Un-Australian Fictions: Nation, Multiculture(~~alism~~) and Globalisation 1988-2008

by

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b. "The Un-Australian condition" *Transnational Literatures*. Web. <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/vol2_issue1.html>. This publication is a compilation of work drawn from the Preface and the Introduction to this thesis.

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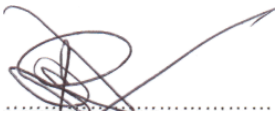

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to analyse a subset of contemporary Australian literary fictions published between 1988-2008: a period which is referred to as a "coming of age" for Australia. During these twenty years the country moved on from the bicentennial celebrations of British settlement and into a new millennium. Such progress occurred during sober and unsettling times, when a new transnational era meant that the relationships of territory to borders, as well as the association between space and capital were being realigned. Already accorded the status of national obsession, issues of national identity, were vigorously contested. Concepts such as nation, multiculturalism and globalisation became topics for heated discussion in the public sphere. These words were appropriated by interest groups throughout this period to put forward their claims as to what constituted "real" national belonging. Therefore, from 1988 onwards to name *who* someone was, as well as *what* he/she represented as *being Australian* became a mounting problem of definition. Australia's literary communities were not immune or isolated from the ongoing discussions in the wider public sphere.

All the texts read in this thesis have already been recognised for their literary merit. Consequently, this thesis sought to read for literary value whilst also recognising the textual politics of race, class, gender and colonisation—that are inherent in the unique literary worlds created by these various contemporary Australian authors. To that end, a subset of "un-Australian fictions" was created. This subset represents the challenges and breachings which these texts, in their own unique way, bought to Australian myths of nation: traditions such as masculism; a bush ethos; the pre-eminence of white colonial settlement; connectedness to an imaginative European geography; as well as an unbreakable tie to Britain. As un-Australian fictions, these texts reflect the destabilisation of what were once certain, spatial and psychic borders and orders of Australianness. They affect as well as reflect, the wider conversation that continues today about what *being Australian* means in a new millennium. In discussing these un-Australian fictions, I seek to interweave two disparate discourses: the nation's political and social discourse i.e. the public realm and the subjective, private and fictionalized discourse in the world of the author. Both nationally and internationally, during a time of escalating fear and conservatism, Australian literature through its un-

Australian fictions reclaimed and legitimated many and diverse ways of *being Australian*. This thesis has been written with the hope of acknowledging this fact.

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Fig. 1. Eleni, my paternal grandmother in Cyprus under British occupation circa 1953, personal property of the author.

Preface:

The Un-Australian Condition

> Identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are—is difficult to maintain ... We are the 'other', an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus.
>
> Edward Said, *After the Last Sky* 16

> 'a work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same'. To the story of Ulysses, Levinas opposes that of Abraham who leaves his fatherland for ever, never to return. This figure of the diaspora returns us to one of the most important aspects of Levinas' formulation of the relation of the ethical to the political
>
> Robert Young, *White Mythologies* 17

My birth was a happy accident which occurred alongside the reactive aftermaths of British colonialism. From very early on Papa taught me off-putting things about the British who were (in Papa's opinion) perfidious in all their habits of colonial government. As a Greek Cypriot he could never forgive the attempted assassination of Archbishop Makarios. However, according to Papa, this duplicity did not extend to the ordinary British soldier who was as much of a victim of the British ruling class as the peoples who they colonised. Unity could be found amongst the common man. It was British soldiers who taught Papa English, allowing him to migrate to Australia as a literate man; an important thing in the 1950s when the post war Greek diaspora populated Melbourne. Befuddled by English documents, mainland Greeks sought out my father to translate papers. Papa took enormous pride in the copperplate writing which the British had taught him. So helpful was Papa's work that it bought him to the attention of Mama's fellow villagers. Having come across such an excellent bachelor who was educated in English, they informed the village and after an exchange of letters and photographs which was brokered by her family, Mama was dispatched to Australia to marry. Shortly afterwards, I was born in Melbourne—a different outpost of the British Empire. Nothing like Cyprus, Melbourne was founded in 1835 by white British settlers. For the 2000 square kilometres surrounding the Yarra River, John Batman and his party paid the traditional owners the equivalent of one hundred British pounds. As under the doctrine of *terra nullius*, only the British Crown held title to the land, the

arrangement was soon repudiated. In 1837, the city was officially renamed in honour of the British Prime Minister—Lord Melbourne. By the 1890s, Melbourne flourished and was for a time the second largest city in the Empire. Peter Craven's introduction to Malouf's essay, *Made in England*, affirms colonial Australia as: "a transplanted form of England itself, and its nineteenth century cities—especially but not simply Melbourne—had the relation to London, the seat of the Empire, that provincial cities like Birmingham and Leeds had" (iv).

For my father, relocation to this seat of empire posed a new set of naming and language problems. There were fresh ruptures in the symbolic order. Much to the birth registrar's annoyance, when I was born in Melbourne, Papa refused to name me properly. Honouring hundreds of years of agrarian tradition, he gave his first name as my last since this was custom in his village. I would be known by the patronymic. Thus I would carry the "name of the father" until I was renamed and married. But here his proper name for me was rendered illegitimate, local nomenclature did not allow for such an overt honouring of the patriarchal bond and I was recorded in the English way. Papa maintained that it was practices such as these that had subjugated the Celtic peoples of Britain long before the British had exported them to their colonies and dominions. Beaten, he acceded to a new symbolic order: "What happens when the subjectivity acquired within one symbolic order is lost in another: are we left with an empty space and a vacated subjectivity, a type of aphanisis or fading of the subject?" (Gunew, "Home of Language" 46). Etymologically, aphanisis derives from the Greek and means to disappear, to become invisible. In psychiatry, aphanisis is first defined by Ernest Jones—a follower of Freud—as the inability to enjoy sex, as the *extinction de la capacite de la jouissance*: the enduring denial of the possibility of the satisfaction of desire (Lukacher 74). Lacan subsequently redefines aphanisis as the act of subjective destitution which has its locus in the very moment of the subject's creation. The signifier of the symbolic "I", its separateness, only comes into being because of the loss of pre-verbal plenitude (75).

In the white settler mythologies of Australia, the "aphanisis" of the child in the bush, the lost child, established itself as a poignant and enduring image from the nineteenth century onwards (Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children*). Alone in the darkness/vastness of the bush, in fear and confusion, disorientated and completely defenceless, the lost child is pitilessly exposed. With no witness to respond the child becomes invisible, its cries unheard, the child disappears, only suffering remains—circumscribed by the cruelty of a traitorous continent. In 1867, the "Three Lost

Children" in Daylesford, Victoria were found dead inside a tree, silently compliant with their betrayer. In luckier circumstances, Jane Duff and her three brothers—bush children lost and found in 1864—had their narrative commemorated, recalled and reinterpreted within the safer limits of educational films and school readers. Pervasive and enduring, the image of the lost bush child retains its hold on the modern Australian imagination and the unconscious brutality of the act is symbolically perpetuated. Media frenzy surrounding the more recent disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain and films such as *One Night the Moon*, disseminate this Australian anxiety for its contemporary audience—leading one historian to ask: "But what is it in our experience of colonisation and settlement that established this image at the core of Australian popular mythology, and why does it retain its potency?" (Torney 11). If the lost child archetype resonates within the settler psyche it is not the only leitmotiv in the gallery of images of unfulfilled promise that haunt the national imaginary (at least amongst the dominant Anglo–Celtic group). Possessively inhabiting that gallery are also the images of the youthful, dying Anzac and the courageous but doomed explorer.

When Mama felt slighted due to her new immigrant status, she would come home from the Melbourne factory announcing that she was proud that she had not come to Australia with "her hands tied together". For her, unfairness was the natural outcome of Australia's convict settler past. If you appropriated your "home" from the other and the other still kept place there, then yours was a haunted nation. Should the betrayer not acknowledge the betrayal, then the omission taints all recognition and the stain remains. This is the paradox of fidelity that the betrayed and the betrayer share. Non recognition for Mama reflected her tormentors' own tormenting lack—it was one from which they could not instigate a chronicle of belonging for themselves let alone for new Australians (as they were known back then). Forever tantalizing, always alluringly out of reach, the "natural inheritance" lives on for the white settler as a manifest symptom of the *extinction de la capacite de la jouissance*—the enduring denial of the possibility of the satisfaction of desire. Meantime, Papa remained much more concerned with the blight of Britishness. Gallipoli and Churchill's abandonment of Australia after the fall of Singapore in WW2 further proved to him the duplicity of British governance. If the subaltern was about race and class for Papa, Mama was thrice denied because for her it was about race, class and gender.

As she could not speak English, Mama was tied to speechlessness. Having gained her access to the symbolic order through language she now lost her right to enter.

> For a while, like so many immigrants I was in effect without language, and from the bleakness of that condition, I understood how much of our sense of self, depends on having a living speech within us. To lose an internal language is to subside into an inarticulate darkness in which we become alien to ourselves. (qtd in Gunew, "Home of Language" 46)

This is Polish-American writer Eva Hoffman writing about the émigré condition of aphasia. Aphasia is also known as aphemia, both words deriving from the Greek and prefixed by the morpheme "α" which means without or lacking. Lacan elevated the morpheme α to the status of trope, incorporating into it a psychoanalytical meaning of archetypical lack, a hole of unfillable desire (Wilden 24). In a drier definition the *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes aphasia as a condition which impairs the capacity to produce and/or understand language. Usually, it is a result of damage to the language centres of the brain. For Mama, it was an inverted condition she lost a language and thus weakened her mind. Use it or lose it, they say and named her "inarticulate darkness" depression. Suffering expressed is articulated as creativity. Neurosis is unexpressed suffering symptomatised across the body/mind. Language is everything. Regardless of which language was used and what was said at home, I went to Australian schools where I learned that I had joined what Churchill termed the English speaking peoples and that: "the greatest thing about that inheritance is that we speak the language Shakespeare wrote and are inward by our birthright with the glories of that great master of metaphor and association" (Craven, "Introduction" iv).

Faithfully, I served my apprenticeship as a colonial Australian, as a Shakespeare Wallah. I wrote eloquently about the creations of "that great master of metaphor and association" (iv). With alacrity, I embarked on the project of English. It echoed my own trans-generational theme of purgatory and redemption through language. Yet where Craven recalls the Bard's Henry V on the field of Agincourt: "And you, good yeoman, whose limbs were made in England/Show us here the mettle of your pasture"—I took up arms and sided with Papa (*H5* 3.1 26-27). I resonated to the rage, suffering, and despair of the Bard's articulate and ridiculous Shylock, the voice for the world's first stateless people—the Jews: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means … If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?" (*MV* 3.1 70-72). I understood the fury of being rendered contemptible—of being unseen and unheard. In time, the demands of individuation being what they are, my views and Papa's diverged as well as merged. Many liberal, generous "real" Australians aided and supported my passage to emotional and intellectual maturity. But this was during the

1970s, when the Multiculture~~alism~~ created by the vast post-war European migration was looked-for, identified and welcomed.[1]

> More than 200 people at the bleak desert centre began a hunger strike eight days ago. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock ordered five children removed from the camp to protect them from having their lips sewn together like those of other children in the protest. (qtd in Gunew "Home of Language" 55)

This quote does not belong to the benign multiculturalism of Australia in 1970s. It is cited from a contemporary report on refugees held in detention camps in Australia during the last decade.

Today, for Australians, the "foreigner" poses a considerable philosophical problem of assessment. How do we identify the "foreigner"? Does the "foreigner" merely breach the cartographic boundary or is the "foreigner" someone who resides amongst us threatening the symbolic boundary, just as the bard's unspeakable Jew, Shylock, threatens to mutilate the body of the Christian Antonio. In what ways do we reject or subscribe to kinship with him or her? "They" stand outside the group identity, the glue that binds "us" together. For that reason there is the political problem of what do you do with the "foreigner"? Should you subjugate the Other or be subjugated by him/her, live peaceably or apart? Try to destroy the Other or fear destruction from him/her? "Who, after all is empowered to define the Subject and the Other? In whose interests are such identities, who profits from these definitions and who suffers?" (Schwartz 79). Does the white settler fear of aphanasis, the fear of the white settler child rendered speechless and terrified in an alien landscape lead him/her to inflict this terror on his or her Other? Does the archetypal lack of a natural inheritance, that Lacanian "a", that unfillable desire, mean that the white settler must violently exclude the Other through expulsion? Is it a tragic requirement that as the illegitimate child of Britain, the white settler must abhor the Other to legitimate his/her future and valorise his/her past? And should this requirement be endorsed by culture, legislated by authority and enacted by symbolic violence in both its definition and its policy?

Fig. 2. “Flagheads”, from http://www.boatpeople.org.au, is a black and white reproduction from a series. This picture also appeared on the front cover of the “Unaustralia”(*sic*) issue of *Continuum,* Journal of Media and Cultural Studies 21.4 (2007).

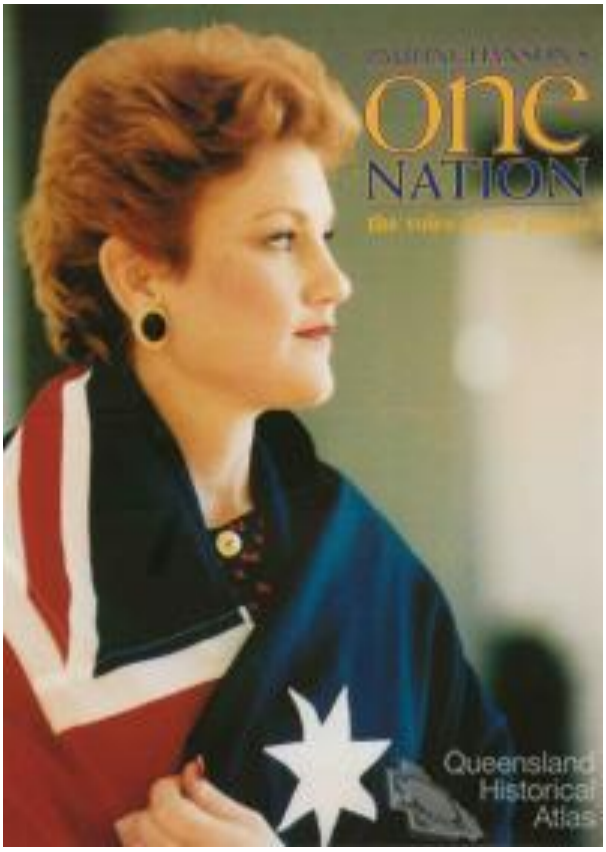

Fig. 3. Pauline Hanson poster prepared for the launch of the One Nation Party, on 11 April 1997. Image available at the website of the *Queensland Historical Atlas* from an article prepared by Chris Salisbury, "Dividing Queensland Pauline Hanson's
One Nation Party"
http://www.qhatlas.com.au/content/
dividing-queensland-pauline-hanson%
E2%80%99s-one-nation-party.

1

Introduction

> Accordingly, to this day the myth that defining and demarcating ourselves over against what is foreign is a precondition of identity, politics, society, community … Let us call this the "territorial either/or" theory of identity. It assumes that a space defended by (mental) fences is the indispensable precondition for the formation of self–consciousness and for social integration.
>
> Ulrick Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* 5

The Australian nation-state is not a static thing, it is as much a discursive practice and imaginative projection as it is a geographic territory and a state and civic polity. Well into the twentieth century, Australians continued to look towards the unreal homeland of Britain to locate Australia imaginatively and morally within the British Empire (and consequently within the natural superiority of the "West"). Even today, the need to claim a British (and hence Western) inheritance appears to be pre-eminent in the nation's cultural and political discourse. However, it was only in the nineteenth century that being Western came to mean "being law-governed and socially and technologically advanced" (Bonnet *The Idea of the West* 5). According to geographers Lewis and Wigen, it was the Greeks who first recognized a "natural" distinction between Europe and Asia. Greek mariners did not regard any one continent as inherently superior to the other. However, over time, cultural values were attributed to geographical differences and Europe came to be seen as being naturally superior to Asia: "Europe was defined in relation to its superiority—progress, civilisation, and reason—over a less evolved Asia" (Cerwonka 39). In such a binary, Europe (and most particularly Britain) was represented as advancing forces for civilisation, signifying what J. M. Blaut calls "*eurocentric diffusionism*, the little-challenged belief that there has been a unidirectional flow of culture, innovation, and overall human causality from a European centre to a non-European outside" (qtd in Cerwonka 39).

As modern maps established "the power of a state by writing the identity of the nation on the physical world"—the "mapping" and "writing" of an Australian state onto Asia–Pacific geography became the outcome of British imperial desire (Cerwonka 23).

In 1770, when the expansionist ambitions of the colonial powers were both aggressive and adversarial, Captain James Cook took possession of the eastern territory of Australia in the name of the British king:

> Captain Cook realised that the Pacific Ocean, which for so long had been unknown in Europe, was almost becoming the Europeans' own toy harbour. They held most of the Pacific coast of America, the Dutch held the Indonesian archipelago, and the Spanish held the Philippines. Even the Russians in their slow expansion eastwards across Asia, were assembling a loosely held colonial empire which extended all the way from Moscow to the shores of the northern Pacific … (Blainey, *A Short History of the World* 407)

A British colony in the Pacific, "the Europeans' own toy harbour", was established on the shores of Sydney Cove in 1788.[1] Thus, historian Stuart Macintyre considers that the history of Australia forms "a late chapter in British, European and world history". British settlers bought with them a unique inheritance: "fashioned from the objective rationality of the Enlightenment and a corresponding belief in human capacity, the moral certainty and stern duty of evangelical Christianity, and the acquisitive itch of the market". As well, such a legacy cast history as "an insistent process of improvement and progress that legitimated the replacement of the old by the new". The isolation, strangeness and disarticulation of the early British colonists was soothed and moderated by attaching their "destiny to imperial origins. Colonial history took British and European achievement as its point of departure" (*A Concise History of Australia* 2). Thus, Australia was irrevocably situated within the reciprocal and binary relationship between the Old World and the New. The Australian attachment to what Edward Said terms a "European imaginative geography" was inevitable ("From Orientalism" 419).

As Australia is isolated in the Asia–Pacific or South–East Asia region, the country's geography became a symbolic site of anxiety for many Australians, due to: "its geographical liminality in relation to the symbolic binary of Europe and Asia" (Cerwonka 39). Therefore, when "chance was turned into destiny" and the six Australian colonies united into a single nation in 1901, Australians demanded recognition of both Australianness and un-Australianness (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 19). So what does un-Australianness mean? In its earliest use from the mid 1850s onwards, "un-Australian" was used in a positive sense to describe the things that were akin to the British motherland and unlike the home country. But it was in the 1990s, following a flurry of the use of the expression "un-Australian" by politicians, that the *Macquarie Dictionary* first included a definition of the term. In 2006, whilst conducting a review of the Hansard records going back 20 years, Professor Klaus Neumann found that politicians in the Senate and the House of Representatives had

used the term 600 times (Duffy). In the Australian parliament the term had been used to describe anything from rental cars to socialism, to the imposition of import duties. Then again, in the 1990s, academic Joe Pugliese saw the growing use of the term as marking a profound anxiety about Australian identity—a failure that indicated Australia's incapacity to come to terms with its own history (qtd in Ireland). So prevalent did the use of the term become, that in December 2006 the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia (CSAA) themed its annual conference around the subject of UnAustralia (*sic*).

In 1981, Richard White had already accorded the status of a "national obsession" to the inventing of a national identity for Australia. White declared that:

> There is no point asking whether one version of this essential Australia is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible—and necessarily false … When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are and whose interests they serve. (*Inventing Australia* viii)

Like Australianness, understandings of un-Australianness progressed or regressed, depending on whose interests were best served at the time. The two terms formed a binary definition and the qualities attributed to each were mutually dependent on the meaning given to the other. For example, former Australian Prime Minister John Howard invoked the word "un-Australian" to great effect. In 2004, 28.2 per cent of the mentions of the word in major metropolitan newspapers were attributed to him by Media Monitor. Elected to office four times, Howard took Australians into the new millennium by reinvigorating a homogeneous and one dimensional Australian identity forever indebted to its British origins. As a result, from the mid 1990s, until the mid 2000s Australians failed to move beyond a state of mind that made national identity contingent on the pre-eminence of a white British diaspora. In fact, Ien Ang considers white Australia culture to be the necessary precursor for Australia's present virulent border protection program: a policy which legislated and mandated attitudes of "self-righteous, self-protective parochialism" and "rigid anti-cosmopolitanism" ("From White Australia to Fortress Australia" 58).

Undoubtedly, the fin-de-siècle political and social environment saw Australia preoccupied with territorial disputes. Within nation-state borders, issues of territorial integrity arose as Aboriginal land rights achieved limited recognition. Meantime, external boundaries were threatened by asylum seekers and refugees. From a European perspective, the virulent response of the Australian state to a comparatively small number of illegal arrivals appeared extreme but as the physical borders of Australia

were breached, the Australian state saw national identity as endangered. Fearful of a breakdown in the old order, Australia's conservative intelligentsia and commentators favoured the sort of nation building sensibility which was politically supported by conservative government. Capitalising on their popular support, the Howard government proved politically astute in their ability to effectively mobilise "the rhetoric of loss" within Australia (Nolan and Dawson xi). Many "ordinary" Australians felt that they had lost out in the ongoing cultural changes which were part of the revolution that had affected all Western societies from the 1960s onwards. Amongst other things, these cultural changes undermined existing orthodoxies by challenging established attitudes to gender, race, sex, ethnicity and religion. More latterly still, industrialised Western societies were encountering the end of a post-war consensus on welfare-state politics (Schierup, Hansen, and Castles *Migration*). The protracted crisis in the restructuring of the modern welfare state which first manifested in the mid-1970s, intensified during the 1980s and 1990s—a change which left many Australians feeling socially and psychologically insecure.

From the 1990s onwards and well into the 2000s, two Prime Ministers (and their respective governments) shaped Australia—Paul Keating and John Howard. In spite of the many differences (and similarities) between them, both attributed the national unease to the tenuousness of the existing definition of Australianness.[2] Leading public documents, such as *Australian Citizenship for a New Century* prepared by the Australian Citizenship Council in 2000, supported these conclusions. The Citizenship Council reported that they could find no "'particular answer' to the question of what was distinct about Australian political life" (Galligan, Roberts, and Trifiletti 2). As a consequence, both Keating and Howard sought to take control of the narrative of Australianness. The debate that Keating set off—about who Australians are as a people—lingers long after his departure from office. A staunch republican, he hit out at his conservative opponents' commitment to Britishness and monarchy:

> I tell you I learnt one thing: I learnt about self-respect and self-regard for Australia. Not about some cultural cringe to a country which decided not to defend the Malaysian peninsular, not to worry about Singapore, not to give us our troops back to keep ourselves free from Japanese domination. This was the country you people wedded yourselves to, and even when they walked out on you and joined the Common Market you were still looking for your MBEs and your knighthoods and all the rest of the regalia that comes with it. These are the same old fogies who doffed their lids and tugged the forelock to the British establishment. We will not have a bar of it. (Speech to House of Representatives, 24 February 1992)

More than a decade later, equally determined, conservative Prime Minister Howard also used power to tell his version of the national story and to propose a different

cohesiveness for the nation. He claimed victory in the culture wars, as he declared an end to the "divisive, phoney debate about national identity" and that Australians did not have to "smother or apologise for our place in the Western political tradition in order to build our relationship in Asia or any other part of the world" (Address to National Press Club, 25 Jan. 2006). Australia's influence in the rest of world could be assured on its own terms:

> Most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having a dominant cultural pattern running through them. In Australia's case, that dominant pattern comprises Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political culture. (Address to National Press Club 25 Jan. Australia Day 2006.)

As well as other differences, Keating's and Howard's perspectives exposed the false homogeneity and consensus of an Australia portrayed as an Anglo–Celtic nation.[3]

Sectarian, political, and economic divisions between Protestant English and Irish Catholics were very evident in Australia before the 1960s. Paul Keating's strong republican and anti-British stance is generally attributed to his Celtic, Irish-Catholic background.[4] Whereas John Howard's valorising of British institutions and staunch monarchism is attributed to his Protestant Anglo heritage. Moreover, as Australia's post-war immigration programme bought in immigrant groups of much greater difference, Anglo–Celtic dissimilarities were subsumed and rendered less obvious. To date, Australianness had been secured by a vigorous exclusion of "un-Australianness"—a term which operated, amongst other things, as a linguistic repository for Australia's "Others". Elaborating on the "Other" from the standpoint of the "anti-discipline" of cultural studies, John Frow capitalizes the word as making "a mythical One out of many" (*Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* 7, 3). Frow's interest lies with that social group "from and for which knowledge of the objectified Other is produced" (3). The knowable Other is generated from within "our" cultural framework, operating as a mirror image to tell us "what we want to know about ourselves" (3). Consequently, there can be no unmediated encounter with the Other; all that we really do is create an internal contrast to our own social framework, using our own language. Created within specific social systems, the "Other" works like the shadow self in psychoanalysis, illuminating unexplored and often unacceptable parts of our own world. As definitions of the "Other" are absorbed into that selfsame world, this system is changed. But the encounter with the "Other" is always mediated by the cultural lens of the "specular relationship" (3).

Reproduced from the fourth edition of *The Macquarie Dictionary* published in 2005, the following four definitions of un-Australian suggest the "cultural lens" of contemporary Australia's "specular relationship" with its "Others":

> 1.
> not Australian in character; an un-Australian landscape; an un-Australian novel.
>
> 2.
> (of conduct, behaviour, etc.) not conforming to ideas of traditional Australian morality and customs, such as fairness, honesty, hard work, etc.; Mr Elliott said the idea should not be seen as un-Australian or against the ethos of the nation's culture of not dobbing in mates', -West Australian 1992.
>
> 3.
> violating a pattern of conduct, behaviour, etc., which, it is implied by the user of the term, is one embraced by Australians; It's un-Australian to drive past a pub. -John Singleton 1988.
>
> 4.
> *Obsolete* disloyal to the Australian nation, especially by virtue of being subject to manipulation by an influence from outside Australia, derived from certain political, religious and ethnic affiliations.
>
> *The Macquarie Dictionary*

From the bicentenary onwards, rejected and expelled "un-Australianness", survived in a liminal border zone: a boundary sector that was physically realised by the creation of a migratory exclusion zone for incoming refugees. But so-called "illegals" were only a small part of the possible spatial incursions into the territorial and symbolic sovereignty of Australians. For Australians in the new millennium, possible definitions of "Others" now encompassed a multiplicity of threatening and unauthorised representations. Moreover, as both of Australia's major political parties forcedly advocated Australia's commitment to economic globalisation, the traditional left was marginalised. Capital became international and won the day in Australia but the price was high. There was social disintegration within affected areas, particularly amongst rural communities and the manufacturing sectors (Castles, "The racisms of globalisation" 38). Economic deregulation occurred "in advance of renewal in Australian civic culture and articulation of Australian citizenship". Old certainties were "eroding without a new consensus emerging" (Galligan, Roberts, and Trifiletti 2). For Australians, already unpersuaded by a connection to a solid sense of national identity, the changes of the fin-de-siècle decade and beyond were seen as menacing to both identity and community. Hence, from the 1988 bicentenary onwards, to name *who* someone was, as well as *what* he/she represented as *being Australian*, grew to become a mounting problem of definition. Indeed, during the whole of the bicentenary year, which commemorated two hundred years of British settlement, the country was consumed by the question of national

identity—a contentious discussion that continues today. The dilemma was, and still is, how to introduce oneself as *being Australian*.

Being Australian: 1988–2008

For all of these reasons, the twenty years from 1988 to 2008—from bicentenary into the new millennium—represented a "coming of age" for Australia. Not altogether celebratory, it was also a sobering, unsettling and introspective time. In this thesis as applied to both literary fiction and general fiction, the coming-of-age period will refer to these years. During this time, did events within Australia's literary establishment in any way reflect the wider socio-political landscape? Were there parallel developments within the category specified as Australian literature? Or does literature only exist and persist in its own hermeneutically contained universe? More to the point, does politics have anything to do with literature and does literature have anything to do with politics? Undoubtedly, academic Mark Davis would answer this question with a "yes". For Davis the decline of the Australian literary paradigm is concurrent with government policies related to globalisation and the end of post-war consensus on welfare state politics: "seen in these terms the decline of the literary paradigm isn't simply to do with literature; it's to do with a broader reconceptualisation of the public sphere itself" ("The Decline of the Literary Paradigm" 117). Yet, although I agree with Davis with regard to the changes that have reshaped the Australian public sphere, I do not consider the literary paradigm to be in decline—even though it is most certainly being refashioned. Rather, in this thesis I propose the opposite, suggesting that literary fiction during the coming-of-age period played a key role in the critical processes of "disenchantment" and "remoralisation" that were taking place within Australian society.

The terms "disenchantment" and "remoralisation" were first invoked by social scientist Max Weber. He believed it was the vocational duty of social scientists to identify these factors and to recognise the differences between them. Whilst I do not want to reduce Australian literary form to a national political and social allegory, in this dissertation I contend that literary fiction not only reflects the "disenchantment" of the political and social but that it also plays a key role in its imaginative restoration or "remoralisation".[5] Not all literary fiction takes on this task. Nor do I believe, by any means, that all literary fiction must to do so or that all fiction must only be given critical attention on the basis of its political engagement. It just simply happens that some literary fiction more obviously takes on this commission. Consequently, this thesis goes on to consider selected Australian literary fictions published between 1988–2008 which

vigorously engage with those cultural changes that undermined existing orthodoxies by challenging established attitudes to gender, race, sex, ethnicity and religion. They are not the only fictions published in Australia at this time to do so. Nor does the thesis claim any comprehensive coverage for the coming-of-age period's published fiction—literary or otherwise.[6] Rather, in dealing with specific fictions I seek to mediate between the nation's political and social discourse i.e. the public realm and the subjective, private and fictionalised discourse in the world recreated and represented by the author. There has always been a classic liberal tension between private and public spheres and, in one sense or another, the authors who are the point of this study replicate this strain subjectively. As well, the critical attention given to the correlation between these two disparate discourses reflects the tension between liberal and radical movements in postmodern times. Where liberal movements seek to "fix" the existing system, radical movements look towards its fundamental overhaul. Once again, the authors studied in this thesis variously take up these positions. All of the authors in this study can lay claim to the status of an Australian national. Yet, in the various imaginative fictions and characters that they create, they show that identity in this coming-of-age period for Australia was not a settled thing. Australianness is a fluctuating, variable and at times negating concept, as these un-Australian fictions show identity being rewritten "within a framework of modern Western ideas about science, nature, race, society, [and] nationality" (White, *Inventing Australia* ix).

As a result, even though this thesis is primarily situated in the area of literary studies, because of its mediated interaction with political and social discourse, it also has a foothold within cultural studies, Australian studies and cultural history.[7] The prefix of un-Australian is applied to the selected authors' fictions because of the challenges these particular texts represent, through various and different means, to authorised, accepted and customary representations of Australianness. Within the projected mental spatiality of "real" and "ordinary" Australians, the border between un-Australia and Australia is already formed, existing figuratively as cerebral blockade. A "mental fence", of the sort Beck refers to in the epigraph to this chapter, had already been historically premeditated for Australia's "Others": "national identity is not 'Born of the lean loins of the country itself' … but is part of the 'cultural baggage' which Europeans have bought with them, and which we continue to encumber ourselves" (ix). Before going on to specifically define the use and purpose of the remaining terms in the thesis title—"Nation", "Multiculture~~alism~~", and "Globalisation"—I would like to briefly consider the historical evolutions of un-Australianness. In part, I do this because

of the enduring hold that these "mental fences" have upon the Australian psyche. National identity may be weak and tenuously conceived but these "mental fences" have also played a de facto nation-forming role.[8] Up to now, they have to a large extent determined the independent status and authority that, as a nation-state, Australia has been able to command. The following brief social, historical and spatial analysis goes some way towards explaining Australia's difficulties during the coming-of-age period, in locating itself within a rapidly changing geo-political environment. Equally, further on in the thesis, these uncertainties are reflected in the study of the selected literary texts.

A Brief History of Un-Australia

> The unity of Australia is nothing, if that does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought.
>
> Alfred Deakin (1901) qtd in Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* 142

Residing securely "within the British Empire that was the dominant global organisation of the day", Australians expanded their self-government whilst at the same time retaining their identity as British subjects (Galligan, Roberts, and Trifiletti 3). But from the very beginning the creation of Australia was based on a racialised ideal. The new nation's constitution denied citizenship, franchise and the right to serve in the armed forces to Africans, Asians, and Aboriginal people. For Macintyre, the new nation's "[r]acism was grounded in imperial as well as national sentiment, for the champions of the Empire proclaimed the unity of the white race over the yellow and the black" (*A Concise History* 141). In 1901, the first act passed by the Australian Federal Parliament was the *Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act* which came to be known as the White Australia policy. Another stratagem in ensuring Australian racial purity, the policy was finally dismantled in 1973. Surveying the policy as the inevitable outcome of modernity, David Walker sees that the White Australia Policy was impelled by "a profound unease at the collapse of distance in the modern world and the growing and unwelcome interaction between peoples of different races and cultures" ("Race Building and the Disciplining of White Australia" 42). Nonetheless, it was not only fear that impelled the mission of Australian racial purity. Prestige could be achieved, as well as global prominence, if the national vision was articulated as ensuring the future of the white races. Consequently, the White Australia Policy gave Australia an imposing and inflated responsibility for the European and Western world (43).

With nationhood came the binding racial imperative of conferring membership to the nation. Australia was to be a white, sovereign and modern European state. “Un-Australia” would contain those groups to be physically or symbolically excluded from national belonging—the collectivised “Others”. In line with the Social Darwinism and racial determinism of the late nineteenth century, Australia was designated to become the protected reserve of the “higher races”. As Carter explains:

> Racialised thinking ... was pervasive in white or European societies by the turn of the century ... The key point in the Australian case is that racialised thinking organised around the core concepts of whiteness and Britishness, became absolutely fundamental to conceptions of the Australian nation. It was not so much Australians were 'racist' as that 'Australia' itself was a racialised idea. (*Dispossession, Dreams and Diversity* 312)

Australia looked to the new government to enforce the exclusion of inferior races by law. Initially, undesirable races were excluded via means of a dictation test administered in a European language. By 1900 the majority of British subjects were Indians and Africans. Given their important strategic interests with China and Japan, the British were keen to avoid any overt racial discrimination being encoded into Australian law. A dictation test appeased Britain. As added insurance, parliament granted customs the responsibility for administering the dictation test in a language unfamiliar to the immigrant identified as racially undesirable (Tavan 10). Paul Kelly observes that historians have tended to apologise for, or diminish the White Australia Policy because of its overt racism. However, the policy had “near universal support and longevity” and was central to the “Australian story”. Far from being deviant, the policy was “merely typical of its age” (*The Australian Story* 52).

