalization", but that its strategic purpose differs between these two discursive practices. The condition of post-colonialism, like that of postmodernism, has a doubleness and contradictory voice and thus parody is an appropriate vehicle through which to express the "paradoxical dualities of both post-modern complicitous critique and post-colonial doubled identity and history". In the postmodern text, parody forms part of the more general challenge to "any hegemonic force that presumes centrality" by supporting what the centre designates the Other, whereas the post-colonial use of parody addresses the colonial encounter. In the context of Castro's novels, the parodic treatment of history is a further (strategic) continuity between *Drift* and Castro's previous novels, but in the post-colonial focus of *Drift* it is chiefly directed towards Aboriginal subjectivity rather than more general notions of marginalization.

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82Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 170.  
83Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 171.  
84Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 170.
Drift exhibits the strong metafictive content of Castro's previous novels, but again this is often directed towards the specific goal of exploring Aboriginal subjugation and Australian social dynamics. For instance, the metafictive device of the self-destruction of the artist is related to the discussion of the alienation and self-destruction of the Aboriginal people. As Johnson becomes increasingly fascinated by the contemporary self-destruction of the Tasmanian Aborigines (and its source in historical events), this manifestation of Aboriginal suffering becomes intertwined with the process of writing and the mental and physical decline of the artist. Much of Drift is concerned with the suicide of the author: the writer B. S. Johnson is obsessed with the idea of self-erasure, and this notion is wittily returned to many times. In the concluding page of the novel, this idea is also referred to through the use of the Latin term nihil ab origine, which suggests a transition from Barthes' "death of the author" to "the suicide of the author."85 The emblematic suicide of B. S. Johnson recalls the symbolic association of the postmodern text with the act of suicide and Johnson's actual suicide. If, as John Frow argues, the founding gesture of postmodernism is an act of modernism itself - because post-modernism begins with a "modernist destruction of the modern, a destruction which is logically entailed by the modernist programme itself" - then, as Frow states, for post-modernism to become distinct from modernism it must become "the end of history"; it must self-destruct.86 Klaus Scherpe arrives at a similar conclusion, declaring that "If the 'death of modernity' has already been decided upon, the only option left in the 'postmodern' condition is self-sacrifice."87 This use of literary theory as the starting point for an exploration of the deepest levels of human experience is a significant feature

in *Drift* as in Castro's other novels, but the emphasis in *Drift* returns to an exploration of Australia's colonial history. Many of Castro's narrators display self-destructive impulses associated with postmodernism, but Johnson's suicide has a further element of social comment regarding Australian history, because as he destroys himself he also attempts to purify the Tasmanian land and history with fire, an act that appears a defiant but ultimately unsuccessful rejection of his connection with white imperialism, and the strength of "bloodlines, lineage, heritage, motherlands..." (254).

Clearly, *Drift* has received strong influences from recent post-colonial criticism and writing but it is also possible to read the satiric voice of *Birds of Passage* and its passionate pleas against ethnic marginalisation and nationalism as an important precursor to Brian Castro's fifth novel. *Drift* shares with *Birds of Passage* the use of ideas drawn from literary theory as a starting point for speculating and hypothesising about the fate of a particular ethnic minority group and their history in Australia. The drive against discrimination based on ethnicity which empowers *Birds of Passage* also influences *Drift*. In *Drift*, more than in any other of Castro's novels, however, the references to Australian history are consolidated and brought together to form a commentary on social order and even to suggest sources of political agency. Further, *Drift* is a more satisfying construction than *Birds of Passage* because it creates a more socially and historically complex and morally problematic vision of Australia. In Castro's fifth novel the transition beyond the double narrative into the complex inner voices of characters, as prefigured in the multiple stories of *After China*, is also successfully achieved. Although the focus in *Drift* is on issues of imperial power rather than the Asian migrant experience of *Birds of Passage* and *After China*, there are significant continuities between these novels in terms of theme (especially the notion of marginalisation) and certain stylistic devices (linguistic puns, metafictive devices and the parodic treatment of history).
The transition of Castro's writing from a discussion of the Asian migrant experience in *Birds of Passage* and *After China* to a consideration of Aboriginal experience in *Drift* introduces questions about possible areas of overlap between the discursive treatment of the two areas. In Annette Hamilton's essay "Fear and Desire: Aborigines, Asians and the National Imaginary"88 she proposes the useful concept of "the National Imaginary", which is centred on notions of the reliance of national self-definition on the Other and the Lacanian "Imaginary". Hamilton argues that due to world conditions in the last two centuries the construct of the nation and "the problem of distinguishing a national self" has achieved priority for contemporary social orders, and that this construction of a national self requires an image of an Other, against which it can be defined and distinguished89. She draws on the Lacanian notion of the Imaginary in which a mirror-relationship exists between self and Other and these two entities can become confused. Thus "Imaginary relations at the social, collective level can... be seen as ourselves looking at ourselves while we think we are seeing others"90; the perceived Other may in fact be a denied part of the Self. The construction of the national self and Other, Hamilton argues, is becoming more complex and powerful through the multiple circuits of exchange of the print media and mass media, and she analyses several Australian films in the light of this understanding91. Although the imagined communities of the Aboriginal and the Asian both have historically distinct positions as "Others" in the Australian National Imaginary, these Others are also shown to share an ability to evoke both fear and desire, a response which is linked with such concerns as "the danger of the ultimate merger between self and other, in the form of the dangers of

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89 Hamilton, 16.
90 Hamilton, 16.
91 Hamilton, 17.
the primitive, and of sexual contact and the production of the 'half-caste'"92. As a result of a shared treatment of the figures of the Aboriginal and the Asian in the Australian National Imaginary, and the broader experience of marginal groups sharing a sense of exclusion from the dominant group on the basis of race, the possibility for literature about the Asian migrant experience to consider (probably sympathetically) Aboriginal Australian experience seems potentially very strong. The shared themes and strategies between Brian Castro's novel Drift and his novels about the Asian migrant experience encourage the notion that Aboriginal experience may become a strong theme in Asian migrant fiction (or vice versa) because of the discursive common ground between the two fields.

An international comparison may lend further insight here. In the United States what is termed Asian American literature makes intertextual links with Afro-American writing. Clearly, however, Australia's literary and social context is significantly different: Aboriginal writing, although growing steadily is not yet a large or powerful writing area like Afro-American literature, and the sense of an "Asian community" has not been taken up in Australia as it has been in America. Thus the strong links between "Asian" and "Aboriginal" as civil rights movements or as "visible minorities" do not exist in an Australian social context. One reason is that Asian Australians are seldom as socially or financially deprived as Aborigines. Wang Gungwu also argues that "Where most Asians are concerned, the survival of aboriginal peoples and cultures has never had any priority", and that "Asians" are concerned primarily with Australian history regarding Australian fears and racial stereotypes about Asians93. Even if Wang's statement is accepted, and his generalisation regarding an undifferentiated Asia overlooked, many of the "Asian" writers under

92 Hamilton, 18.
discussion are highly educated, longterm residents in Australia and produce
texts which explore issues of community identity, history and narrative, all
of which suggest an awareness and interest in the complexities of Australian
history. I contend that the developing area of literature about the Asian
migrant experience has commenced using, and may draw further on,
Aboriginal characters and perhaps even literary techniques from Aboriginal
writing in the future: firstly, because of certain commonalities regarding the
similar ambivalence with which these imagined communities are treated
within the National Imaginary; secondly, because writers addressing the
Asian migrant experience often focus on complex issues of Australian
history and narrative which encourage an attention to Aboriginal
experience; and thirdly, because there are significant similarities in the social
experience of marginalisation as a non-white minority group in Australia.

A number of texts about the Asian migrant experience already
addressed in this thesis consider the Aboriginal experience in Australia in
passing, including Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*, Don'o Kim's *The
Chinaman*, Sudesh Mishra's "Perth, December 1987" and "Black Swans in
Ballarat" (in Tandava) and Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage*. In Alex Miller's
*The Ancestor Game*, considered in Chapter 4, the connection between some
Aboriginal people and Asian migrants is a common sense of cultural
displacement. A central figure in the mid-nineteenth century historical
narrative of Feng One is the Aboriginal shepherd Dorset. As a child, Dorset
was taken to England as a "curiosity" where he "lived in opulent splendour
with a great and whimsical duke until he was fourteen", when he was
returned to Australia with a beautiful chestnut hunting horse and
impeccable riding clothes (221). In Australia, he becomes friends with two
fellow shepherds and social outsiders: the Chinese migrant, Feng One and
the angry, working-class Irishman, Patrick Nunan. The trio share a sense of
displacement and create their own form of communication as "masters of
linguistic make-do" (223). In an occasionally comic scene, Dorset sets out in
his hunting pink, obligingly trying to track a murderer for some local landowners but utterly unable "to read the land":

Dorset saw on the ground only fallen twigs and bark and leaves and shaley outcroppings of rock and such like. He had diverted the fashionable salons of Regents Park with the pathos of his readings from Racine's great tragedy *Andromaque*, but in the text of his motherland he was an illiterate. He had lost his link with her (227).

Dorset's deepest beliefs about his identity are explored in this scene, including his conviction:

...that the essence of freedom is in dislocation from one's origins, that freedom is to be judged for oneself and not for one's tribe. He understood that freedom is identity for the individual. And, as he rode about the place in his futile search for the murderer, he did not expect this to change suddenly (227).

Dorset's confidence in British justice in Australia and in his freedom of being seen as a full citizen are poignantly shattered when the landowners turn on him, and kill him, because they identify him as Aboriginal and are convinced that he is ridiculing them by not leading them directly to the culprit. Miller explores questions of group loyalties in this text as he does in the tensely woven novel *The Tivington Nott*, in which the young narrator from London learns to survive in the threateningly parochial society of Exmoor. Dorset is sympathetically presented as an outsider victimised by the the majority, who are driven by their unbridled fears and desires. The Chinese Feng, it is suggested, could just as easily have been the victim: it is with "a quiver of deep alarm" that he initially answers the questions of the group of landowners, he is "intuitively" aware that the landowners feel threatened and that "in becoming the familiars of each other, they had become strangers to him" (225). A "Koorie" warrior, invisible to those who cannot read the country, watches Dorset's death (231). The suggestion here seems to be that a connection with one's cultural tradition and family ties
will continue to influence outlook and behaviour; as Lang discovers in his middle-age, the true "Ancestor Game" cannot be destroyed as easily as he once burned his great-grandfather's book of ancestors. In The Ancestor Game the Aboriginal character is shown to have similarities with the Chinese Australian, in their shared concerns about retaining links with a cultural heritage and the experience of social marginalisation.

Several other texts principally about Asian migrant experience have also emphasised the similar experience of racism and cultural displacement for Aboriginal and Asian characters. In Don'o Kim's The Chinaman, for example, the Japanese Joe and Fran, an Aboriginal woman, feel drawn together as fellow outsiders. The bigoted white man, Vic speaks of Fran in the same presumptuous manner as he treats Joe:

"Why a woman deck hand, Dick? And an Aboriginal at that. Really getting your money's worth, eh?" Vic didn't bother to hide the twist in his voice (125).

Joe and Fran laugh and dance together briefly, but it is hinted that in the dynamics of the small but representative society of Moses' Perch, where they are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, they will always be drawn apart by the desires of those in more powerful positions; just as Fran is subject to Dick's whims, Joe is being subtly manipulated by Beatrice. A reminder of their status occurs when Dick suggests that Joe is Vic's dependent and speaks of Fran in the language of possession:

"Fair go, mate," Dick said to Vic. "You've got my bird, what's there to be so het up about?"
"Me? Your bird?" Vic spoke to Dick at last.
Dick pointed his thumb down the beach. Instantly, Joe could feel Vic's burning stare among all the eyes suddenly thrown at him (129-130).

Fran copes with racist assumptions differently to Joe. She can be quiet at moments but "hard and assertive" when she is with those she considers, like Joe, to pose no threat (124). Fran emerges as a more complex character than the other female figures in the novel; the poignancy and complexity of
a dispossessed individual is presented as her most intriguing facet rather than her femininity.

The sense of empathy for Aboriginal people as fellow victims of racism is also reflected in some other Asian migrant fiction. The nostalgic Indo-Fijian narrator of Mishra's poem "Perth, December 1987" is drawn to the Aboriginal Australian experience of British imperialism through its parallels with the racial genocide of Indo-Fijians and the Fijian experience of British colonisation94. A similar connection is made in Mishra's "Black Swans at Ballarat"95. In Castro's *Birds of Passage* a parallel is drawn between Seamus O'Young, the Australian-born Chinese, and an Aboriginal woman who sits opposite him in a train. Seamus poignantly observes "The native and the foreigner: there was something of both in us" (80). This brief comparison encourages a consideration of the position of those considered Aboriginal and Asian in contemporary Australia. A strong Aboriginal presence is not a regular feature of fiction about the Asian migrant experience, but where it does occur it is strongly sympathetic, emphasising the connections between fellow sufferers of white Australian racism and a sense of displacement.

Several tentative thematic and strategic links can be drawn between Asian migrant writing and Aboriginal writing. Chapter 4 drew attention to the fascination in *The Chinaman* and *The Ancestor Game* with disrupting the received version of Australian history and with establishing a claim to an Australian authenticity which involves traversing the country, either through the experience and stories of ancestors or through geographical understanding and travel. These are elements which are also familiar to Aboriginal writing. Some other characteristics of the literary treatment of the Asian migrant experience surface in discussions of Aboriginal literature and society. For instance, the attention to creating new perspectives on the

past and inserting new voices into a historical tradition which has given primacy to white Australian narratives, often through the stories of the deeds of ancestors. Writers such as Mudrooroo Narogin have stressed the need for a new imaginary mythology of Aboriginal people. Mudrooroo writes, with regard to his theoretical text *Writing from the Margins*, that it:

...is a book about the politics of authenticity, about how to form a recognisable (literary) voice and a distinctive identity in relationship to the hegemonic white culture.

The stress on the significance of the imagination and storytelling as a potent source for identity which Mudrooroo emphasises is also reflected in certain texts which address the Asian migrant experience. For instance, Beth Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* and Dewi Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces* draw upon folktale traditions and emphasise the importance of the storytelling process itself in the formation of a cultural and personal (and particularly feminine) identity. In light of Annette Hamilton's argument that Asian and Aboriginal Australian groups and communities are linked in the Australian National Imaginary—because of their specific constructions as the Other which are characterised by both fear and desire—the exchange of thematic and strategic elements from the Asian migrant experience to the Aboriginal experience and vice versa seems an area of potential. The more established area of Aboriginal writing could certainly provide a source of inspiration in the development of political agency and subversive post-colonial practice, although the specific histories of these groups would have to be carefully observed to avoid any facile identification of the one with the other.

**III**

The first section of this chapter argued that Brian Castro's novels about the Asian migrant experience reach beyond the stereotype of a

97Hamilton, 14-35.
parochial immigrant literature in Australia by adopting a transnational philosophy involving cosmopolitan protagonists who figure as symbols of modernity, an emphasis on intersections between nations, and a postmodern textuality which endorses hybridity and plurality. The second section explored the political qualities of Castro's novels, concluding with a discussion of Drift and the opportunities for literary exchange between the discursive areas of Asian and Aboriginal experience. Castro's Asian migrant novels can also be seen to place themselves within a transnational context through their strong parallels with Asian migrant writing from other Western countries, which often features the strategic devices of historiographic metafiction outlined above. These texts include Salman Rushdie's Shame and Midnight's Children, Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family. In the last three decades, there has been a strong movement in the First World towards an appreciation of cultural difference in literature. A number of these texts have addressed the subject of "Asian" migrant experience with such popular and critical success that they have broken the ground for the publication of other works which are set against this background and which discuss related issues98. Brian Castro's Birds of Passage and After China can be placed within this First World trend because of central themes and devices which these novels share with other Asian Cosmopolitan texts, including an emphasis on historical references and reflexivity. To illustrate this point, I will briefly compare Castro's Birds of Passage and After China with Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Shame, two texts written by one of the best known "Asian" migrant writers.

The narrators of these four novels- Seamus, of Birds of Passage, You, of After China, Saleem Sinai, of Midnight's Children and "Salman Rushdie", of Shame- are self-conscious and playful, with complex multicultural backgrounds and the souls of émigrés. The migrant theme is

98See the Introduction.
a powerful force in *Shame*: the narrator occasionally interjects with comments about his own cultural ties to India, by birth and to England, by adoption, and to Pakistan, through the migration of his family. Further, the country of Pakistan in which the novel is set, and which it satirises, is presented as a society of migrants, with a concomitant lack of history. Although Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, is not a migrant, he is an ethnic outsider to some extent because of his Muslim background. The lives of Castro's narrators, Seamus and You, and Rushdie's narrator Saleem and the protagonist of *Shame*, Omar Khayyam, are psychologically and socially tense, their thoughts complicated by a multiplicity of cultural loyalties. Each of these protagonists is pushed to the point of anomie and self-destruction: Seamus and You experience moments of complete anarchy and the loss of individual subjectivity; Saleem Sinai, the usurper of the place of Shiva in family history, passes on his position to Aadam Aziz, the son of Shiva, and finally self-destructs; and Omar Khayyam experiences chaos through his connection with his wife, Sufiya Zinobia, a woman emotionally retarded through lack of love and murderous with the rage of Pakistani society. The central Asian migrant characters in these texts register a heightened experience of the pressures of modernity; they experience the contours of change and continuity in a world characterised by multicultural plurality and a disruption of the basic loyalty to place through mass travel and migration. The theme of the postmodern apocalypse surfaces in heightened form in the attempts at self-annihilation of the narrators. As in Castro's novels, the Asian migrant figure in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* appears as a representative figure of secular modernity. This representation may be seen

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99"It is well known that the term 'Pakistan', an acronym, was originally thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals ... So it was a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history...". Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Pan, 1984) 87.

as particularly appropriate in texts which deal with Asian subject matter and are aimed at a principally Western audience. The introduction of a transnational perspective with postmodern overtones encourages a Western reader to persevere with unfamiliar subject matter by couching it in recognisable, if experimental, forms which do not, however, contradict the main spirit of inclusiveness of the text. In keeping with the border crossing nature of these texts, the experimental elements of these novels can also be read as being located not just in Western postmodernism but also in Chinese or Indian literary or philosophical traditions.  