In *Anxious Nation,* David Walker argues that the racialising drives in Australian nationalism “would have been a good deal less intense, had it not been for the geo-political threat attributed to awakening Asia from the 1880s” (5). Thus, with the “empty” continent of Australia so conveniently close, populous Asia emerged as Australia's pre-eminent threat, before and after Federation. A strongly expressed nationality was deemed crucial for the infant Australian nation—a weakly expressed nationality could only lead to an Asianised disaster. Is it any wonder then that racial purity and the imperative and pre-eminence of British ancestry (after all the British were the masters of an Empire that ruled a quarter of the world) became the touchstones of Australia's fledgling national culture? As well as labour protection (cheap Asian labour was seen as a threat to the working man) and egalitarianism, Kelly links the “powerful social and economic logic” of the White Australia Policy to the founding of “an enlightened, democratic, progressive Australia” (*The Australian Story* 53).

But from the very beginning, this utopia was based on racialised thinking—it was utopia for the white man only. Whiteness of course evolved in definition over the decades of the White Australia policy. From Britishness and the initially accepted Protestant and Nordic peoples, it subsequently moved eastwards across Europe to include Greeks, Italians, Maltese and other World War 2 European refugees. Like the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, the Migration Act in 1958 which replaced it, also did not mention race or the White Australia policy. Nonetheless, the Migration Act of 1958 perpetuated the White Australia Policy for another ten years (Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera* 9). During the 1960s and the 1970s, the massive, post-war migration of non-British Europeans required Australians to reassess the pre-eminence they accorded to their British heritage. International conditions also challenged Australia's sense of "nationness". It became increasingly difficult for Australia to locate itself imaginatively and morally within the British Empire. Between the 1960s and the 1970s decolonisation and global migration escalated. International opinion condemned the regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa. Britain joined the European Common Market and as Australian agricultural markets were lost overnight, Australians felt abandoned. Further weakening ties to Britain, Australia took Japan as a major trading partner and the United States as a major military partner. Theories of political plurality were championed within the academy and Western democracies experienced a rise in activism: civil rights, the Vietnam peace movement and Aboriginal activism. Both nationally and globally Australia was being forced to redefine itself. In response to the need for change, Australians elected the Whitlam government in 1972, ending 23 years of conservative Coalition government. Motivated by a reformist agenda, the Whitlam government introduced initiatives in key areas. Al Grassby, the Whitlam government's Minister of Immigration, is generally credited with pioneering Australian multiculturalism.[9]

Australian multiculturalism is often seen as a response to Canadian multiculturalism which was adopted as state policy in Canada in 1971. Multiculturalism is a word devised to describe something that had not existed before, namely "that cultures had relevance beyond the immigrant generation" (Jupp, *From White Australia* 80). However, Canadian and Australian multiculturalism had different histories and were driven by dissimilar imperatives. Mark Lopez views the Canadian model as emphasising cultural maintenance and exchange whereas the Australian model was focused primarily on migrant welfare (*The Origins of Multiculturalism* 117). Nonetheless, from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, multiculturalism became the

accepted policy framework for managing Australia's post-war diversity. This also established a tradition of treating "'White–Aboriginal" relations and "Anglo–Ethnic" relations as two separate spheres of life"—a problematic convention that persists today (Hage, *White Nation* 24).

On the other hand, from the early 1980s onwards, the Australian political climate was changing. As the ambassador of disaffected conservative opinion, the journal *Quadrant* had been critical of multiculturalism from the early 1980s. However, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's enthusiastic support had kept conservative opposition at bay. Electoral defeat and the prospect of long years of entrenched Labour government bought the conservative critics out in force from the mid 1980s. In 1984, Professor Geoffrey Blainey aired his ambivalence toward Asian migration and published *All for Australia,* a volume which was highly critical of multiculturalism—the "Asian" part of it in particular. He coined the term "ethnic payola" to refer to the grants and subsidies being distributed to ethnic organisations. Further denunciation of multiculturalism came from Katharine Betts, an academic who published the influential *Ideology and Immigration* in 1988.

The Coming of Age of Un-Australia: 1988–2008

> We've drawn back from being too obsessed with diversity to a point where Australians are now better able to appreciate the enduring values of the national character that we proudly celebrate and preserve. We've moved on from a time when multiculturalism, in the words of the historian Gregory Melleuish, came to be associated with 'the transformation of Australia from a bad old Australia that was xenophobic, racist and monocultural to a good new Australia that is culturally diverse, tolerant and exciting'. Such a view was always a distortion and a caricature. (Prime Minister John Howard, Address to the National Press Club on 25 Jan. Australia Day 2006)

> Having spoken earlier about Quadrant's role in the defining global struggle of the second half of the 20th century let me say just a few words about the global struggle we now face at the start of the 21st century. Today free and open societies face a new tyranny, the tyranny of Islamist terrorism ... The fact is that we are part of a global campaign for the very ideals that some people wistfully dreamed were unchallengeable after the Cold War. (Prime Minister John Howard's address at the 50th anniversary dinner celebrating Quadrant magazine: 4 October 2006)

By ominous coincidence, as Australia celebrated 200 years of British settlement, bi-partisan support for multiculturalism was withdrawn. In 1988, then opposition leader John Howard refused his support to the Bicentennial Multicultural Foundation and addressed the Canberra Press Club about his opposition to this "aimless, divisive" multicultural policy which had "profound weaknesses" (Jupp, *From White Australia* 106). He also spoke out against Asian immigration saying that it should be "slowed down" in the interests of "social cohesion" and developed his critique of

multiculturalism by espousing his concept of One Australia (107). Howard's views were adopted as party platform with the release of the Coalition's immigration and ethnic affairs policy on August 22, 1988. By then however, protest about the bicentennial celebrations had escalated. Australia Day 1988 in Sydney "saw the largest ever protest march by Aborigines and their supporters" (Carter, *Dispossession* 101). Howard lost the 1989 election and was removed as opposition leader, only to return as Prime Minister in 1996. During that seven year interval, conservative criticism of multiculturalism continued to be both insistent and influential. Often, the debate was fuelled by the culture wars in the United States where multiculturalism was embroiled in the right/left divide and the political correctness (PC) controversy which surrounds cultural pluralism. In Australia, on the conservative side, the debate was fuelled by politicians (John Howard), academics (Katharine Betts and Geoffrey Blainey), and journalist cum opinion makers (Paul Sheehan, Alan Jones, David Barnett etc). Small as they were, levels of Asian immigration to Australia were the flashpoint for this political turn to the right. On the basis of deep-seated and long-standing fears directed towards Asia, multicultural policies stalled at the first hurdle.

By the 1990s, given the impact of the Mabo and Wik decisions, Indigenous issues took centre stage, becoming the pivotal political and ethical questions of the fin de siècle decade. For the first time in Australian history, the High Court of Australia recognised the existence of Native Title over both water and land. If culture is understood "as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practises of symbolic representation", then a fundamental basis of the claim to nationhood—the unquestioned tie of a people to their land which gives them the right to practice *their* culture—was irrevocably undermined for non-Indigenous Australians (Tomlinson, *Globalisation and Culture* 18). As a result, the question of unresolved territorial ownership—"Land = society = nation = culture = religion"—both preoccupied and confronted the space wherein "Australian" culture was practised (5). Meantime, an "uneasy conversation" continued to exist between multicultural, white settler and Indigenous agendas: "Whites relating to Aboriginal people appear as totally unaffected by multiculturalism while the 'Anglos' relating to the ethnics appear as if they have no Aboriginal question about which to worry" (Curthoys, "An Uneasy Conversation" 21-36; Hage, *White Nation* 24).

On top of this, Australians faced the challenges of economic globalisation—"the free movement of capital, goods and labour"—which made the boundaries of the nation state much more permeable (Davidson 130). Confronted with uncertainty about the

boundaries of their anthropological space, Australians previously sustained by the once common understandings of the equation of "Land = society = nation = culture = religion" became ferociously protective of their borders. Elected to office in 1996, the conservative Howard government maintained government until 2008 with popular support. George Megalogenis makes the following observation about the Howard era, which oversaw the ferocious fortification of symbolic and geographic (but not economic) boundaries:

> Howard threw a switch that no leader has considered in more than a century of federation: muscular social conservatism. He kept the economy open, but closed the debate on the society because he wanted to assert old Australian values. (*The Longest Decade* 289)

Socially, this led to such turbulence as the rise of Hansonism,[10] aboriginal riots in Redfern, ethnic riots in Cronulla (which had worldwide coverage), and a series of vindictively administered asylum seeker incidents which also gained international attention.[11] Following the events of September 11th, 2001 and "the clash of civilisations", Australia also identified with its traditional partners, Britain and America, in joining the war against the "axis of evil". The end of the Howard years also oversaw highly contentious ventures into coercive reconciliation with Australia's Indigenous population. As a result, in Australia from the mid-1990s onwards, race acquired a different meaning. Reasserting "old Australian values" also meant Australians reverted to what Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll term the "bad new regressive policies" of the White Australia Policy (*Borderwork* 16). As this was White Australia for the new millennium, and not Federation, the terms of exclusion shifted from race to culture. David Stratton explains: "Where previously race operated as a reductive concept and was thought to determine culture, now culture is the more privileged term and race is thought to be a signifier of culture" (*Race Daze* 11). As it was no longer appropriate to refer to undesirable races, undesirability and non-assimibility became characteristics now more properly attributable to cultures: cultures unsuited or incapable of adapting to Australia's "way of life". In 1999, on the eve of the new millennium, Australians also rejected the idea of becoming a republic. Australia chose instead to remain identified with Britain. Today, the British Queen still remains as Australia's Queen, which links the country to the baggage of colonialism within its own geographic region.

As shown by the above brief, spatial, historical and social account of the "coming-of-age" period for Australia, concepts of Nation, Multiculturalism and Globalisation not only circulated freely in public discourse, but were also fiercely contested. In a postmodern era, the fact that there is no non-aligned and neutral use of

language is presumed to be a self-evident truth. What is proposed instead is that "meaning is derived by reference to the wider social context and interaction" (Jacobs 137). For the purpose of clarity and as the terms Nation, Multiculture~~alism~~ and Globalisation serve as key words for the thesis, I would like to define each one and indicate how they apply in this dissertation.

Nation

As befits a leader speaking on the day that commemorates Australia's founding as a British settlement, in his Australia Day speech, cited earlier in this chapter, Prime Minister John Howard, hailed the nation into being—"the family by birthright". Here I have used the term "nation" and not "nation-state". Also, I state that the Prime Minister is hailing the "nation" into being, using the words "hail/hailed/hailing" as signifying a form of address in the Althusserian sense, wherein the nation-state's citizen/actor is generated via a habitual practise of address and identification. Walker Connor warns against the conflation of the term "nation" and the term "state" (*Ethnonationalism* 89-118). The state is a political apparatus claiming supreme jurisdiction over a clearly demarcated territory. A state may be constitutional, democratic, liberal, absolutist or totalitarian. The term "state"merely declares sovereignty over a bounded terrain which can be policed by some form of coercive power. Nation is something much harder to describe and is linked to the idea of "nation by birth" of a "people" defined by common religious, linguistic, and symbolic heritage. For Connor the essence of nation is a psychological bond based on kinship ties. A nation is the largest group of people "who believe they are ancestrally related" (Smith 63). What sustains this bond is the belief and thus the bond requires no validation in reality. What the discourse of nationalism hails into being is the "nation by birth" and not the nation as represented by civic membership. In spite of globalisation or perhaps because of it, for many Australians the key heritage of their nation-state is Anglo–Celtic and it is this foundation that must be validated and commemorated. Yes, there is civic citizenship available for those who want to belong to the *state* but only kinship ties can secure full membership to the *nation*.

Nations also lay claim to a homeland with mythic traditions linked to their land where there "will be shared memories and an attachment to an historic territory, or a "homeland" ' (Smith 63). For an immigrant society like Australia to insist on a form of nationalism predicated on the "nation-by-birth" philosophy only makes more glaring the failure to address the colonial dispossession of the indigenous population. John Joseph

posits that the ideal of a nation-state, where "no-one but members of the nation-by-birth would inhabit the national territory and no member of the nation-by-birth would live outside the territory"—has probably never existed—at least not for any length of time (*Language and Identity* 92). The closest that such an ideal could have been said to have existed may have been in Australia—prior to 1788 and white settlement. Ironically, although Australia's indigenous people are probably the true inheritors of the "nation-by-birthright" ideal of nineteenth century European nationalism, it is this very ideal that necessitates their dispossession. As the immigrant Australians establish their languages, their sense of a moral universal, their imagined good life, their inter-generational continuity, their meaningful past, present and future—the indigenous people need to surrender theirs—encountering what Joshua Fishman calls the "neither life nor death" experience ("The Language-Ethnicity Link " 86). I believe that it was the recognition of this experience which impelled the highly contentious ventures into "coercive reconciliation" with Australia's Indigenous population at the end of the Howard years.[12]

Multiculture~~alism~~

Multiculture~~alism~~ is the preferred inclusion in my title because, in effect, Australia has always been lived as a multiculture. This is unavoidable for a settler and immigrant society that is less than two hundred and fifty years old. Moreover, the policing of the country's multiculture via state policy, has created multiculturalism which has followed what Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll describe as the following trajectory:

> Australian multiculturalism is usually described as a policy progression that conveniently begins in 1901. It goes like this: 1901-1945 (bad white Australia policy); 1945 – 65 (not-quite as bad assimilationist policy); 1965-1972 (even-less-bad-integrationist policy); 1972-96 (trying-to-be-good multiculturalism policy); 1997- present (bad new regressive policy). We challenge this story on many grounds. It ignores the complex connections people have always made in Australia even before Federation. (*Borderwork* 16)

Hodge and O'Carroll use the term multiculture as a way of describing what happens in a multicultural society and they endow the term with the following principles. Firstly, that "Australia's multiculture includes all its diversities, majority and minority, of ethnicities, classes, genders, ages, sexualities and regions". Secondly, Hodge and O'Carroll acknowledge that "a multiculture is both a product of and a strategy for coping with a chaotic, far from equilibrium world, so it is full of contradictions and surprising changes." Thirdly, they recognise the truth that "all modern societies contain diversities within and across their borders" and that multiculture is *not* the natural enemy of "national cohesiveness, security and sense of purpose." Fourthly, they inextricably link multiculture with democracy, seeing the two as being interdependent.

Australian democracy can only function as "a free, dynamic open system" if Australian multiculture is acknowledged (*Borderwork* 19-20).

On the other hand, multiculture needs democracy to thrive and to legitimise its existence as a political and social reality. The term multiculture also permits the inclusion of Indigenous Australians whereas in Australia the term "multiculturalism" has generally excluded them from discussion. This precedent was set because "the policies were mostly not designed with them in mind – they fall under a different government department" (4). Discussions about Australia's multiculture can also include issues of class, sexuality and gender, which become blurred when the talk turns to multiculturalism. Also, the use of this term can include those Australians who are essentialised as the Anglo–Celtic majority; those, who as the "dominant" culture supposedly police, allow, tolerate or disavow the nation's diversity.[13] Mediated by government policy, Australian multiculture has been tagged with an "ism". Similar to other "isms", such as socialism, Republicanism, feminism, racism, conservatism, facism, nationalism, Hansonism and Thatcherism etc., multiculturalism can be used as a symbolic platform upon which governments or groups can articulate or formulate political and social policy. For this reason, being qualified with the ubiquitous "ism", multiculturalism can be seen as an ideology i.e. a system of thought or belief in the realm of social and political practice. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists a number of definitions for the term "ideology":

> 1.
> The science of ideas; that department of philosophy or psychology which deals with the origin and nature of ideas.
>
> 2.
> The study of the way ideas are expressed in language.
>
> 3.
> Ideal or abstract speculation; in a depreciatory sense, unpractical or visionary theorising or speculation.
>
> 4.
> A systematic scheme of ideas, usu. relating to politics or society or to the conduct of a class or group, and regarded as justifying actions, esp. one that is held implicitly or adopted as a whole and maintained regardless of the course of events.

Describing multiculturalism as an ideology also acknowledges the potentially disparaging connotation implied by the third and fourth definitions. "Ideology" or "ideological" in the pejorative sense is always applied to the "other": it is never a description we would use of ourselves, even if our position is similarly constructed (Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* 5). In the service of power, ideas expressed in language—ideology—shape what Foucault terms a discourse: "a set of propositions/

significations/ representations that derive their truth value not from correspondence to reality but from the power relations they imply and are implicated in" (Kahn, *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture* 7). Due to the changing political environment in Australia during the 1990s and 2000s, the discourse of multiculturalism entered the realm of semantic instability. Attacked, supported or dismissed, by those both on the left and right of the political spectrum, the term was engaged in every possible way by those with a political axe to grind.

Consequently, for the purposes of this thesis the term multiculturalism will *only* refer to multiculturalism as "state policy":

> As a policy, multiculturalism is based on the *recognition* that the nation is in fact a "multicultural" or ethnically diverse society. It defines a framework in which certain rights and obligations flow from this recognition: mostly the right to maintain cultures, religion, language etc. (within the framework of the Australian law) and the obligation to respect the rights of others to do the same. (Carter, *Dispossession, Dreams and Diversity* 333)

As distinct from the "state" multiculturalism explained above, Sneja Gunew goes on to define another sort of multiculturalism a practice she terms as "critical" multiculturalism. David Carter goes on to describe this as "a theory —a field of academic debate" where multiculturalism becomes "concerned with how we understand ethnic and cultural differences, and how they map onto relations of social power, cultural identities and subjectivity and national structures" (*Dispossession* 333). Once again, highlighting the semantic flux of the term, Hodge and O'Carroll define "critical" multiculturalism differently, seeing it "a left critique that looks at the failures" and the power imbalances maintained by government policy (*Borderwork* 11). For the purposes of this study, the issues raised by Gunew as "critical" multiculturalism will be included under the term multiculture. In other words, this thesis will look at how Australian *multiculture*: "which includes all its diversities, majority and minority, of ethnicities, classes, genders, ages, sexualities and regions" maps onto "relations of social power, cultural identities and subjectivity and national structures" (Hodge and O'Carroll, *Borderwork* 19; Carter, *Dispossession* 333).

Globalisation

> Globalisation means "an intensification of multinational, international and transnational linkages in all spheres of human activity, including trade and commerce, governance and non-government lobbying as a consequence of new communications technology". (Galligan, Roberts, and Trifiletti 1)

> Globalisation is a "fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic incantation, a pass-key meant to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries. (Zygmunt Bauman qtd in Huggan, "Postcolonialism, Globalisation and the Rise of (Trans)cultural Studies." 28)

Homi Bhabha considers the genesis of modernity as the moment of colonialism: "the colonial moment is the history of West" (qtd in O'Shaughnessy and Stadler 265). In other words, the Enlightenment may have bought about the "Rights of Man" but it was for the white man only. Since the ideas of Social Darwinism and the "tree of man" established a hierarchy of races a century ago, the issues of ethnicity and nationalism have always been tied to an imperialist and capitalist system. In this view, "contact between races other than by conquest and subjection was undesirable" (Jupp, *From White Australia* 8). Colonialism always acquired territory accompanied by its Siamese twin—Capitalism. From here we trace the linking of the liberal democratic polity to the capitalist market system—a relationship which is currently seen as being indivisible. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, given the risk of unwanted political interference in economic affairs and the requirement of regulatory frameworks for trade and business, the new emerging classes of a capitalist society demanded involvement in setting the direction of state action. However, even in the "core" of Western Europe, membership/citizenship of the polity was often disputed. Once established as a colonial power, the Europe nation-state became connected to a global system of trade and production. In turn, this led to the genesis of European *globalisation* which established a capitalist world economy based on the endless accumulation of wealth, a world economy which survives into the present day and is currently threatening the very hegemony of the boundaries of the nation-state (Held 72-122).

For sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, the world economy "created a new world-wide division of labour. World empires created by colonialism have virtually disappeared but the world capitalist economy continues to prosper creating massive imbalances of economic and political power amongst nation-states" (qtd in Held 100). Graham Huggan is persuaded by Wallerstein, agreeing that capitalism has always perceived itself as a "world system" ("Postcolonialism, Globalisation and the Rise of (Trans)cultural Studies" 29). However, in Huggan's view (and it is one that I agree with) there are three distinct discourses relevant to the globalising process, first, "economic hegemony ('the global economy'); second, "cultural uniformity ('the global village')" and third: "the transcendence of Western capitalist modernity ('end-of-history,' 'end-of-ideology')" (32). Huggan warns against the collapsing of these distinctions under the overarching signifier of "globalisation". Nonetheless, he does concede that presently, globalisation and postcolonialism are imbricated in a dialectical relationship. Thus, globalisation can be seen as an extension of colonialism and imperialism by different means (30). To this end, Huggan goes on to cite a definition of

a “postcolonial globalisation”, as proposed by sociologist Ankie Hoogvelt, where this process represents “the distinct social formations which have emerged [in the contemporary world]” and which “are a result of the way in which the aftermath of colonialism interacts with the forces of globalisation and responds to it” (qtd in 34). It is this definition of postcolonial globalisation that I will apply for the term globalisation in this thesis.

Literature, Ethnography and Postcolonial Globalisation

“All literature is ethnography”, responds Leigh Dale to my query regarding the appropriate domain for Australian literature in 2006 (Presentation to Postgraduates). Ethnography derives its etymology from the Greek, where εθνοσ means nation and γραφια writing. Accordingly, ethnography can be defined as the “written” description of nations or races of men, with their customs, habits, and points of difference (*OED*). Normally associated in the social sciences, ethnography presumes a “scientific” impartiality. Working from the discipline of anthropology, Arjun Appadurai challenges the ethnographer’s impartiality when he coins the neologism ethnoscape*:*

> This neologism has certain ambiguities deliberately built into it. It refers, first, to the dilemmas of perspective and representation that all ethnographers must confront and it admits that (as with landscapes in visual art) traditions of perception and perspective, as well as variations in the situation of the observer may affect the process and product of representation. ("Global Ethnoscapes” 191)

In themselves, the processes and products of a national literary culture form a literary *ethnoscape,* where the perceptions of the observer, be they writer, critic, or judge, affect the literary representations that are permitted, endorsed or even celebrated within a culture. The opposite of course is also true: the literary observer's positioning also determines what is *not* given prominence, authorisation and validity within a national literary culture. For much of the 20th century, the *ethnoscape* produced by those teaching literature within Australia's tertiary institutions was one of obligatory cultural symbiosis with Britain. In her landmark study *The English Men,* Dale argues that anxiety about being perceived as “colonial” permeated the “discipline of English in Australia for the first century of its operation” since identifying with the cultural and intellectual elite meant being able to “pass for English”. Ultimately Dale concludes that this dependence on Britain subsequently retarded “the development of Australian literary culture inside and outside the academy” (1).

During her undergraduate years, the sighting of the manuscript version of George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* inspired political scientist Judith Brett to voice a

newfound awareness of an alternative literary *ethnoscape* for Australians. Brett is inspired by Eliot: "[she] wrote of her own experiences of people, landscapes, seasons and language. I realised, that is, that books are written within people's experience of a real material world. And that some people read books about places that they actually know. This changed my whole way of reading literature" (qtd in Curthoys, "Windows on the World" 61). Brett's experience was echoed by others of that generation who entered Australian universities in the 1960s to discover that their undergraduate education "included very little about Australian culture, society and history" (60). However, from the 1970s onwards Australian literature was revived from the cultural cringe and rehabilitated into university curricula, creating a new literary ethnoscape for a generation of Australians (61-62).

For Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths, in postcolonial societies it is the contact/creation with the "Other" which enables the realisation of identity. Hence, settler societies like Australia are "constituted by their difference from the metropolitan and it is in this relationship that identity both as a distancing from the centre and as a means of self assertion comes into being" (qtd in Bennet, "Nation and Literary History" 96). Concurrent with this newfound awareness of the value of Australian cultural life, were the tensions inherent in the dyad of the "centre" (Britain) and the "periphery" (Australia). Consequently, long after the actual moment of colonisation, the theory of postcolonialism with its paradigm of "colonialism as a set of institutions, ideas and habits" persisted to become pervasive in Australian literary studies (Carter, After Post-Colonialism" 114). This led one literary critic to complain about the 2006 shortlist for the Miles Franklin Prize:

> That all five novels on the list were works of historical fiction might be little more than coincidence, but it underlines the extent to which contemporary Australian literature is preoccupied with the past. A debate has been simmering for several years about the health of Australia's literary culture, and a recurring complaint is that too few novelists are prepared to grapple with the reality of modern Australia. Too many novels, it has been suggested, take refuge in what one critic called the 'soft glow' of history, safely quarantined from the social and political transformations that have taken place over the past decade. (Ley, "When the Past Isn't Past." 23)

On the other hand, Carter recognises theories of post colonialism, feminism and multiculturalism as shifting Australian literary studies beyond the national frame. He also credits postcolonial theory with moving literary criticism into "textual politics: reading beyond questions of literary value to those connected with the politics of race, class, gender and colonisation" (115). But Carter also regards postcolonial literary criticism in Australia as being primarily of a "Utopian sort" and its metaphors as

generally being "aesthetic & psychoanalytical". In other contexts, South Asia and the Caribbean for example, postcolonial literary studies have been much more "robust and worldly" in their applications, speaking more urgently to the present through their "purchase on history". For Carter, the truly illuminating work on colonisation in Australia has been done outside the discipline of literary studies by academics who "have not been postcolonial theorists in the stricter disciplinary sense of the term". Among others, this includes figures such as Stephen Muecke, Ann Curthoys, Paul Carter, Henry Reynolds, John Hirst and Marilyn Lake ("After Post-Colonialism." 115-17).

In many ways, the ongoing dialogue between "centre" and "periphery" favoured by postcolonial theorists simultaneously challenged and bound Australia to the imperial centre and the enabling/disabling energy directed to its "peripheries". In the new millennium, reflecting on the origins of the discipline of Australian literary studies, Robert Dixon concedes:

> On the one hand, especially since the 1990s, I think we've begun to see Australian literary studies in historical perspective as a discipline whose origins lie in a period that in certain respects we no longer feel to be contemporary. This has to do, amongst other things, with our changing attitudes to issues of nation, race and gender. ("Boundary Work." 28)

It is debatable whether the conservative form of criticism, which David Carter identifies as favoured by postcolonial literary critics in Australia, mirrored the conservative turn that Australia took as a society in the 1990s. At any rate, Carter argues for a theory of postcolonialism which looks at a "transnational process of simultaneous, if differentiated developments", one which does not "condemn the colonies to perpetual belatedness ... [and] therefore is always derivative" ("After Post-Colonialism." 115-17). Similarly, Bill Ashcroft wants to celebrate the "circulatory energies" of globalisation rather than the energies of imperialism: "Globalisation is the radical *transformation* of imperialism, continually reconstituted, and interesting precisely because it stems from no obvious imperial centre ... Globalism obtains its energy from its very diffusion, global culture making itself at home in motion rather than in a place, quite unlike the energy of imperial control" (*Post-Colonial Transformation* 213).

Ashcroft correctly emphasises the destabilisation that accompanies "postcolonial globalisation" in a "global culture [that] make[s] itself at home in motion rather than in place". For the subjects in question, often what parallels this instability is a concomitant sense of alienation. Certainly, for a lot Australians the events of the coming-of-age period were experienced as what Arthur Frank (using another motion metaphor) terms "The Ride":

> The ride is a place (event, experience, site) where the individual has no influence, the ride replaces the reality of the person with an image; signs have primacy, truth-value; the ride tells people who they are and what they feel; and the ride proposes everything is ok but once you on the ride, you are out of control… The Ride [encompasses] the multiple ways … which contemporary society alienates, dehumanises, tricks and steals agency from actors. (Richardson, "The Metaphor is the Message" 373)

For Frank, the counter-practice to this experience of postmodern alienation is "The Story", which Richardson prefers to reframe as "the Narrative". From the point of view of a social scientist Richardson goes on to ask, "[W]hat stories might empower people caught in rides not of their own choosing? What stories might help remoralise the social world?" As people become aware of their affinities with the collective story they become "co-authors" and as such the story becomes an act of "symbolic interaction" which can remoralise the social world (372-76). During her undergraduate years, it was this awareness which inspired Judith Brett's excited reaction to literary reading (cited earlier in the chapter). Leigh Dale is precise in stating that literature is ethnography: the written "description of nations or races of men, with their customs, habits, and points of difference" (*OED)*. Benedict Anderson attributes a nation-forming purpose to this sort literary ethnography: "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (49). For Anderson such activity consolidated and promoted the ideas of "nation" and "nationalism" which became the *idée fixe* in the Western hemisphere from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. But, by the new millennium, Australia was made up of many diverse groupings of constructed categories of people. All of whom struggled to find a way of being in the world, in the context of larger cultural, historical and social forces, whilst still claiming some bondedness to a national affiliation. The following coming-of-age textual studies reflect the diversity of this struggle.

In the late 20th century, it was not only the Australian politico-social world that went on "The Ride": existing orthodoxies in literary studies were also upended by the advent of literary theory. To that end I will briefly discuss how theory will be apply to the literary study in this thesis. I have already stated earlier that I seek to mediate between the nation's political and social discourse i.e. the public realm and the subjective, private and fictive world recreated and represented by the author. But the moment of theory (which has lasted for over 30 years) has not only impacted on literary studies but also the political and social discourse that I hope to interweave with the literary analysis throughout this study.

The Postmodern Ride and Readings

Surveying a selection of dissertations at the University of New South Wales from the School of Politics, Gavin Kitching laments the poor utilisation of theory by postgraduate students:

> if philosophy is little taught or not taught at all, this will not prevent students or their teachers doing it because there is almost nothing of any importance to human beings that does not involve their reflecting on their use of language. So since philosophy is unavoidable, in place of good philosophy well and professionally taught we get bad philosophy poorly and amateurishly taught and called *theory*. (my italics, "Paralysed by postmodernism" 13)

Personally, I am not unsympathetic to some of Kitching's points. Equally, John Frow responds to Kitching's lament by making some very salient points of his own. Frow points out the conflation of the terms "postmodernism" and "poststructuralist", stating that he has "never been really sure what postmodernism means, since it is used in such disparate ways as to almost be meaningless". Then he finds that "poststructuralism is more precise" but that this term also brings together a broad range of thinkers, generally French, "whose work does not have much in common" ("Whatever It Means, It Isn't This" 13). Likewise, I find myself in accord with Frow. For the purposes of this thesis, I find postmodern and its "ism" equally hard to define. What I would like to apply to the term postmodern is the subjective *experience* of contemporary modernity: the postmodern condition that Arthur Franks describes as the "The Ride" and which was summarised a few pages earlier.

As for the next question that needs to be addressed, how theory (or should it be called philosophy?) will be applied to the literary readings, I find myself echoing Ellen Rooney's elevation of Barbara Johnson's celebration of "textuality". Rooney explains Johnson's resolve to not "permit theoretical paradigms to pass themselves off as master texts". Theory does not provide an uncontested metalanguage for mastering literary structures. For literary specialists, theory gains relevance when it comes into contact with literature: "literariness inhabits theory; that theory is, in fact, a genre of literature and not a pure metalanguage". The process of reading creates an exchange between theoretical texts and literary works which illuminates the literariness of both texts. Therefore, there is no single philosopher/theorist who acts as the master interpreter of this dissertation. Nor is the use of some of the aspects of liberal humanism, as applied to literary analysis, discounted. Most certainly, this thesis does rely on close readings of the texts discussed. This is not specifically a Foucaldian thesis, a Freudian thesis, a Butlerian thesis or a Marxist thesis, although it draws at times on the ideas of all these theorists. What I try to pursue is an intertextual reading of a specific literary text and

theoretical text. Thus, in a mutual illumination, theory becomes “the straight man” whose “precarious rectitude … passion and pathos”, the literary text has “somehow already foreseen” (Rooney, "Introduction” 1-4).

The complexity arises where theory is applied to the political and social discourse which also interweaves this dissertation because, here theory seeks its empirical validation. Theory (or philosophy?) does not arise of its own, gaining its validity and raison d’etre within a hermeneutically sealed, self-referential universe. Did whiteness theory develop in the United States as a result of the endemic injustices and inequalities which affected the non-white population? Or does whiteness theory merely provide a discursive model? Did Marxist theory arise because of the capitalist exploitation of real people? Or is it only a discursive medium through which to address the excesses of a capitalist society? Similar questions can be asked about postcolonial theory. Consequently, in this dissertation a three-way triangulation occurs between political and social discourse, theory and literature. As such, theory becomes the delicately balanced fulcrum mediating between the political and social realm and literariness. Theory seeks its empirical reality and validation in the realm of the political and social whilst locating its *poetics* in literariness. Most certainly, in undergoing its empirical validation in the political and social realm, theory seeks to impose itself as metalanguage. The burdens of scientific proof required by the social sciences necessitate this sort of imposition. But in the end, the validity of such constructions of truth and reality is granted by a social agent who is always socially positioned. This is why I began a thesis that explores the complex varieties of literary expression available for contemporary Australian identities, with a preface written as a work of autobiographical ethnography. My thesis then goes on to consider the way that various identities map onto “relations of social power, cultural identities and subjectivity and national structures” (Carter, *Dispossession* 333). Another descriptor for my preface could be “autoethnography”, which illustrates my view that there is no disinterested, objective academic viewpoint, no access to a rational approach that keeps me as the author in the background channelling the knowledge. My position is interested and my research approach (as demonstrated by my “personalised” preface) sets up a discourse which I want to specify as follows:

> It accepts its *perspectivism*, the fact that all discourses represent a point of view … Rather than seeing itself as disinterested knowledge, it can openly avow its own political position: all texts speak from or represent particular positions within power relations. (Grosz 167)

In other words, my approach is underpinned by one of the tenets that Elisabeth Grosz elucidates for a feminist philosophy: the credo of “perspectivism”. In the forthcoming textual study, this credo is applied to the viewpoints of both the authors and their fictive creations. As well, all of the forthcoming texts, in the broadest possible sense, whether unconsciously or consciously, articulate the uncertainty of existing within a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Thus, they give voice to the effects of postcolonial globalisation, which forces a rethinking of knowledge, space and place and challenges previously known, fixed and settled knowledges. Therefore, this dissertation is structured around three parts, Part 1: Post-war Migrations and Negotiations, Part 2: Queer and European Journeys, Part 3: Unsettled Histories and Unstable Geographies. Each of these sections includes two chapters.