These four novels also share the central features of historiographic metafiction: they are intensely self-reflexive but also gesture towards extratextual events by laying claim to historical events and personages; they rethink the past and in the process challenge the cultural and ideological codes of the present. All four texts use the personal history and/or family history set against a background of extra-textual historical figures and events as a starting point for an investigation into the construction of history and a coherent subjectivity. For instance, Saleem Sinai's tracking of his family history and Seamus' search for details of his ancestry are both central to the exploration of history, genealogy and place in *Midnight's Children* and *Birds of Passage*. The creation of the nation, and the notion of reality and truth as constructs of the imagination, are related issues which are raised in the post-colonial and multicultural landscapes of these texts.

Other similarities between literary strategies can be discerned in Castro's Asian migrant novels and Rushdie's *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*. The serial folktale, stories which lead into each other through the
use of oral narrators, is a device which Rushdie regularly uses\textsuperscript{102} and which Castro also explores in \textit{After China}. \textit{After China} celebrates the potentially infinite flow of language and tales which can be created in a dialogue between storytellers. Similarly, in \textit{Midnight's Children}, the size, scope and multiplicity of the text gives a sense of a multitude of stories which can be found in India and one individual's fabulous inner life. The protagonists of these works also appear as allegorical figures who represent aspects of the national histories of the countries from which they came. Perhaps most interesting, however, is the recent movement in \textit{Drift} towards a narrative structure which has even more striking similarities of structure and subject with Rushdie's work. In an unusual structure for Castro's novels, \textit{Drift} is divided into two major prose pieces, the first person narratives of B. S. Johnson and Thomas McGann\textsuperscript{103}. The narrative voice of B. S. Johnson has numerous, complex inner voices familiar to readers of \textit{Shame} and \textit{Midnight's Children}. The similarity of B. S. Johnson's narrative with Rushdie's writing style is comically acknowledged when B. S. Johnson's physical appearance is likened to that of Salman Rushdie. The subject matter of \textit{Drift} also shares some of the major preoccupations of Salman Rushdie's fiction: the dynamics of imperialism and neo-imperialism and political corruption.

The representation of the Asian Australian migrant as a symbol of a common international experience has been particularly effective because a singular handicap of Australian migrant fiction has been its tendency to be associated with a narrow, ethnic Australian experience. The Asian as Neighbour has traditionally not been as interesting to Australians as the Asian as authentic, untainted Other or, from the 1980s onwards, the Asian as a representative of an economically important region. Castro writes the

\textsuperscript{102}Sangari, 177-178.
\textsuperscript{103}This structural procedure may be contrasted to that of Castro's \textit{Birds of Passage}, which also has two narrators but which juxtaposes the two narrative voices in short, alternating chapters.
Asian Australian migrant into world history by creating a cosmopolitan figure in a transnational context, by highlighting broader questions regarding narrative, history, social construction, and modernity and by situating his texts about Chinese migrant experience in the recently developed global arena of Asian migrant literature. In an Australia which is exhibiting a post-colonial impulse towards entering the global theatre, Castro's migrant cosmopolitans have introduced a critically appealing vision of "Asian Australians". Castro's Asian migrant protagonists strive to create, quite successfully, what Diana Brydon has termed "a new globalism", which asserts local independence and global interdependencies and defines differences without recourse to myths of cultural purity and authenticity. The incorporation of metafictive moments with local historical reference has been essential in this process of melding the local with the global. Brian Castro's novels, which assert an Australian voice and landscape but uncover numerous transnational threads, engage in a self-conscious search for a new globalism that is "neither the old universalism nor the Disney simulacrum."
Conclusion

Exploration of the Asian migrant experience in Australia is an increasingly dynamic area in contemporary Australian literature. Definitions of Australian nationhood have been problematised by these works as by much post-war migrant writing in Australia, which has introduced a range of non-Anglo-Saxon experience to the Australian cultural imaginary. The texts share with other migrant writing an interest in the experience of cultural disorientation and reorientation in a new land and the powerful and mysterious place of the homeland for migrants and the children of migrants. The emphasis in these texts on the "Asianness" of the migrant in the eyes of mainstream society often establishes a greater void or division between the newcomer and the Australian-born than in the migrant text in general. The Asian migrant is thus shown to experience a heightened sense of migrancy, of cultural disorientation and cultural difference, with differing implications. In Gooneratne's A Change of Skies the attention to the occasionally harsh responses of white Australians to the arrival of the Sri Lankan migrant protagonists is softened by the emphasis on the importance of the idiosyncracies of the individual as a fundamental factor in determining his or her ease of adaptation to Australia. As I have argued in Chapter 1, Gooneratne's prose writing does have a sociohistorical element but is more concerned with investigating the intricacies of human nature than social forces and a sociopolitical commentary. In contrast, in Ee's Nearing a Horizon, Mishra's Tandava and much of Yahp's short fiction the migrant's transition from homeland to the new society invokes powerful social and political statement, and the personal appears political. In the more experimental texts discussed, such as Miller's The Ancestor Game and Castro's Birds of Passage and After China, the Asian migrant
experience provides an emphatic representation of the pleasure and pain which issues from the uncertainties of modernity.

A gradual change in the literary approaches to the Asian migrant experience is evident from 1965 to 1995: realist depictions of a sympathetic migrant community have recently been challenged by an experimental style which uses the Asian migrant experience as a starting point for broader investigations concerning language and representation. This stylistic transition reflects to some extent the development of the postmodern in contemporary Western literature. In texts such as Abdullah's *The Time of the Peacock*, Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and *Relative Merits* and Dewi Anggraeni's fiction, non-threatening migrant communities serve to counter the fear and hostility often directed towards those migrants perceived as Asian in Australia. The role of the texts is fundamentally educational, with an emphasis on creating positive stereotypes of the Asian migrant. In Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, as in Abdullah's *The Time of the Peacock* and Anggraeni's works, the migrant protagonists are sincere, hard-working individuals who courageously weather the trials of cultural disorientation and the sometimes harsh reception of Australian society. These sympathetic portrayals of a migrant community are familiar in much migrant writing in Australia but, as I shall demonstrate below, these texts also engage with specific preconceptions about the Asian migrant in Australian society. Gooneratne's, Abdullah's and Anggraeni's texts also have informative styles which maximise their appeal to a mainstream Australian audience through a careful introduction of new cultural information about Sri Lanka/India/Indonesia. In Gooneratne's fiction the process of cultural translation is eased by the use of British literary references and structures familiar to most Australian readers. (Similarly, Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* fosters a Romantic sense of place and the poetry of Wordsworth is a favourite intertextual reference). Dewi Anggraeni's fiction favours female, middle-class, Christian narrators who
mediate the introduction of new cultural information through their shared assumptions with an Australian audience. As I shall describe in more detail below, this method of cultural translation and appeal to a broad Australian audience in Anggraeni's novels ultimately undermines the texts' analysis of the social construction of the Asian woman and depiction of sexual politics. The favouring of female narrators in texts which promote a sympathetic vision of a migrant community may be significant: the female migrant is generally a less threatening figure than the male and more likely to diminish, and less likely to recall, the stereotype of the Asian invader familiar in earlier Australian discourses about Asia.

The publication of Castro's *Birds of Passage* in 1983 heralded a change in treatment of the Asian migrant experience from the creation of positive stereotypes towards an experimental style which used Asian migrancy as a starting point for the investigation of broader notions about language and representation. The Chinese migrants, past and present, in Miller's *The Ancestor Game* and Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China* are presented as suffering a particularly harsh form of social alienation. The migrant's reconciliation with his or her place in Australian society and creation of an imaginary homeland, a source of personal connection between the place of birth and the new society, is shown to be fractured for Chinese migrant characters and their children in Australian society by the domination of the Orientalist notion of an opposition between China and Australia as East and West. In Castro's *Birds of Passage* the contemporary Asian Australian is presented as a social paradox in a country in which national identity is linked with ethnicity and the Asian is always the Other. In Miller's *The Ancestor Game* the place of the Asian migrant in Australia is somewhat brighter: Australia is figured as the quintessential migrant society, a place where all residents inhabit uncertain areas of identity and belonging. Even the dimorphic migrant Lang- who is severed not just from the comforting stability of a single national identity but also from a
conviction of his place within either of the imaginative regional divisions of East or West- finds a sense of home with fellow "displaced and hybrid" settlers in Australia (260). In both Castro's and Miller's texts the characters of Asian appearance living in Australia are presented as having, due to the migrant experience and the unique inscription of the Asian in Australian cultural life, a privileged understanding of the postmodern realisation of the "provisional... and fabricated nature of all social and cultural structures". The Asian migrant appears in these novels as a symbol for modernity: an embodiment of multiple cultural loyalties, transition and constant change. The philosophical perspective that life and language are in a process of constant change and that reality is a subjective vision is incorporated into the form of Castro's and Miller's novels through metafictive moments, fragmented structures and multiple narrative positions. Castro's and Miller's novels interrogate human certainties and grand narratives, including the literary philosophies of realism (and its foundation in assumptions such as that of linear time) and to some extent postmodernism. The formal qualities of the texts evoke a sense of the disorientation of migrancy experienced by those considered Asian in Australia and the discoveries about the provisional nature of social categories which, it is suggested, can result from this experience.

The formalist approach of Castro's and Miller's works may be contrasted with the depiction of the instabilities of Sri Lankan migrant experience in the relatively ordered worlds of Gooneratne's texts. Although the character Bharat Mangala-Davasinha in A Change of Skies discovers in a flash of insight that the migrant experience produces "an awareness that everything around us is caught up in a process of profound and inexorable change", the text does not support and endorse this notion through its form (46). Despite the differing styles and depth of the treatment of issues of

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1 Wenche Ommundsen, Metafictions?: Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1993) 82.
migrancy, one factor remains constant in all of the texts under discussion: the Asian migrant character appears as a subject position of particular insight from which a literary exploration can delve into important areas of discussion with ramifications for the urbanised world and Australia as a whole.

The Asian migrant text can be seen to extend Multicultural writing in Australia and to some extent avoid the restrictions of being viewed as a migrant text. (By Asian migrant text I refer here, as elsewhere, to literature about the Asian migrant experience: the focus is on the subject matter of the text, and particularly its place in Australian discourse about Asia, rather than the author's ethnic background and therefore the "authenticity" or otherwise of the text). A singular handicap of Multicultural writing has been its association with the untextualised, parochial experience of a small migrant group. However, this stereotype of migrant writing is eased for the Asian migrant text because of the particular moment of Australian literary and socioeconomic history in which these works are being written and read. In the 1980s and early 1990s Australia's attention, more than ever, has been directed towards Asia. This development is partly due to an increasing recognition of the importance of Australia's neighbouring countries in its social and economic future and the appeal of the booming economic markets in China, Malaysia and Indonesia. With a changing orientation from Europe to South, Southeast and Northeast Asia, Australia's post-colonial fascination with the outsider's perspective, the foreigner's observations about Australian life and society2, has become increasingly directed towards "Asian" perspectives. Further, in a literary context, the enormous success in global literary markets of writers whom I have termed "Asian Cosmopolitan" authors- such as Salman Rushdie, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and Timothy Mo- who address issues of migrancy and

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the position of the Asian in the West, has increased the appeal of texts about
the Asian migrant experience, especially those written by "authentic"
migrants in an Australian context. The cultural and social attention
directed towards the previously little known (if much imagined) region of
"Asia" and the opinions and literary works of the writer perceived as Asian,
may be seen to provide the text which addresses the Asian migrant
experience with a freedom from some stereotypes associated with migrant
writing more generally. However, as I shall suggest below, the implications
for different forms of restriction based on the "Asian" qualities of the texts,
the way in which they encode cultural difference, and the authenticity of the
author as an "Asian" representative are equally powerful.

The development of the image of the Asian Australian migrant as
the ultimate cosmopolitan in the recent, more stylistically self-conscious
literature has also aided the movement away from stereotypes that have
characterised much migrant literature. In Castro's Birds of Passage and
After China the highly textualised style and system of global references work
to refute the common misconception that Australian migrant writing is
narrowly parochial in content and untextualised in form. Castro's works
can be perceived as "transnational" because they encourage a perspective
beyond national boundaries by reflecting on the permeability of the
boundaries of the nation and by demonstrating the value of creative
intersections between the intellectual and cultural traditions of nations.
The transnational quality of the novels is heightened by their form: the
avoidance of closure and of totalizing myths through a fragmented
structure, numerous intertextual references, a self-reflexive style, and the
celebration of puns. Castro's novels have a verbal texture and structure
which celebrate the breaking down of boundaries, including traditional
literary expectations regarding form. Traditional notions of the migrant text
are expanded through the thematic and structural attention to the
questioning of social categories, particularly those of the nation and
ethnicity. The effect of the numerous "transnational" devices within Castro's two novels is that a broader reading of the texts is encouraged beyond preconceived notions of the "typical" Australian migrant text or even the Australian novel. The texts of the Asian migrant experience, which are increasingly characterised by a highly wrought textual form, can thus be seen to encourage a perspective that self-consciously looks beyond the interests of a small migrant community, and even national community, towards larger global movements.

A fundamental element of the Asian migrant text is its engagement with the discourse about Asia and the Asian in Australia, although the complexity of this treatment varies considerably between texts. In one sense, all of the texts under discussion make a statement regarding the significance of the Asian migrant experience by placing those considered "Asian" in Australia at the centre of serious literary attention, a focus which has seldom occurred in Australian literature. Many of the texts also undermine the conglomerate notion of "Asia" itself by illustrating the unique cultural traditions and complex histories of particular communities. Mena Abdullah's short stories, which were originally published in The Bulletin in the 1950s and later in book form as The Time of the Peacock(1965), were the first short stories to address the Asian migrant experience in the sympathetic voice of the insider. Brian Castro's Birds of Passage(1983) was the first novel to be published in Australia to have an Asian Australian as its first person narrator and central character. Castro's novel was written in the atmosphere of misconceptions and hostility which preceded the push against Asian migration during the early 1980s, and looks closely at the Australian perception of the Asian Australian and its debilitating effects on the individual and, to some extent, Australian society. Other novels of the 1970s and 1980s failed to produce a complex characterisation of the "Asian". The focus in Koch's The Year of Living Dangerously and d'Alpuget's Monkeys in the Dark, for instance, which were both set in Indonesia, was on
the Anglo-Australian experience overseas. The figure of Billy Kwan touched on some of the issues which were to be raised in Brian Castro's texts, but the dwarf Indonesian Australian character of *The Year of Living Dangerously* was a figure of grotesquery rather than of sustained social insight. It is only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that a significant body of works has been produced which casts the Asian Australian migrant as a central figure and discusses in depth the place of the Asian Australian in contemporary Australia.

Asian migrant literature broaches the complex and politically charged arena of the depiction of cultural difference. The misconceptions of the Australian reading public about the societies perceived as "Asian", particularly the lack of knowledge of local specificities, makes the imaging of cultural difference a difficult area for literature about the Asian migrant experience. The role of those considered Asian in the Australian consciousness has often been that of the Other: an opposite against which Australian national identity has been defined. Orientalist notions of Asia and the Asian have served a variety of social and political purposes in an Australian context, including shoring up the prestige and perceived superiority of certain ethnic groups, creating a sense of national identity based on British ties and white purity, and providing justification for limiting migration and therefore reducing the competition for resources. One of the most enduring characteristics of the imaging of Asia in Australian literature has been its role as the exotic, erotic and dangerous Other; images of the Asian and Asia have often fascinated the Australian public by their elements of danger and sexuality while eschewing the cultural complexities and political realities of the societies in the region. The more sophisticated Asian migrant texts self-consciously avoid such stereotypes which have formed the basis of the tradition of discourse about Asia in Australia.
In coding cultural difference the text addressing the Asian migrant experience must tread the difficult line between presenting a vision of Asia and the Asian which is neither exotic nor threatening (and which does not cater for the desires of a predominantly Anglo-Australian audience) nor elides the differences between the societies involved. The texts under discussion frequently use the Asian Australian individual who has cultural, ancestral and historical ties to Australian history and to one or more "Asian" countries to celebrate the creative possibilities of hybrid identities. This representation can, in such sophisticated yet stylistically varied texts as Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and Castro's *Birds of Passage*, powerfully deconstruct the opposition between Self and Other, Australia and Asia, while celebrating cultural distinctiveness and difference.