The first of the two chapters included in Part 1: Post-war Migrations and Negotiations, is titled “Multicultural Texts in the 1990s: *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father*”. Respectively published in 1997 and 1998, both these novels tell the stories of individuals who emigrate to post-war Australia. But the metanarrative of history is only given attention because of the way in which it affects the lives of the protagonists. Rather, the focus is on the experience of individuals within a localised community. Here, the “European imaginative geography” of the protagonists is challenged by resettlement in Australia (Said, "From Orientalism" 419). At the same time, Australia’s positioning within such geography, as an England-identified monoculture, is also unsettled. Traditionally, the history of Australia’s post-war immigration has been presented as progressing successfully through the phases of assimilation, integration and multiculturalism. Flanagan and Gaita narrativise post-war immigration and multiculturalism with a 1990s perspective and unsettle established categories (sometimes unintentionally) in the process.

The second chapter in this section is titled “Reading Nation in the 1990s: Edith Campbell Berry and Helen Demidenko” and deals with the novels of Frank Moorhouse, *Grand Days* and *Dark Palace*. The controversy surrounding the exclusion of *Grand Days* from the 2000 Miles Franklin Award is revisited. These events are compared and contrasted with the Helen Demidenko affair and her novel, *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. Demidenko is seen as cultural manifestation in her own right rather than as a literary writer. In an almost ficto-critical comparison, Moorhouse’s heroine, Edith Campbell Berry is juxtaposed against the fictive Demidenko persona. A review of these controversies finds in them a possible explanation for today’s hostility to cosmopolitanism and immigration.

The first of the two chapters included in Part 2: Queer and European Journeys, is "The Queer and European Journey of Robert Dessaix and *Night Letters*". The second chapter is titled "The Queer and European Journey of Christos Tsiolkas and *Dead Europe*". Both books deal with a queer masculine protagonist in existential crisis and trying to locate meaning within Said's "European imaginative geography". This geography is experienced both actually and metaphysically. As such, both books undermine the conservative reinvigoration of Australian and traditional values in the 1990s, which oversaw an endorsement of masculinist values and gender roles that have come to be seen as typically Australian, particularly as they apply to the Aussie male. Debates about sexuality circulated simultaneously within a general reformulation of Australian identity. All macho stories are "inherently nationalistic", but Tsiolkas's and Dessaix's narratives most certainly are not (Wimmer 135). However, the journey of the queer protagonist in their respective novels does coincide with the shift in the debates about national identity. On the other hand, Dessaix and Tsiolkas situate their narrators very differently hence, also destabilising the notion of a normative male homosexuality. In this sense, both these novels (in very different ways) anticipate the fragmentation of the political spectrum, which queers issues such as national identity within the present global context.

Part 3: Unsettled Histories and Unstable Geographies deals with authors who locate their characters and their subjective worlds outside of this "European imaginative geography". However, these authors also people the literary worlds they create with characters that have convincing—and in the case of Alexis Wright—compelling cause to claim Australian identity. The first of the two chapters included in Part 3 is titled "Burdened by History: Alexis Wright". This chapter considers Alexis Wright's three full length works, *Grog War* and *Plains of Promise*, both published in 1997 and *Carpentaria* published in 2006. Wright peoples her world with indigenous characters that have long been denied claims of legitimate belonging by White Australia. The evolution of Wright's work is paralleled by a consideration of the developments in White and Indigenous relations at the time that Wright published her work.

The second chapter is titled "Resiting the Yellow Lady: Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo" and considers Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* and Hsu-Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo*. Both these novels were published in 2000. At a time when racialised groups were targeted for being culturally and physically unable to assimilate as Anglo-Australians, these novels re-address the compromised cultural participation of Asians in Australia. Voiced by female Asian narrators, both novels take on significance from the

wider social field within which they are incorporated and the social practices with which they communicate. In the quest for national belonging, the white in the White Australia Policy is vividly experienced by the respective novel's characters. Both within Australia and the home culture—which has it geographic base in Singapore —these novels narrativise different postcolonial histories entwining and colliding in new global postcolonialisms.

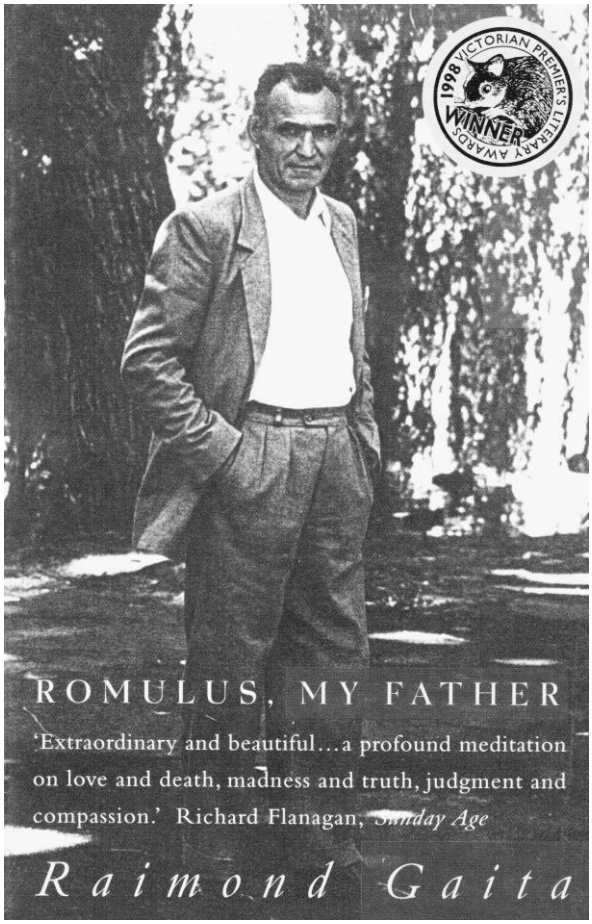

Fig. 4. **The intertexts of *Romulus, My Father***—a photograph of the "real" Romulus on the dust jacket of Raimond Gaita's memoir published by Text Publishing, Melbourne in 1998. The cover also features Richard Flanagan's recommendation.

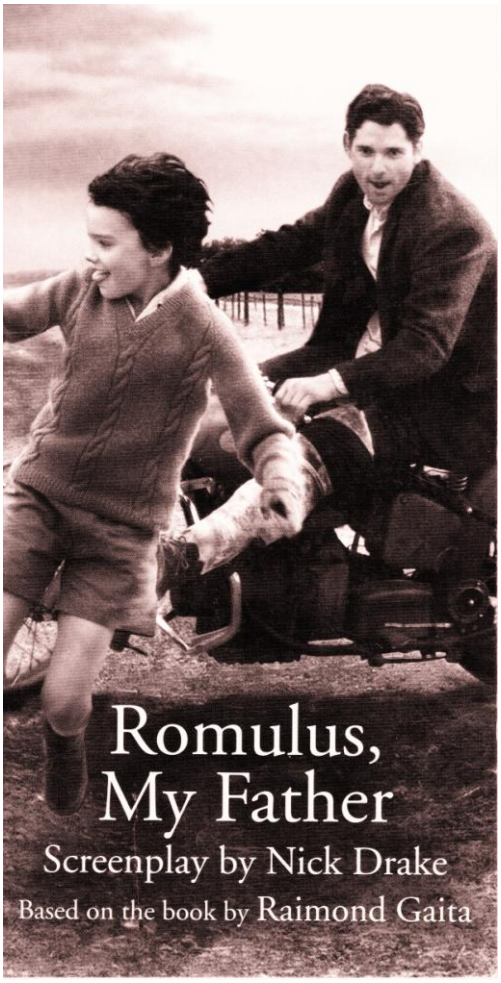

Fig. 5. **The intertexts of *Romulus, My Father***—the dust jacket for Nick Drake's published screenplay which features a scene from the film. On the motorcycle is actor Eric Bana, who has the role of Romulus. Running in the foreground is Kodi Smit-McPhee who stars as the young Raimond Gaita. The screenplay was published by Currency Press, Sydney in 2007.

2

Multicultural Texts in the 1990s:

The Sound of One Hand Clapping and *Romulus, My Father*

> The days of isolation are over. We live in an age when the earth's surface seems to be contracting under the influence of scientific discoveries that almost baffle our imagination. The call to all Australians is to realise that, without adequate numbers, this wide brown land may not be held in another clash of arms, and to give their maximum assistance to every effort to expand its economy and assimilate more and more people who will come from overseas to link their fate with our destiny.
>
> Arthur Calwell First Australian Minister for Immigration
> Speech to the House of Representatives, November 1946
> qtd in Wilson, Thomson and McMahon 161

Instigated by the twin imperatives of defence and expansion, Australia's post-war immigration program began in 1947. The program was popularly focused by the catch cry of "populate or perish"—a phrase first used by Billy Hughes in 1937 and then reintroduced by Arthur Calwell, Australia's first Immigration Minister. The government sought an intake of 70, 000 immigrants per year, an ambitious yearly population increase of 1% percent, with a further 1% percent to be provided by natural increases in the birth rate. Given the close political and economic ties between Britain and Australia, Calwell's stated preference was for British migrants and his declared hope was that for "every foreign migrant there will be 10 people from the United Kingdom" (Appleyard 62). Even so, to sustain this rate Calwell had to accept more "foreign" migrants than preferred from the displaced persons camps in Europe. Acknowledging Australia's responsibility, Calwell signed immigration agreements with the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) which had the task of resettling the eleven million survivors of the European post-war trauma. Australia's official effort to accept the European refugees was driven equally by expediency and humanitarian obligation. By 1954, under this scheme, 170,000 refugees had arrived in Australia. The refugees were bonded to work wherever they were directed by the Commonwealth for two years. Another 11,512 refugees arrived independently, largely sponsored by Jewish agencies. The ambitious

nation rebuilding program, first envisioned when the *Full Employment in Australia* report was tabled in parliament in 1945, was now launched in earnest.

As the Australian state sought to safeguard its sovereignty and buttress its economic enterprise, it also needed to allay the concerns of its citizens at this sudden influx of foreigners. Consequently, the Aliens Act was passed in 1947 to come into effect on 1 January 1949. Post-war resettlement came at a cost. Under this act, all aliens over sixteen needed to register and notify the Department of Immigration of any change in address or occupation. Surnames could not be changed without the written consent of the Minister of Immigration. On the other hand, Australians and Immigration officials could rest more easily knowing that state and central office registers allowed the department ready access to "the number, nationality and occupations of aliens residing at any given time in any particular locality of the Commonwealth" (Jordens 66). After the Second World War, the identity of Australian citizen also came into being for the first time with the introduction of the *Nationality and Citizenship Act* of 1948, prior to this all Australians had been British subjects. Given that British subject status was seen to be synonymous with Australian citizenship, all post-war British migrants had full citizenship rights once they arrived in the country. British subjects had no need to become Australian citizens as they were already recognised as such because of pre-existing ties of kinship. Even with a post-war economy and a heightened sense of vulnerability, Australians still had the power to establish the terms by which they understood themselves. Australian anxiety was relieved by segregating the aliens, numbering them, keeping them under surveillance, identifying their usefulness and putting them to work as directed by the Commonwealth for two years. Embodied in these aliens, the European post-war trauma took up residence in Australia to raise new questions about Australia's post-war identity. What was unforseen and largely underestimated was the subsequent social and cultural change that the post-war aliens would bring to the country.

For post-war Australia, the corporeality of immigrants' bodies were the necessary prosthetic accessories for the national rebuilding project. Cultural change is kept at bay if the immigrant is seen "as attached to the nation by a 'prosthetic national body' which is worn to shield off difference under the social call for assimilation into the nation" (Healy 268). Notwithstanding the catastrophes of World War 2 in Europe and the Pacific, with the aliens cordoned off, catalogued and put to work, the sense of progress for Australian history was restored. Thus, even with the looming crisis of cold war politics, the distinctions between true and untrue remained the same for most

Australians and it was still possible to believe that the state would use its power to enact the will of the people. The hopes and fears and aspirations of the Australian citizen or British subject (after all they were seen as one and the same) could still be vested in the country's institutions. Institutionally at least, if not in everyday life, alien bodies were separated from Australian bodies. Therefore post-war citizens could still represent themselves as beings who belonged to a unified and coherent social space. But with body, memory, hope and dreams cast casually and brutally adrift onto the sea of history, the European refugee could no longer believe that "natural" national belonging signalled an objective order of being. "Do people make history? What is the relationship between people and historical forces?" the question is posed to author Richard Flanagan and he has no ready answer. He responds that he has written two novels—*The Death of a River Guide* (1994) and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997)—trying to address this issue, an issue which for him is "the big one" (Interview). As well as Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* this chapter also examines another literary text published in the 1990s, Raimond Gaita's *Romulus, My Father* first published in1998. Where Flanagan writes fiction, Gaita writes memoir. Both writers address the post-war European exodus to Australia motivated by a common desire to answer the questions posed to Flanagan—"Do people make history? What is the relationship between people and historical forces?" As well as being published internationally, both books were adapted to film. Equally, the two films achieved worldwide distribution and mainstream release. Hence, this chapter also consider the film texts and, in the case of *Romulus, My Father*, the published screenplay as well. Film theory as such is not applied; rather the films are considered as parallel texts or intertexts for the literary study of the novels. *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father* were published without the fanfare and the occasional controversy which greeted the publication of multicultural literature from the 1980s to early 1990s. Consequently, this chapter also reflects on how these two novels located themselves within cultural nationalisms of fin de siècle Australia thereby subtly repositioning the supposed opposite categories of "multicultural" and "national" literatures.

The Sound of One Hand Clapping

The Sound of One Hand Clapping chronicles the story of Bojan Buloh, a post-war Slovenian refugee and his daughter Sonja and their desperate attempts to redeem a future freed from the past. In 1989, early on in the novel, when Sonja returns to Hobart after an absence of twenty-two years, another momentous historical event is being

broadcast—the fall of the Berlin Wall. Flanagan underwrites this historic event by contrasting it with the distinct inner world of the newly pregnant Sonja: "in the end history—like the Berlin Wall—shapes people, had shaped her, but would not in the end determine her, because in the end it cannot account for the great irrational—the great human-forces: the destructive power of evil, the redeeming power of love." (25) Simulating the turmoil of his characters' journey, Flanagan's narrative moves backwards and forwards through time and place. From Europe, to post-war Tasmania and into the present, Flanagan circles around time, emulating the non-linearity of a mythic storyteller. Unconventionally, he divides the novel into eighty six chapters, each chapter titled with a date that ranges from 1954 to 1990. However, present time occurs in the real time of Sonja's pregnancy. The longing to return to Tasmania, to reconcile her family history, to no longer be "stranger to her past", grows in Sonja's belly just like her own child (17-18). Corroborating the inescapable interweaving of the past and present for the novel's protagonists, the story regularly digresses. Now and again the narrative moves forward, only to return to the past. However, the last two chapters being undated, could be set in either the present or the future. Operating without a calendrical marker, these two chapters signal the characters' redemption or their reconciliation with their past. Once the narrative ends its temporal disruption, peace is found at last in the here and now of Tasmania (410). Here, the absence of date acts as a metaphor for the characters' belated sense of belonging—a sense of home—hard fought for and realised at last.

Yet in 1954, when Bojan's wife Maria walks away from the isolated Hydro camp that the family has been assigned to, she never returns. Flanagan does not reveal Maria's harrowing secrets until the end of the novel. After being made to watch the murder of her father and the rape of her mother and sister during the war in Slovenia, Maria herself is raped by SS soldiers when she is just twelve years old. Accompanying Bojan to the camp at Butlers Gorge, having travelled so far to be free, in the end Maria takes her own life. The care of her three-year old daughter Sonja is abandoned to Bojan and a series of strangers. Thirty-three years on, when she herself is pregnant, Sonja returns to Tasmania endeavouring to make sense of her mother's despair. As for Bojan, after Maria's suicide, the dream of a new life becomes a nightmare, an agonising failure to realise deliverance. The journey to live beyond history's frontier is now nothing more than another passage to betrayal and despair. Flanagan writes bleakly:

> Life had revealed itself Bojan Buloh as the triumph of evil. He felt that his whole life had been a journey downwards to what he now believed to be a true hell. Out of his time. Far from his home. Forever bound to her, yet no longer a

> husband. Where was the sun? Where was his rightful place? Where could such a man and his child who was as surely her child now go? (407)

Bojan's dislocation and anguish are re-enacted in an early scene in the film version. At his naturalisation ceremony in Butlers Gorge, the camera turns dizzyingly around a distraught Bojan as he clutches onto the confused, three-year old Sonja. The day before, not far from the hall where he is being naturalised, Maria was found hanging from a tree. Echoing Arthur Calwell's 1947 speech which is the epigraph to this chapter, the politician officiating at the ceremony speaks of the intertwining of post-war immigrant fates with Australian destiny. With naturalisation the migrants will be offered "the great gift of English civilisation, the English language and our belief in justice and fair play" in exchange for their "hope and determination" (44). At that moment, a Polish worker cynically observes that they would rather have the food rations that are supplied to British immigrants.[1] For the officiating Australians, the moment "when the new Australians renounced their previous citizenship—their country, their past" is a moment to be celebrated. For the new Australians: "it was a sad but necessary step to take" (42). For Bojan, his loss of embodied subjectivity is symbolically represented by the suicide of his wife; a loss which coincides with his naturalisation ceremony. Still grieving Maria's suicide, Bojan's experiences physical disarticulation in the hall where the ceremony is being held: "Bojan knew he had an arm… That must mean that it is connected to a hand and the hand to an arm […] he knew he must still have eyes even if he doubted that also" (45).

Loss of homeland for Bojan is reinscribed by the loss of his wife and a mother for Sonja. Struggle as he might, Bojan proves incapable of providing a home for Sonja:

> 'Doma,' he said. 'You know what doma means Sonja? It means home. In Slovenian doma means home. You know what Australians call these places, Sonja? Wog flats, that's what they call them. That means that they are not for the Australian people. That means they are for the wogs. (146)

"Doma" is something that Bojan cannot recreate. He seeks solace in alcohol, viciously beating his daughter in drunken fits of rage, until she too abandons him. Bojan will not see Sonja again for twenty-two years. He talks into the emptiness she leaves behind: "You and me … we lived, we lived worse than dogs. I am sorry. I don't expect you to come back. Believe me I never wished it the drinking, the fighting, these wog flats" (320). Symbolising the unbearable and irrecoverable loss of love, his parting gift to Sonja is a music box that plays "Lara's theme", from the 1965 film of *Dr Zhivago*. For Sonja, all the good in her father's soul is symbolised by wood. Bojan is a master woodworker. He works with all sorts of wood, plywood, Tas oak, off-cuts, King Billy: as far as Sonja is concerned "he made something of it all and it was something good of

which she was part" (9). Finally reconciled with Sonja who is expecting his grandchild, Bojan experiences the longing to return to his woodwork and the "womb of his work" (333). It is in the "womblike" experience of his work that Bojan is finally able to discover compassion for himself as well as for others who have suffered:

> And then he started making things for everybody else who might be lost like him … no longer with hate but with love, a poultice for their sad wounds, good solid things that would not let them down when everything else in life had failed … he knew they had seen their children die and their mothers never return and had buried their fathers too young, had watched innocents executed like he had, watched men go mad, good men and bad men alike, … and everyday he was smuggling out…his message to them all, … and that message was that others knew-*that all*-that all that they had together, the one thing they shared … was knowing that this thing happened just to him but to them all … and he tried to tell it all with love. (335)

Redemption for Sonja and Bojan comes from the replication of the mother in their "womb work". Functioning like the dream work of Freudian psychoanalysis, their womb work acts like a "safety valve through which repressed desires, fears, or memories" find an outlet in the conscious mind and in the process, a healing and an acceptance transpires which allows for the reintegration of their subjectivity, as well as their familial relationship (Barry 99).

Bojan offers Sonja the gifts of his labour, a cot, a high chair and a baby cradle all painstakingly and traditionally crafted as gifts for her child. His grandchild is named Maria after the grandmother whom she will never know. "Doma" is located at last in the house that Bojan lovingly restores for Sonja and the baby, with the help of his friend and fellow immigrant Jiri. Symbolically, the restoration of their familial relationship occurs when Bojan returns to Sonja the teapot that she deliberately smashed the day Maria disappeared. Sonja, in turn, hands the baby Maria over into Bojan's arms (416). For Hannah Arendt, "with each new birth a new beginning is born into the world" (465). In *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (both the book and the film), the new beginning is finally secured by the birth of a child. In spite of the nightmare of loss that Flanagan describes, the power of the birth metaphor ultimately frames his work and redeems the suffering of his protagonists. In a literary sense, a creative birth is also realised in the lives and narratives Flanagan gives voice to in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*. By interweaving his wog narratives into the "national story", he valorises the nation building efforts of the "new Australians"—both men and women.

Nation and History

In contrast to Flanagan's "self confident storytelling" in his previous novel *Death of a River Guide*, the *Times Literary Supplement* found *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*

deficient (Henighan, "European Past, Tasmanian Present"). According to the reviewer, Stephen Henighan, "The narrative unease betrays Flanagan's uncomfortable relationship to his subject" and the author was not "tough minded" enough in the same way that he had been "on the broader Tasmanian society in his first novel". Henighan argues that the author denies his characters' hybrid existence:

> the novel's closing assertion that 'only those who lived it can ever know' a particular history cuts both ways, separating Sonja and her daughter from the Slovenian past while shutting the gates of Tasmanian society against the 'wogs' the novel set out to include. (22)

For Henighan, Flanagan's narrative premise that we live with others who are both distinct yet like ourselves negates community. On the other hand, the review in *Publishers Weekly* has a different point of view, lauding Flanagan for illuminating the lives of those forgotten by history (55). Whereas one critic saw the novel as not achieving a unity with the broader culture of the society wherein it was written; another critic celebrated the novel for illuminating cultural absences. These opposing critical stances reflected the debates about the prerequisites for social cohesion taking place within Australia at the time. According to Flanagan, in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* he is merely reflecting his own reality. His wife Majda is Slovene and her family migrated to Australia post-war, struggling to survive. Thus, Flanagan writes about a Slovene family because that is the migrant world he knows best and because he believes that Australia is a country of immigrants (Jurak 27). As he tells it, growing up in post-war Australia as the son of Irish Australians of convict descent "in a small mining town in a remote part of Tasmania, full of immigrants", his narrative becomes implicated with their narratives: European narratives until then had purposely been kept apart from his own. For James Jupp, the official story is simply put: "Australia was not settled by 'Europeans' but by the 'British' partly to keep the 'Europeans' out! Its subsequent history was determined by that fact" (*From White Australia to Woomera* 4). Official government policy distinguished between British/Irish and Europeans until 1958 and to some degree until 1983, when British subjects could still vote without becoming Australian citizens. Conceivably, the unity that Henighan ascribes to broader Tasmanian society and culture is an artificial construct.

For Flanagan the reality was different and growing up in a small Tasmanian mining town, from "a very young age" he remembered the post-war European migrants and their "extraordinary stories":

> it never ceased to astonish me how they imprinted on one's soul in such a remote place. You might have written the great epic movement of history of the last one hundred years—fascism, nationalism, communism, the disappearance of nations, languages—and all that would exist in one person's own story. (Interview)

Writing this immigrant story in the 1990s, Flanagan creates a narrative which mediates between histories: his own, as the son of Irish settlers in Australia, and the history of the post-war displaced persons who settled in Australia. Perhaps the narrative unease which Henighan detects in the novel merely reflects the critic's own unease at the melding and meshing of histories which had hitherto been deliberately kept separate.

Strictly speaking, Flanagan cannot be classified as an ethnic or multicultural writer yet he intervenes and mediates in Australia's cultural self-concept with a purpose similar to that attributed to the multicultural literary project that stalled in the early 1990s.[2] Flanagan's mission is as politically purposeful as Arthur Calwell's statement in 1947 or, for that matter, both Prime Minister Howard's and Prime Minister Keating's speechmaking about nation during the nineties. Flanagan is not interested in writing the Australian Legend. The need for the sense of Australianness created by "the radical nationalist tradition" or, what Turner calls the Lawson/Furphy legacy, has long passed ("Whatever Happened to National Identity?" 32). A century on, there was a different story about nation waiting to be written. Yet, in recognition of his nationalist literary inheritance, Flanagan also writes as a myth-maker but his myths about nation are different to the ones of the past. Despite the considerable social change that Australia experienced after the Second World War, modern day nation-making still relies on communal myths shared by the nation's people. These myths of national origins always link to a sense of continuity with an immemorial past and belong to the officially sanctioned, collective national memory.

In the bicentenary year in 1988, the official publication issued by the Department of Immigration (DIMIA) and titled *Australia and Immigration 1788 to 1988*, described Australian settlement as follows:

> Australia's Bicentenary is not merely a celebration of 200 years of European settlement. It is a celebration of human life on this continent since the ancestors of today's Aboriginal people took their first cautious, hopeful steps on this land. Tens of thousands of years later, on 26 January 1788, eleven British ships hove to after the longest migration in human history to found a raw settlement on the shores of Sydney Cove. Thus began Australia's age of modern history. (Armit et al. 1)

But this is the story of the "old" nation. Since 1945, over six million people have immigrated to Australia. With *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, Flanagan tells the myth of the "new" nation which incorporates the story of post-war migration. The first chapter of *The Sound Of One Hand Clapping* begins prophetically: "All this you will come to understand but can never know, and all of it took place long, long ago in a world that has since perished into peat, in a forgotten winter on an island of which few

have ever heard" (1). Countering the monochromatic, nationalist legend promulgated in the public sphere during four terms of conservative government, Flanagan writes the saga of the non-British, European exodus and arrival to the Promised Land. Telling their story with a sometime baroque prose that embellishes their bare, bitter lives, Flanagan creates a myth of arrival, a foundational narrative and a primordial tie for his wogs and reffos to their new land:

> If this tale could be told properly it would be filled with everything. There would be an ocean of what had been and the dreams of what would be and you could swim within the shallows of those memories and surf the waves of those dreams as they rose up before breaking into nothingness. Watch as their foamy wash swirled up schools of reffos arriving day after day pushing their scant belongings to the single men's quarters in mangy old wooden wheelbarrows, them thinking that at last their journey was ended … all those Poles and Krauts and Czechs and Lithos and Yugos and Eye-ties and other Balts and wogs … (376)

Flanagan belongs to the group of writers who have drawn attention to Tasmania, responding to a market demand for writing about regional and authentic places. Tasmania's remoteness, convict legacy, large tracts of wilderness and island status, provide the requisite inventory for such authenticity.[3] For Lucy Frost, the relationship of Tasmanian writers to Australian writing is akin to that of Southern writers to American twentieth-century writing. Frost celebrates the southerners' "resistant space on the periphery" in opposition to an ever encroaching metropolitan culture (41). Anxieties surrounding the effects of modernity and globalisation and their consequent erasure of difference have spurred a demand for regional and authentic fictions. Tasmanian authors such Flanagan, as well as others such as Christopher Koch and Danielle Wood, feed this demand. As a result, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and its subsequent claims for legitimacy derive from Flanagan's and other authors' prior mythologising of the Tasmanian location.

Here however, Flanagan's intercession takes on particular importance. By locating the reffos' arrival in Tasmania, the author creates a regional narrative for a "new" localised nation as opposed to the "old" nation which claimed its legitimacy from its founding as a British settler nation-state peripheral as it was to the imperial centre. Without *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*—and to some extent his earlier novel, *Death of a River Guide*—the localised narrative of Tasmania could have become a just a small island version of the larger island narrative of mainland Australia. Similar to the DIMIA bicentenary publication, this would have perpetuated the already established pattern of Commonwealth sanctioned continuity between British settlement and thousands of years of Indigenous occupation. This was a trend perceived in some prominent

Australian literary fictions of the 1990s, which sought for continuity (and perhaps reconciliation) by endlessly recycling Australia's colonial past and colonial present (Ley, "When the Past Isn't Past" 23). A trend which appeared to signal another emerging social "structure of feeling", namely, the difficulty Australians faced in coming to terms with their past at the end of the last century (Williams, *Marxism and Literature*). Rather than continually linking the Australian to the British, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* seeks to establish an alternative circularity, one which links the local to the global. Flanagan's narrative mediates between Tasmania as the local and the mainland Europe as the global, by bringing what Flanagan calls "those epic movements of history of the last one hundred—fascism, nationalism, communism, the disappearance of nations, languages" into relationship with Australians outside of the British sanctioned tradition (Interview). Unable to offer an oppositional narrative of localisation like Flanagan's new nation, the old nation's status is threatened by the forces of globalisation as well as its own history of the dispossession of its Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, the founding moment of the old nation in division and violence is something which the localised new nation also inherits.

Flanagan writes this necessary prequel to his tale of post-war Tasmanian migration: "Once this weary pastoral land had been open forest through which blackfellas hunted and camped and of a night filled their stories of which one had no end: that of the fierce war against the invading whitefellas" (21). The old nation whitefella brings with him a "terrible revolution", carving up the land so as to generate hydroelectricity with "its seductive false prophecies that Tasmania would one day be Australia's Ruhr Valley" (21). Like the old nation Australians, the post-war, fugitive Europeans are also trying to create a post-war history that forgets "a recent, often hideous past" on an island that was "falsely praised as a land without history" (21). The brutality and dislocation which drove the post-war European immigration to Australia creates Flanagan's new nation. In turn, this is linked to the brutality of original British settlement which created the old nation. It was Hannah Arendt who first linked the excesses of imperialism (responsible for the founding of the old nation) to the excesses of totalitarianism responsible for the mid-century European exodus. For Arendt, imperialism destroyed the consensual character of the state which, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, came to rely on increased democratisation. Imperialist rule required that inferior races and cultures were subjugated to the purposes of the imperial power. Consequently, colonial administrators initially operated independently of popular consensus. They acquired forms of power based upon "abstract rationality" wherein

people are treated "as abstract, 'behaving mechanisms' to be managed rather than as willing co-participants in a public realm" (qtd in Hansen 135). Tasmania's importance to Australian history rests first, upon the often disputed fact of the genocide of the state's Indigenous population second, in the fact that it was founded as a brutal British penal colony.[4] Van Diemen's Land, which the colony was then named, acquired a reputation as a place of unspeakable horrors. By locating the Europeans' arrival in Tasmania, Flanagan links their stories to the local, colonial tradition of managing human beings as "abstract 'behaving mechanisms'" (135).

As a result, the refugee Europeans become co-inheritors of the fatal shore, adding their own inhuman treatment to the legacy of Tasmanian convicts and the dispossession and killing of Tasmania's Indigenous peoples. All three groups have been subjected to terror: for the refugees, terror as inflicted by European totalitarianism, for the convicts and Aboriginal people, this brutal treatment is imposed by the administrators and upholders of British imperialism. For Arendt, "terror is the realisation of the law of movement" which has as "its chief aim to make it possible for the force of […] nature or of history to race freely through mankind […] 'Guilty' is he who stands in the way of the natural or historical process which has passed judgement over 'inferior races' over individuals 'unfit to live,' over 'dying classes and decadent peoples'" (465). Thus, tangentially and imperceptibly, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* inserts itself into the fin-de-siècle debates of the Australian History Wars by shifting those debates about who owns a nation's history, who has the rights of national belonging, or the rights to limit or delimit a nation's history, or a nation's human beings onto a global as well as local stage. With Pavel's story, Flanagan documents the cost of treating human beings as "abstract, behaving mechanisms":

> Pavel had served first in the Polish Army, then the Red Army, then, when overrun by the Wehrmacht in 1941, had been pressed into serving in the Germans' Russian army. When in 1943 he had been captured once more by the Red Army he … was instead sent for seven year to the labour camps of Kolyma. And of what did Pavel talk? Seven years in the Gulag. How on his job application form for the Hydro his English interviewer had written 'seven years forestry experience, Russia.' That was a funny thing about which they all laughed … Of what did Pavel not talk? That when he returned to Poland his wife and children had disappeared, executed, it was said by the Communist authorities, by the Germans who had in their time denied it and said it was the work of the Russians. (107)

The fugitive Europeans whom Flanagan inscribes into the national story in the 1990s, no longer believe in history, at least not in the same way that Australians needed to believe after the Second World War. Instead "They were trying to leave it behind them, dissolve it" (394). As a Polish workman remarks "Europe is a cancer […] It spreads

death everywhere" (394). In isolated gullies in Tasmania, work on confident nation building projects like dam structures only deepens the reffos' cynicism in the triumph of the capitalist, industrialised state:

> "What the bloody hell they want all this bloody electricity for anyway?" asked the Albanian. Bojan waved dramatically at the bush. "For all their bloody industry, of course, you wog fool."
> The Albanian turned and looked at the wilderness that enveloped them and laughed. The bearded Pole spoke once more.
> "They think if they get the electricity then industry will come and then they will be like Europe, then they will have factories instead of forest, battlefields instead of potato fields, rivers that run with blood instead of water." (394)

Having lost all confidence in the progressive narrative of history, what the reffo now needs is to disassociate from history's sham stories and random culpabilities.

Most of all "none wanted to think that they were all complicit in what they had left" (394). What the reffos want is a world more ordinary:

> Australia was ordinary, and even if it wasn't, they didn't want to know about that. They simply wanted a world that might be ordered with the hope that the order might last long enough to build a home and raise a family and have them in turn bring their children back, and then to die knowing one had as much as one could rightfully expect out of life without having to suffer cataclysmic wars, occupations, revolutions, destruction of homes, cities, nations, countries, languages, peoples. (116)

For Arendt "the suprahuman force of Nature and History […] can be hindered only by the new beginning and the individual end which the life of each man actually is" (465). It is for this reason, that Frost finds *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* "intensely disturbing" both as a historical critique and social critique of Australia's refugee policies. Foreshadowing more recent concerns about Australia's refugee policies, Frost questions procedures that separate traumatised post-war refugees from any sense of normality and keep them "confined together in remote isolation constraining as a prison". She also questions the ethics of Australia's commercial and industrial interests which have been, and are still being served "by a diaspora of damaged people easily seduced from elsewhere by a desperate desire for freedom" (41). *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* begins with an epigraph which was written in Sarajevo in 1946 by Serbian author and Nobel laureate Ivo Andric. Reflecting on the cost of war to the young, Andric mourns "how the hand of this last war has passed over the heads of these frail beings". He laments the passing of this generation because "[n]othing could speak more clearly to future generations about our times than these youthful grey heads, from which the nonchalance of youth has been stolen" (i). Yet, at the time that Flanagan was writing his novel of World War 2 refugee Slovenes in Tasmania, another war was raging in Sarajevo. The Siege of Sarajevo gained dubious honour as the longest siege in

modern warfare lasting from 5 April 1992 to February 29, 1996. As a result of the Bosnian War, nearly two hundred thousand people were either killed or displaced and another generation was driven into forced migration. Only fifty years after World War 2, the "burnt ones" were on the move once more. Andric tries to make sense of the ethnic and religious divisions in what was then Tito's Yugoslavia. After the break up of the former Yugoslavia, Andric's works were blamed as fostering the ethnic hatreds which led to war in the 1990s.