The literary creation of a sense of cultural difference can take many forms, such as the inclusion of untranslated terms, references to unique cultural beliefs, the use of dialogue which reflects different belief systems, and the evocation of an ethnic past in the homeland or a community's brief history in Australia. The choice of the first person narrative, references to folktale and mythology, and the illustration of a shared history between the migrant community and Anglo-Australian society are some features which denote cultural difference and are particularly prominent in the Asian migrant text in Australia. The use of the first person narrative position has been particularly popular in Asian migrant fiction of the past thirty years. As Gunew notes, drawing on Deleuze's work, the "compelling nature" of this narrative position in the representation of migrant experience is that it provides a direct voice which speaks with "the authority of experience"\(^3\). As with many issues relating to cultural difference, complications are involved in the choice of the first person narrative: it provides a sense of ethnic voice and presence which has seldom been heard in Australian writing, and yet it

also invokes the authenticity of the migrant text as oral history or ethnography, which has often restricted the appreciation of migrant writing as textual construction. The first person is also seldom used by writers who are not Asian Australians themselves, perhaps because of the implications of cultural appropriation which are attached to this narrative position. As indicated in the Introduction, I would suggest that the notion that writers cannot write of cultures other than their own in an intimate fashion is a false restriction, encouraging a connection between an author's ethnicity and the authority of his/her text which can only be restrictive for those considered to be Asian migrant authors as for other authors. In the sophisticated novel The Ancestor Game, by the English migrant Alex Miller, the combination of extensive cultural research, a self-reflexive approach and the mediation of Lang's story of Chinese Australian experience by an English migrant enables the text to successfully negotiate the area of Asian migrant experience. The Ancestor Game illustrates the possibilities for an intelligent and sensitive discourse about the issues surrounding the Chinese migrant to Australia, and recalls Spivak's notion that the author can "(earn) the right to criticize" through a process of study of the unfamiliar culture and "a critique of (his/her) position as the investigating person"4.

References to folktales and mythology are potent signifiers of cultural difference and a common characteristic of Asian migrant writing. Gooneratne's A Change of Skies and Satendra Nandan's The Wounded Sea refer to the Indian epics, Yahp's The Crocodile Fury abounds with Chinese ghost stories, and in Anggraeni's Parallel Forces the supposed supernatural link between a contemporary woman and the thirteenth century queen of Majapahit in Central Java is crucial to the plot. The folktale provides a sense of cultural authenticity and expression of the difference of the migrant community from Anglo-Australian society. The folktale is a potent cultural

signifier with the aura of an authentic remnant of the homeland but it also has the important quality in texts about the Asian migrant experience of being easily translatable to the Australian reader. In combining the folktale or mythology from the homeland with Australian mythologies a symbolic point is occasionally made in the realist texts about the possibilities for a productive cultural hybridity and a resolution of the social alienation of migrancy. In Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* the model migrant Navarinjini develops an inventive, hybrid mythology between Sri Lanka and Australia which is symbolised by the reassuring figure of "Arjuna-as-Surfer" (69). Similarly, in Abdullah's short story "The Outlaws" (from *The Time of the Peacock*) the folk legends of Thunderbolt, the Anglo-Australian bushranger, and Malik Khan, the Punjabi hero and thief, are imaginatively joined for the child narrator Nimmi and her Uncle Seyed.

The gaze of the predominantly white reading audience, and its thirst for certain images, shapes the images of Asia which become published and creates a need for a critical scrutiny of self-serving expectations of otherness. Certain codings of difference are preferred by the Australian public and these are influenced by the symbolic inventory of previous literary styles of imaging Asians in Australia ranging from European Orientalism and its Australian variants to the styles of well-known international Asian Cosmopolitan authors, such as Kingston and Rushdie. The critical and popular reception of the fantastical landscape of Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* in comparison with Anggraeni's educational, realist novels highlights the appeal of certain codings of Asian female difference in contemporary Australian society. Yahp's novel taps into a range of innovative literary forms and is in many ways a more complex and self-conscious construction than Anggraeni's novels. However, part of the appeal of Yahp's novel for an Australian audience must also be located in its exotic tropical setting and numerous superstitions which feed the considerable thirst for difference in Australian society. Yahp's writing style can be linked with the dangers of
exoticism whereas Anggraeni's texts elide important differences between Australia and Indonesia in order to forward (unsuccessfully in my reading) the journalistic accessibility and informational content of her texts. With regard to the Indo-Fijian texts of political exile, the Wordsworthian sensibility of Nandan's The Wounded Sea and its emphasis on the idyllic nature of pre-coup life for Indo-Fijian villagers means that Fiji does not appear politically complex and the book tends to endorse notions of the South Pacific as a tropical (if earthy) paradise. In contrast, the poems of Sudesh Mishra's Tandava self-consciously engage with Western representations of Fiji.

The success of the Asian migrant text in Western publishing markets in recent decades may in part be attributed to the Western fascination with an invigorating cultural difference that reaches beyond a sometimes bland and stable, often Americanised global culture to the exoticism of the West's traditional Other, Asia. Nevertheless, as my analysis has illustrated, works written for an Australian audience about the Asian migrant experience are not necessarily complicitous with Orientalism. Many of the primary texts exhibit an awareness of the fictionalisation of Asia and the Asian in the Australian (and Western) imagination and, with varying degrees of success, attempt to refute the binary opposition of East and West, Australia and Asia.

The Asian migrant text in Australia often contains an element of double coding in which certain puns and observations are directed at readers with a background in the particular migrant community being depicted. The resultant combination of cultural and linguistic references from a language other than English is also an attractive feature of the cultural hybridity of migrant literature more generally. In Yahp's The Crocodile Fury the symbol of the crocodile contains an alternative meaning for the Chinese Malaysian: a regional colloquialism links the crocodile with a lecherous and untrustworthy man- a connection which enhances the
complex links between patriarchy and colonialism in the novel. In Castro's *After China*, the name of the protagonist "You" contains extra meaning drawn from the Chinese language: in Chinese "You" is both a surname and a form of humble scholarly self-introduction by an author meaning "foolish" or "fool". The names of Sri Lankan characters in Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* also communicate additional information to the Sinhalese speaker because they involve, as Gooneratne points out in her "Author's Note" a modified use of "the traditional Sinhala ge or 'household' name which incorporates, preserves, and conveys essential information about its owner" (327). Consequently, Gooneratne explains, the name of the hypocritical character Mr M. K. B. Koyako "would roughly translate into English as 'look, mate, at the way this rascal's lying his head off" (327). Although Yahp's, Castro's and Gooneratne's prose fictions share an interest in linguistic puns drawn from languages other than English and therefore in the process of translation, Yahp's and Castro's texts approach the area of language and representation in a more playful fashion, with a greater sense of philosophical speculation and word-spinning than Gooneratne's realist works, which display a more practical interest in versions of reality.

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A preoccupation with history, particularly the details of the migrant group's past in Australia, characterises texts about the Asian migrant experience and forms part of a response to the particular place of Asia and the Asian migrant in the Australian cultural imaginary. Many of these texts criticise and contest current practices and register correctives to negative aspects of the imaging of the Asian in Australia, primarily the perception that the Asian migrant is the Other and a perpetual foreigner. The lack of a substantial recognition of "Asian" ethnic histories in Australia- or an

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5Fen Liang, in conversation, 7 Sept. 1995.
appreciation of the role of these diverse cultures in Australian national history—means that Asian figures can easily be exoticised. Through the grounding device of the historical narrative and references to particular historical events and cultural features, literary texts about the Asian migrant experience often work against this tendency. The pervasive Orientalist division between East and West, Asia and Australia, and the related perception that "Asian" individuals and countries have few historical links to Australian society, is a particular focus of attention and criticism in these texts. The reasons for this focus can be tentatively linked to the specific place of the communities considered Asian in contemporary Australian society: their vulnerability as small, relatively recently established migrant communities, their status as visible minorities, and the history of hostile representations of "Asia" and "Asians" in the Australian cultural imaginary.

The historical narrative is a common device in texts that address the Asian migrant experience and forms an important element of the recurrent engagement with history in the texts examined in this thesis. As illustrated in Chapter 4, the experiences of a contemporary "Asian" migrant protagonist are often revealingly paralleled with an historical narrative concerning the experiences of a previous "Asian" migrant to Australia. The historical narrative can appear as excerpts from a diary or autobiographical travel book and/or in the imaginative musings of the contemporary narrator. Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Miller's The Ancestor Game, Kim's The Chinaman and Castro's Birds of Passage all contain varieties of the historical narrative. The historical narrative is a device which counters dominant perceptions of the Asian migrant as an eternal alien, with no strong connection with the Australian society or landscape, by establishing a sense of a tradition of contact with white Australia. A common emphasis is on early moments of contact (and conflict) between an "Asian" migrant community and white Australian society, such as the mid to late nineteenth
century Chinese gold diggers (Birds of Passage) and Sri Lankan indentured labourers (A Change of Skies). Such representations install (or perhaps recall) new cultural heroes in a literary tradition which has been dominated by Anglo-Australian legends. The interweaving of a contemporary migrant narrative with a historical migrant narrative also stresses the longevity of the relationship between a particular migrant group deemed "Asian" and Australian society, and the continuity of the group's migration to Australia, and thus the legitimacy of its presence in Australia. Further, the attention to the historical detail of Asian migrant experience and its connections with the present through the device of alternating historical and contemporary narratives provides the foundation for potent expressions of a unique, hybrid, partly Australian cultural identity for a particular ethnic group.