Whereas Andric is accused of fostering murderous disunity, Flanagan seeks cohesion with *The* Sound *of One Hand Clapping*,. He writes of Andric's fellow countrymen who fled to Australia after World War 2. He writes of people who were "both part of and beyond history, forgotten by history, irrelevant to history, yet shaped entirely by it" (24).[5] In *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* the epic movements of history survive in the stories of the characters that Flanagan records. Characters like Jiri, who drinks with the gypsies in Czechoslovakia and the Aborigines in Tasmania, neither of whom will ever really accept him. Jiri arrives in Tasmania in 1954, bonded to work for two years in a remote and isolated construction camp in return for the offer of resettlement. Travelling what the gypsies call "o longo drum" belonging, for Jiri, proves to be an elusive goal:

> but then he, being half Sudeten German, half Czech, had never felt accepted anywhere. After the great exodus of Sudeten Germans in the war's wake Jiri's family had remained in Moravia because they felt themselves to be what the Czechs believed his family were not: Czech. The Gypsies who arrived in Moravia in large numbers from Slovakia, where they had been persecuted during the war by the Slovak fascist Hlinka Guards, believed themselves to be only forever travelling *o longo drom*, the long road, along which the abandoned German homes in Moravia that they occupied were but way-stations. Jiri was to them a *gadjo*, a non-gypsy, an outsider to that race of outsiders. Later Jiri became to the Australians a reffo and then a wog. The Gypsies sang songs of forever travelling, not romantic ballads but bleak laments and in them Jiri heard something of himself he had until then not known … truly a *gadjo*, always outside, unable to enter. Jiri had made it a lifetime policy to make the best of it that he could, because like the Roma and the blackfellows he had never had any other choice. (115)

A homeland, with an authorised inclusion into its history, proves to be beyond Jiri's attainment. Once more, Flanagan links this immigrant story to the "blackfellows'" story. It is only in recent years that public debates have acknowledged the contribution that Aboriginal stockmen and domestic servants (mostly unpaid) made to the settling of the Northern and Western Australia. All of which leads Adi Wimmer to wonder: "what would the historiography of post-war Australia be like without the contribution of low-paid immigrant labour?" (132). Both the contributions of "blackfellows" and the post-war immigrants have been repressed, so as to make manifest the ideological project of a

British founded nation-state, White Australia. In interrogating the silence about non-British migration, both *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father* (which I will discuss next in this chapter) validate the significant role that the post-war Europeans played in establishing the new Australian nation. As well, they make manifest the symbolical and actual violence which inevitably adheres to the realised project of modern nation-state formation, an idea which had its origins in nineteenth-century Europe. Today, this idea is being increasingly challenged by a global space which is being deemed post-national. It is in this space that narratives like *Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father* locate themselves, emphasising the sense of belonging that can be found in the local. Within these texts, it is the local that acts as the stabilising fulcrum to oppose the uncertainty and loss of forced migration.

Romulus, My Father

Gaita believes that the authority of his memoir would have been destroyed by the "inclusion of fiction". Should it happen that ''*Romulus* is exposed as fraudulent, or seriously mistaken no publisher would recommend that it be reissued as fiction" ("From Book to Screenplay" viii). In the first chapter, Gaita introduces the journey to follow: "In 1950 when I was four, they [Gaita's parents] emigrated on an assisted passage on the migrant ship *SS Hersey* (*Romulus* 10). Straight away, he appends the power of fate hovering over his family's journey like an ancient Greek curse: "On the eve of their leaving a woman read my father's future in her cards. She said he was destined for a journey across a large water, that he would lose his wife and suffer greatly" (10). Reflecting on his memoir a decade onwards, Gaita realises that his biography does not take on "a novelistic form". Rather because of "its emphasis on character, fate and affliction" his memoir is more of a "tragic poem", in the sense that the ancient Greeks spoke of poetry ("From Book to Screenplay" xii). Written in this time of modernity, with its central motif of turbulent journeying, Gaita's memoir can no longer describe an epic Odyssean voyage of return. Romulus, his father, leaves Yugoslavia never to go back. Christine, his mother, departs Germany only to take her own life, in Australia.

Set in motion by the pivotal event of forced migration, events in *Romulus, My Father* unfold with the imperative of coincidence which is central to tragedy. Once in Melbourne, the Gaita family is cleared through the Bonegilla migrant reception centre. Romulus is bonded to work for two years building the reservoir at Cairn Curran. Meanwhile he lives in the single men's camp in Baringhup, 150 kilometres from Melbourne. Although there is a family camp adjacent to the single men's quarters', the

family camp is for Australians only and so Raimond and his mother stay behind in Bonegilla. At Baringhup, Romulus befriends two refugee Romanian brothers, Mitru and Hora, whose fate becomes inextricably linked to that of the Gaita family. Christine's mental health, already fragile, deteriorates in Australia and she becomes increasingly promiscuous and unable to care for Raimond. "Heartbroken by his unfathomable, troubled, vivacious wife" his father accepts the offer of a derelict farmhouse, Frogmore, as a way of keeping the family together (*Romulus* 19). However, soon afterwards his mother begins her affair with Mitru, becomes pregnant to him and separates from Raimond's father. Hora helps Romulus to look after Raimond whilst Romulus in turn supports Christine and Mitru financially. Unable to cope with Christine's instability, Mitru commits suicide. He is twenty-seven years old when he takes his own life. Incapable of caring for her two children with Mitru, Christine hands them over to state care. Alone, abandoned and refused return by her husband and Raimond, Christine also takes her own life. In turn, Romulus has his hopes for a new life dashed when he discovers that Lidia, the woman he hopes to marry, has duped him. She is already married. Romulus, "[who] could accept many forms of folly, weakness and vice but not a malevolent human will", is not capable of dealing with Lidia's betrayal (121). In 1960, threatened by insanity, he voluntarily admits himself to Ballarat psychiatric hospital. Ultimately, Romulus recovers and remarries but he is never the same again. He survives to see his grandchildren and his son achieve scholarly success. Romulus dies as his son, Raimond Gaita, turns fifty. *Romulus, My Father* is written as a result of the eulogy that Gaita gave at his father's funeral.

For Gaita, the memoir is assigned the task of bearing witness and he wrote *Romulus, My Father* "because I wanted to bear witness to, rather than merely record, or even celebrate, the values that defined my father's moral identity" ("From Book to Screenplay" viii). Simultaneously, Gaita recognises that although Christine, his mother, "in the book is little more than a sketch" she is also the centrifugal, tragic force of the story (xiv). Nick Drake (the screen writer) as well as Richard Roxburgh (the director) are haunted by her (xiv). Nearly a decade after publishing his memoir, Gaita acknowledges that only recently had he come to realise how much he wanted to write about his mother. Christine's dislocated and fractured subjectivity is refracted by the different ways that those who remember her. The manner in which those who love her go about assigning her name, serves as an example: Gaita writes that "in my book I refer to her only as 'Christine'" but the screenplay and film refer to her as Christina. Christine sounds like Christina when pronounced in German, his mother's native tongue

(xii). Her lover Mitru called her Christina. His father called her Christel which is what Christine's German family called her. Christine's subjectivity is much more unstable that that of her husband's, much more determined by the perceptions and expectations of those who surround her. She is sixteen when she meets Romulus in Dortmund, Germany, during the war. At that time, Gaita writes, she is well educated, reads Shakespeare in translation and is fond of theatre and opera (*Romulus* 6). Dortmund was devastated by bombing during the war and his mother and father's turbulent relationship fed on the destruction: "the intoxication that comes from the violent destruction of the symbols of order and continuity inspired a passionately anarchic way of living which the pressures of responsibility could not touch" (8).

After the war everything changes, particularly for Christine, who once her son is born, begins to show signs of the mental illness that will ultimately consume her. In the same passage that celebrates his father's lifelong friendship with Hora—"I have never known anyone who lived so passionately, as did these two friends, the belief that nothing matters so much in life as to live it decently"—Gaita juxtaposes the difficulties presented for his mother (101). Despite the condescension accorded to the foreigners in their midst, Romulus and Hora were better equipped to survive the Australian environment of the time and its "puritanical conception of human possibilities". Hora in particular was grateful for the tolerance accorded to them by Australians because it was "greater that could expected in most European nations" (100). In time, Romulus's exceptional capacity as a welder wins him the respect of the local farmers and townspeople and Romulus is "deeply gratified that his work and he through it, should become respected" (99). For Gaita, women in particular suffered at that time, because of what Australia offered for them. Thus, they became "especially vulnerable to the deadening attractions of middle-class respectability" (103). For Christine, "highly intelligent, deeply sensuous, anarchic and unstable" this proved to be the wrong environment for her to "find herself and for others to understand her" (103). Contempt for Christine is common in "a culture whose limitations were partly the reason she could not overcome hers" (104). It is in Australia, working with the screenwriter Nick Drake and taking him to the remains of Frogmore, that Gaita finally realises one of his goals. "Nick was able to show why Rai could be at home in, and later awaken to the beauty of, a landscape that was alien to Christina" (From Book to Screenplay xix).

Tragically, Christine had emigrated to both a social and physical landscape "that was alien to [her] and she to it, and which played its part in the despair that drove her to kill herself" (xix). Even though her influence over other characters is profound,

Christine is a minor character in the memoir. She comes to life in the collaborative work that is required between the memoirist, Gaita, and the screenwriter, Nick Drake. Ultimately, her portrayal is fully realised in the performance of Franka Potente who plays Christina in the film version of *Romulus, My Father*, directed by Richard Roxburgh. For Gaita, this means more than Drake getting her right as a believable character: "I came to trust that the way I was moved by his [Nick Drake's] depiction of Christina did not falsify my mother or her relationship with me" (xiv). Gaita then goes on to lament the loss of a critical scene from the published screenplay. The following scene was never shot for the film but Gaita goes on to describe it in his introduction to the published screenplay:

> Rai asks Romulus, 'Do you think that muti loved us?' 'ROMULUS', the screen play tells us, 'looks at RAI. Suddenly he is sobbing, an awful, animal sound. He cannot stop. It pours out of him, the loss, the pain. RAI holds onto his hand for dear life.' This is the first (and only) time when Rai realises that he and Romulus may together have been victims of Christina's incapacity to be a wife to Romulus. (xiv)

For Gaita, the imperative for his memoir is to try to draw meaning from his family's journey, both metaphysically and morally. Thus he hopes that his book could show a "calm pity for the people whose story it told […] and that though all of them were to some degree broken by their suffering, in none of them was their humanity diminished by it" (xiii).

Truth sometimes being stranger than fiction, Gaita finds Neil Mikkelsen waiting outside the church at his father's funeral (*Romulus* 207). Mikkelsen owed Romulus Gaita his life due to a near tragic accident. More telling still, he was one of the few men who did not judge Christine, describing her "as very intelligent and a 'woman of substance'" which Gaita takes to mean "that she had the arresting presence of someone who experienced the world with a thoughtful intensity" (31). His final sentence in the memoir reads "My father is buried in the Maryborough cemetery *close* to my mother" (my italics) (207). A decade later, Gaita agonises as to whether by that sentence he merely yields to a childlike wishful fantasy: should he have used a phrase that said his father was buried *nearby* his mother? (my italics) ("From Book to Screenplay" xiv). As for Christine, even in death, her own space proves hard to claim. Her presence acts to affirm, summarise or underwrite the main text which after all is titled *Romulus, My Father*. For the reader her haunting of the story of *Romulus, My Father,* is due to the contested relationship Christine has with the "texts" she is permitted to inhabit.

Women and Space

Central to the migratory narrative in both Gaita's and Flanagan's texts is the woman's absence as mother, wife or lover. The physical loss of the motherland is experienced as the woman's loss/absence in the place of arrival. In *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, female lack and its consequences are fictively recreated, whereas in *Romulus, My Father*, the absence of a real woman is painfully memorized. Fiona Polack's textual interest is in how notions of gender intersect with those of space. She queries "the long-held binary oppositions connecting women with mainly confined and stable spaces, including the traditional home", as well as such other oppositions as man as public and woman as private, female as nature and male as culture (183). For Polack, the maternal metaphor operates on two levels here, both of which are inherently conservative and invested in the Law of the Father. For example, Gaita's memoir is titled *Romulus, My Father*. The author's act of witness and/or disclosure is primarily named and promoted as a tribute to his father. Then, there is the regional version of linking motherhood with nation. In patriarchal discourse, women often *embody* nation, symbolically taken on the role, especially as mothers, of birthing the nation's ideal citizens. In *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, Sonja returns from the metropolis to give birth in Tasmania. In Polack's opinion, this is a patriarchal resolution for Sonja's subjectivity. Sonja's trauma can only be resolved when she is established as a mother and can give Bojan his granddaughter. Thus, she perpetuates his lineage and fulfils her parochial as well as patriarchal duty (181-208).

However, I would argue that the texts of *Romulus, My Father* and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (novel, screenplay as well as film) operate on a more nuanced level. In part, this is because Gaita's and Flanagan's storytelling is affected by the intertexts which adapt and interpret their story. It is much more difficult to insist on a singular and definitive interpretation of a story when it is presented and adapted across different texts and different mediums. Depending on the sequence and time lapse between different versions/adaptations of the author's story, it is unreasonable to completely discount intertextual influences on readers' (and critics') reception and perception. As well, it becomes unreasonable to insist on the existence of a singular "ur-text".[6] In my opinion, Gaita correctly insists that the value of his memoir resides in its inherent truth value ("From Book to Screenplay" viii). However, the adapted texts which are the outcomes of *Romulus, My Father* are to some extent recreated fictions that originate from memoir and as aesthetic, cultural products they will inevitably be received as such. Gaita suggests that the value of these adaptations lies not so much in

being assigned a truth value, but in ensuring that they stay "true to the spirit of book" (xxiii). On the other hand, in the case of *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, the assumption is that all the texts that are discussed are fictional. This raises all sorts of issues concerning adaptation across genres and mediums, as well as the value of "truth" versus "fiction". It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into further discussion about these issues. However, I would like to elaborate on my earlier assertion that *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father* cannot be simplistically dismissed as patriarchal texts.

Flanagan and Gaita are liberal humanists. However, rather than being guilty of the masculinist bias which Polack proposes, I would argue that both authors employ the migratory destabilisation of gender as a metaphor for the uncertainties of modernity. Ultimately, it is the women in their "real" lives who bring about Flanagan's and Gaita's creative journeys. Flanagan writes the story of immigrant Slovenes as his wife is from an immigrant Slovenian family; Gaita authors *Romulus, My Father*, only to realise, a decade later, how much he wants to write about his mother. Both of the central women in the novels—Maria Buloh and Christine Gaita—are in different ways not present and therefore they are beyond understanding. However, Christine is a real person whereas Maria is a fictional character. Rather than imposing weighty judgement on Christine, Gaita writes compassionately of the difficulties his mother confronted in 1950s Australia. He reasons that the limitations of the culture that she had migrated to, was one of the reasons why she was unable to overcome her own difficulties (*Romulus* 103). Christine Gaita's and Maria Buloh's inability to survive in the new country is a corporeal re-enactment of the metaphor of migration—where the physical loss of the motherland/ homeland is experienced as the woman's loss/absence and inability to replicate a home or habitat. Gender operates as a *structuring* and *stabilising* mechanism because its ongoing performance gives the appearance of meaningful, as well as predictable dichotomy. Within a patriarchal logic, Christine's and Maria's subject positions make no sense, as they need to be "absent" to themselves at the level of metaphor whilst being "present" corporeally as mothers—recreating home and homeland. Romulus and Hora are more able to situate themselves within a new environment. Yet migration, experienced as woman's loss/absence (metaphorically and corporeally) also becomes a feminising experience for the menfolk. They in turn experience their own helplessness and vulnerability and this produces its own version of masculine hysteria. Bojan Buloh becomes a violent alchoholic. Romulus succumbs to mental illness. Mitru takes his own life. The children are abandoned, as the menfolk—

with varying degrees of success—try to compensate for the absence of the mother and motherland. Consequently, the destabilisation of gender in both novels becomes the motif for the turbulent uncertainties of modernity.

Mainsteam or Multicultural?

Although these texts write about post-war migration to Australia, they link the Australian to the multicultural because they speak to the anxiety of contemporary Australia: an anxiety about modernity and globalisation; about border destabilisation which becomes sited in the present/absent mothers of their stories.[7] With their regional, post-war immigration narratives and with their women and wogs themes, somehow, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father*, as well as their film adaptations, managed to straddle a position that is both "multicultural" and Australian. In the 1990s, Flanagan, the son of Irish Australian settlers and married to a Slovenian and Gaita, born in Germany but growing up in Australia as the son of European refugees, spoke in new ways about the essential Australianness of the post-war immigrant experience. These authors linked the national conversation to urgent global questions about who was entitled to claim the rights of citizenship and rights of national belonging that arose at the end of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, *They're a Weird Mob* (both the film and the novel) comically treated the experience of Australia's Italian immigrants. In the 1990s, *Romulus, My Father,* and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping,* although ostensibly books about Australia in the1950s, responded to the global need to "rethink the politics of identity" (Papastergiadis 2).

Moreover, the praise and prizes that were garnered by both the books and their film adaptations appeared to answer the questions raised at a national conference by Kerry Kilner, coordinator of AustLit ,Australian literature's flagship database. In 2005, Kilner suggests scrapping the multicultural literature subset in the database on the basis that multiculturalism is now inherent in Australian culture. In 2006 in Australia, overseas-born people comprised 23.4 percent of the population and 6 million people had migrated since 1945 ("Multicultural Writers' in AustLit"). Should not the category of multicultural writing now be subsumed into the category of Australian writers? Was the subcategory of multicultural writers still valid in today's Australia? Within the public sphere, the possibility of multiculturalism co-existing with Australianness had been vehemently debated since the late 1980s. Opponents of multiculturalism saw diversity as antagonistic to social cohesion. As discussed earlier in the introduction to this thesis, bipartisan government support for multiculturalism broke down in 1988, the year of the

bicentenary. Positions became further entrenched when the conservative Howard government was elected to office in 1996. During John Howard's first term in office, which also presided over the rise of the xenophobic One Nation Party, the Prime Minister deliberately shunned the use of the word "multiculturalism". Yet, in spite of the many criticisms of multicultural policy which continue into the present day, by the 1990s *Romulus, My Father* and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* proposed a different post-war synthesis for Australia.

Igor Maver credits *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* with bringing the post-war European migrant experience (particularly the Slovene experience) into Australian mainstream literature (75-84). Elizabeth McMahon also acknowledges Flanagan for presenting "a world which has had some, though not extensive, coverage in Australian fiction, but very little in film. The all too obvious reason for this is that such a topic conflicts with long held ideas about the apposite themes and subjects of Australian fiction" (94). Thus, some forty years after it happened, a disowned and denied discourse came into majority acceptance within Australian consciousness. The post-war migrant experience freed itself from a category sometimes ghettoised as Australian multicultural literature. As a subset of Australian literature, and a product of the positive discrimination policies of the 80s, multicultural literature had, at times, been derided as lacking literary merit. Perhaps, due in part to Flanagan's status as an established author, his narrative was readily accepted and his novel slipped easily into the category of Australian literary fiction without having to be marginalised into a "multicultural" category. Flanagan also scripted and directed the film version and his cinematic vision of Tasmania was realised with the film's release in 1998.

Equally, McMahon recognises the film's debt to the national literary inheritance: "Readers and viewers of *My Brilliant Career* are aware that the film [*The Sound of One Hand Clapping*] is, in part, a response to the position Franklin's novel occupies in the Australian literary tradition" (91). By establishing these linkages, Flanagan's treatment of the culture and articulation of the Australian world, albeit from an immigrant European perspective, appeared acceptable to the society wherein it was conceived. Flanagan's effort to rehabilitate and imaginatively situate the post-war aliens, wogs and reffos into the story of the Australian nation was successful. Even though some reviews were unsympathetic, ultimately both the book and film garnered cultural capital. The film was well received within Australia and at Berlin Film Festival (1999) but did not pull off a US release. As well as being short listed for the Miles Franklin Award in 1998 (a bequest established by the author of *My Brilliant Career*), the book won the Victorian

Premier's Literary Award and the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction for that same year. The novel was also set as a text on the Tasmanian school curriculum.

As a moral philosopher of international renown and a Professor at King's College, Raimond Gaita also bought considerable prior prestige to the publication of his memoir. Both as a film and as a written work, *Romulus, My Father* was widely praised. Gaita's story of growing up in Australia as the son of traumatised post-war immigrants won the 1998 Victorian Premier's Literary Award and became a set text for the Victorian Year 12 curriculum. Reviewers saw correlations to longstanding Australian narrative traditions in both the book and film. *Quadrant*, the conservative journal enthused: "*Romulus, My Father* approaches the success of the book it has already been compared to, the best-selling *A Fortunate Life"* (qtd in *Romulus* ii). Critic Peter Craven acknowledged the book's singularity: "It is only once in a blue moon that Australian writing gets a work of such moral gravity and human charm" (qtd in *Romulus* ii). Yet another review in *Screen Education* linked the book imaginatively with Henry Handel Richardson's *The End of a Childhood* (McFarlane 10). In the same review, the film's genealogy was traced to other significant Australian films such as The *Getting of Wisdom* (Beresford 1977), *The Man from Snowy River* (Miller 1982) and *The Caterpillar Wish* (Sciberra 2006). All these films tell the stories of Australian children coming of age in rural landscapes.

As texts of the 1990s, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father* not only bridged the gap between mainstream and multicultural, but also the perceived divide between high and popular culture. Both narratives operated as literary texts with privileged aesthetic merit in the realm of "high" culture. Equally, both films were well received within the wider realms of circulation attributed to Australian "popular" culture. Both projects challenged the primacy of the literary text, occupying a postmodern space that encouraged intertextual and reflexive readings between film and book. For curriculum study, the texts also presented as "modern" and up-to-date in the sense in that they could be studied within a number of disciplinary boundaries: Media Studies, Cultural Studies, English and Australian Studies.[8] As a result, in the public imagination, the two texts could be intertwined or dealt with independently. You could read the novel but not see the film or vice versa but the dialogue that had been set up between the two mediums could not be ignored, nor the challenge that it presented to the literary paradigm.

Adi Wimmer attributes the rich visual imagery in the novel, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, to the fact that it started life as a film script and was simultaneously

written as a novel ("Richard Flanagan's Novel and Film" 141). In contrast to Flanagan, Gaita did not write the screenplay adaptation of his memoir. The task was assigned to Nick Drake a poet, playwright and novelist in his own right, which led Gaita to ponder: "How, though, could an Englishman with a Czech father, who had never visited Australia, write a screenplay in which the Central Victorian landscape was a major character rather than just a beautiful backdrop?" ("From Book to Screenplay" xix). Reaching international audiences, the films also moved on from the stereotypical representation of Australianness that prevailed in the first decade of the revival of the Australian film industry (1973-83). Conventional portrayals and images dominated in films like *My Brilliant Career* and *The Man from Snowy River*. Together, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father* managed to demonstrate their continuity with the earlier nationalist film tradition, whilst proposing a more hybridised Australian identity "negotiating its forms and its meanings across grids of ethnic and cultural diversity" (Turner, "Whatever Happened to National Identity?" 35). Grids of meaning were also established internationally. An international cast and a Czech/English screenwriter were used for *Romulus, My Father* and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* was shown on Slovene TV as well as at the Berlin Film Festival. Both literary texts were translated: *Romulus, My Father* was published in England and translated into Spanish, German and Dutch; *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* was published in New York and London and translated into German, Dutch and French. By using wog narratives the films managed to be both distinctively Australian and international at the same time.

With their strong emphasis on setting, both projects also linked to a tradition of depicting life in an Australian context as determined by landscape. Furthermore, both texts with their strong emphasis on regional settings also foreshadowed localism as the countervailing force to globalisation with their emphasis on the local and the regional. Tasmania was the key location in *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and Central Victoria was lyrically depicted in *Romulus, My Father*. Acting as resistant texts to the discourse in the public sphere, *Romulus, My Father*, and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* produced new narrative identities for Australians. Consequently, both texts can be studied as cases in point where Australian aesthetic production in the late 1990s became emblematic of Raymond Williams's conception of a cultural system. Constantly created and recreated, they reflect a dynamic process wherein cultural complexity "is to be found not only in its variable processes and social definitions—traditions, institutions, and formations—but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the

process, of historically varied and variable elements" (*Marxism and Literature* 121). Culture was evolving, as well as being experienced, in a *particular* way during a *particular* historical moment. What Flanagan and Gaita did with their aesthetic production is challenge the authorised, official, British-biased and monocultural memory of the nation that was being strongly promoted by the conservative government, a time when monocultural, nationalistic memory was being reinvoked to shore the nation up against the gremlins of globalisation and to ensure social cohesion. Simultaneously, this approach marginalised a number of groups within the nation—amongst them were wogs and women.

Flanagan and Gaita did not invoke old, tired, myths of the laconic Aussie male of Anzac legend, or revert back to colonial stories of settlement. Instead, these two authors documented counter-memories for the nation wherein wogs and women acquire a central role. Consequently, their texts responded to political needs in the present which remained unaddressed or were disavowed within the public sphere. In this instance, Flanagan's and Gaita's particular genius lies in updating Australian literary narrative genres and rules to suggest new possibilities for Australian narratives for the future. As well, both authors managed to do this without attracting the censure that sometimes greeted the category of "multicultural literature" in an earlier period. Narratives such as Flanagan's and Gaita's intercede as alerts that global migration is now a necessary condition of modernity: "the tension between movement and settlement is constituent of modern life" (Papastergiadis 10). In *The Turbulence of Migration*, Papastergiadis argues there is no longer any predictable or pre-set destination for modernity's project and that there has been "a break in the vision of progress and control" (11).

For Arendt, the implacable belief in the suprahuman forces of history and nature require that their redemptive force "race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action" (465). Against this totalitarian vision, Arendt proposes another movement which is that of the "constant motion of all human affairs" and the "potentiality of something entirely new and unpredictable" (465). Driven by the metaphor of journey, texts like *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father*, take on a crucial role of imagining alternatives to the failures of modernity. Although both texts record the trauma that history inflicts on its human bystanders, they also celebrate the uniqueness and meaning to be found in each human life. In the meantime, they also serve their more old-fashioned literary purpose, namely, that of becoming part of the nation's imaginative realisation whereby, despite the interventions

of the state, “something new and unpredictable happens” (Arendt 465). For Australians, despite a decade-long political push in the 90s to maintain strong links to a British identity, the something new and unpredictable that happens is the everyday acceptance of the hybridization of Australian identity that was the result of Australian post-war European migration.

Fig. 6. Helen Darville/Demidenko/Dale photographed in Oxford for "Reinventing Helen." by Jane Wheatley appearing in *The Age* 10 May 2008, sec. Good Weekend: 26-32.

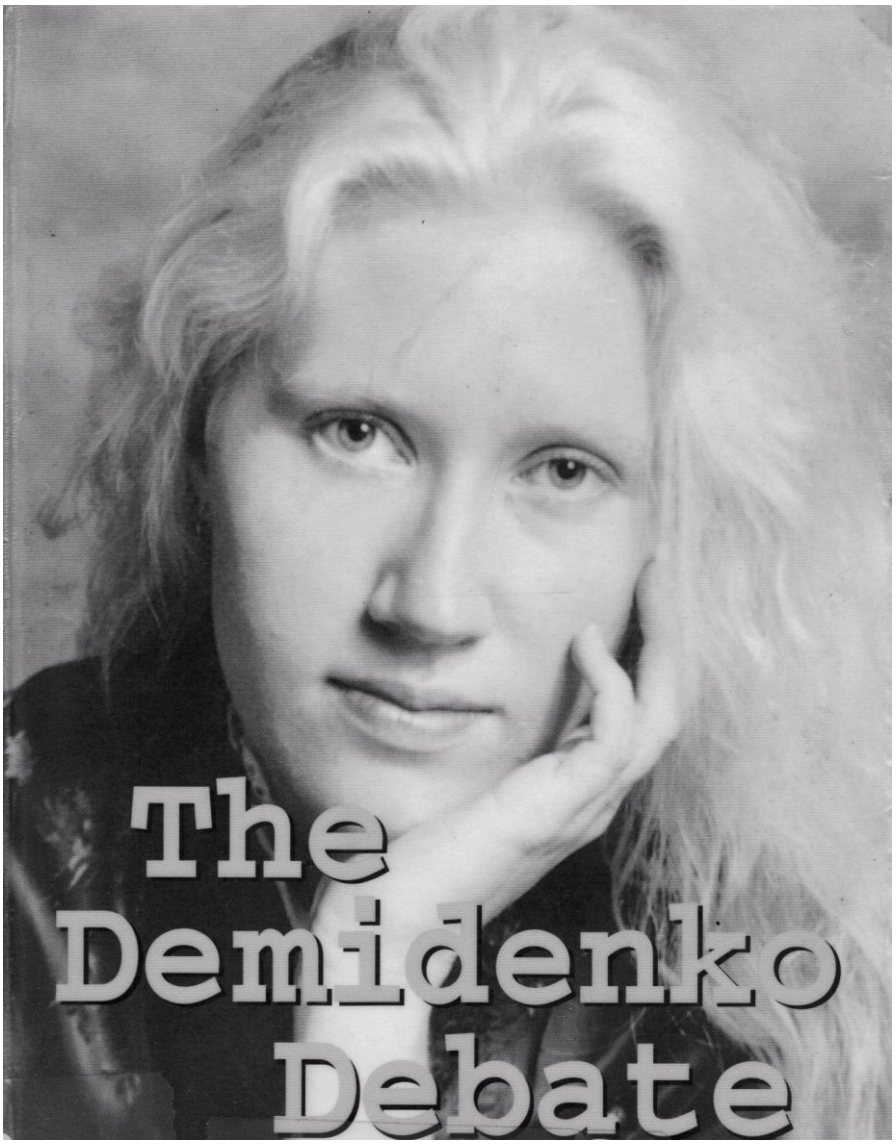

Fig. 7. Helen Darville/Demidenko (not yet Dale) as pictured for the front cover of Andrew Reimer's book *The Demidenko Debate*. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996.

3

Reading Nation in the 90s:

Edith Campbell Berry and Helen Demidenko

Nation
Few things are more potent than song or story in relating peoples to their soil …
Miles Franklin qtd in Roe, *Her Brilliant Career* 391

Multiculture
Demidenko, Helen(a) (Markovna)
BA Hons. *b:* 24 Jan 1971. Univ Student. *Prev:* ATAS Tutor (1990-94); ESL Tutor (1990-1994); Shop Asst (1989-93) Model (1989-91). *Books:* Hand that Signed the Paper (1994). *Contrib (Aust):* Bris Weekend Times, Bris Rev, Imago, Republica 3 [sic], Aust Book Rev, Weekend Aust, English Teachers Assn Qld Jnl. *Awards:* Australian/Vogel Lit Awd 1993; Arts Qld Project Gnt 1995. *Memb:* ASA, Qld Writers Centre, Qld Multicult Writers Assn. *Recr:* Adult debating, Rostrum, bushwalking. *Types:* Fict, ShrtSto, Journ, LitCrit, Multi. *Avail:* ComWri, FeaArt, Int, Read, Resi, Rev ShcVis, Sem, Story, Talk, Tour, Work. *Lang:* Ukranian. *Contact:* PO Box 640, Rochedale South, Qld 4123 Tel*:* (02) 901 4088 Fax*:* (02) 906 2218.
qtd in Nolan and Dawson, *Who's Who of Australian Writers* v

Globalisation
Australian writing is no longer about Australia as a nation state or about its geography. Nor is Australian life just in its borders. Australia has always been a player in the international arena …
Frank Moorhouse on being awarded the Miles Franklin in 2001
qtd in Bennie, Angela "What a Difference"

Nations are sustained by nationalism—the narratives that are retold in official histories, national literatures, media representations, invented traditions and foundational myths. In the past fifteen years or so, Australian literature and Australia's history of nation formation have found themselves between a rock and hard place. Both have been (and still are) threatened and destabilised by, amongst other things, the forces of globalisation. As far as nation goes, Alastair Davidson makes the following claim:

> Australian leaders have said for nearly twenty years that to live decently today we must adjust ourselves to economic and social forces which no nation-state can control […] The Australian state's will and capacity to make autonomous political decisions guided by principled national sovereign interest has all but ended. ("Politics of Exclusion" 129)

As for the prospects for Australian literature, in the ominously titled chapter "The Decline of the Literary Paradigm in Australian Publishing", Mark Davis identifies that nine out of ten of Australia's top book publishers are now indebted to global media giants (116-31). Davis finds that habitual attempts to talk the literary novel back into cultural prominence have become increasingly unconvincing. Speaking with Ramona Koval in 2007, Elizabeth Webby conceded that the hundred years or so of the primacy of the novel in telling the "stories of the tribe" has ended. Appearing on the same radio program, Mark Davis linked the survival of Australia's literary culture to the broader categories of literary and cultural analysis—a view with which this thesis has some sympathy ("Death of Australian Literature"). In *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989-2000*, the sequel to their well-known literary history, *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-1988,* Gelder and Salzman argue for a more optimistic outlook for the future of Australian publishing (2). In spite of the perception of a " 'new reign' of multinational publishers" they claim that independent publishing, with all its ancillary benefits for Australian literature, survived and even thrived in the 1990s (3). However, Davis, Gelder and Salzman, take issue with the need for a national storage place for national literature: "Contemporary Australian novelists can travel, in other words: quite literally so, in terms of their location, where they live and work, the way they are published and distributed, the media venues that review and discuss them, the prizes that are awarded to them-and thematically, in terms of the actual content of their writing" (Gelder and Salzman, *After the Celebration* 5).

Nationalism and Print Culture

According to the much quoted Benedict Anderson, the ideas of nation and nationalism, which became the *idée fixe* in the Western hemisphere from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, took hold because of the print culture of the day. These very ideas were mediated by the print elevation of language. Such ideas bought about the end of dynastic empires, monarchical institutions, serfdoms and subjecthoods. Old institutions were replaced by new concepts such as nation-states, republican institutions, common citizenship and popular sovereignty**.** These progressive ideas took hold because "it became easier to arouse popular support, with the masses discovering a new glory in the print elevation of languages they had spoken all along" (Anderson 77). Anderson explains that nationalisms were inextricably tied to the consolidation of unique print-languages and their inevitable by-products, the novel and the newspaper (which he calls the "daily novel"). For Anderson, literature, and the novel in particular, "imagines" who

is entitled to membership of the national community and thus assumes an implicit understanding and a pre-existing intimacy with its audience. In this sense, what is categorised as the national canon or the national literature serves as an imaginary border patrol. It unites and excludes. It differentiates the "us" and "our" from "them" and "theirs". It reassures and connects by appealing to a common cultural memory that the audience wishes to share. How Australia needs to represent and understand itself as a nation is embodied in the canon of Australian literature which, in turn, is beholden both symbolically and materially to its means of production. In the nineteenth century, to further the claims of cultural nationalism, Chairs of "national" literature and history were established for the first time in European universities. Thus Western notions of nation formation and the creation of a national literary canon are inextricably linked.