Asian migrant texts symbolically map and claim a place for the Asian migrant by populating the Australian landscape with ancestral figures and their voices and the historical narrative is an important element in this process. A common feature of the historical narrative is an emphasis on ancestral contact: the narrator is often an ancestor of the contemporary migrant narrator. The result is a reliance on language and storytelling, the tales of family history and the genealogy of ancestry, to establish a sense of connection between the migrant character and Australian landscape and society. This is the case, for instance, in the device of the journal of Bharat's Grandfather Edward in A Change of Skies, and the writing of Seamus O'Young's ancestor, Shan, in Birds of Passage. An ancestral history establishes a sense of personal connection to a landscape and provides a symbolic claiming of the land through the voices of ancestors. Interestingly, the ancestral figures establish their identity against the land whereas the contemporary Asian Australian migrants are city dwellers who must seek their cultural identity in other places, such as the overlapping areas of family and history. The emphasis on ancestral contact, which combines the legitimacy of a shared history in Australia with personal ties, is a common
strategy of the migrant text which seeks to establish a place for the Asian Australian in a seemingly hostile Australia.

The process of mapping the landscape occurs in many texts about the Asian migrant experience and establishes an authenticity of connection between the migrant characters and Australia. In a number of the texts, as noted above, this is achieved through populating the landscape with ancestral voices and stories but in Don'o Kim's *The Chinaman* the same end is symbolically achieved through the Japanese protagonist's understanding of his geographical positioning in Australia and his growing knowledge of the natural world. Joe forges a link to the Australian landscape through a familiarity with certain landmarks and a thoughtful appreciation of the unique plant and animal life he comes across, and through this process he is shown to earn the right to belong. These strategies for establishing a sense of the migrant's legitimacy of presence in Australia recall, to some extent, the works of Ee, Mishra and Nandan which argue for the place of the Chinese Malaysian in Malaysia or the Indo-Fijian in Fiji but against indigenous claims and from the perspective of political exile.

The historical narrative also gives a temporal perspective to the theme of the manner of the production of Australian images of Asia, which is a common feature of texts about the Asian migrant experience. In Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*, Castro's *Birds of Passage* and Kim's *The Chinaman*, in particular, the historical narrative is used to illustrate the changing or enduring nature of certain perceptions of Asia and Asian migrants in Australia. The coexistence of a distinct historical narrative and contemporary narrative within a novel encourages a comparison between the two versions of migrant experience and typically establishes a continuity in the reception of Asian migrants by Anglo-Australians. In Kim's novel, for instance, the parallels between the experience of Australian bigotry in the narrative of the contemporary Japanese student Joe and the historical
narrative of Lee, a Korean who arrived in Australia twenty or so years earlier, suggests a tradition of white Australian racist attitudes. This is an important framing device for a text which is, in part, a parable about the racial divisions and hostilities within Australian society and their potentially disastrous effects upon the future of Australia. The historical narrative thus provides a deft strategy for illustrating a white Australian tradition of racism towards "Asia". Further, the parallels between the historical and contemporary narratives can provide a satiric commentary on Australian attitudes to Asia and thereby an impetus for change. Although Lee and Joe in Kim's *The Chinaman* are shown to be entirely different in cultural background, personality and personal philosophy the two narrators are considered "Chinamen" by Australian society and are consequently marginalised. The parallel between contemporary and historical narratives invites comparisons between the two "Chinamen" narrators, and the striking dissimilarities between these two narrators highlight the imprecision of the category itself. The historical narrative is thus a useful tool for illustrating the enduring and distorted language of racism which surrounds the Asian in Australian society. The strategy of the historical narrative is shared by a range of texts under discussion, including both realist texts and more experimental styles. However, the extent to which the historical narrative achieves its goal of rejecting mainstream stereotypes about Asia is linked with the formal structure of each text and its intrinsic attitude towards history. For this reason, the present thesis has attempted to consider each text individually, as well as comparatively, for the insights they can provide into the migrant experience and its representations.

A fundamental tension regarding the use of history is evident in the texts about the Asian migrant experience: there is an ambivalence between the desire to create a new history to legitimate the standing of a vulnerable migrant minority group, and the urge to reject traditional historicist notions of a stable history altogether. The response to this dilemma varies
considerably between the texts. The works which tend towards literary realism establish a new history on the edges of official historical discourse by employing unusual fragments from the past - folktales, voices of family, personal voices - in an effort to find alternative sources to traditional archival material and to forge an uncompromised ethnic history. In contrast, the more experimental texts reach beyond investigations of the representations of the Asian migrant and the historical place of the Asian migrant in Australia to investigate, and speculate upon, complex questions regarding the nature of history and historiography.

The treatment of the past in Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and *Relative Merits* is typical of the approach of what I have called the realist Asian migrant texts: Gooneratne's novel and family biography create an ethnic history rather than deconstruct historical discourse or encourage scrutiny of their own and other conceptual apparatuses. Both texts are counter-discursive, work generally within the boundaries of literary realism, and use devices of irony and a multi-voiced structure to insert levels of ambiguity and doubt into dominant discourses of history which have excluded the perspectives of less powerful groups. *Relative Merits* refutes a totalising sense of history and opens up the British colonial archives to the voices of Sri Lankans; *A Change of Skies* questions an Anglo-Australian history which excludes a Sri Lankan migrant past. *Relative Merits* evokes the lives of the Sinhalese élite of the 1830s to the 1950s through a combination of the diverse forms of the family anecdote, snatches of popular songs and the interpretation of a photograph rather than through references to archival material and the thoroughly documented public lives of the Bandaranaike family. In *Relative Merits* the narrator's voice is interspersed with the sometimes conflicting opinions and voices of other members of the family. This innovative style inserts a level of doubt and drama into the notion of a single history. The narrator's ironic treatment of the British cultural traditions of the Ceylonese élite confirms
and explores the ambivalent relationship between Britain and Sri Lanka, coloniser and colonised. Similarly, *A Change of Skies* has an often ironic tone (which questions to some extent the notion that any single voice can possess the absolute truth) and a multi-voiced narrative (a strategy which draws attention to the coexistence of different versions of the past and present). Further, in Gooneratne's novel the historical narrative—the diary of Bharat's Grandfather Edward—grants a new perspective on Australian history by including details of Ceylonese indentured labourers and establishes a history of connection between Sri Lanka and Australia. This vision of history, like that of *Relative Merits*, draws on alternative sources to received history. *A Change of Skies* reaches beyond the (Anglo-) Australian archives in which Sri Lankan migrant voices are often silent. Gooneratne's prose operates within the boundaries of realism and while it does not radically problematise the English language or fundamentally destabilise constructions of the nation, morality or ethnicity, it effectively raises some important themes of post-colonial and migrant literature, such as national and ethnic identity, the place of the Asian in Australia and the complexity of post-colonial loyalties.

Although *Relative Merits* and *A Change of Skies* both operate within realist literary conventions, important distinctions exist between the two texts which are related to their different purposes. Whereas *Relative Merits* is concerned with refuting a totalising sense of history in order to permit the entry of Sri Lankan perspectives in a post-colonial context, *A Change of Skies* satirises but also attempts to construct a more inclusive sense of history upon which to base a sense of place for Sri Lankan Australians. Consequently, the authority of history is preserved with greater attention in *A Change of Skies* than *Relative Merits*. The chronological movement of Gooneratne's novel is more regulated than the family history, with a clear linear progression which is delineated by informative subheadings. In contrast, *Relative Merits* moves back and forth
more flexibly through time, encouraging to some extent a questioning of linear time. Nevertheless, neither of Gooneratne's prose works examined in this thesis radically problematises the notion of history itself; the fictional worlds of *A Change of Skies* and *Relative Merits* are ordered places in which the corrective force of irony is employed in the style of Pope and Austen, as a civilising force, and which affirm a humanist vision of human nature rather than making radical statements about the problematic nature of human reality. The strategy of irony encourages certain characteristics of human behaviour (particularly cultural tolerance) and restores a sense of natural balance and moral order. The structures of the texts also evoke a sense of progression and stability although (as I have suggested above) to differing degrees: in *A Change of Skies* the subheadings clearly delineate the narrator, subject of discussion and chronological progression, while in *Relative Merits* the strong guiding force of the narrator and punctuated breaks define the narrative of the narrator from that of her interjectors. Neither *Relative Merits* nor *A Change of Skies* seeks to fundamentally challenge the workings of history by teasing apart the connections between historicism and realism, history and literature, as in the more experimental writings of Castro and Miller. Similar limitations in the discussion of history are evident in Abdullah's *Time of the Peacock*, Nandan's *The Wounded Sea* and Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces* and *The Root of All Evil*, and are commonly linked with the preservation of the authority of historical discourse for a political purpose. In contrast, Castro's and Miller's writing can be seen to be influenced by postmodern literary innovations and thus to enter new areas of discussion about narrative historiography from the starting point of Asian Australian migrancy.