For sociologist Ulrick Beck this "methodological nationalism", which Anderson describes, belongs to the "first modernity" and, to date, has analysed societies (and consequently their literatures) "in terms of concepts associated with the nation state" (2-3). With respect to this first modernity, Anderson also claims national sentiment as the secular religion of our time, aligning contemporary nationalism with the two relevant cultural systems that preceded it, religious community and dynastic realm. What both of these systems invoke as sacred—the ruler's divine right to rule and the meaning of a human life—is now being reinvested in the significance of nation. Anderson goes on to say that "it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profound self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism—poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts—show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles" (141). How did Anglo–Celtic settler Australians, the first immigrants, who felt they had an inalienable right to their land, explain their belonging to the nation and their pre-eminence in the making of that nation in the 1990s? How do the cultural products of Australian nationalism, particularly its literary forms, find reinvigorated and renewed expression? What sort of literary expression is left for the love of country?

The Language of the Nation and the National Language

Throughout his term in office, the former Prime Minister John Howard proved an emphatic supporter of cultural nationalism. In an interview with 3AW's Neil Mitchell, Howard begins with his concerns regarding the requirements for Australian citizenship, especially the capacity of the applicant to pass an English language test.

Prime Minister: You'll certainly need to know a good deal more about Australia and Australian customs and the Australian way of life.

Mitchell: What kind of things Prime Minister?

Prime Minister: We're not ashamed of this country, we're very proud of what it has achieved, and if we've made a mistake in the past in relation to national identity it's that we've crawled away from it a little too frequently and we went through a period of time about 10, 15, 20 years ago where we were sort of almost apologising for what this country had achieved and being too deferential to alternative cultures […] Cultural diversity should never come at the expense of a clear, strong, compelling national identity.

Mitchell: The English language thing interests me because as you well know that sort of dictation test was misused…

Prime Minister: That was designed to enforce a White Australia policy […] I mean the great unifying thing about this country is language. I mean, our culture, the culture of any country is heavily defined by its language because along with the language comes the literature and the cultural history bound up with it …

Here the former Prime Minister is bringing "the nation by birth" into being as an English-speaking nation whose literature and cultural history are bound up with British settlement. According to Howard, the key cultural heritage of the Australian nation-state is Anglo–Celtic and this is the foundation that the nation must continue to validate. However, as James Jupp points out, English is not legally the official language of Australia (*White Australia to Woomera* 22). As for Indigenous languages, more than half of those spoken in 1788 have disappeared and no Indigenous language presently has more than 5,000 speakers. Notwithstanding the 1933 census, there are no official figures on language use in Australia before 1976. It was only when the White Australia Policy was officially abandoned in 1973 that language suddenly became a central concern for policy makers (Tavan 239).

Sociologist Ulrick Beck would class the conservative Howard as an advocate of "introverted nationalism" (4). Introverted nationalisms oppose the assault of the global world by turning inwards. This is not to belie Howard's popular support: he was elected and then re-elected to office from the mid 1990s onwards for four consecutive terms. It was the Australian public who needed to turn inwards to affirm national identity. Beck warns against the fin-de-siècle neo-nationalisms which have come into prominence:

> These domestic nationalisms do in fact foster an aggressive intolerance which is capable of turning on anybody or anything. Their novelty consists in the fact that they involve usually conscious resistance to the cosmopolitanisation of their life-worlds, to globalisation and globalisers who are perceived as threatening the local form of life of the "natives". Those involved seek refuge in a strategic "as if" essentialism of ethnicity in an attempt to fix the burred and shifting boundaries between internal and external, us and them ... (4)

Regarding the present, which he dubs as "the second modernity", Beck is a powerful advocate of the concept of a cosmopolitan vision where multiple identities are acknowledged and it becomes possible "to combine forms of life founded on language, skin colour, nationality or religion with the awareness that, in a radically insecure world, all are equal and everyone is different"(i). The "delimiting territorial societies and states of the first modernity" are no longer valid for the second modernity, which is characterised by a "global sense of boundarylessness" (3). Promoted by the mass media, "the emergence of transnational forms of life" have reconstructed and expanded "cultural ties, loyalties and identities […] beyond national borders" (7).

By the mid-1990s Australians had responded to the requirements of the second modernity by endorsing the introverted nationalisms of the conservative Howard government well into the first decade of the millennium. Did events within Australia's literary establishment in any way presage the conservative turn of events? This chapter contends that the conservative political turn of the mid-1990s was foreshadowed by the furores surrounding the Miles Franklin Award in the early-1990s and in particular by the rejection of the "cosmopolitan" through two invented characters, Edith Campbell Berry and Helen Demidenko.

Miles Franklin

A century ago, writing in the then fin de siècle, the issue was clear for Miles Franklin: "Without an *indigenous* literature, people remain aliens on their soil" (qtd in Bennie, "Finally, a Grand Day" 20). Hailed by the *Bulletin*'s A. G. Stephens as the "very first Australian novel" to be published, *My Brilliant Career* first appeared in 1901, the year of Australian Federation (Huggan 60). Not averse to the use of the pseudonym, Miles Franklin published under various names such as William Blake, An Old Bachelor, Brent of Bin Bin, Stella, The Glowworm, Vernacular, Stella Lampe, Sarah Miles, Sarah Mills, and SMS. By the time of her death in 1954, Miles Franklin had written twelve novels (Nolan and Dawson vi). Franklin left a bequest in her will to found an award for Australian literature. The terms of Franklin's will were clear—not only should the awarded novel be of "outstanding literary merit" but it should also present "Australian life in any of its phases". Posthumously, the bequest became known as the Miles Franklin Award. In 1957 Australia's then Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, presented the inaugural award to Patrick White for his novel *Voss*. Although successful outside of Australia, up until then White's fiction had been criticised within Australia as un-Australian (Betson 245). In awarding Patrick White the Nobel Prize for literature in

1973, the Swedish Academy praised him for his "epic and psychological narrative art, which has introduced a new continent into literature" (245). The Miles Franklin Award has gone on to become Australia's longest-standing literary award and arguably its most prestigious. Although a plethora of literary awards have been established since then, Angela Bennie maintains that the Miles Franklin is still "Australia's most prestigious cultural Geiger counter" ("Finally a Grand Day" 20).

A Moral Remaking

Given the complex scenarios of the 1990s, the Miles Franklin judges could not be blamed for bearing in mind that the award winner needed to perform some sort of indigenising ritual for Australians. Cultural theorist Emile Durkheim, who formulated many of his conclusions about religion, symbolism, ritual and solidarity, from ethnographic data collected from Aboriginal Australia, contends that:

> There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiment and the collective ideas which make its unity and personality. Now this moral remaking cannot be achieved except by the means of reunions, assemblies and meetings where the individuals […] reaffirm in common their common sentiments. (427)

Now it would be going too far to say that the awarding of a national literary prize performs the same sort of consecrating effect that Durkheim describes. But, as Anderson and Gelder have suggested, literature as "a discipline that organises itself around the nation and *invokes* nation still has relevance as well as some real force" (1). As the remainder of this chapter will show, the Miles Franklin Award annually performs such a ritualising function by bringing together institutionally the cultural formations that establish Australian writing. Like other literary awards, the Miles Franklin provides the opportunity for stakeholders in the national literary system, whether they identify with theory, review, teaching, criticism, writing or publication, to interact and engage. By reaffirming "the collective ideas which make its unity and personality", the cultural formation of the national literary system is renewed and what Durkheim calls a "moral remaking" occurs "where the individuals reaffirm in common their common sentiments" (427). However, from the bicentenary onwards, the possibility of Australia's "moral remaking" through its literary establishment became increasingly uncertain.

Awarding the Miles Franklin in the Nineties

In the mid-1990s, "genuine Australianness" proved difficult to get right for the judges awarding the Miles Franklin. Controversies escalated regarding their selections and the

award risked being discredited. In 1994 Frank Moorhouse's novel, *Grand Days* was disqualified from competition. This was justified on the basis of the terms governing the Miles Franklin bequest wherein the prize-winning novel "must present Australian life in any of its phases". *Grand Days* with its feisty heroine Edith Campbell Berry, an aspiring young diplomat who leaves Australia after World War I to work for the League of Nations in Geneva, was deemed too "unAustralian" to qualify for the prize. A furious Moorhouse was "absolutely astounded", threatened legal action and argued through his legal counsel that *Grand Days* "reflected Australia's emerging national place in the world theatre of the 1920s" (Bennie, "Finally a Grand Day" 20). Furthermore, he accused the judges of suffering an attack of a "variant in the cultural cringe virus" and having in mind sheep station novels for the Miles Franklin as well as an "extraordinarily narrow, unsophisticated conception of what constituted Australian experience" (J. Hall 6). Nonetheless, Moorhouse remained excluded, with one judge expressing the opinion that Edith had "discarded her Australianness" by leaving to live in Europe (Bennie, "Finally a Grand Day" 20).

Questions of authenticity continued to haunt the Miles Franklin, with the prize being awarded the following year to Helen Demidenko for her first novel, *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, which was supposedly based on her family's story of collaboration with the Nazis. Even more telling, the novel's heroes are not Australian but two Ukrainian brothers, Vitaly and Evheny Kovalenko. *The Hand that Signed the Paper* had already won the Vogel award, a major literary prize reserved for first novels, as well as the Gold Medal of the Australian Literature Society (ASAL). Narrated by Fiona Kovalenko, the novel is about a young Australian-Ukrainian woman who investigates her family story when she becomes aware that her father and uncle may have been involved in the Holocaust. Briefly and brutally, the novel tells of the brothers' recruitment by the SS during World War 2, mitigating the atrocities carried out by the SS against the Ukrainian Jews. The Stalinists, who appear to be conflated with the Jews, are presented as responsible for the horrors of the Ukrainian famine. Accordingly, the brothers' crimes are portrayed as vengeful reprisals against the Stalinist Jews. More surprisingly still, given the judges' disqualification of *Grand Days* the year before, Demidenko's novel, apart from its first and last chapters, is set in Europe. Having rejected *Grand Days* and Edith Berry Campbell's Australian cosmopolitan credentials in 1994, the judges hoped to rediscover them in Demidenko's Ukrainian-Australian novel featuring mainly Ukrainians and Jews.

Two months after accepting the Miles Franklin Award Helen Demidenko was unmasked as an impostor. Her real name was revealed to be plain old Helen Darville. Her imposture generated a storm of controversy that is difficult to overstate. The controversy generated four books about the "fiction" of Helen Demidenko/Darville as well as a mass of media commentary. Between 1994 and 2006 however, the judges' interpretation of the Miles Franklin stipulation that a nominated novel must portray "Australian life in any of its phases" altered considerably. In 2001, Frank Moorhouse was awarded the Miles Franklin for *Dark Palace*, his companion novel to *Grand Days*. A triumphant Moorhouse gleefully accepted the prize, claiming it represented "the end of any narrow view of what was Australian writing" (Bennie, "What a Difference" 1). Accordingly, Frank Moorhouse's heroine, Edith Campbell Berry, whose "Australianness" was rejected in 1994 with *Grand Days*, was rehabilitated as an Australian in 2001. Acknowledging the irony, one newspaper mischievously headlined the story, "What a difference seven years makes: Edith's now an Aussie" (1).

Edith and Helen: Synecdoches of Nation in the Nineties?

Whereas *Grand Days* tells of Edith Campbell's post-war departure from Australia and her committed engagement as an officer in Geneva with the League of Nations, *Dark Palace* reverses the optimism and hope of the earlier novel. Having learned his lesson the first time around with the Miles Franklin judges, Moorhouse strategically scripts a return visit for Edith to Australia in *Dark Palace*. Still an expatriate but faithful to her origins, Edith is presented in her Australian context. As the League's attempts to prevent war and promote human co-operation on a global scale prove to be a tragic failure and the world moves inexorably towards another war, Edith resolutely continues to propagandise the League's vision. Moorhouse's League of Nation novels may be about a nostalgic past but, according to Walter Benjamin, whenever we write about the past what we really write about is the present (Goebel 11-12). Moorhouse provides the perfect example of this. Edith foreshadows present-day political concerns when she talks about the threat posed to the League in a lecture she gives at University of Sydney, her old alma mater. At the time, the League risked being discredited because of its failure to prevent Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. This failure chimes with America's vote of no confidence regarding the UN actions in Iraq (Bone 8):

> There is something called the Dilemma of Preventative Action. If you take strong and successful action—be it military or economic—to prevent some *predicted* dreadful thing happening, history will never know if that predicted dreadful thing really would've happened … History cannot tell you that you

> were right to act; it can only tell you that you were wrong not to act. (Moorhouse, *Dark Palace* 328)

In the end, Edith's return to Australia only reinforces her sense of alienation from her homeland. She rejects the idea of working for the emerging Canberra public service, returning instead to Geneva.

Gelder credits Moorhouse with "the only attempt by an Australian novelist over the past fifteen years to write a sustained work of political realism". In his view *Grand Days* and *Dark Palace* are "Jamesian novels of manners where political events are ultimately backgrounded in order to trace the sexual awakening of a relatively innocent young [Australian] woman abroad" ("Politics" 49). Moorhouse being Moorhouse, Edith's private and public awakenings are fused. In Edith's quest for identity, sexual encounters of all sorts have a significant role to play. To chart her course, both territorially and metaphorically, she must transgress all manner of borders. Reviewing both books and commenting on their extensively researched historical background, Renate Howe considers that both novels also provide "an opportunity to explore the issues raised for the historian in a postmodern era of interpretation; of the difference between fiction and fact, between was is imagined and real" ("Oral Sex and the League of Nations"). For Nicholas Birns, Edith Campbell Berry's character is synecdochal "for the emergence of Australian nation identity after the First World War" ("Beyond Disillusionment" 68). But in 1994 this was a synecdoche that the Miles Franklin judges could not or would not recognise. Curiously, their selection of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* as a novel "about Australian life" soon bought another synecdoche to life and that synecdoche became the character of Helen Demidenko herself, a character who proved to be no less a fiction than Edith Campbell Berry. Demidenko, through the character she portrayed, proved to be a much more unbalanced invention than Moorhouse's creation of Edith Campbell Berry.

In the 1990s, as an alternative synecdoche for the Australian nation, Demidenko destabilised the sense that "nation" was required to explain. Similar to "nation", Demidenko exposed herself as an unstable fiction, a fake metonym for a cohesive body. In succession, she would go on to be masked/unmasked as Helen Demidenko a.k.a. Darville a.k.a. Dale. According to Susan Egan, it is autobiography and its imposture that lie at the heart of the Demidenko affair:

> Where autobiography brings personal experience into a public domain, imposture unravels both the experience itself on which memory and culture are based […] Imposture cuts the connection between story and life both in the instance in which specific imposture has been exposed and in our own trust that some things, at least about ourselves can be known for sure. The rage that erupts

> after exposure of every deception reflects the desire and the impossibility of such knowledge, and, indeed, perhaps, the folly of hoping for it. (25)

Did Demidenko have the same rights as Frank Moorhouse to write her faction? Moorhouse's credentials for writing his League of Nation faction novels appear certain and assured. *Grand Days* and *Dark Palace* are the outcome of two years of extensive research in libraries and archives on three continents, Europe, Australia and North America. Also, he had the support of a Creative Fellowship endowed by the Australian government. Helen Demidenko's credentials to write faction seemed to rest primarily with her own experience. Sonia Mycak resites the archive which should have been used to test and verify Demidenko's testimony: "Neither Darville's constructed Ukrainian-Australian identity nor her text were interrogated or situated within what was supposedly their natural milieu—the writers and readers, the literary culture, and the community of Ukrainian-Australians" (112). As migration displaces the archive of verifiable memory for a community, how that archive is subsequently resited and revalidated also suggest the political nature of that archive within the migrants' host country. The nature of that archive then determines the sort of migrant identities that become sanctioned or permissible in the new country.

The Cultures of Forgetting

Commencing his book on the Demidenko affair, Robert Manne writes:

> This book is about a fictional character, Helen Demidenko, and the cultural controversy surrounding the prize winning novel she wrote, *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. Helen Demidenko was created in 1992 by Helen Darville and was killed off by the Australian media in late August 1995. Between these dates—as an author and in both her public and her private life-Helen Demidenko altogether supplanted her creator. In a book such as this, names matter a great deal. Between 1992 and August 1995 I call the subject of this study by what I regard as her true name, Helen Demidenko. Before Helen Demidenko was born and after she died, I refer to her creator and successor, of course, as Helen Darville. (*The Culture of Forgetting* vii)

As a synecdoche of nation, the dubious autobiography of Helen Demidenko/Darville could almost stand as a substitute for the dubious autobiography of Australia, particularly after the stoushes of the History Wars. Controversy dogged Demidenko's book from the beginning, with Vogel judge Roger McDonald expressing the opinion that some readers might find the text anti-Semitic. During the publishing process three editors—Brian Castro, Lynne Segal, and Stephanie Dowrick—refused to edit the novel because of its anti-Semitic perspective. Nonetheless, *The Hand that Signed the Paper* was published in August 1994, subsequently going on to win the Miles Franklin Award

on 1 June 1995. The Miles Franklin judges were Harry Heseltine, Jill Kitson, Dame Leonie Kramer and Adrian Mitchell. Their citation reads in part as follows:

> novels about the migrant experience seem to us to be seizing the high ground in contemporary Australian fiction, in contrast to fiction about the more vapid aspects of Australian life. In particular they are incorporating into the cultural memory first-hand experience of the major historical events of the century, events from which Australia has been largely insulated, but which are growing components of contemporary Australian life. (Jost, Totaro and Tyshing 26)

Jill Kitson justified the judges' decision by claiming that the Holocaust killings and the Ukrainian famine, which killed five million Ukranians, were stories for our own telling because many Australians "carry some kind of dead heart of shame or guilt" (64).

Gerard Henderson was a leading protagonist in the Demidenko debate and he responded to Kitson's justification: "The main character in Demidenko's novel is/was a killer who was a willing participant in or observer of murders and rapes. Is Ms Kitson really arguing that more than a minuscule number of Australians carry such guilt?" (64). Yes—Australians did carry such burdens of guilt but it was not about the Ukrainian famine, it was about the illegitimate dispossession of Australia's legitimate people—its Aboriginal population from their land. The most politically and ethically complex questions raised for Australians in the 1990s were about Indigenous issues (Nolan and Dawson vii). Neither Kitson nor Henderson seemed to be aware that their conflict had already been pre-empted by Peter Carey, an Australian author perceived to be "writing in the national interest" and asking "important questions of national heritage and dreams" (Turner, "Nationalising the Author" 6). In 1988 Peter Carey was awarded the Booker Prize for *Oscar and Lucinda*, which went on to win the Miles Franklin Award in 1989. Speaking about *Oscar and Lucinda*, Carey warms to his national role:

> There are two extraordinary things in our national life: the *concentration camp* that was built for us and *this great murder* that took place by our forbears, and we don't know how to deal with them […] *The guilt level's very high*, but you have a sense of trespassing even when you begin to think of writing about it. In *Oscar and Lucinda* what I attempted to do was to inform the book with *a* sense of the *outrage that was committed to these people*. At the same time to write within what I could know and imagine—the best of us writers can imagine anything while avoiding *what I couldn't know without doing damage, without trespassing*. [my italics] (Turner, "Nationalising the Author" 5)

Somehow, these "extraordinary things in our national life" and the inability of Australians to deal with them found their pivot point in the controversy which surrounded Demidenko/Darville. She provided the synecdoche whereby the country could better define itself by interrogating its "Other".

When the Miles Franklin judges tipped their collective hat in the direction of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* and validated migrant experience, which was now

"seizing the high ground in contemporary Australian fiction", they were in a sense ritualising what Ghassan Hage calls the "multiculturalism of having". In his influential work *White Nation*, Hage opposes the "multiculturalism of being" to the "multiculturalism of having":

> While the former establishes a unified Australian 'we' where Whites and non-Whites fuse in a 'consubstantial state of being', the latter always establishes and extrinsic relation between a White possessor and non-White possessed. The White multicultural 'we' which appreciates diversity seems continuous with the old Australian 'we' that did not appreciate it. Diversity simply does not affect the nature of the White 'we'. It remains extrinsic to it. It is in this sense that White multiculturalism's 'to have' is set against the verb 'to be'. For if we are diversity there would be nothing 'appreciate' and 'value' other than ourselves. This is the difficult imaginary domain of the multicultural Real. (140)

That said, the lobby for the greater recognition for multicultural writing, which had been particularly active during the 1980s, had also traded on the "multiculturalism of having". How can writing seen as Australian, also receive the belated recognition due to writing that is marginalised because it belongs to the minority? The conundrum springs from the idea that you cannot speak both from the centre and the margin at the same time. In 1995, given the controversy over the Moorhouse disqualification, the judges were aware of the need to demonstrate a more cosmopolitan outlook. Even so the mystery remains: Why choose the Demidenko novel? Besides the issues the Demidenko affair raised—about authorial responsibility in creation of "faction"—it is still hard to explain why "the fake, peasant costume-wearing, assumed ethnicity parading, anti-Semitic 'wog' voice was the wog voice chosen to represent the inclusion of wog voices into approved literature by the Anglo establishment" (Baranay, "Multiculturalism" 3). Whose pathologies were on display: Australia's pathologies? Demidenko's pathologies? The pathologies of the an Anglos mainstream? The pathologies of the multiculturalists? The answer is both yes and no to each of these questions.

Querying/Queering Identity in the Nineties

Sneja Gunew begins her article about the "gratifying pathologies" of the "Demidenko show" with a quotation from Majorie Garber ("Performing Ethnicity"). For Garber the scandal of transvestism is that it tells the truth about gender. Even so, what was being mimicked and exaggerated in the Demidenko case were not the markings of gender but the markings of the multicultural "Other" as author. In assuming the role of a transvestite, multicultural author, Demidenko was signalling the signs as broadly as a gender transvestite spreads the lipstick and the eyeliner. As a performer of what David Carter calls "wog drag", Demidenko's public appearances were staged with exaggerated

costuming ("O'Grady, John See 'Culotta, Nino'" 59). During Warana Writers Week she continuously wore a Ukrainian scarf and claimed that she had never heard of Warana Writers Week. The life that Demidenko put up for herself and described to her audience was one of ordinary "wog" routine. She maintained that she only went into Brisbane city if there was something on at the Ukrainian Hall or if she was going out with the good looking Croatian guy who was getting average marks and hoping for a job at Woolworths. Meantime, Demidenko and her ethnic friends would dare each other to cross the freeway and steal chips and coke from Fang Yu's store. They celebrated dole day, which their parents had renamed "'vodka day', 'beer day', or 'raki day'", depending on their ethnicity. They "went to the soccer on Saturday, waved our parents' flag and ate our parent's food … [and] watched the telly and ate junk food and told each other stories about who was fucking whom and just why Mrs Izbegevic's husband had given her a broken nose." Demidenko ends her excruciating, ethnic parody in Ukrainian with—"Da. Svidaniye" ("Writing after Winning").

With hindsight, Demidenko's posturing and ethnic affectations appear clichéd and laughable. This is was the cultural equivalent of a "legs and boobs" show, where the assemblage of cultural signifiers was guaranteed to evoke a set response. As for Frank Moorhouse, he has been quering/queering, the preconceptions of the literary establishment for years, according to Catharine Lumby who is presently writing his biography:

> The literary establishment in Australia is extremely middle brow [and] parochial so there's this constant need to have a grand sense of the nation reflected back. Frank has always written in a cosmopolitan way without concern for national boundaries, in fact boundaries generally—which is why he is so comfortable inhabiting women characters. (qtd in Guilliatt, 28)

Given the complex scenarios and fierce anxieties about border issues in Australia in the 1990s, is it any wonder that Helen Demidenko and Edith Campbell Berry appeared in literary fiction of that time querying/queering boundaries to help us work out some of our fin-de-siècle anxieties?

Where are they now?

The Demidenko and Moorhouse controversies of the early 1990s engaged some of "heaviest hitters" on Australia's cultural scene, not all of whom were confined to Australia's literary establishment. The diverse group included Andrew Riemer, Gerard Henderson, David Marr, Louise Adler, Peter Craven, Les Murray and Robert Manne. Curiously enough, it was the encounter with Demidenko/Darville which led Robert Manne to revise his stance on Aboriginal dispossession ("Left, Right, Left" 7).

Ultimately, these views led him to resign his role as editor of *Quadrant*. Thus, in the 1990s Manne went from being a Cold War activist to becoming a strong campaigner for justice on Indigenous issues as well as a vocal critic of Australia's virulent asylum seeker policies. Helen Demidenko/Darville/Dale reinvented herself by moving to England in 2007 and enrolling in a Bachelor of Civil Law degree at Oxford University. Presently, she is revelling in cucumber sandwiches and Earl Grey tea and planning to stay on to write her PhD on questions of liberty, autonomy and libertarianism. No longer waif-like, as per her famous photo on the cover of Andrew Riemer's book, Helen Dale now looks more like a Valkyrie as she proselytises for a Tory masculinist position: "If you're non-left libertarian like me, there is no place for you in Australia; no voice of the literate piss-taking right like *The Spectator"* (Wheatley 32). Frank Moorhouse is currently writing the third and final novel for his League of Nations trilogy. This novel is set in the 1950s and sees Edith Campbell Berry relocate permanently to Canberra to confront the conformism of the Menzies government and Cold War paranoia. For the moment, we can only anticipate the ways Edith will address these boundaries. As for Australian literature in the new millennium, Gelder sees one of the current divisions between the literary elite being the Tory masculinist position, which celebrates "the novel's rarefied and 'insubstantial' world", and the feminist left position, which critiques this style due of its lack of political engagement ("Politics" 51). Once more, Helen Dale's stance (presently Tory masculinist) is in sympathy with trends in Australian fiction and she is writing another novel. Meantime her current boyfriend is Rob: "He's Aboriginal, fully initiated tooth missing," she says, but she does not know if the relationship will survive her absence from Australia (Wheatley 32).

Conclusion

The controversies around awarding the Miles Franklin in 1994 and 1995 effectively discredited cosmopolitanism as being "Australian":

> That cosmopolitanism has been forgotten, that it has been transformed and debased into a pejorative concept, is to be ascribed to its involuntary association with the Holocaust and the Stalinist Gulag. In the collective symbolic system of the Nazis, 'cosmopolitan' was synonymous with a death sentence. The Nazis said 'Jew' and meant 'cosmopolitan' the Stalinists said 'cosmopolitan' and meant 'Jew'. Consequently 'cosmopolitans' are to this day regarded in many countries as something between vagabonds, enemies and insects who can or even must be banished, demonised or destroyed. (Beck 3)

The controversy surrounding the character of Helen Demidenko, "multicultural writer", who was elevated to prominence by the Australian literary establishment, effectively associated the cosmopolitan with the Holocaust and the Stalinists. On the other hand,

Grand Days presented the character of Edith Berry Campbell as an alternative synecdoche for nation in the nineties. As a plucky, idealistic Australian and aspiring cosmopolitan, Edith hopes to rid the world of war by working for the League of Nations. *Dark Palace,* its sequel, shows that the League's, and Edith's, cosmopolitan vision is a tragic failure in the face of the Nazi threat. Gelder acknowledges that *Dark Palace* has something to say about how "the politics of demoralisation" have played out in Australia in recent years ("Politics" 49). These literary controversies foreshadowed the "introverted nationalism" of the Howard conservative government which found favour with the electorate between 1996 and 2007. Popularly, this stance of "introverted nationalism" is still favoured, given the prominence of border protection topics during the 2010 election that resulted in a hung parliament. Even so, this focus on the nation's interiority only brings preconceptions of Australian nation formation into greater contention. Played out in latter-day literary storms, the more current controversies continue to struggle with the question of which concepts of nation and national identity should advance Australia in the second modernity.

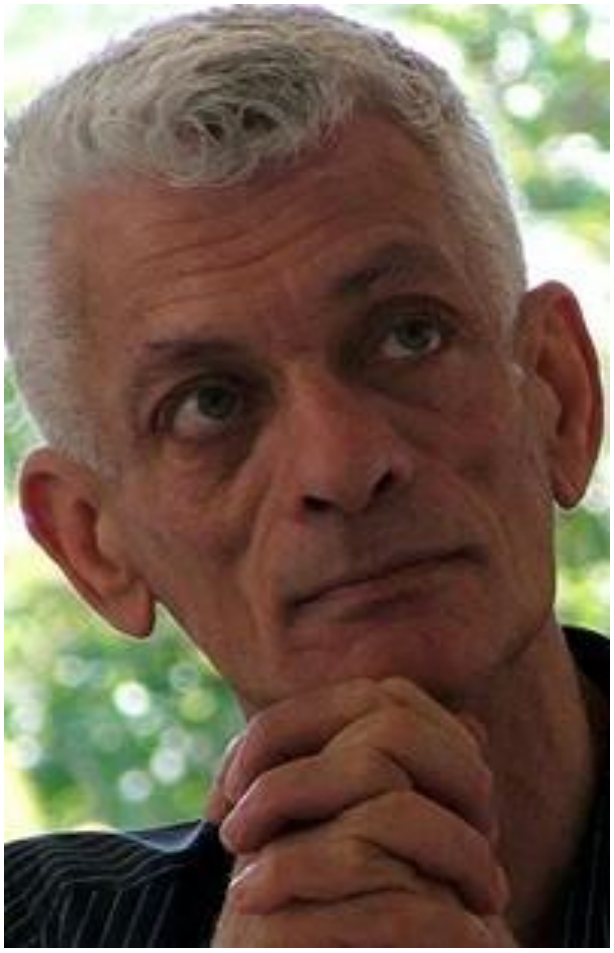

Fig. 8. Robert Dessaix photographed for "Author with HIV refused China visa", an article by Malcolm Knox appearing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 Mar. 2010. The article details how Dessaix, due to appear as a headline speaker for Shanghai's International Literary Festival was refused a visa by the Chinese government due to his HIV-positive status.
Image available at:
http://www.smh.com.au/world/author-with-hiv-refused-china-visa-20100305-pozb.html.

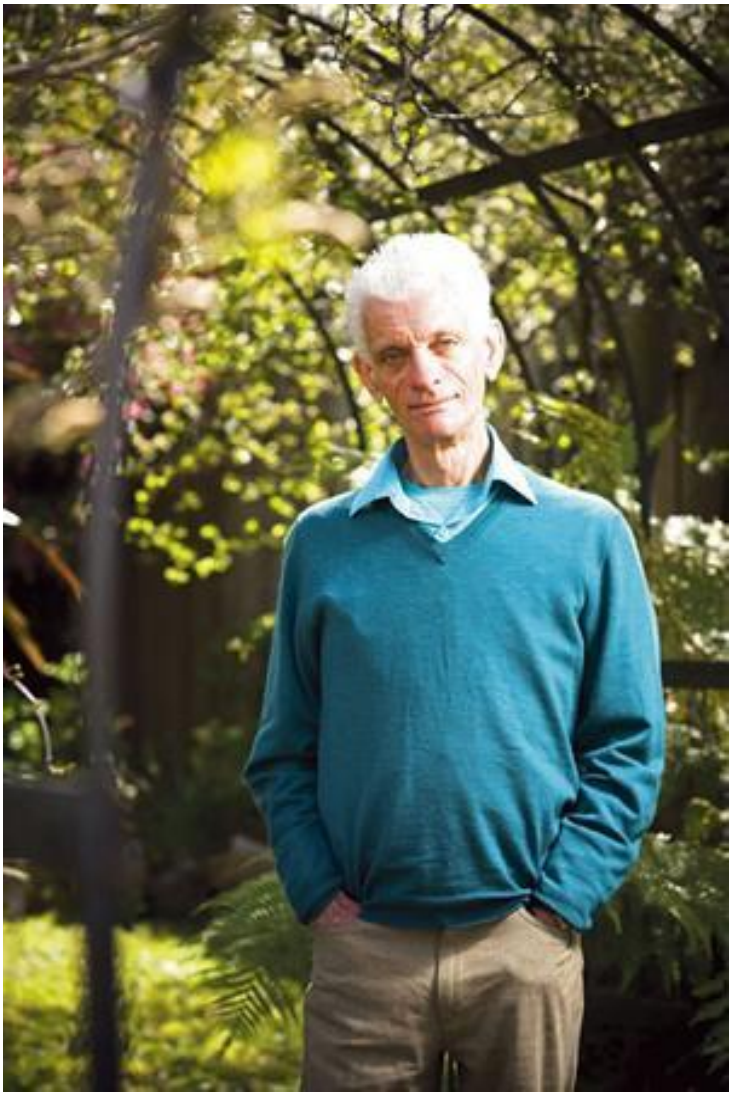

Fig. 9. Robert Dessaix photographed for "A superior kind of banality", an article by Helen Greenwood appearing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 27 Sept. 2008.
Image available at:
http://www.smh.com.au/news/entertainment/books/a-superior-kind-of-banality/2008/09/26/1222217489978.html

4

The Queer and European Journey

of Robert Dessaix and *Night Letters*

Now when a country's young like ours
one has to make quite sure
that womanhood and manliness
are governed by the law
For what is going to come
of a nation bright as this
If a woman breaks the horsies
and a man sits down to.
(Boom, boom)
…mend his trousers!
qtd from *Poor Johanna* (1991)
by Robyn Archer and Judith Rodriguez

Poor Johanna was co written in 1991 by Robyn Archer and Judith Rodriguez and was subsequently produced in Adelaide in 1994. According to Dessaix, the play "captures with almost insulting vigour a deep seated perception of Australia as a land where, on the whole, women are women and men are men and Blind Freddy can tell the difference" (*Australian Gay and Lesbian Writing* 2). Drawing its subject matter from an Australian classic, *Poor Johanna* tells the story of the character of Nosey Alf who features in Joseph Furphy's novel *Such is Life.* The quote which begins this chapter comes from a set piece performed by the play's music hall Bawd, a selection which celebrates "the notion that in a young, healthy land such as Australia social order depends upon keeping sex rigorously identified with gender" (2). Decent Australians are sickened by "women who masquerade as men" and "men who don't see their penis as their primary signifier" (*Australian Gay* 2). There is no need for the Bawd to overtly express her abhorrence of homosexuality as it lurks "unnamed in every line of her song" (2). Yet, as Dessaix warns us, the very bravado of the Bawd's delivery draws our attention to the reality that "the assumptions it is based on are in fact under threat" (2).