In Castro's and Miller's more experimental novels, the preoccupation with the rejection of Orientalist notions of the Asian as Other and perpetual foreigner remain but the texts also suggest that ethnic history, like all histories, is ambivalent, multiplicitous and problematic. The
attention is not so much towards discovering an alternative ethnic history at the edges of historical discourse but towards relinquishing all notions of a single history in favour of more liberating and unstable forms. Castro’s Birds of Passage and Miller’s The Ancestor Game provide an ongoing exploration of traditional historical discourse and questions of historiography. Migrancy, history and postmodernism are central areas of enquiry. Castro and Miller ask questions about discourse and ideological systems, undermining literary hierarchies as they interrogate the mediated nature of all historical and literary narratives. These texts form part of a style of writing about the Asian migrant experience which is highly textualised and reaches to broader areas of discussion by acknowledging the fictive nature of ethnic history, as with all histories, and thus relinquishing a dependence on the development of an ethnic history and the creation of positive representations of the Asian migrant. The emphasis of these novels is instead on the imaginative and subjective components of history. The New Historicist notion of the close ties between history and literature, the qualities of history as narrative6, has strong points of contact with Miller’s and Castro’s novels. The subject matter, and occasionally the style, of these works also gestures towards international Asian migrant fiction such as Salman Rushdie’s Shame and Midnight’s Children. For Castro and Miller, as for Rushdie, the tussle with history is a significant element of the text which addresses the Asian migrant experience: it reflects the kinds of ambiguities and transgressions, between disciplinary as well as national borders, which texts that address the Asian migrant experience are being increasingly drawn towards. The postmodern fascination with boundaries

6New Historicism treats history as narrative by taking into consideration aspects of production and not treating it as unmediated “truth”. It rejects assumptions of historical coherence and (according to Greenblatt) maintains that versions of history are produced by particular social groups in conflict with each other. Donald E. Pease, “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon,” The New Historicism Reader ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1994) 150; Said’s succinct summary of New Historicist Hayden White’s notion, that “there is no way to get past texts in order to apprehend ‘real’ history directly”, affirms this interpretation of New Historicism. Edward W. Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic (London: Vintage, 1991) 4.
and mobility finds a powerful expression in the figure of the cosmopolitan Asian migrant in the West.

In employing Hutcheon's definition of the postmodern novel as "historiographic metafiction" to describe Castro's writing, I have suggested that although Castro's novels may be defined as "postmodern" these works are not necessarily ahistorical, as Jameson and Eagleton would contend. Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China* affectionately acknowledge modernist literary influences and make reference to historical characters and events. Further, the emphasis on narrative process, textuality and intertextuality are central features of the exploration and problematisation of the master narratives of History and Literature in Castro's texts. Characteristically, these disciplines are brought together in Castro's novels: the interdisciplinary boundaries between History and Literature are shaken through a thematic discussion of the shared features of these traditional fields of study; especially the problematics of narrative construction and authorial subjectivity. My reading of Castro's prose suggests that it does not argue stridently that history does not exist, but rather that we can know history only through its texts and that this understanding can be both terrifying and liberating. The transnational perspective of Castro's fiction, symbolised by his cosmopolitan Asian migrant narrators, is centrally supported by the postmodern style of the texts, which celebrates the virtue of border crossing between all human categories.

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Although literature about the Asian migrant experience in Australia has drawn inspiration from the works of international Asian migrant writing, the texts are grounded in Australian historical and social realities and concerns. For instance, Beth Yahp's and Dewi Anggraeni's fictions focus on the coding of the Asian woman in Australian society, with
Anggraeni highlighting the debilitating effects on Indonesian women of the stereotype of the Filipina mail order bride. The poems of Sudesh Mishra's Tandava counter Western perceptions of the South Pacific as a tourist paradise, a notion which has powerful proponents in Australian romance and adventure fiction. In contrast, Nandan's The Wounded Sea employs the Western stereotype of the South Pacific as a peaceful, rural paradise to highlight the tragedy of the Fijian coup of 1987 for an Australian audience. Brian Castro's Birds of Passage explores the fate of the Chinese Australian migrant and his/her descendants and examines the patterns of thinking which underly generalisations about "Asian" communities in Australia. These texts raise specific concerns regarding the imaging of the Asian migrant in Australia.

In criticising the construction of the Asian woman in Australian society, the short stories and novels of Dewi Anggraeni and Beth Yahp assume a role for literature in social change. Anggraeni's and Yahp's texts address one of the most challenging areas facing contemporary feminism, the analysis of multiple oppression, through their representations of the Asian woman and their related treatment of the intersections between race and gender. These works have a common interest in the relationships between female kin and in tracing connections between the feminine and the supernatural. They also share with contemporary Australian women's writing a fascination with a woman-centred perspective. However, the effectiveness of the discussion of the complexities of sexual politics and of race and gender in these texts is fundamentally influenced by their form. Anggraeni's writing style, which owes much to Indonesian literary tradition, is journalistic realism with a strong sociopolitical concern to educate (Anglo-Australian) readers. The emphasis in her novels is upon reaching a broad Australian middle-class and informing these readers about the difficulties of being perceived as an "Asian" woman in Australia, and details about the status of woman in Indonesian (particularly Javanese)
culture. In writing for an Australian audience, an important element of Anggraeni's fiction is the process of breaking down the perceived divisions between East and West—the traditional opposition between white Australian and the Indonesian as Asian Other and potential rapacious invader—and emphasising similarities between Australian and Indonesian citizens and society. However, Anggraeni's writing relies on an infrastructure of traditional gender and Orientalist stereotyping to establish a common ground with a broad Australian audience. Thus the presentation of femininity in Parallel Forces is based on classic binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity: female characters are emotionally sensitive, intuitive and artistic, and male characters are limited to the world of rational thought. In The Root of All Evil the expatriate Komala views Indonesia through the eyes of a foreigner. Although this perspective enables a greater identification for an Anglo-Australian reader with the protagonist, the final result is a distancing from Indonesian society because of Komala's reliance on stereotypes of an inherently corrupt and sexually licentious "Oriental" Jakarta. Anggraeni's narrators are typically female, middle-class, Javanese and Christian narrators who mediate the introduction of new knowledge to a predominantly Anglo-Australian reading public through their adherence to traditional expectations of the feminine, their Christianity and middle-class values. The final effect of the (apparently unsuccessful) populist emphasis\(^7\) in Anggraeni's writing is that the ideological construction of Asian femininity remains largely unquestioned and significant cultural differences between Australia and Indonesia are elided.

In contrast, Yahp's depictions of the intricacies of sexual politics, and the interactions between race and gender, are much more complex. The playful form of The Crocodile Fury suggests that the experiences of sexist

\(^7\) Ironically, despite being directed towards a broad, middle-class Australian audience, Anggraeni's writing has had little success.
and racist oppression intersect in a complex fashion and draws attention to the sometimes subtle ways in which a social structure can restrict some groups from speech. A primary interest in this novel is in forms of resistance to empire by the colonised and the resistance by women of a passive place in society through the process of storytelling. The novel teems with stories by the narrator and her grandmother who create and perpetuate subversive tales of rebel bandits and strong "Asian" women (such as "the lover" who defies the rich man and thus white colonial authority) who have supernatural gifts. Yahp's representation of the symbolic, unnamed Southeast Asian society of The Crocodile Fury- which has a matriarchal family at its centre and powerful women characters supported by traditional beliefs- can be seen as a response to the pervasive notion in Australian society that "Asian" women are passive, and powerless within the family. Anggraeni and Yahp share a fascination with the position of the Asian woman in Australia but whereas Anggraeni's fiction targets a broader audience and the process of educating middle-class Australia about the difficulties confronting Indonesian women in this country, the focus in Yahp's writing is on questioning the notion of ideological oppression and illustrating an empowering resistance to it.

The literary representations in Australia of Asian migrant women have been influenced by Chinese American authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan who have written innovative and popular fiction about the lives of Asian migrant women in the West. The influence of Kingston's writing style on the coding of Asian migrant women in Australia has been demonstrated in novels such as Yahp's The Crocodile Fury, Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, Lillian Ng's Silver Sister and Arlene Chai's The Last Time I Saw Mother. These novels display features which are important elements of Kingston's distinctive fiction, such as an attention to woman-centred perspectives and the supernatural, and a narrative structure informed by traditions of oral storytelling. In
interviews, Yahp and Lazaroo have mentioned the impact of Kingston's work on their own writing\(^8\). Clearly internationally acclaimed writers such as Kingston are providing sources of inspiration for young women writers of varying backgrounds who are tackling the politically charged area of race, gender and cultural difference in their presentations of Asian women in Australia. Salman Rushdie's writing can similarly be seen to have had some influence on Brian Castro's fiction, particularly *Drift*, as illustrated in Chapter 5. The existence of what I have termed "Asian Cosmopolitan" texts has therefore provided Australian-based authors with sources of stylistic inspiration. The market success of novels by Asian Cosmopolitans has also bolstered the confidence of Australian-based publishers to accept novels which address the relatively new and untried area of contemporary Asian Australian literature. However, as I have demonstrated in my readings of a number of works in this area, these texts should not be considered derivative literary forms drawn from international trends: writing about the Asian migrant experience in Australia has also been shaped by many other literary and personal influences and the sociohistorical specificities of Australian cultural life.