Given the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the postmodern valorisation of non-essential identities and the budding influence of queer theory in the academy, Dessaix's

rightly observes that sexual and gender difference as established by the national culture were at risk. Sex and gender could no longer be considered one and the same. Previously solid assumptions such as two sexes and two genders which neatly lined up with one another—men that were masculine and women that were feminine—began to slide. Sexuality, in terms of genital orientation towards or away from the opposite sex, once considered a taboo subject, now became a matter for public discussion. The years following the 1960s revolution led to the publication of a small but influential series of Australian literary works in drama, fiction and poetry which thematised sexual orientation (Dessaix, *Australian Gay* 3; Gelder and Salzman, *The New Diversity* 166-86). These works presented "gender as a system of social power" that operated across divisions among "normative and transgressive sexualities" (Moore, "Colonial Manhood and Masculinities." 1). From the 1970s onwards, feminism also became a central political project producing revisionist readings of Australia's cultural history. Scholars of Australian history and literature sought to include and enlarge women's role in the making of the nation, exposing the patriarchal domination and institutionalised subordination of women.[1]

Women's contributions to Australian culture became more prominent as women progressed from "absence to Other" whilst "men remained non-sexed non-specific historical actors" (Carter, *Dispossession* 382). However, since the 1990s, the subject of masculinity informed and politicised by feminism has seen a wide variety of literature emerge. Gender relations, rather than women's role in isolation, became the focus with the understanding that one gender could not be studied separately from the other (382). Subsequently, this has led to the consideration of the multiple masculinities and the multiple femininities which exist within the nation and which are only given meaning in relation to one another. Evolving over time, these meanings are not static. To illustrate the varying conceptions of masculinity which became possible in Australian literary fiction of the 1990s and 2000s, the next two chapters of this thesis study the novels of two of Australia's prominent "queer" authors, Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* published in 1996 and Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* published in 2005. In this study I seek to provide a nuanced consideration of the sort of Australian masculinities with which these authors challenge the new century. The early part of this chapter describes the varied socio-cultural elements that influenced these novels.

Within Australia the queer moment coincided with a shift about the debates that circulated around national identity (Hunn 113). Were the 1990s a queer temporality for Australia? Is there such a thing as a queer masculinity and is this sensibility important to

the understanding of both these novels? Certainly, both *Night Letters* and *Dead Europe* share common elements. Both were written in the 1990s and 2000s by authors who openly identify themselves as homosexual men. As an open avowal of identity, this in itself can be perceived as unAustralian.[2] As acknowledged earlier, such masculine sexual identification potentially destabilises customary and time honoured foundations of national identity. But Dessaix and Tsiolkas do not stop there. Both authors narrate their novels in the first person through a male, homosexual protagonist. As well, both novels are contemporary, being set in 1990s and onwards, a time which foreshadows an existential crisis for both of the gay narrators. Fin de siècle, to resolve their respective crises, both of the central protagonists travel to Europe to question of their place, as Australian men, within a "European imaginative geography" (Said, "From Orientalism" 419). Ultimately, a resolution comes about when each of the novel's narrators returns to share a space of domestic bliss in Australia with their same sex partners. Before proceeding into the literary exposition of next two chapters, I would like to briefly consider the terms "masculinity" and "queer" in their Australian context at the time that *Dead Europe* and *Night Letters* were published.

Australian Masculinities

As far back as the 1890s, masculinist values in Australia had achieved "the status of national traditions" (Lake, "The Politics of Respectability" 11). Marking a hundred year parallel in fin-de-siècle anxiety about national identity, the conservative reinvigoration of Australian and traditional values in the 1990s, reiterated the 1890s endorsement of masculinist values, reinstating these values as the determinants of appropriate national conduct. Original Australian values were recognized as having emerged during the decade of 1890s by the radical nationalist writers and historians of the 1950s. Positively identified, they were represented by such values by egalitarianism, a collective spirit, a sense of social optimism and an anti-authoritarian stance. Primarily identified as male attributes, these characteristics granted maleness a privileged position in relation to nationality (Carter, *Dispossession* 384). Clive Moore however, posits colonial manhood as "violent, racist and sexist" and constructed against multiple images of the "other" such as "women; recent immigrant males; non-Caucasian males; and the limits of the expression of homosocial and homoerotic behaviour" ("Colonial Manhood" 43). For Moore, the colonising of Australia was part of a "masculinised imperial enterprise," wherein men fashioned gender roles which came to be seen as typically Australian (43). Central to portrayals of Australian masculinity, was the ideal of male mateship.

Adherence to this code meant being wary of forming overly close bonds with either women or men (48).

Originating from the sort of masculinity celebrated by the bushman, the shearer and the stockman, this masculinity subsequently came to embody the "national character", as famously described by Russel Ward in *The Australian Legend:*

> He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is 'the world's best confidence man', he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a 'hard case', sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong … He tends to be a rolling stone, highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss. (16)

In the discursive space recognized by *The Australian Legend*, there was a place for women but it was narrowly defined and "largely supplementary to the male figure upon which they depended", validating such roles for women as "pioneer wife", housewife or "Australian girl" (Carter, *Dispossession* 384).

Marilyn Lake also sees the 1890s decade as representing a contest for masculinities which lies at the very heart of Australian history and which was fought out between the budding feminist movement and the masculism promoted by influential journals of time such as the *Bulletin*.[3] Opposing the masculinity of *The Australian Legend* and the "national character" was the excluded masculinity of the Domestic Man. Distinct from the practises of home-grown men like the bushman, the shearer and the stockman, this masculinity celebrated the rewards of domesticity and married life. Imported by British immigrants and hence not perceived as "native" to the country, this sort of masculinity was viewed as inauthentic. Consequently, the ideals of masculinity as recognised in Australia from the 1890s onwards exposed an inner schism that opposed the breadwinner amongst his family to the hard drinking working man sticking by "his mates through thick and thin" (Carter, *Dispossession* 381). This schism was repaired somewhat during the era of the conservative Howard government. Here, public policy oversaw the reinvigoration of the masculinist values as mythologised by *The Australian Legend*, including the reification of mateship and the Anzac myth, whilst integrating the image of a masculine breadwinner into a conservative social agenda. Considerable emphasis was given to "family values". The equation was simple,

reinvigorated masculinist traditions meant reinvigorated nationalist traditions and these habits had antecedents which were both racist and sexist.

On the other hand, Robert Reynolds credits the Hawke/Keating era of the late 1980s and early 1990s with promoting a national ideal of an inclusive, cosmopolitan, tolerant and multicultural society. Deborah Hunn recognises that this social model directed "a degree of inclusiveness towards gays and lesbians and some recognition of sexual identity as a legitimate area of concern in the dialogue that was reshaping national identity" (113). However, this was an interrupted dialogue within Australia. As of the mid-1990s, church and state sought to return sexuality to its historically understood position "as a dangerous phenomenon, to be rigidly constrained into heterosexual marriage for the purposes of procreation" (Matthews, *Sex in Public* xii). As public policy hyped up family values, other manifestations of sexuality were invalidated as the expression of homosocial and homoerotic behaviour were once again strictly contained. It is in this particular socio-cultural environment that *Night Letters* and *Dead Europe* voice a gay, male Australian subjectivity for the 1990s. Was this discursive space for Tsiolkas and Dessaix opened up by the influence of Queer Theory? Certainly, debates about sexuality, circulating simultaneously within a general reformulation of Australian identity provide the context for both Dessaix and Tsiolkas. How do they articulate through their novels what it means to be an Australian man, a queer man in Australia or a queer Australian man abroad? Did reciprocity apply? Was it by working in Queer Theory (if indeed these authors can be considered in this way) that Tsiolkas and Dessaix expanded its very terms of reference? The next section goes on to briefly consider some definitions of Queer Theory.

The 1990s and 2000s—a Queer temporality?

Berthold Schoene rightly states that any attempt to address the development of the Queer movement must begin by acknowledging its debt to the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*: "the text that, everyone now says, you can't even begin to practice queer politics without reading" (183). A debt that David Halperin acknowledges in his own volume titled, tongue in cheek, *Saint Foucault*. However, Schoene concedes that the "terminological indeterminacy" of "queer" is simultaneously both its biggest asset and largest drawback (286). David Halperin credits Teresa de Lauretis with coining the phrase "queer theory" when she used it as the title for a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In the beginning, the phrase was intended to be "scandalously offensive", disturbing the "complacency embodied by the

rubric ‘gay and lesbian studies’ ” which, in de Lauretis’s estimation, had now become formulaic and homogenizing.

By calling attention to everything that “is perverse about the project of theorising sexual desire and sexual pleasure”, de Lauretis saw her project as being to both make *theory queer* and to *queer theory* by introducing the “problematic of multiple differences” (Halperin, “Response to Altman”). From these radical origins, Halperin goes on to lament the consolidation of the now capitalised “Queer Theory” into an academic discipline, seeing in its very institutionalisation a betrayal of a once radical agenda. Initially designated as a “branch of lesbian and gay studies”, which conducted its work through critical theory, it eventually came “to stand in for the entire field of lesbian and gay studies” (“Response”). Halperin considers that the dominance of “Queer Theory” has led to “theory-heavy, empirically undernourished work” (“Response”). He sees that Queer Theory has “sexually despecified” lesbian and gay studies by merging this study into the “‘larger’ practice of critical theory” whilst folding this back into “the standard practice of literary studies” (“Response”). On the other hand, in an article which he titles "Un-Queer Anti-Theory", Dean Kiley establishes Queer Theory as an event by citing the explosion of interest in “queer” sexuality in the media, the conference circuit and the classroom. Kiley goes on to identify the “takeovers” that Queer Theory pulled off in the 1990s and amongst these publications he lists *Antithesis* (1992), *Melbourne Journal of Politics* (1994), *Meanjin* “Australian Queer” (1996) and *Siglo* (1997), as well as the establishment of *inQueeries*. At the same time, he laments the paucity of its impact on “Australian literature and its critical machinery” which he neatly terms as OzLitCriture ("Un-Queer Anti-Theory").

Hitherto, even when critical and literary theorists freely register their approval/disapproval of what Queer Theory *does*, it is difficult to arrive at an answer to the question what *is* Queer Theory? Seemingly, it appears to be inseparably coupled with considerations of sexuality. But some theorists also believe that it is very “un-queer” to even attempt to define Queer Theory (Sullivan 43). Certainly, Kiley is able to enumerate the stakeholders in Australian Queer Theory by determining the category as those who work “*in, from,* or *as,* queer theory”.[4] As well, there have been ample definitions of Queer Theory proposed, some of which are:

> Queer is an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation. (Berry and Jagose 11)
>
> Queer is whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. (Halperin, *Saint Foucault* 62)

> [Queer Theory is] the promise of new meanings, new ways of thinking and acting politically—a promise realised, sometimes not. (Duggan 11)
>
> Queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics. (Jagose 96)
>
> Queer, which is discussed in a number of chapters, refuses definition; it identifies with only one negative - not straight; its positive substance is open-ended, multiple, playful. (Matthews xvi)
>
> Queer Theory, as a deconstructive strategy, aims to denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relations between them". (Sullivan 81)

In this chapter and the next, I will argue that in *Night Letters* and *Dead Europe* both Dessaix and Tsiolkas can be seen to be writing "*in, from,* or *as,* queer theory" (Kiley). However, analogous to the differences between the two writers, *Night Letters* and *Dead Europe* negotiate this terrain in very different ways.

Robert Dessaix and *Night Letters*

Acknowledging Dessaix's influence on Australian literary culture in the *Australian Book Review* in 2001 Peter Craven declared that Dessaix "had proved himself to be someone whose signature mattered more than the thing he signed" ("Nothing if not dappled" 11). As the presenter the ABC's "Books and Writing" program for many years and, subsequently, the Radio National series "Rethinking Australia: Intellectuals and public culture", Dessaix was one of the winners of the culture wars of the Howard era. Dessaix is also an openly declared homosexual. But for Dessaix, the politics of sexuality are secondary to the practice of art. For Ken Gelder, Dessaix belongs to a group of Tory libertarians who emerged as the victors within Australia's literary establishment by defending a contemporary literary culture that "values literary style as an end in itself" ("Politics and Monomania" 48). Gelder goes on to define this "Tory" style as "cool and remote, objective and distanced, dispassionate, respectful of high literary traditions" (49). On the surface, these characteristics appear completely at odds with the strategies of queer politics. But at the same time, Dessaix also played an important role in gay and lesbian studies with his compilation of: *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Gay and Lesbian Writing* which was published in 1993. In the light of Dessaix's establishment position however, it comes as no surprise he is *not* nominated as a stakeholder in Queer Theory (Kiley). Even so, it is unlikely that Dessaix would choose to self-identify as a writer who works *in* Queer Theory. What Dessaix *does* have in common with most Queer Theorists is the disavowal of identity politics.[5]

Indeed, Dessaix's philosophy of writerly creativity emphatically separates the act of creation from theories that seek to draw meaning from works of literature. He

goes on to describe such strategies "as deadly to creativity as narcissism is to love" (*And So Forth* 415). Nonetheless, his stance does not preclude an analysis of *Night Letters* from a theoretical point of view. In fact, Dessaix himself concedes that *Night Letters* could be read as "a Lacanian essay on desire" (418). Undoubtedly there is much talk of desire in *Night Letters* where, using an epistolary format, Dessaix describes a journey through Switzerland and northern Italy. An introductory note by the novel's fictional editor, Igor Miasmoz, states that the twenty letters are written nightly, for the duration of the author's stay at the Hotel Arcadia in Venice. Maintaining that the letter writer, as well as his Melbourne correspondent must remain anonymous, the fictional editor of *Night Letters* reveals that he has undertaken the task of editing of the letters for general readership. As a non-native English speaker, Miasmoz considers himself "ideally equipped to make the necessary sensitive adjustments" (i). Thus begin the unimaginative interventions of Miasmoz with the author's text as he interrupts the narrative to laboriously correct perceived errors of fact or interpretation. As for the letter writer himself, whom we know only as the anonymous R., he describes himself as "a Citizen of Nowhere" (182). Cloaked in the atmospherics and faded certainties of European high culture, R. charts a self-reflexive journey that enfolds upon itself. Occasionally, his passage harks back to home and to Melbourne. Meanwhile there are encounters in European cafes, railway stations and red light districts. There are stories that the narrator is told and which he relates in turn, tales of mystic amulets, princes, courtesans and theories proposed about Casanova, as well as chronicles of depravity and debauchery.

Such is the plethora of European detail that many critics consider *Night Letters* to be a European novel. So much so, that the publisher of the German translation called it a "German novel" (Bartoloni, "Traveling with Mortality" 107). Paolo Bartoloni observes that *Night Letters* could be considered a "homecoming" novel as it reconnects to the Grand Tour that Australians felt obliged to undertake to complete their cultural education. Hence, R. is compelled to take "a sort of 'sentimental journey' seeking both his cultural roots and a closer more intimate presence to himself" (107). Dessaix concedes that "some regard [*Night Letters*] as an autobiography posing as a novel" (*And So Forth* 420). He did indeed make a trip across northern Italy, very much like the one in the book:

> I saw those shops, I spoke to many of those people, I caught trains at those times, at those times at those stations, I sat all one night in the glassed-in First Class waiting room at Vicenza, my suitcase handle broke in Bologna—and that

> breakage is, of course, central to the book's structure and meaning. (*And So Forth* 420)

Returning from Europe, he is convinced that there was a story to be told about that passage: "I knew in other words, that the journey could be an abundant source of metaphor" (420). Dessaix has loved travelling for over forty years. Celebrating the sense of unbordered, as well as unordered engagement which journeying offers, he experiences travel as a "deeply erotic" experience (Sari 154). Dessaix sat down to write *Night Letters* two years after his European sojourn, when a "breakage" in his own life recalled a suitcase rupture during his travels. Apparently his life's fracture demanded a soul searching from him that could not take place in Australia: "as if Australia lacks the cultural references essential to enter a deep reappraisal of the self" (Bartoloni, "Traveling with Mortality" 107).

David Carter regards *Night Letters* as a ficto-memoir because of its significant autobiographical component. Indeed, Carter credits Dessaix (and Modjeska) with "double handedly" changing the nature of both the book industry and literary culture in Australia in 1990s. Similar to Gelder's stance quoted earlier, Carter considers that Dessaix (and a select group of others), pulled off their literary coup by marketing their books as "intensely aesthetic, unapologetically high cultural and self-consciously ethical".[6] Accordingly, Dessaix belongs to that group of writers whom fin de siècle encouraged and fostered a readership with a taste for interiority and "aesthetic experience". Carter goes on to define the "aesthetic experience" as what happens when "style, voice or authorial persona is invested with ethical value" ("Public Intellectuals"). With ironic intelligence, Carter playfully performs the pretensions of this style:

> You take a detail, an arcane fragment from the European high cultural archive, the more arcane the better, the deeper one's culture […] then the fragment, for those with the sensibilities to notice it, becomes the key to deeper meaning. ("Public Intellectuals")

Night Letters is crammed full of such aesthetic experience. Much talk is made of authors past and present, as well as their oeuvres—Bruce Chatwin, Lao-Tzu, Patricia Highsmith, Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie—to name but a few. Connections are made between the author's present day journey to William Lithgow's (1632) travelogue, as well as to James Howell's (1642) ruminations on continental travel (213-4, 113, 202).[7]

Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Laurence Sterne's *The Sentimental Journey* are also credited as influences. In an interview with Bartoloni, Dessaix explains the tribute that *Night Letters* owes to both of these authors ("Traveling with Dante and Sterne" 21-24). The "triptychal structure" of *Night Letters* mimics Dante with the novel divided into

three parts: letters from Locarno, Vicenza and Padua. In Dessaix's own words: "the overall structure of the novel [*Night* Letters] is reminiscent of the Comedy's ascending movement whereby the passage from the state of damnation to beatification is attained through a series of intervening stages" (22). Thus, both the metaphorical and literal travelogue of the novel is informed by Dante. On the other hand, Sterne provides the model for the experience of time:

> The Sentimental Journey is the emblematic negation of linearity which, both in its temporal and spatial meaning, has informed most of Western writing. *Night Letters* is a homage to non-linearity, digression, the errant, and, as such, is a journey without destination. (22)

Outside of an Australian literary tradition and situated between two canonical European authors, *Night Letters* describes a figurative and literal passage which has already been pre-imagined in literature. With all the reference points marked out already, all that *Night Letters* requires of the central character is that he acts out the fictional European itinerary and so when R. appears in Zurich, he arrives very much like "Sterne came to Calais" (*Night Letters* 15).

Signposting the journey in *Night Letters* are recurring references to the European high cultural archive: the golden winged lion in St Mark's Square in Venice, Fra Angelico's Madonnas, Marco Polo's adventures; Viana Palace in Cordoba, Tintoretto's "terrifying vision of paradise"—the list goes on (45). All this could provide a rich source for a Carter-like parody were it not for the breakage in his own life which impels Dessaix's foray into what one critic mocks as "homotextual dissimulation" (Biarujia 69). The "breakage" to which Dessaix refers is his diagnosis as being HIV positive. Even if Dessaix is cultivating a particular reader sensibility, the centrifugal force for his narrative is both sombre and shattering. Up to the point of his diagnosis, Dessaix had established an acclaimed career as an intellectual, public commentator, academic, teacher, writer and critic.[8] Despite the upheaval of his early life, he was (and still is) in a loving and committed relationship with a same-sex partner. An adopted child, Dessaix had only reconnected with his biological mother a few years prior to his diagnosis. This event inspired a creative genesis that led to him to publish his first semi-autobiographical work of fiction titled *A Mother's Disgrace* (1994).[9] He explains his purpose for writing this novel as an act of voluntary self-revelation, a sort of benediction for both himself and his mother absolving them both of guilt and disappointment:

> *A Mother's Disgrace* is in part a letter to my mother to tell her things that I found it difficult to explain around a table with coffee, with the telephone going and the dog barking and attention wandering to what people were wearing or

> what was going on outside. I felt in the end that I must tell her in all its complexity why my life has assumed the shape it had, because I knew when she first met me that the shape she saw in front of her was not quite the one she had expected. Or perhaps really hoped for. And so partly I wanted to say, *this is why I am this shape, this is why it is so odd and it is alright.* (my italics) (*And So Forth* 412)

But with the AIDS diagnosis and the subsequent reviolation of Dessaix's spiritual and corporeal "shape", that appeal is made to a wider audience.

Mortality is on his mind when he writes *Night Letters* and "the notion of living with death is the poetic framework of *Night Letters"* (Bartoloni, "Traveling with Mortality" 23). Consequently, *Night Letters*, written alone and in darkness, "arming […] against the coming night", *a*lso seeks to explain why Dessaix has "this shape, […] why it is so odd and [that] it is alright" (*Night Letters* 30; *And So Forth* 412). Except that this time the confession is made for a wider maternal incarnation in Dessaix's reading public. Thinking of his radio audience as "someone who is very fond of me, but not uncritical" helps Dessaix to acquire his "true voice" (*And So Forth* 421). He goes on to state that *Night Letters* is "based on an incident that cannot be repeated", as was his initial meeting with his biological mother, an event which inspired *A Mother's Disgrace* (Sari 157). But when Dessaix says that "[a]t some level it would have been better if I'd died in the sense that the book [*Night Letters*] could have been my definitive statement", he also reveals his self-consciousness about his legacy as a writer. He wants posterity to remember him on his terms, as he renders his premature dying (157). He eschews the use of "clinical words", yet wants the reader to experience what it feels like to be told of an incurable illness (152). He strongly believes that "readers want art and art involves composition and a particular take on reality. Truth and fact are not the same thing" (152).

Art can induce the deferral of disbelief, something which a factual rendition cannot do, no matter how "truthful". In *Night Letters* the elusive R. acquaints the reader with the deferral of disbelief which art encourages:

> Once some years ago in Tbilisi, Georgia, I went to see a spell binding performance at Rezo Gabriadze's famous Marionette Theatre. In the darkened, crowded room only one thing was real: the brilliantly costumed medieval scene blazing with life in a magical box at one end of the room. For an hour or two nothing existed for us but this jerky, many-hued dream-world. Its dimensions were our dimensions, its time our time. Suddenly the lights came on, a curtain was thrown back and there stood grinning puppeteers, dangling their princes and wizards like corpses from their fingers. They were monstrous grotesque, like fairytale giants … But I've never forgotten *that instantaneous destruction of a way of seeing, the nauseating jolt*, the feeling of foolishness, the spectacle of garish lifelessness … (my italics, 8)

In this instance, the exemplary performance which R. describes takes place on the proscenium stage. But before this description, R. poignantly tells of his boyhood joy about another sort of make-believe. He describes being taken to one of the big department stores at Christmas with "all those brightly coloured displays of dolls and masks, everything glinting and gleaming in the beautiful menacing darkness. I couldn't bear to come out" (4). Immediately after this anecdote R. immerses the reader within a veritable "Old World cabinet of curiosities" by literally expelling the reader into the middle of Venice and the splendour of St Mark's Square (Kadushin 34). Inventing Venice as his textual, proscenium stage, Dessaix becomes the grinning puppeteer manipulating his personages as they perform *Night Letters*. If this is death, he will assemble death artfully. Thus, illness is re-enacted as an aesthetic experience.

As R. expels the reader into the literal Venice with his initial letter, he also sets up the forthcoming allegorical journey. All of which is intentional and necessary as per Dessaix's stated philosophy of art and his deployment of the tools of his craft, "the unreliable narrator, the polyphony, the voice, the spiral structure" (*And So Forth* 418). Is *Night Letters* the suspension of disbelief that R. needs to create for himself and for his readers as he is confronted with the diagnosis of being HIV positive? Is the illness—one which still carries significant social stigmatisation—the "nauseating jolt" and the "instantaneous destruction of a way of seeing" that R. experiences at the Marionette theatre when the curtain is thrown back? (8). One critic wonders whether Dessaix evades both the illness and its stigma through the use of "elegant words and elaborate repetitions", all carefully "designed to provide vestments and vestiges of a desirable and presentable self?" (Mercer). Whilst taking account of this criticism, it is important to bear in mind the choice of setting for *Night Letters*. Although the drifting and aimless R. does go on to describe other places, all of book's fictive epistles are written from Venice and the Hotel Arcadia. As the chosen locales which act as the "vestments" for R.'s text and provide him with the hideaway in which to write—both Venice and the Hotel Arcadia are important.

The first letter in *Night Letters* is written from Venice on 1 April which is April Fool's Day. In this letter, R. describes a Venice which is "blue veined" and "rotting in the night" (3). Depicted corporeally, this is a venous Venice, transporting the stench of death thus Venice is a bodily metaphor symbolising both decay and incurable illness. In his conversation with Bartoloni, Dessaix explains the reasons for this symbolic choice. The passage is lengthy but worth quoting in full:

> It's no accident that I decided to set Night Letters in Italy and moreover in Venice, the symbol of ambiguity. I read Venice as the emblem of the human urge to domesticate and colonize nature. It is a symbol which, however tarnished and precarious it might be, still reflects that visionary dream that generated it. Venice is at one and the same time the city of masculine power (the Church, the Oligarchy) engaged in exploring and conquering the world, and the center of a sensuality and a style which are unmistakably feminine. If on the one hand Venice is a borderline city, ideally open to the world, and such a hybrid place, on the other hand it is a city jealous of its own identity to the extent of creating one of history's most ironbound systems of imprisonment, repression, and racial segregation. ("Traveling with Dante and Sterne" 23)

Steeped in a sensuality which is both malodorous yet fascinating, Venice administers fanatical systems to coerce and control undesirable bodies. At the same time as it is despotic and repressive, Venice also survives as hybrid and open to the world. Confronted with an untreatable illness, R. pens his letters from the very site of ambiguity. Accordingly, Venice becomes a place for the resolution of opposites: nature and culture, spirit and flesh, masculine and feminine.

As for the Hotel Arcadia, the explanatory note by the lugubrious editor Igor Miazmov gives the clue to its meaning: "the Romans still thought of Arcadia as a grove. Desire for the living forest kept throbbing away like a morbid vein, refusing to die … In the living forest there was some consolation for mortality which mere masonry could not provide" (203). Once more the venous system is used as a metaphor for corporeal life. R. is dying, stricken with a mortal illness, longing for renewal, whilst trying to come to terms with the ambiguity of being. All of which are metaphorically represented by R. taking up residence in Venice at the Hotel Arcadia. R.'s letters become interior monologues: meditation on mortality, contemplations in the guise of a travelogue, written to an anonymous loved one at home. As this home is "antipodean" it survives in the opposite hemisphere from where R. figuratively and literally exists for the duration of *Night Letters* (15). But this is a necessary period in-between for it is this other northern hemisphere that resets the direction for R.'s "compass". Shrouded by the metaphor of journeying and the idea of going somewhere, R. comes to terms with being robbed of time. "It's the subtlety of your vision that casts a spell on time, not the number of things you see": waylaid by mortality, R.'s compass is reset to a true "magnetic north" (*Night Letters* 197).

Critical response to the novel was almost unanimously positive; however, Gina Mercer and Javant Biarujia sternly judged its elaborate masquerades. Assembling her own epistolary meditation, Mercer is inspired to engage in a masquerade of her own ("Masquerade of the Tiny Leaden Ball"). She constructs a fictive correspondence between M. and G., disguising Gina Mercer behind each of these respective personas. Where G.

is vocal critic of *Night Letters,* M. is an advocate for the novel. Their interaction begins when G. is laid up in bed with a "noxious flu" and presented with a copy of *Night Letters*. Lampooning the novel as the invalid's self reflexive journey, Mercer (disguised as G.) divulges that it has been recommended as the "the perfect read" for a "languishing body". A creative writer, academic and editor in her own right, Mercer is ideally placed to deconstruct Dessaix's arrangement with art. Dessaix's artifice are mischievously but fatally exposed as she takes "a leisurely tour of Dessaix-land with a view to my moral improvement […] to puzzle my way through all of Dessaix's disguises, masks and masquerades". Firstly, Mercer subverts the epistolary form of the novel. Rendering her critique as exchange between G. and M. (i.e. between herself), she shows that in *Night Letters* Dessaix is simply writing to himself (Biarujia 95).

As for the dating of the letters, Mercer begins her correspondence 28 March when G. falls ill and ends the exchange in May. Dessaix begins his on 1 April. Mercer starts one of *her* letters as follows:

> Dear G.,
> Here we are, suddenly into May, and it's getting thoroughly autumnal, which I like. Though in Italy of course, it's still spring. Why do you think R. writes his decidedly autumn-tinted letters yet dates them as being written in the archetypally hopeful months of European spring? Another of Dessaix's witty jokes I suspect. ("Masquerade" 8)

Exasperated by *Night Letters*' textual, sleights of hand, Mercer's alter ego (the fussy G.) firmly states that should she be told she had a terminal illness she would lose all patience with "artifice and masks" ("Masquerade"). Equally, Biarujia also accuses Dessaix of textual "transvestism" (70). Veiled behind a host of disguises R. could be anyone or anything (71). Unquestioningly, R. has been told that he has a terminal illness but whether R. the character in *Night Letters,* neatly lines up with Robert the author of *Night Letters* is never clear. In fact, there is not one instance where the words AIDS or "HIV positive" are used in regards to the main character, R. who receives the diagnosis. Further heightening the confusion is the fact that the novel is dedicated to Dessaix's real life partner, Peter Timms, who is also referred by name in the novel. In fact, *Night Letters* includes many instances from the couples' real lives, such as the death of their dog (71). In real life, when told of the illness, Peter Timms says to Dessaix "I'll be alright", just as his lover reassures R. in the same circumstances in the novel (Mercer, "Masquerade").

Declaring that without doubt "R.'s soul is self masked", Biarujia condemns the make-believe. In his view, Dessaix has a history of playing textual charades of "maintaining a cool distance between, on one side, author and protagonist, and on the

other, author and reader" (70). Ultimately, it is the method and manner that Dessaix chooses to recount, his "being toward death" which disturbs both Biarujia and Mercer.[10] However, Dessaix maintains that death is also "a protagonist of *Night Letters*" (Bartoloni, "Travelling with Dante" 23). Insisting that death is only a linguist construct, a concept, an idea, Dessaix is committed to demystifying its meaning "by narrating, by speaking it" (23). Given Dessaix's avowed fascination with unreliable narrators, herein lies his narratological problem. As a long time admirer of Bakhtin's concept of polyphony or "many-voicedness", Dessaix likes to experiment with "uncertain voices, emotionally unstable voices, disingenuous voices, untrustworthy voices" (*And So Forth* 423). Consequently, *Night Letters* is caught between, on one hand, Dessaix's avowed aim to demystify death through the use of language and narrative, and his writerly strategies which deliberately hide and obscure. Nonetheless, Dessaix proposes this dilemma as part of the writer's project of mounting self-knowledge, where the aim is "to befriend unknown parts of yourself—the known parts, after all, are already provided with words" (424). I would like to go on and consider *Night Letters'* characters in this way, as the "unknown parts" of himself that the author assembles or brings into self-awareness as he (or the anonymous R.) confronts what Dessaix terms as "the timeless anguish of love and death" (424).

Three characters in particular take on significance: the fictive editor Igor Miasmov, the Englishwoman Rachel Berg and finally, there is Professor Eschenbaum who is loosely modelled on Gustav von Aschenbach in Mann's *Death in Venice*. Rachel and the Professor are given the task of voicing (or performing) the two lengthy tales in *Night Letters.* The themes of these two tales are important to the novel, as are their allotted story tellers. Interwoven around these stories are the novel's epistolary exchanges. The first tale is related by Rachel and tells of the fate of a Golden Amulet across the centuries. Professor Eschenbaum tells the second story which accounts for the fortunes of Camilla, the vanishing Venetian courtesan. Although R. acknowledges that Rachel and the professor have "helped me befriend a part of myself I only had a nodding acquaintance with before", Miasmoz is not mentioned (261). Whereas Rachel and the professor advance the narrative, Miasmov irritatingly interrupts the story. Referring to the editor would mend the separation that Dessaix tries to create between his protagonist R. and himself thus shattering the illusion that *Night Letters* is fiction. In conversation with Bartoloni, Dessaix explains that Miasmoz's name is a combination of his own passion for Russian literature and the "iasma" which pervades Mann's *Death in Venice.* Moreover, the author views Miasmoz as "a parody of that intellectual attitude

which, from the heights of inflexible knowledge, looks down derisively on the cultural reflections and ideas of the *dilettante"* ("Traveling with Dante and Sterne" 24).

As a notable academic in his own right, Dessaix is known for his criticism of the contemporary humanities academy. In this respect, he rates the self-made, seeker of knowledge (the dilettante) far ahead of the professional and the expert (Carter "Public Intellectuals"; Mercer, "Masquerade"). At the same time, Dessaix is a well versed in the performance that Miasmov's work requires. Whether the author recognises it or not, there is a part of him which is split off and operates just like Miasmoz. Dessaix's academic parody works because Miasmoz's process is something in which he is proficient. Consequently, the Miasmoz's character becomes another site for the theme of doubleness and ambiguity which is such a key topic in *Night Letters*. Then again, Alberto Manuel considers that Miasmoz is used as the Russian plural for the word that means a noxious escape of air, hence conjuring up an image of "Igor the Windbag" (172). For Manguel, the character creates a different sort of ambiguity, one which reduces "the traveller's numinous experiences to a diary of doubtful observations that lend the letters an illusion of order" (178). Before the novel even begins, the editor introduces himself inserting *his* presence, precedence and prescience between the reader and the text. Supposedly Miasmoz is rearranging the text in order to create a translation that is comprehensible to the reader. Yet, his existence ensnares the reader in uncertainty once more and thus undermines the moral certainties presented by "aesthetic experience" in novels such as *Night Letters* (Carter, "Public Intellectuals").

During the narrative that Miasmoz presents, R.'s first significant "actual" meeting is with the elderly, well-mannered and expensively dressed, Englishwoman—Rachel Berg. With her fine boned face and "severe helmet of greying hair", Rachel could easily be a cross-gender depiction of Dessaix. More importantly, she first comes to R.'s attention because of the "refined obscenity" of the tiny, golden amulet brooch that she wears: "it was a hugely endowed male copulating with a large-limbed female, all in exquisitely fine detail—every bead in the bracelet, every toe picked out" (23). In other words, this amulet is the very picture of the timeless anguish of love and death which fascinates Dessaix (*And So Forth* 424). Timeless, but dead, because it has been set in precious metal, the amulet forever preserves the act of love and desire which is the most the primal act of creation. Conjoining the opposites of love and death, both the amulet and its history sustain the theme of irresolvable ambiguity which is central to *Night Letters* signifying, perhaps, that all that art ultimately accomplishes is the ossification of real experience.

The poetic framework for the amulet's improbable juxtapositions is set up by Rachel. True to her role of storyteller, she relates “The Story of Antonietta, Baroness de St Leger, and the Golden Amulet” by telling of both the triumphs and troubles that her brooch bought to its desiring possessors (47). Rachel connects with that part of Dessaix who tells “stories to offer my readers the opportunity to tell their story to themselves and to others—and to give them pleasure” (Bartolini, “Traveling with Dante and Sterne” 24). On the other hand, the author’s alter ego R. also transcribes his conversation with Salman Rushdie. Here, Dessaix appears to suggest the opposite: that story telling might just be about “absurdity and the need for meaning”.

> ‘On the first page of *Midnight’s Children* the narrator says that more than anything else he fears absurdity and then he tells this huge, rambling ‘shaggy-dog story’ as a way of inventing meaning, a meaning for his own life - a meaning which, even as he talks himself into it, he fears it may not actually have.’ We all know the feeling. Talking to Rushdie was like an elixir. (*Night Letters* 107)

Once more, with its rubric of fictions encased in more fictions, *Night Letters* oscillates between ambiguities, pursuing meaning in what could well be a meaningless existence. For the moment, Dessaix’s alter ego R. eases the passage to death with stories. R.’s third and final significant meeting during his travels occurs with the encyclopaedic Professor Eschenbaum, “a cultural historian (or something like that)” whom R. befriends at the Hotel Arcadia (*Night Letters* 32). Further on, the Professor, who is also a storyteller, goes on to relate the second tale embedded in R.’s story. Sporting a crew cut which highlights “his splendid sunken eyes”, the Professor’s description, like that of Rachel Berg’s, also recalls pictures of Dessaix (12).

Fussy and over refined, the German Professor returns to Venice yearly to complain about the degenerate Italians (12). At the same time, he yearns for Italian youths, as he guardedly tries “to let his sensual and predatory instincts off their leash” (Bartolini, “Traveling with Dante and Sterne” 23). Both R. and the Professor admiringly eye off the waiters at the Hotel Arcadia. On the other hand, unlike R., the Professor acts on his desire only to end up robbed, stricken and shamed. But R. registers uneasily, that the Professor continues to yearn for the waiter Emilio who robbed him and beat him (*Night Letters* 235). Similarly exposed as a homosexual, Mann’s Gustav von Aschenbach awaits "death in Venice", still longing for the handsome youth Tadzio. Even so, it is this old *finocchio* (foreign queer), as the Professor terms himself, who becomes R.’s intellectual and cultural tour guide to Europe (199). He recommends Dante’s *Divine Comedy* to R., conversing at length about its many layers of meaning. As well, he instructs R. regarding the Venetian ghetto and the legendary Venetians,

Marco Polo and Casanova (131-34, 240-53). All of Dessaix's novels include a character that has a "desire to transcend their modern education" and in *Night Letters* this character is the Professor (Sari 155). This desire to transcend contemporary teachings represents what Dessaix sees as a craving for "spiritual consciousness" which he explains as the awareness of the possibility of the soul and the afterlife, as well as a conception of an existence outside of time (155).

Contrary to the author's own view, I believe that this longing to transcend modern education is be found more in the gaps and ambiguities that make up a composite personage of both R. and the Professor. In this double act, where Eschenbaum plays foil for R. and vice versa, in due course, a character emerges who is as a sort of *subtextual Professor R.* (or Professor Dessaix). This subtextual manoeuvre develops the idea of the simultaneous co-existence of opposites: an ambiguity already established by setting the scene in Venice and by the characters of Miasmov and Rachel Berg and Rachel's story of the Golden Amulet. Although age is never mentioned, the impression is that R. is a young man compared to the Professor. In spite of the difference in their ages, it is R. who seeks spiritual transcendence, meanwhile the Professor pursues the transcendent bliss of the senses. Professor Eschenbaum tells R. of the S&M club he visits, speaking of the venue as a Dantean subversion: "hell disguised as paradise" and wondering whether it should be "the other way round". When R. reminds him that all this might be too much for "an old man" the Professor wistfully protests: "It's the only sort of place in the world that I can stop thinking […] and just be … Although there, you see, I wasn't old. I wasn't anything because in there it's all smell and touch, you can't see a thing, no-one speaks" (*Night Letters* 199). The old *finocchio* finds the elusive transcendence that he seeks within the club's fleshly, pleasure trove.

Given that the reader is led to understand that both the Professor and R. are homosexual, Christian grace is denied to them. If R. is searching for spiritual transcendence, then the course via a Christian practice of faith is barred. As for the Professor, his desire to immerse himself in carnal experience makes him aberrant and sinful to a Christian understanding. In light of this, the Professor tells R. the story of Casanova, a man who also had insatiable desire for sexual experience (248-60). As the Professor takes on his pedagogical chore with his "voice positioned as expert", there are long passages assigned to the discussion of sexuality (Mercer, "Masquerade"). Occasionally R. asks a rhetorical question. But mostly R. listens as Casanova is depicted as a bisexual and "a subverter of paradigms" (*Night Letters* 251). Suggesting

that Casanova was pursued by the church because of his homosexual involvement with three powerful Venetians, the Professor puts forward the idea that the Inquisition, "while it could tolerate murder, robbery, greed and corruption quite happily, could not tolerate such a flagrant attack on the very foundation of Venetian society; the heterosexual family. All power and wealth relied on the maintenance of its forms" (253). Equally, the Professor's lectures, as well as R.'s many musings suggest that, as a church sanctioned mission, the policing of sexuality upholds a particular order of power in a "civilised" society. Hitherto, this is an order to which the homosexual can never attain full membership, something which R. appreciates in the legend St Anthony, who pursued homosexuals, heretics and Jews with equal loathing and fervour.

Required to thank him "for grace received", R. cannot bring himself to ask the homosexual hating and heretic hating St Anthony for a cure and a blessing (228). As R. and the Professor shape their behaviours to their real desires instead of in opposition to them, they are perpetually deemed Christian heretics. Therefore, contrary to Biarujia who sees in R.'s attitude to St Anthony evidence of his self-pity and "internalised homophobia", I argue that R. honestly depicts his ambiguous predicament within the Christian faith into which he and the Professor have been—once more reinforcing *Night Letters*' key theme of irresolvable ambiguity (80). By taking the Christian term "Annunciation" to refer to the instant of his diagnosis R. announces the spiritual tradition to which he belongs and as well, he identifies the moment as inaugurating his spiritual quest. R.'s Annunciation is foretold and delivered by his own archangel "Gabriel"—his Chinese doctor. Whilst AIDS is never mentioned, the diagnosis of incurable illness is presented to R. (5). The Annunciation is what initiates the Virgin Mary's beatitude. But before R. can reach the Dantean cycle of beatitude (Padua Letters), he is banished first to purgatory (Locarno Letters) and then to hell (Vicenza Letters). As demonstrated by *Night Letters*' form, dialogues and structure, Dessaix and his protagonist R., are well-versed in the art and language of the Judeo-Christian faith. Yet, their own faith denies them solace. R.'s heterodox sexuality determines his unendingly ambiguous location within a culture that the composite character of Professor R. appreciates and values but which ultimately negates him. Cut off from real life except for his annual two weeks in Italy, the aging, vulnerable Professor who lives so certainly enclosed in knowledge is a wistful alter ego for Dessaix. Near the beginning of *Night Letters*, R. says that he has lived his life "too timidly I now think, looking back. Not blandly but taking too few risks" (*Night Letters* 15). Acting as a metaphor for their ego/alter ego relationship is the incident when R. decides to follow the Professor on his

nocturnal adventures. The Professor hides his forbidden cruising and when R. finds him in a Venetian side street the Professor, not saying a word, stares him down until R. turns and silently leaves (114). This scene can be read as the part of R. which disavows the deviant expression of the other as the sin that dare not speak its name. Yet, as the lecturer, teacher and "the voice positioned as expert", the Professor is a part of Dessaix—even if Dessaix is fond of favouring the *dilettante* in public life and disowning the expert (Mercer, "Masquerade "). More importantly, it is the Professor who relates the second key tale of the novel "The Disappearing Courtesan", the story of "the nymph" Camilla Scamozzi (*Night Letters* 135).

In a scene which is arguably the climax of *Night Letters*, Camilla's story has its apotheosis when a powerful lover exacts his revenge. In the supposed tradition of the Venetian *trentuno*, her rejected lover arranges that Camilla is raped thirty one times by a motley crew resembling a cast of Peter Greenaway characters: butcher boy, wine merchant, pastry cook, idiot boy, fisherman and sons, and so on (Biarujia 90). Implanted as a story within a story, the rape scene contains the most graphically sexual writing in *Night Letters*. Critics interpret the scene differently. Some read it as Dessaix's homotextual revenge on heterosexuality which has "sullied and irrationalised" the homosexual (Biarujia 80). Another critic suggests a psychoanalytic reading, taking the rape scene to mean a disgust of women which is formed by the author's infantile hatred for his birth mother: a mother who abandons him and does not protect him from mortal disease (Mercer, "Masquerade". Furthermore, there is the Freudian interpretation that the rape scene is an expression of self-hatred (Mercer). Or perhaps Camilla's story is simply a shamed account of contracting AIDS and the ensuing burden of self-punishment? Has R. been reduced to something that does not deserve to exist because of his pursuit of sensual pleasure? By the end of her sadomasochistic pack rape, Camilla is "a tiny leaden ball, no bigger than a pinhead, floating in empty blackness" (*Night Letters* 168).

Like the courtesan Camilla, blessed with beauty, elegance and allure, has R. sullied the grace and gifts he has been granted? Is the rape scene really about Dessaix (or R.) taking revenge upon himself? I would argue that Camilla's rape scene is about the AIDS diagnosis but rather than proposing Camilla as another alter ego for Dessaix, I suggest that this scene operates discursively in a more subtle manner. My evidence is textual. Previously, R. has quoted Freud's maxim: "Nature destroys us through the very things that occasioned out satisfaction" (*Night Letters* 105). This Freudian dictum appears in the text almost immediately after the anecdote about Bruce Chatwin's slow decline from AIDS. Stressing Chatwin's physical magnetism, Harry (R.'s friend) relates

the story of his toil toward death. R. informs the reader that Bruce Chatwin was indeed "breathtakingly beautiful", going on to observe that men usually skirt around the subject of another man's loveliness. However, once that man is dead "his beauty somehow enhances the tragic narrative of his death, [and] it may be mentioned" (104). Therefore, in cases such as Chatwin's "beauty becomes a flaw inviting infection" (104). Aside from Chatwin's perspective—he refused to admit to AIDS - there is no shame associated with AIDS in this anecdote. Rather, this is more the conventional and romantic reflection about the beauty of the flesh being fleeting and carnal pleasures ephemeral. As well, it presents a well-worn paradigm of fairytales. Anything too beautiful invites a curse and it enhances the tragic narrative to emphasize the beauty of the one afflicted. Following the textual clues once more, when R. has his diagnosis confirmed, he finds himself walking home "barely connected to time and space, shrunken into *the tiniest dot"* (my italics 109). As her rapists depart, Camilla too has become "a tiny leaden ball, no bigger than a pinhead, floating in empty blackness" (168). No wonder that Biarujia identifies the rape scene as the climax of the novel because consciously or not, the author links this scene with R.'s (or his own) AIDS diagnosis. So accurate is the description of Camilla's feelings after the rape scene that Mercer wonders how R. has come to know this reaction? How has R. come to understand this "particular kind of desecration, torture, cruelty" (10)?

The answer is simple: this is the way that R. (or the author) felt after the confirmation of his diagnosis. The two scenes are connected by the sense of disappearing into oblivion. Camilla's story is a metaphor for the experience of despair after being desecrated by the diagnosis of terminal illness. It is not the story of self-mutilation or guilt about AIDS or mother hatred. Rather, as a romantic, Dessaix the author has spun this into a fairytale, a Peter Greenaway fairytale but a fairytale nonetheless. The same key hypothesis is there—too much beauty and youth is cursed and envied. Born, as well as schooled to engender desire in others, longing herself to be desired, Camilla manufactures her disappearance after her rape, never to again reappear. Perhaps this is what the HIV diagnosis means for R. (or Dessaix)—the loss of the certainty of ever being desired again. Once again engaging with the thematic of doubleness and ambiguity, Camilla's disappearance is engineered as a game of double disguise. Dressed as Camilla, one lover goes to a secret rendezvous to meet another. Alberto, who is disguised as Camilla, is the son of Count Lorenzo, the lover who eagerly awaits her. Reunited, father and son intimately and passionately fondle each other until the ruse is discovered. Thus, Camilla is avenged by staging a scene that

verges on homosexual incest for it was the father, Count Lorenzo, who orchestrated her pack rape. By taking on the outline of a fairytale, a form which often describes a blissfully completed heterosexual courtship, Camilla's tale decentres the "normality" of heterosexual desire. In relating Camilla's tale, the Professor subverts "normal" expressions of desire—where "normal" desires are deemed to be heterosexual. But Camilla's story presents them as costumed performances that only mask prohibited desires. Costumes, masks and masquerades ritually allay the disquiet of the social self whose desire is rigorously held in check by the joint authority systems of church and state.

After Heidegger's "Dasein Zum Tod": Being Toward Death

As stated earlier, *Night Letters*' meditations on mortality orbit around the two central tales in the narrative. Rachel Berg relates the first fiction and her subject is the history of the talismanic golden amulet that she wears as an artefact which literally and allegorically entwines love and death. The poetic framework for Rachel's tale is a priceless ornament, yet it is a lifeless simulation of the thing that it seeks to represent. In imitating existence, artistic creation fossilises and bloodlessly drains the very thing it seeks to capture. Fleetingly, it grants its creator or possessor the illusion of godlike generativity and a chance to exclaim in wonderment "look at what l too can create" or "look at what I too can possess". Yet, ultimately an artefact renders what it seeks to capture an unresponsive and inert thing. Works of art are but poor substitutes of lived experience. Rachel's story suggests that those who wish to possess the amulet labour under the illusion that they can arrest the unstoppable cycle of creation and destruction of life itself. While existence is revealed to be nothing more than a Heideggerian process of "being toward death Dessaix valorises the act of artistic creation even as one of *Night Letters* key motifs—the amulet's legend—undercuts its enduring value. Like the story that R. recounts about his meeting with Rushdie (quoted earlier), readers are left to wonder if Dessaix elevates aesthetic creation as a way of inventing meaning for his own life. Fearful of oblivion, masked as R., Rachel or the Professor, Dessaix talks about inventing stories, leaving his audience wondering whether Dessaix (or R.) considers that his life has been voided of any meaning that can be uniquely claimed and owned. (107)

Dessaix's other alter ego, the Professor narrates the second story which provides the next key, allegorical motif for *Night Letters*. Ultimately, Camilla tale's is about the arrival of untimely death. Even so, her story operates with more discursive subtlety than

the AIDS genre of short stories and American plays to which R. alludes. Using the agency of his protagonist R., Dessaix disassociates himself from this genre and its "slightly mawkish bravery" (192). By never mentioning the exact nature of R.'s life threatening illness, he sidesteps the AIDS literary genre classification. However, only the most inattentive reader would misinterpret R.'s illness given that the allusions throughout *Night Letters* are so laden and specific. But Dessaix wants and needs to elaborate on the subject of death rather than write a novel on "death by AIDS". R. explains:

> In many of us, including myself, as the century draws to a close I think there has been a desire to wipe out all sense of sin and shame and regain a pre-religious paradise whenever we indulge ourselves sexually. We wanted to de-school ourselves. It's worked and hasn't worked, both. It certainly hasn't brought us much wisdom about what to do about death. (190)

Once again in keeping with the novel's overall theme of doubt, doubling and ambiguity, the paragraph ends on an uncertain note: "It's worked and hasn't worked, *both*" (my italics, 190). In the end, *Night Letters* becomes a fin-d-siècle lament for the sexual revolution.

Returning to one of the questions with which I began this chapter: does Dessaix broaden conceptions of Australian masculinity in *Night Letters*? My answer would have to be an unequivocal yes. In the 1990s, *Night Letters* became a mainstream publication. As well as being recognised for its literary merit, the novel was successfully adapted for the stage. Due to Dessaix's establishment position, the novel and the play gained an audience that may not have been otherwise possible. As a gay novel thematised by an AIDS diagnosis, *Night Letters* ambled into mainstream consciousness in the 1990s and was unquestioned.[11] Readers came to *Night Letters* to encounter a wounded, vulnerable and questioning male voice, unnerved and terrified because of the diagnosis of an incurable illness. Thrown into existential crisis, this sort of masculine identity is light years away from the self-confident maleness proposed earlier by Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend.* The one thing that these two accounts of Australian maleness may have in common is the complete absence of self-pity. Beforehand, I argued that Mercer and Biarujia judge *Night Letters* severely because of the manner in which the narrative deals with the topic of "being towards death". Dessaix, via his alter ego R, acknowledges that "everyone has such conflicting ideas about how to live when mortality is breathing down your neck" (191). With stoic acceptance, he writes of R.'s terror and sadness:

> During those first days back in September I woke night after night from chilling dreams about banging around in a forest of hanged corpses. I'd stagger to my

> feet and walk in circles, wringing my hands. (People do ring their hands.) I don't do that anymore, but I do wake up feeling desperate to be companioned. (31)

Here, the male figure who once stood so surely at the interpretive centre of aesthetic, liberal humanism and who admits the existence of the Other so as "to establish a profundity of which it alone has the power to speak" is mortally destabilised (G. Rose 10-11). Returning to the other question that I asked at the beginning of this chapter: does Dessaix work in Queer Theory? Once again I have to respond with an emphatic yes. One key reason is the unbalancing in *Night Letters* of his central male figure R., who at the same time as he promotes an aesthetic, liberal humanism narrates a journey which *queers* its perspective. If the question is whether *Night Letters* does the things that Queer Theory proposes in the six definitions provided earlier in the chapter then the answer is yes in all six instances. In *Night Letters* the narration does occur within "an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (Berry and Jagose 11). *Night Letters* tells the stories of those who are "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin, *Saint Foucault* 62). *Night Letters* does suggest "the promise of new meanings, new ways of thinking and acting politically" but the promise is not fully realised (Duggan 11). At the end of *Night Letters*, the self-aware R. simply states the empty weariness of the European journey and of needing as "an Antipodean" to free himself from the imaginative European geography in which he has been immersed.

> I was suddenly conscious of feeling tired of … not Europe, exactly, but the accumulation of stories, battles, treaties, families, duchies, paintings, churches, palaces—all the things the antipodean finds so exciting on arrival. And 'tired' is the wrong word […] perhaps *saturated* is a better word, the sort of feeling that comes over you at the end of an evening of looking at your grandparents' photograph albums, listening to all their half remembered stories … Going to Europe is always like visiting the grandparents to me […] you know they haven't the faintest idea about, let alone respect for; the things that move *you* and they are never going to change. (270)

Australia represents a kinder world and R., realises that he does not want to live without "kindness". Ultimately, R. returns to share a space of domestic bliss in Australia with the ones he loves. (271). At the same time as arriving at this finale, *Night Letters* also presents "multiple, open ended sexual identities", often dealing with them playfully (Matthews xvi). Moreover, because of the variety of personas that Dessaix chooses to voice, *Night Letters* does "denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relations between them" (Sullivan 81). *Night Letters* works in queer theory because Dessaix exposes what rages underneath the narrowly contained orders of sexuality. Camilla's story, which ends in a scene of (nearly) contrived incest between father and son, could almost be a Sedgwickian parable. For it was Eve

Sedgwick who "queered" definitions of heterosexuality by demonstrating how bound up they were with homosexual definition (Blumenfeld 23). It is as a result of their desire for the same *woman* that father and son experience their "queer" sexuality.

Readers may have turned to *Night Letters* so as to engage with an "aesthetic experience" novel but ultimately Dessaix throws them (as well as himself) into disorder (Carter, "Public Intellectuals"). Dessaix regards his literary work as straddling an abyss: "the chasm between different views—the post-modernist aesthetic and what is actually a severely 'realist philosophy'—'realist in an almost noumenological sense—which is utterly un-post-modernist" (*And So Forth* 423). He keeps writing so as to "assuage the anxiety" that this inner "clash" entails and to "befriend" those "unknown parts" of himself (423). But with *Night Letters,* Dessaix affirms that the experience of "'coming to oneself,' or 'psychotherapeutic reconstruction of a life history' (through confession, witnessing writing) […] is merely a futile attempt to establish a 'new-old identity' and an (illusory) 'coherence of life'" (Vladiv-Glover). Circling distractedly around the once-revered certainties of high European culture, *Night Letters* becomes "queer" as it demonstrates "neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics" (Jagose 96). The certainties of existence are revealed as shape-shifting and ambiguous, chimera and misapprehension. Thus, Dessaix reveals himself as an unwilling practitioner of the "post-modernist aesthetic" whilst hiding himself within an "aesthetic experience" novel. All of which works in *Night Letters* as a novel and inspires as well a sophisticated literary criticism (Mercer and Biarujia) leaving the last word to Dessaix: "If you want not only to create, but also to be read, I think that in some way or other you also have to tap into aspects of the central anguish of your times" (*And So Forth* 424). With *Night Letters,* Dessaix taps into that central anguish.

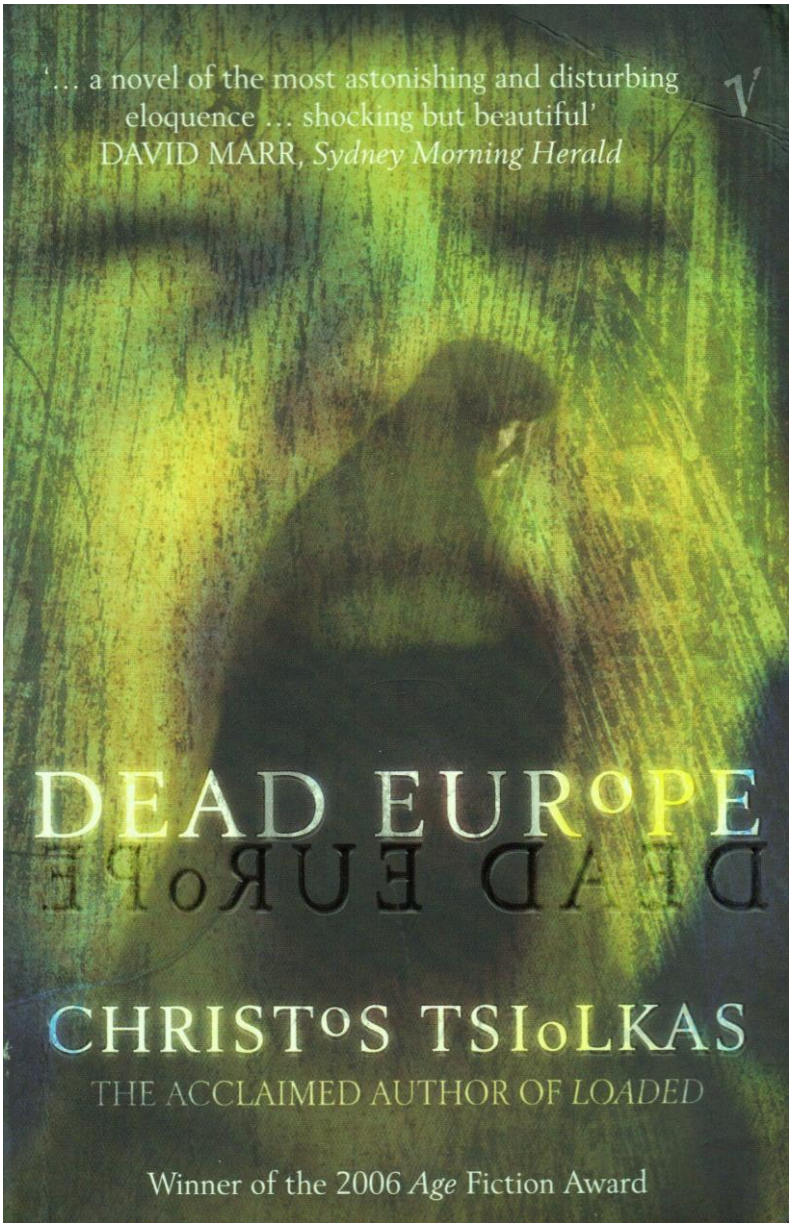

Fig. 10. The dust jacket for *Dead Europe* which was published in Sydney by Random House, 2005.

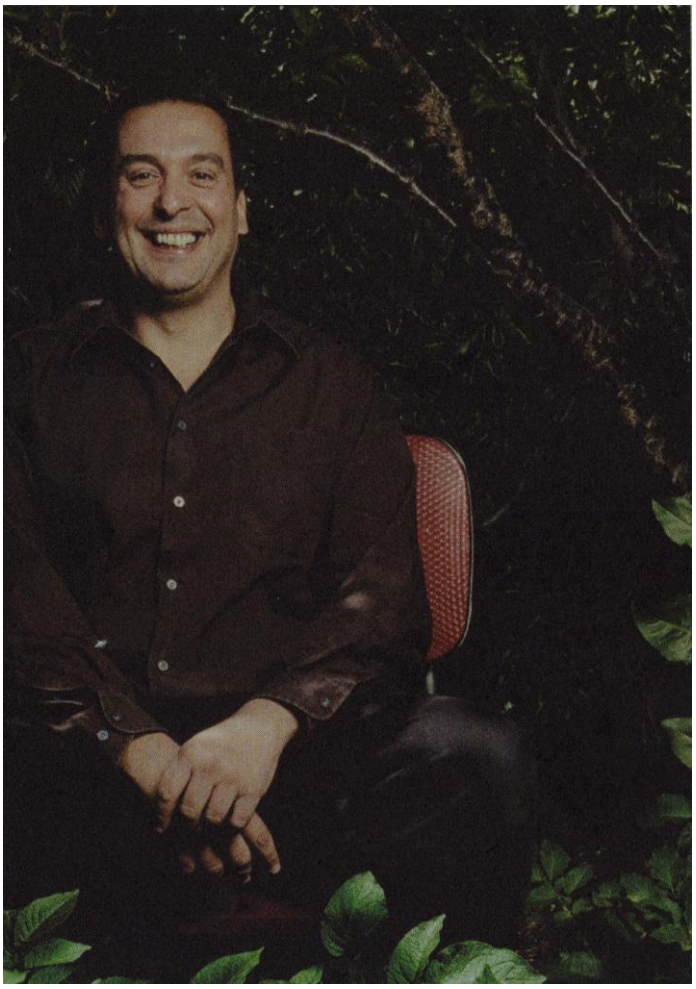

Fig. 11. Christos Tsiolkas photographed for "The Passion of Christos." by Caroline Baum appearing in *The Age* 12 Dec. 2008, sec. *Good Weekend Magazine*: 27-29.

5

The Queer and European Journey

of Christos Tsiolkas and *Dead Europe*

> I'm not Australian, I'm not Greek, I'm not anything.
>
> Ari's speech from Tsiolkas, *Loaded* 115

> The excitement, for me of recent queer theory and activism has been the challenge it poses to the ascendancy of the White Bourgeois Gay Man.
>
> Tsiolkas, "Raining on your parade" 15

> Which contemporary author is not an author of the Holocaust? What I mean is that the Holocaust does not have to be made an explicit theme for us to sense the undercurrent of trauma that has haunted modern European art for decades. I would go even further: I know of no genuinely good and authentic art in which one cannot discern such a rupture, like someone shattered and disoriented after sleep haunted by nightmares. For me the Holocaust represents the human situation, the terminus of the great adventure at which Europeans have arrived after two thousand years of ethical and moral culture.
>
> Sigrid Theilking qtd in Beck *Cosmopolitanism Vision* 3

When Christos Tsiolkas writes that "[t]he distinctly Eurocentric and bourgeois construction of 'gay' identity has a suffocating dominance in contemporary meditation of non-hetereosexuality", the expectation is that the "queer and European journey" of his gay protagonist in *Dead Europe* will be different to that of R.'s, Dessaix's central character in *Night Letters* ("Raining on your parade" 15). Nonetheless, within the different literary universe of *Dead Europe*, the main protagonist Isaac Raftis, just like R., confronts the irreconcilability of opposites, ambiguity, doubleness and deception in his search for existential meaning. With his first novel, *Loaded*, Tsiolkas profoundly challenged Benedict Anderson's concept of the novel existing as a means of reaffirming and reinstating the sameness of a national community (*Imagined Communities)*. In the first epigraph to this chapter, *Loaded*'s narrator and protagonist, Ari, vehemently declares his independence from national identification and state-sponsored multiculturalism. As a second generation, queer, Greek Australian, Ari also rejects the

aggressive masculinity and dominant heteronormative of both the Australian "host" culture and the "home" culture of Greece. Through Ari's experiences in *Loaded,* the idea of containing and subduing ethno-cultural difference within the nation-state boundary is seen as feeble and easily upturned. For Mandy Treagus, Ari is "queerly" resistant to all the subject positions available to him. Tsiolkas conjoins queer aesthetics and migrant identity to defy "widely held understandings of identity, ethnicity and nation" (219).

The same themes of belonging, of claiming, rejecting, or just surviving, a pre-sanctioned place in the world, are strongly evident in *Dead Europe*, Tsiolkas's third novel. But here, queer aesthetics are combined with a problematic of diasporic identity as well as migrant identity. In *Dead Europe,* a new geo-political climate both in Europe and Australia now requires that migrant identity, more often than not, be described as "refugee" identity. Therefore membership to a global diaspora is the only real belonging that now appears possible. For Sneja Gunew, diaspora means "an endless process of travelling and change rather than simply being framed by leaving and arriving, with mourning or nostalgia as its dominant markers" (*Haunted Nations* 107*)*. For John Docker, diaspora is defined by "a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, more than one past and future. Diaspora suggests the omnipresent weight of pain and displacement from a land or society, of being an outsider in a new one" (*1492* vii-viii). In *Dead Europe,* Isaac connects with a variety of people who are in the process of undergoing the feeling states which Docker and Gunew describe of nostalgia, mourning and the pain of displacement. Isaac realises that he also belongs to these wider communities of loss, as well as being "Greek" and/or "Australian". As a result, *Dead Europe* speaks to and effectively engages with the event of diaspora and the survival of diasporic communities. Moreover, the novel attempts to create new subjectivities for today's citizens by challenging the narratives of belonging to the nation premised on ethnic absolutism and common origins. However, even though he embarks on a new adventure of identity, Isaac does not find any easy answers.

Briefly, *Dead Europe* tells the story of Isaac's return journey to Europe. At this point, Tsiolkas reverses the migratory trajectory of the original Europe to Australia arc of his fictional narrator's family. In this respect there is no disjunction between the author and his main character. For Tsiolkas, as a Greek-Australian writer, this is the migratory path already established by his own family. Isaac Raftis, the first person narrator, is also the son of Greek migrants to Australia. When the colonels' right-wing

regime ascends to power, as a communist, Isaac's father has to flee from Greece and Isaac's parents ultimately migrate to Australia. After Isaac's father dies in Australia, the remaining family stays on in Sydney. As well as growing up as a child of immigrant parents in Australia, Isaac is doubly marginalised as he is also a homosexual. Isaac makes his living as a photographer. In recognition of Isaac's heritage, on his return to Greece, the Greek Ministry of Culture sponsors an exhibition of his work in an Athens gallery. Returning to Europe to open his exhibition in Athens, Isaac is confronted with the ambivalence of his identity as a part of the Greek diaspora.

> As I spoke of migration, the history of the Greeks in Australia, as I watched the happily nodding faces, I realised that nothing I said was of interest to them, that what they were seeing was some nervous young foreigner mangling their language and pretending to speak with commitment on a subject that had long ago become ossified. They were not interested in my return. I was not interested. I dribbled out in English, quoting Cavafy's 'Ithaka'. (37)

Later on, whilst visiting his mother's village, Isaac's sense of belonging to an imaginary Greek homeland is all the more destabilised.

It is in Greece he realises that "Australia is irrelevant to these modern Europeans" but that he resides in a continent where "we all ask ourselves where we come from" (35). Sorting through Isaac's photographs, a Greek journalist points to the photograph that he's taken of an Aboriginal boy who is standing in front of a Greek bomboniere store, "is he asking himself where he comes from?" she asks Isaac. "No," he ruefully replies, "he's asking me where I come from" (35). Later, whilst still in Greece, Isaac admits to his cousin Giulia that the aboriginal people are: "The only true Australians". Guilia taunts Isaac: "Good, she answered so you have finally realised that you are Greek?" Introducing Isaac to her friend Andreas, Guilia announces: "He keeps insisting he is not Greek, he is Australian". Turning towards him, laughing, Andreas also confronts Isaac's self conception: "That's preposterous. You are indeed a Greek. Not only physically but in your soul" (83). Further travels through Europe only alienate Isaac, promoting a delirium and a despair which bring about a moral and physical crisis that nearly costs him his life. He struggles to make sense of countries that are created from the turbulence of difference so as to manifest modernity's Western vision of homogenous nation-states. Isaac's secular cosmopolitanism cannot resolve the tensions of ethnic belonging created by these modern, self-contained nation-states. Such "artificial" nation-states seethe with divisions created by religion, ethnicity, class and economic privilege. Given these schisms, how does the modern day subject/citizen resolve his/her place of belonging in the world both globally and locally? For Isaac, deliverance comes in fleeing the Old World for the New World and seriously ill in

Europe, he is bought back to Australia. Isaac's release is reliant upon his return to the Australian haven that he shares with his same sex-lover.

The Maternal surrender

Even so, Isaac's resurrection is not just premised on his physical return and his healing also requires maternal sacrifice. Reveka, Isaac's mother, is the "real" familial parent but she also represents the archetypal "mother": mother as a metaphor of nation, a homeland which insists on ethnic absolutism and common origins. With his mother, in this fissure between the Old World and the New World, nestles Isaac's ancestral story and the memories of life with family and community, as well as connections to the sacred that sit uneasily within the Europeans' imagined simplicity of Australia. Isaac wonders how to tell the Europeans that he meets about "the xenophobia and suspicion of strangers that had long been part of the Australian character" (*Dead Europe 273)*. Trying to evade his parents' old friend, Gerry and his request for assistance for Sula, who is a refugee hiding in Paris, Isaac longs to "explain the difficulties now involved in attaining an Australian visa, an Australian identity" (273). He wants to tell Gerry "about the detention centres for asylum seekers" and "that this woman's life would be no better in Australia than it would be here. Not better, not more safe" (273).

For Julia Kristeva, those who subscribe to the cult of origins seek shelter "among their own" (*Nations* 3). But then, so as to submerge the conflicts that they experience with their own, they project them onto others—"the strangers":

> the cult of origins is a hate reaction. *Hatred of those others* who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally: I then move back among "my own, 'I stick to an archaic, primitive common denominator,' […] hoping they will be more trustworthy than 'foreigners'. (*Nations* 3)

Confronted with violence, human beings begin to question the tenuousness of their own survival and the validity of their own achievements. Thus, they remove themselves back into a sullen and "warm private world", returning to a space which is both "unnameable and biological". Kristeva calls this space the "weird primal paradise", which cleaves to the certainties of race, nation, and ethnicity (3). All of which have their origin in the notion of the biological family. In spite of Isaac's disclaimers, the Europeans persist in their vision of Australia as a haven. In Prague, Maria tells Isaac that "Australia seems a perfect place in which to finish one's life. I imagine it is a very quiet place, a very safe place" and then chides Isaac when he is embarrassed by her comment (*Dead Europe* 231).