In texts which concentrate on representations of Asian female experience and are written by women writers, sexual politics is commonly foregrounded, as demonstrated in Yahp's *The Crocodile Fury* and Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces* and *The Root of All Evil*. However, in the literature which depicts male Asian migrant experience, gender issues often take second place to the analysis of race and ethnicity. For instance, in the world of Joe and Lee in Don'o Kim's *The Chinaman* women are idealised figures who do not initiate bigotry. The source of racial tension is shown to be masculine competition and struggles for dominance. By naming the

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central female character Beatrice, recalling Dante's idealised heroine, Kim gestures towards the limited symbolic role of women characters in his novel. The primary interest of *The Chinaman* is in the complexities of racial rather than sexual politics. This is demonstrated in the characterisation of the Aboriginal woman Fran, who is a more complex character than the other female figures, but whose depth and poignancy is located in her status as a dispossessed individual rather than her femininity.

Brian Castro's *After China* and *Birds of Passage* also centre on male experience. Masculine sexuality is a primary focus of *After China* and forms an important thematic link—drawn partly from Taoism—between sex, literature and immortality. This depiction tends to exclude the female writer from the intriguing relationship between literature and human life outlined in the novel. Further, the character of the redhaired woman writer is granted the opportunity to articulate only two stories, deluged by the wordy You's storytelling prowess. Texts depicting Asian female experience tend to focus on specific cultural beliefs, household life and folklore and the ways these shape female experience. This accent on the local and domestic may be contrasted with the approach of texts which address male Asian Australian experience and which, while also containing a strong component of reference to the family, generally call upon the cosmopolitan Asian narrator and (masculine) postmodern forms to contribute to a transnational atmosphere.

The notion that literature has a political purpose and engages with the real world is a strong feature of many texts about the Asian migrant experience and is linked with the wider thematic engagement with Australian discourse about Asia. In Chapter 5, I used Hutcheon's critical writing on postmodern and post-colonial literary modes to trace the political elements of a postmodern style evident in Castro's *Birds of Passage* and *After China*, and to distinguish the political elements of these works—which assert through their verbal texture a suspicion of master narratives and the
(allegedly) liberating effects of a departure from the point of origin- from the overt post-colonial politics of Castro's fifth novel, Drift. In Chapter 2, I suggested that Ee's Tranquerah and Nearing a Horizon, Mishra's Tandava and Nandan's The Wounded Sea are texts of political exile. Australia is presented in these works principally as the place of exile, a sanctuary not yet able to be explored: the protagonist's new land which lacks the resonance of his (the emphasis is on male perspectives) homeland. The attention of these texts is for the most part directed towards voicing the concerns of a cultural minority, the Indo-Fijian or Chinese Malaysian in exile from Fiji and Malaysia. The texts criticise the social and political situation in the homeland through strategies of resistance such as allegory and satire. They also assert the equal status of the migrant minority to the indigenous mainstream through a number of devices which recall a past history of contact, create a sense of belonging through connection to the landscape and establish the status of the migrant community as unique and valuable through reference to a complex culture. Thus in Ee's poetry the Babas and Malacca are important symbols and points of reference for establishing a Peranakan voice and sense of place, and in Mishra's and Nandan's literature the suffering of the Girmits, the Indian indentured labourers in Fiji, asserts the rights of the contemporary Indo-Fijian by referring to an ancestral past in Fiji. The social and political commentary and the creation of a sense of belonging have the potential to form a continuity between the politically-charged position of a migrant minority in Malaysia (or Fiji) and that of the "Asian" migrant in Australia. The possibilities for continuities between these perspectives is highlighted by the brief but satirical commentaries on Australian society occasionally made in these texts. Further, Ee, Mishra and Nandan's writings provide evidence that powerful interrelated discussions of indigeneity, land ownership and migrancy- issues with a particular relevance in post-Mabo Australia- are already being
undertaken in an Australian context by authors who have considerable international experience in representing these issues.

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The majority of texts about the Asian migrant experience are written by authors who are highly educated and have direct, first-hand experience of the cultural group of which they write. Many of the authors of the primary texts of this thesis have received university educations. Gooneratne, Nandan and Mishra, for example, are academics in English departments in Australian universities. All of the other writers under discussion have had tertiary educations and a number have received higher degrees. Clearly the very high standard of education can be linked with the author's confidence in writing in English, and the kind of contacts and knowledge which would increase the possibility of publication. Further, in countries such as Malaysia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines amongst others, written fluency in English indicates a certain level of privilege and quite often an elite background. The ramifications of these details of the sociology of production are significant: they suggest that the kinds of images of the Asian migrant which are being installed in contemporary Australian discourse are often being written by individuals who have privileged backgrounds in Australia and their original homelands. The images of the Asian Australian have reflected this trend, with a greater attention to the fate of privileged migrants. In Gooneratne's novel, *A Change of Skies*, the wealthy, educated Bharat and Navarinjini must come to terms in Australia with the absence of servants to perform domestic duties. A similar adjustment is made by the Filipino narrator of Arlene Chai's *The Last Time I Saw Mother* who finds it difficult to explain a life without domestic aid to her relatives in the Philippines. The experiences of refugees and lower-class individuals have yet to come to prominence in Asian migrant writing
written in English. Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* explores most thoroughly the fate of the impoverished Chinese individual considered Asian in Australia. The orphaned Seamus does gain a university education but only after a considerable struggle.

In terms of future developments in the area of Asian migrant writing, it seems certain that the writing of political exile will increase as more writers attempt to draw the attention of an Australian audience and government to injustices in their countries. For a number of writers- as for the late Ee Tiang Hong from Malaysia- an Australian audience will be largely unimportant for purposes of political persuasion and they will focus their attention on reaching the broader international community. However, it can be speculated that political writers from countries such as Fiji, for which Australia is an influential power, will continue to be attracted to an Australian literary context for political purposes. Perhaps an East Timorese or Bougainvillean voice will soon address an Australian audience with the vigour and urgency of a humanitarian political message. The trend for these writers to become outspoken academics is also significant: perhaps the activities of such writer-academics will inspire a resurgence of the public intellectual in Australian universities.

The Asian migrant text can also be seen to encourage an exploration of the conjunction between post-colonial and migrant fields of inquiry. The Asian migrant experience in Australia can be viewed, on one level, as a "post-colonial migrant" perspective. This mingling of categories contributes to the development of both migrant literature and post-colonial literature in Australia. The notion of certain continuities and conjunctions between the subject positions of the post-colonial and the migrant encourages a consideration of the possibilities for the transition of literary devices and approaches between the two fields. Both migrant writing and post-colonial literature are concerned with the relationship between language and power, and developing strategies of resistance to a dominant discourse which
enable them to move beyond the restrictions of the colonial power or white Australian hegemony. These strategies vary significantly between texts. In the poetry of political exile of Ee and Mishra, satire and allegory are shown to make this transition in the few poems which address Australian cultural life rather than the political reality of a Malaysian or Fijian homeland. The shared counter-discursive agenda of Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and *Relative Merits* further illustrates the possibilities for the productive exchange between post-colonial and migrant literature. The self-justifying master narrative of a single history is a familiar source of exclusion for colonised and migrant writers and is a subject of critical attention, and attempts at evasion, in both Gooneratne's family biography *Relative Merits* and novel *A Change of Skies*.

The literature of the Asian Australian migrant experience from 1965 to 1995 is a remarkably vigorous new genre. The advent of complex representations of the Asian migrant has powerfully challenged traditional notions of the Asian and the Australian, questioning the binary opposition between East and West and pervasive notions of the Asian as exotic and a perpetual foreigner. The subject position and characterisation of the Asian migrant is not only an important new development in the field of Australian representations of Asia but also involves a reworking of traditional perceptions of what it is to be Australian. The growth of writing about the Asian migrant in Australia reflects a literary confidence in which the Australian national psyche can be soundly probed through the creation of culturally hybrid identities, the investigation of the Australian dependence on an Asian Other for national self-definition, and also (in some more experimental works) the deconstructive power of a transnational gaze. Opportunities for further research exist in a number areas which are beyond the scope of this thesis, such as the examination of texts written in languages other than English, the Asian migrant experience in Australian children's literature, and comparative studies of literary texts.
written by Asian Cosmopolitan writers in Australia, North America and Britain. The analysis of the Asian migrant experience presents an opportunity to trace the often lively negotiation between Self and Other and the development of innovative literary attempts to represent cultural difference through the creation of new, more inclusive mythologies.
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