Having come into his inheritance, once Isaac returns to Australia, he realises that he belongs to more than one history. For the Christian West, this history represents a collective narrative of hatred. But for Isaac, it has also a personal narrative that can only be redeemed by his mother's sacrifice. With her rests his first beginning and with her rests his salvation. Sooner or later, the "cult of origins", which is imbedded in both Isaac's personal and collective stories will lead to self-hatred. For Kristeva, the equal and opposite force in the "cult of origins" is the "hatred of origins" (*Nations* 3). Those who are driven by their "hatred of origins" prefer to flee, needing to "repress their roots" and to ignore where they have come from. Thus, unable to transcend or acknowledge their origins, they perpetuate their own self-hatred (4). For Isaac to become whole, to overcome his self-hatred, Reveka must make atonement both as the biological mother and as the symbolic, "archetypal" mother of nations.

Reveka's ancestral legacy resides in her village in Greece. Here, a curse is unleashed on her family because her father, Michaelis, (Isaac's grandfather) murders a young Jewish boy during World War 2. Michaelis has sworn to protect the boy and in exchange is paid with gold and precious stones. Reveka still carries the jewellery with her. Unbeknown to Michaelis, the Jewish boy is the father of his son and, incongruously, the baby bears the name of Christ—Christos. He is also Reveka's half-Jewish, half-brother. Outwardly devout Christians, Michaelis and his fellow villagers view Jews in the traditional way as diabolical Christ murderers. Discovering her daughter-in-law's deceit, Michaelis's mother murders the baby. But the baby is protected by the demon ghost of his murdered Jewish father who now wanders eternally disconsolate.

> Maritha placed a hand over Christos' mouth and with her other hand she pinched his nostrils shut. The demon awoke and his shrieks were thunder in her ears but she did not let go. It seemed to her that she lived infinite time in that room, in that moment, the demon attacking her, she murdering her grandson. She felt the boy's last breath, his last struggles, and then she felt his spirit rise. And then it was gone. The fiend had begun a piteous lament. (*Dead Europe* 175)

Here, the allegory of Jewish, Christ killers that has haunted the Jewish people for the history of Christianity is reversed. The Christian Maritha kills Christos and the fiend, the ghost of Christos's dead Jewish father, lives on to haunt Reveka. Even to the New World of Australia he pursues her.

Reveka is now old and failing but when Isaac brings back a photograph from Europe of his father's friend, she recognises it as a man who killed himself a long time ago. Then, he was known as the Hebrew. The Australians called him Gerry but his real name was Isaac (406). Suggesting a biblical genealogy—Isaac begat Isaac—Gerry's

real name is now Isaac's name also. But the question of whether Gerry is Isaac's real, Jewish father remains unanswered. As Isaac lies close to death, sustained by transfusions of her blood, Reveka ponders Gerry's photograph. She asks: "What odyssey have you been on, Isaac? How will I bring you back from the underworld? What am I required to sacrifice?"(406). Taking the jewellery with her, jewellery that was obtained by false promise and betrayal (given that her family murdered the Jewish boy) Reveka goes to the cemetery to find Gerry/Isaac's grave. There "she look[s] at his name, at her son's name" (410). She buries the jewels at his graveside, using a rock to erase the Hebrew's name as she makes her exchange with her Christian god vowing "if you save my son, Lord, she repeated, the Devil can have my soul" (410).

Through Reveka's gesture of erasure, Isaac's biblical genealogy is no longer commemorated on the Hebrew's gravestone. As of this moment, the taxonomy of the cult of origins and the hatred of origins is obliterated. Eventually, Isaac returns to good health but Reveka's knows that "she was never to see the light of the Saviour's face […] never again taste of His blood, partake of His flesh" (411). So, the ghost/fiend of the murdered Jew returns to embrace her, he kisses her again and again, "whispering her name, wrapping his slender, icy arms around her" (411). Not unaccompanied anymore but held close with mutual acknowledgement and recognition, he whispers to her, "not alone, but together. You and I, together, for all of time, for all of eternity" (411). Reveka's sacrifice requires that she become the Other, that she embrace the Jew. Given her cosmology as a devout Christian, Reveka knows that she can no longer aspire to salvation. All that remains is the eternal damnation of a half-life with the Other, as symbolised by the murdered Jew with whom she is bonded in perpetuity.

For Kristeva, it is the Christian religion which dominates the West as well as the secular thought that has replaced it, which have acted as the "efficient laboratories" where "identification hatred [can] be metabolized, without for that matter, voiding the commission of crimes" (*Nations* 4). Whether it is the cult of origins or the hatred of origins which motivates such crimes of commission or omission, the end result is the same and it "affects the core of the speaking being", which is split between "our symbolic identity", which ties us to "strong brotherly demands", and "our imaginary identity rooted in the original cell (family, race, biology)" (4). Isaac's restoration is premised on the healing that his mother effects for the core of his "speaking being". Life returns to him when his mother heals his "symbolic identity" by acknowledging brotherhood with the tormented ghost of the Jew with whom Isaac shares his ancestry.

In acknowledging the truth of her family's origins in violence and murder, Reveka also heals the self-hatred—the hatred of origins—that is perpetuated by denying history.

Perhaps this is at the heart of Colin's self-hatred. Colin is Isaac's Australian lover. He is only fifteen when his mother's boyfriend, Steve Ringo, takes him to a tattooist mate who carves "a swastika on the boy's right arm"—a tattoo which is still visible. Steve Ringo teaches Colin to read from the Bible and the doctrines of the Aryan nation. Hating its history and its power, Isaac threatens to leave his lover if he does not have his tattoo erased. Colin pleads with him, crying "I can't … This is my history and this is my shame" (*Dead Europe* 10). Seeing his lover's torment, Isaac stays. Later, Isaac asks Colin if he still hates the Jews and Colin replies: "No, no, I don't. I still envy the rich. I envy you wogs because you can be passionate and touch each other without cringing. But I don't envy the Jews. I've exiled myself from the Jews" (254). Tapping on his arm Colin indicates the damage he has inflicted on his symbolic identity: "This tattoo, it's never going to go away" (254). Responding to the wounding of his lover's symbolic identity which has been denied its "brotherly demands", Isaac grants him brotherhood and benediction.

> If with me Colin had found someone who is prepared to accept his shame, I now shared something of his exile. As I was holding him, loving him, my own dark arm brushed against his pale flesh, and his tattoo. The ink was on my skin too. (255)

Isaac's act of reconciliation is not one of sanction but of compassion as he recognises and acknowledges the moral damage inflicted on his lover as a damage which he also owns.

Racism, Anti-Semitism and The Spectre Of Otherness

In an interview with Patricia Cornelius, Tsiolkas admits that *Dead Europe* is informed by his experience growing up as a migrant child in Australia. Like the characters in *Dead Europe*, Tsiolkas experiences his abjection corporeally.

> I thought aspects of myself that were Greek were disgusting. I thought I was smelly. I thought I was hairy. I thought all those things because that's what was partly there at my time when I was growing up in the culture … I'm not saying I understand what it is to be someone who is not me but I do understand what it is to have something called racism do something to you and the way your psychology works and to your sense of self worth. ("Politics, Faith and Sex" 24)

Relating back to his migrant, European origins, Tsiolkas begins *Dead Europe* with Isaac's first person narration of the vicious anti-semitic tale that his mother used to tell him: "The first thing I was ever told about the Jews was that every Christmas they would take a Christian toddler, put it screaming in a barrel, run knives between the slats, and drain the child of its blood" (1). Where there are those would praise Australia's

European inheritance—Tsiolkas damns it. For him, the European inheritance is as poisonous as the anti-Semitic libel with which he begins his novel. Tsiolkas spares no-one and the Australian working class (including the migrant imports) get the same merciless going over.

Working on assignment at a Melbourne construction site, Isaac is never sure how much of what the workers say to him is truth or bait. On the building site, conversations go like this: "They should shoot fucking boat people, shoot any cunt illegally trying to get into this country. Too easy. We've made it too easy for them." Then there are the taunts about Abos and AIDS: "You take it up the arse Isaac? Watch it boys, he's got fucking AIDS." or "My son reckons he can't get into his course because they've got to take a percentage of fucking Aboriginals. I should paint my face black. If you're an Abo they give you everything" (*Dead Europe* 214-15). There are names like Steve, Greg and Mick among the workers but there are also Greek and Slav names and the eldest of the group is Maltese. Isaac is not repelled by his subjects as they taunt and tease him and the camera, sometimes turning their arses in denial, sometimes flexing their muscles. In such displays of highly charged masculinity the homoerotic is at always at hand. Isaac develops his proofs at a safe distance, examining the photos of the "strong-armed" and "strong-willed men" like the professional voyeur that he is (215). But he also finds desire on the worksite, something that he captures in his shot of Colin who soon becomes his lover. Colin is working class, red haired and freckled, marked by his Celtic inheritance. Isaac argues with his lecturer who wants him to exhibit his photographs without the captions with which he has labelled them. "Fuck Democracy" is the caption underneath Colin's photo; "Asians Out" is the caption below Yianni's; "That One Deserves to Get Raped" shows Steve and Mick jack hammering; "Six Million Was Not Enough" introduces Slavko and Greg sitting on a beam above the city (215).

But if Tsiolkas damns the Australian working class then Robert Manne in turn damns Tsiolkas. Arguably Australia's leading Jewish intellectual, Manne finds the argument of the book "repellent and unpersuasive". Reviewing *Dead Europe*, what disturbs Manne is:

> the discursive role assumed in it by "the Jew". There is nothing in the novel that resists the idea of the Jews as a single united group and as cultural burden. Its energy and interest frequently rely on injecting, crudely and ambiguously, some of the oldest and most consequential anti-Semitic libels—the vengeful Jew; the diabolical Jew: the bloated capitalist Jew; the Jewish curse; the world power of the Jews. ("Dead Disturbing" 53)

Manne is right to be concerned and Isaac's visit to Czechoslovakia helps prove his point. Isaac travels to Prague but he had been there before during the time that "the Velvet Revolutions had just spread through Eastern Europe", when he "fell in love with a European city that had just emerged from a fairytale: Sleeping Beauty awoken from a nightmare of forty years" (179). During his earlier visit Isaac mocked the American students attired in Nike shorts and Gap t-shirts as he heard them debating "the backwardness of the former communist states. Warsaw, they were braying loudly, was much more advanced than Prague, for it had three McDonald's restaurants and they had found no difficulty in using their Visa card" (180). Caught up in the early, heady days of freedom Isaac scorns the Yanks since he is convinced that Czechoslovakia will become the symbol of "the new way forward […] a democratic socialism without totalitarianism and a liberal acceptance that would be the envy of all of Europe" (180).

Yet, during this visit Isaac finds the Czech fairytale betrayed by capitalism. Sal Mineo, Isaac's Australian photographer friend now works in Prague. Once a talented artist Sal now prostitutes his talent photographing pornography. He introduces Isaac to Syd, who is his boss. As the carrier of the disease which has now ineradicably leached through Prague, Syd is the emblematic figure of the capitalist betrayal and exploitation. Sal describes Syd as "a big fat Jew cunt" and calls him "King Kike" (180, 197). Hugely wealthy, Syd is the fattest man that Isaac has ever seen: gross, loathsome and sated with profits from Prague's sex industry. Sensing that Isaac judges him because he works for Syd, Sal tells Isaac "this isn't Australia […] so don't fucking get moralistic on me" (201). As for Syd, Sal has this to offer:

> "You think that Syd gives a fuck being called a kike? You think that Syd is anything like those faggot Jew boys we knew back at college? Syd never went to fucking college. His old man's still in jail for murdering a man. Syd's probably done a few hits himself. You got a problem with that?" (201)

Manne's argument that Tsiolkas invokes "some of the oldest and most consequential anti-Semitic libels: the vengeful Jew; the diabolical Jew: the bloated capitalist Jew", gains credence with Syd's portrayal (53).

Compare this with the stereotypes of the Jew as represented in *Der Ewige Jude (*Hippler*)*. Made on the insistence of Joseph Goebbels, *Der Ewige Jude* was the Nazis' most famous propaganda film against the Jews. Initially, the film sought to mobilise German anti-Semitism with genocidal intentions. Later, it was distributed in America with the title *The Eternal Jew*. Today, within Germany the use of the film is tightly controlled. However, in the United States, the film still has rights of legal distribution and has attained cult status amongst neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic groups all over the world

(Lieb, “Nazi Hate Movies” 216). Below are seven stills from the film with their accompanying narration (translated into English) as presented on the *Holocaust History Project* website

Fig. 12. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 1

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Narration: This parasitical Jewish race is responsible for most international crime. In 1932, Jews, only 1 per cent of the world's population, accounted for [...] 47 per cent of crooked games of chance.

Fig. 13. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 2

Narration: 82 percent of international crime organizations

Fig. 14. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 3

Narration: 98 percent of prostitution.

Fig. 15. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 4

Narration: While millions of established Germans were unemployed and in misery, immigrant Jews acquired fantastic riches in a few—not by honest work, but by usury, swindling, and fraud.

Fig. 16. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 5

Narration: Under the cloak of ingenious or even learned discussion

Fig. 17. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 6

Narration: they meant to turn mankind's healthier instincts

Fig. 18. “Der Ewige Jude” — Still 7

Narration: down degenerate paths.

(“Der Ewige Jude”)

Revelling in the profits of pornography and sex, Syd exploits Prague’s underclass in his brothels and nightclubs, growing rich on their misery and wretchedness. Syd’s family are not Prague Jews, they are “from little old Pilsen” and they are no longer living (*Dead Europe* 217). Maria, who is both friend and whore for Syd, tells Isaac that his family is “Dead. Assassinated. Murdered” (218). Consequently, once Syd launches into a diatribe about Prague—“Imagine this city covered in my shit. This city of spires and cathedrals and testimonials, imagine it covered in my shit. Imagine them all choking from my shit. That’s what I would like to do to Prague”—it is questionable whether Syd is motivated by greed or vengeance (219). Isaac listens when Syd speaks as the vengeful Jew.

> “I am the real Jew, mate … You don’t know Jews do you? You think we should be the nice old fella in the back of the store, wouldn’t hurt a fucking fly. Salt of the earth and God’s chosen people. I’m not that kind of Jew, cunt. That kind of *mumza* Jew is finished. I hope that mumza has gone forever. (220)

Afterwards, Maria tells Isaac that if he knew that she and her son were Jewish, Syd would not employ them as whores in his brothels. Tsiolkas uses Jewish identity as a

metaphor to depict a present-day crisis, principally in Europe, but also within Australia, it is with Syd's portrayal in particular, that concerns escalate regarding Tsiolkas's use of anti-Semitism to explore the calamity of the Other.

The brief glimpse of *Der Ewige Jude* in this chapter shows that given recent European history, as well as the present-day increase in European neo-Nazi groups, Tsiolkas is treading on very dangerous ground indeed. Robert Manne was not alone in his strong response to the novel. The novel's perceived anti-Semitic themes also elicit ambivalent responses from other critics. Catherine Padmore found *Dead Europe* to be "a disturbing and difficult book" but one which nonetheless, remains "firmly lodged" in her consciousness ("Future Tense" 434). Ken Gelder identifies *Dead Europe* as a source of "heated debate" (*After the Celebration* 18). Equally, Les Rosenblatt observes that Tsiolkas's Jews "are not people one can feel any pity or sympathy for" thus it becomes easy to see them as "disposable human beings of little worth" ("A Place Where Wolves Fuck" 79). In actual fact, Tsiolkas's stance is much more complex. When he attends the launch of the *Dead Europe,* he is at pains to explain that it is anti-Semitic fears and hatreds of the past which animate the European racist hatreds of today (79). For Tsiolkas, the anti-Semite seems "to always be the other, it was never who we are" (Padmore, "Interview with Christos Tsiolkas" 448). *Dead Europe* urges against the moral failure of such non-accountability. Confronting the reader with abhorrent characters, Tsiolkas demands that we become our own as well as our brothers' keeper. Besides, if *Dead Europe* is simplistically read as anti-Semitic, then there would not be a constant parallel motif running through the novel about who is Jewish and who is not. Jewish and Christian bloodlines and names, intertwine throughout the novel to create complex lineages (Padmore, "Blood, Land and Ghosts." 54). Frequently, these threads make readers question Isaac's own origins, hinting that he too may be Jewish (59). Even the poisonous Syd recognises Isaac as a Jew and has difficulty accepting Isaac's denial (*Dead Europe* 218).

Tsiolkas goes on to write that Syd "is obsessed with taking revenge on history" (232). But history does not need Syd's help. According to Tsiolkas, history has already taken its revenge and Western Europe is now a "blasted ideal of a continent" (Falconer 24). The odyssey of the anti-hero, Isaac, makes a mockery of the tourist brochure travelogue of Europe. Recorded in the photographs he takes, Isaac's European idyll is not muted by the shades of tourist Provencal and Tuscan sentimentality. Acting as a metaphor for Isaac's despairing vision, the motif of the narrative depiction of photography immerses the reader in a wretched geography. Peter Davis draws a

distinction between the actual physical immersion of a photograph in an imaginative text and the "narrated photograph", which employs narrative to insert a photograph (or the act of taking a photograph) into a text ("Double Gazing and Novel Spaces"). As a key device for representing the "blasted ideal of a continent" back to the reader, the narrated photograph in *Dead Europe* acts as a photographic filter superimposed upon reality. In *On Photography,* Susan Sontag theorises what it means to continually mediate reality and experience via the insertion of a photographic image.

> A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights – to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on. Our very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera's interventions … This, in turn, makes it easy to feel that any event, once underway, whatever its moral character, should be allowed to complete itself – so that something else can be bought into the world, the photograph. After the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring onto the event a kind of immortality. (11)

Capturing photographs which he recreates in words, Tsiolkas uses his authorial gaze to invade and intervene in Isaac's odyssey, thus creating the inevitability of the European unconscious in the present. Here, following Sontag, photography allows an event, once underway, "whatever its moral character" to complete itself, so that "something else can be bought into the world". In *Dead Europe* it is the dystopic present which is the culmination of the hellishness of European history.

Numbing themselves into neo-liberal materiality, this is a history and a present which Europeans choose not to make conscious. But, as Isaac's camera records it, this is a moral event that is already and inevitably underway. Rather than camera work, Isaac's journey more properly owes its antecedents to Hieronymus Bosch – that painter of grotesque images depicting sin and moral failure. Isaac is crossing through, "Ghosts. Blood and land and ghosts" (90). Isaac explains: "Every photograph is an apology, every photograph I take is an act of contrition before a mocking and malignant God. With every shot His laughter rings out" (304). For Isaac this is a passage from this world to that which is to come. Here, Europe becomes a haunted landscape, where the real and unreal, the past and present, flesh and spirit, the dead and the undead, mingle and merge. As he travels through hell photographing the delirium of his progress, Isaac sublimates the death drives that he witnesses. He contains these urges within his art. At one of the oldest remaining ghettos in Europe—the Venice ghetto—Isaac stumbles upon the ugly remnants of the European chthonic spirit, unleashed and turned political. As bidden by a mute and aged Jew, he photographs the legacy.

> A black swastika was scrawled in thick brushstrokes on a peeling whitewashed wall. He pointed to my camera. He wanted me to take the photograph. I shot the photograph. He took me through the ghetto, all the while pointing at graffiti and

> wordlessly commanding me to take photographs of it. It was mostly swastikas. (150-51)

Subsequently encountering bodies, Isaac pursues them so as to capture their images but they vanish before him and ghosts appear in his photographs. He takes pictures of real people who transform into corpses (52, 134, 303). Similarly, in Paris Isaac takes photographs of the immigrant men who work in Gerry's warehouse, African men, and Arabs, men with names like Mohammed, Ibrahim or Hussein. When he develops the photographs he finds that:

> [t]heir faces are contorted into death masks of sullen despair, of unbearable anguish and never-ending grief. Those morose faces turned towards the lens are countenances pleading for a great silence: they are doomed. [Gerry's] face is not proud, it is not welcoming my mother's gaze into his European world. There is no expression on his face, it can't be read. He is Charos. (303)

Tsiolkas demands that the reader comprehend the inevitable reoccurrence of the chthonic drives of the human psyche. Reviewing his photographs, Isaac's mother, Reveka, understands that the camera cannot hide these death drives in the dark underbelly of the new Europe: "Could Colin not see the truth of the photographs? Isaac had not photographed the past, he had captured the future" (405). The carcasses and ghosts that Isaac captures are not only from the past, they are also the present-day hauntings of the displaced, the stateless refugee and the colonial refugee. In his reading of *Dead Europe*, Nick Mansfield turns to Derrida to explain that the ghost "is a remnant from the past, unresolved and unassimilable coming to us from the future" (1).

"My father bleeds history"[1]

As well as the murderous legacy of his mother's family history, Isaac has a second legacy to confront in Europe, his father's politics, which brought about the family's exile to Australia. Giulia, his cousin, has given him his father's Greek Communist Party membership badge which she has saved for him and which he treasures.

> I took that pin with me across Yugoslavia beginning its descent into civil war, through Hungary and Czechoslovakia just emerging back into history. I travelled with through Italy, Germany and France, flew with it from London to Melbourne. (9)

But there is no good book to accompany Isaac on his journey, nor can he draw comfort from the heaven on earth of a communist utopia. Both his father's creed—Marxist politics—and his mother's creed—religion—have failed him. Now, in Europe Isaac encounters the devastation of both aborted attempts at human deliverance. Believing in nothing, Isaac becomes a voyeur consuming experience, drugs, blood and bodies. An itinerant, rootless traveller, Isaac carries with him the two stigmata of the modern history of Europe: anti-Semitism and the communist failure. For Isaac, these two things

represent both a public and a private, familial wounding. Both are "in the skin" like Colin's swastika tattoo and the tattoos on the body of the male prostitute that Isaac procures. Like the body of the prostitute, this Europe that Isaac travels through, has a tattoo of the Nazi Iron cross on its belly and a tattoo of the warm proud face of Stalin on its back. Polluted to the core, this is a Europe which trades in the flesh of the exploited, global underclass of stateless refugees. Bodies are everywhere, stinking, fucking, dying, bleeding. Here is the failure of Judeo-Christianity, the Enlightenment, of the nation state, and the triumph of global capitalism.

Known (ironically) as Lucky, Isaac's father is a Cold War warrior exiled to Australia because of his membership of the Greek Communist Party. After the Colonels are deposed in Greece, he spends a whole summer in Australia planning the family's return. Isaac listens to his father talk about Europe.

> He told us about Paris and Berlin, real cities … He spoke about his own home Thessaloniki, how it was the most beautiful city in Greece … He said how he would take me on a walk under the Alexandrian Arch that was over two thousand years old … What does this country have to offer that is that old? Nothing. Fucking nothing. We are going back to real history. Greece is free again. (6)

By the time autumn comes, all talk of return to the homeland has ceased. Embittered by exile, unable to undertake the odyssey of return, Isaac's father dies in Australia as a heroin addict. Before his decline, countering his wife's anti-semitic talk, Lucky tells Isaac that "Jews have my eyes and my nose and my hair and my chin and we may all even share some of the same blood. I grew up with Jews and Jews were my friends" (4). Reveka's creed is Christianity and Lucky condemns her: "Your mother is a peasant. Scared of everything she doesn't know. And she knows nothing about Jews" (5). Lucky has premised his life's meaning on a secular salvation—the brotherhood of a workers' paradise and the world-wide communist triumph.

But, by the end of his life Lucky starts "going a little mad … He obsesses about the collapse of history, the disintegration of the Soviet Union" (94). Using heroin to numb the pain, Lucky watches television continuously, condemning the news as propaganda and telling Isaac that the heroin is "Jew powder […] Rich man's powder […] to keep us numb, to keep us under control". Lucky's tirade escalates as he blames the Jews for the Communist collapse: "Fucking Jews, fucking traitors, they betrayed us. After all we did for them, after all the Party did for them. Fucking traitorous cunts, that's what they are" (94). As per its failure of the Soviet Union, for Lucky, Marxism is now reduced to the pedalling of anti-Semitic slander. Despite Reveka's pleadings, when Lucky dies, Isaac and his sister Sophie honour his wishes for a secular burial on

unconsecrated ground. They have his gravestone inscribed with his name, the dates of his birth, his death, and with the words—husband, father and worker—all written in Greek. Unable to persuade the stonemason to carve the hammer and the sickle into the stone, Sophie and Isaac paint the symbol crudely on the headstone using Sophie's nail polish. Yet like the utopia it sought to foretell "the symbol wash[es] away in the first rain" (8).

Witnessing the failure of Judeo-Christianity and Marxism to morally regulate the new Europe, Isaac returns to discover that capitalism and consumerism have taken on the social function of religion. Here Prada, Gucci, Versace and credit cards serve as the new religious symbols which have become the collective representation of the collective reality. These new religious representations require the endless absorption of new clothing, adornments and new consumption patterns, new patterns which change nations. Consumerism has taken on the purpose of evoking, maintaining, or recreating the mental state of the new European citizen. Accordingly, the mobile European professional class, living under the dubious blessings of neo-liberal economics and globalisation, anaesthetize the meaningless of their existence. Andreas compares his substances of choice with Giulia: "I prefer my Ecstasy from Holland, he explained. People swear by London and Barcelona but in my experience that is not the case at all. I think it is Amsterdam for LSD and for Ecstasy" (82). Meantime, the stateless refugees—displaced because of the communist collapse—and the colonial refugees—displaced because of imperial exploitation—arrive to haunt the streetscapes of the European metropole. These are the new colonial armies arriving at the gateway, underpaid and undocumented and always held at arm's length from inclusion in citizenship and national belonging. As well, there are the metropole's "own" marginalised and homeless: the necessary by product of the collapse of welfare state politics and the triumph of global capitalism.

Confronted with spiritual despair, for Isaac the only response to the European crises is crazed consumption, an orgiastic immersion in the religious marketplace on offer in Amsterdam:

> I will look on at a young African woman, her cunt shaved, cupping her mammoth breasts in her hands, and it will make me laugh … I will walk among schizophrenic homeless men and women and their snarls for money will appal me and I will understand the urge to wipe this wretched scum from the earth. I will enter a porn cinema and have sex with three men, a German, an Italian and a Korean. (302)

Under imperialism, it was the modern Europeans who forced non-Europeans to participate in a system that alienated them under the "dominant selfhood of the

European "'I'" (Manoochehri 292). For Abbas Manoochehri, it is the actualisation of the modern European self through "striving to achieve" which has created the "wretched of the earth" (293). It is these abject ones, displayed in death, pimped and prostituted that Isaac records. These are the unresolved ghosts that Mansfield identifies, ghosts from the past "returning" to the present to create the future. In *Dead Europe* these unresolved ghosts return to the metropolitan centres of power to be newly subjugated in impoverished, ethnically or racially segregated ghettos. Socially excluded, denied rights of citizenship, living on the margins without papers, these "wretched of the earth" supply the new capitalist demand for cheap, unregulated labour and when they cannot work, they whore, indentured to the European flesh trade in a new form of slavery.

For the modern European, God was declared dead and the synthetic religion of Reason arrived to solve the problem of private and public morality. A cultural reorientation was required wherein the modern European's conception of the world was changed. This rationalization of life and the life world bought into being "the economy, politics and culture" (291). The capitalist economy, the bureaucratic system and secular culture are now the new pillars of being in the world (293). In the schism created between the Old World and the New World, principles deriving from the Enlightenment such as "the meaning of being", "justice", "and freedom" were accorded different meanings across the dominant or dominated poles of the new global order of modernity. Where is the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* now? In the aftermath of the 20th century, given the ravages of Stalinism and Fascism, the exploitations and injustices of colonialism, how does the West restore its history? Are these the "progressive" and totalising outcomes of European secular thought? Given its moral failure how does the West declare its triumph, maintaining that it should be the refined culture of Europe and North America against which all other cultures should be measured? Can Francis Fukuyama declare "The End of History" and claim liberal democracy may constitute "the endpoint of mankind's evolution" and the "final form of human government" (*The End of History and the Last Man* xx-xxi). Given the failure of the European liberal democracies to deal with their past omissions, as well as their current commissions in the service of neo-liberal capitalist markets, who will become "last man standing" (xx)? With *Dead Europe*, Tsiolkas shouts these questions to the reader, his perspective revealed by the novel's frontispiece: a full cover image of a half-human face, green-hued, wildly screaming.

Sacred and Profane Cosmologies

In spite of his despair, Isaac does not appear to come easily to religion as the answer. During a crazed semi-visionary euphoria in Paris, he mocks the co-operative co-existence of the three great monotheistic religions.

> I take a photograph of two Arab men smoking cigarettes in a Halal pizza shop. There is no God but Allah and his Prophet is Mohammed. I shoot the luminous spires of Notre Dame. Jesus Christ was the Son of God crucified and Resurrected on the third day in order to redeem us from sin. I capture the Hebrew lettering on the windows of a bakery in an alley off the Bastille. There is one God and the Jews are his Chosen People. The savage mythologies of ignorant, obsolete tribes. (302)

Yet, Isaac cannot exceed the force of what Kristeva calls his own cult of origins or, its equally powerful opposite, the hatred of origins. In seeking to find a moral resolution to his journey through Europe, Isaac finds that both faith and political meaning fail him. However, he too is fatally ensnared in the Western telling of its myths. Ultimately, Isaac can only return to the cosmologies he has inherited to make sense of his experience. Unable to validate the capacity of neo-liberal capitalism to shore up a threatened social order, Isaac does turn to religion but his return is hugely problematic. Isaac's return is not premised on the religiosity of the MacWorld of Hillsong, nor the faith of the Christian right, who currently use religion to justify the new Pauline doctrine of global capitalism and its trade in people.

Even if religion is the breeding ground that feeds Kristeva's cult of origins and hatred of origins Isaac is unable to find meaning with secular cosmopolitanism and consumer culture and is forced back to Christian spirituality. Thus, in the end, in both its heart and structure, *Dead Europe* becomes a profoundly religious novel. The introductory epigraph to *Dead Europe* is about the mercy of God, the first chapter/section is titled *Ante-Genesis*, the second section is titled *Apocrypha*, the last section is called the *Book of Lilith*, and the last chapter is titled *Atonement*. Rosenblatt describes Isaac's odyssey as a "Judeo-Christian devil's jumping castle submerged in excrement, blood and foul vapours" ("A Place Where Wolves Fuck" 48). He correctly identifies the odyssey of the novel as having it antecedents in the Roman church. *Dead Europe* is a "passion" in literature and here the need is to resort to Derrida's definition to properly locate this terrain. Derrida describes seven seals of "passion" which can briefly be summarized as follows:

> '**PASSION'** first implies a history in literature that displays itself *as such* in Christian culture. Literature forced upon the land of Christian passion-more precisely, in its Roman period-linked to the history of rights, of the State, of property, then of modern democracy in its Roman model as well as its Greek one, linked to the history of secularisation which takes over from sacrality, before and through the Enlightenment, linked to the history of the novel and of Romanticism.
>
> **PASSION** also implies the experience of love … inseparable from the desire to avow, from the confessional testimony and from truthfulness, from *telling the other everything* and *identifying with everything*, with everyone, opening up thus new problems of responsibility before the law and beyond the rights of the state.
>
> **PASSION …** implies liability that is imputability, culpability, responsibility …
>
> **PASSION** implies an engagement that is assumed in pain and suffering …
>
> **PASSION** always implies martyrdom … A passion always testifies.
>
> (Blanchot and Derrida *The Instant of My Death/Demeure* 27)

Dead Europe engages deeply with this legacy, testifying in pain and suffering to an allegorical "History of the West".

The narrative structure of the *Dead Europe* serves as one example of this testimony. The novel is organised between two strands which move the reader backwards and forwards through time. One strand begins in the brutal and archaic Greek peasant past which is ruled by a medieval Christian cosmology. We begin in "sacral" time where Christian mythology renders meaningful a brutalised existence of curses, blood vengeance, ghosts, witches, murder and rape. This is what Walter Benjamin calls "Messianic time" as signalled by Auerbach (qtd in Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 29). Here, the sacrifice of Isaac prefigures the sacrifice of Christ. All is linked to Divine Providence where everything that has been, is and will be. This narrative strand represents the Old Testament thread of *Dead Europe.* Tsiolkas skilfully moves this strand into the historical realities of modern Europe, to collide with the second narrative which details Isaac's journey. This is the New Testament narrative of the novel. I mentioned earlier that in Messianic time the death of Isaac prefigures the coming of Christ, who takes on the sins of mankind so as to atone for them. Accordingly, Isaac becomes the grunge Christ for a new millennium: drug-fucked and predatory as he bears witness to his brothers' suffering.

Speaking in first person narrative, Isaac's voice implicates us in the horrifying responsibility of being our brother's keeper and what Kristeva identifies as the brotherly demands of our symbolic identity. Isaac rages and lusts as he watches the Jewish brothel owner Syd with one of his boy prostitutes:

> I wanted to kill the filthy fat fuck … the urge was my very soul. But I knew that however primal the urge to kill and to rip the flesh and skin off the Jew, it was nothing compared to my envy of him. I wished it could be me, that it was I who would be taking this little boy, that it was I. (229)

For Isaac there is no easy answer, no way of putting the sin out there upon the Other. This is the true testimony of the metaphor of Christ taking on the sins of the world. Here is the real and terrible suffering of taking on the sin of the paedophile and the racist—of *becoming* the paedophile and the racist. Robert Manne is right—Isaac implicates the reader in "some of the oldest and most consequential anti-Semitic libels" but these are slanders which are implicit in the Christian community of the last millennium. These are collective sins, not merely Isaac's. On the other hand, Manne misreads the passion of the Christian metaphor of atonement where the passion of love brings new responsibility before the law and beyond the rights of the state. Even so, *Dead Europe* is not some sort of homage to enlightened Christianity. Rather, Tsiolkas simultaneously borrows from and subverts Christian-Roman metaphors and meaning. Within the negating discourse of Christian anti-Semitism, Tsiolkas poses the challenging and resisting discourse of symbolic brotherhood. Without the poisoned myth of the Jews betraying Christ, the murderous European excesses of anti-Semitism would not have been possible. The Jews were Europe's first stateless people and as such represent the very first global diaspora.

In his interview with Patricia Cornelius, as a homosexual, Tsiolkas identifies with the characters in *Dead Europe*:

> It's only in terms of a religious position that you can understand a moral condemnation of homosexuality. I am not espousing it … *Dead Europe* is a book that argues that because of the choices my characters make about the nature of their lives, they're always going to be exiled from the monotheistic God, and that's an aspect of Judaic, Islamic and Christian faith that I think is almost impossible to overcome. (23)

In *Dead Europe*, Tsiolkas makes the vampire his unsanctioned literary emblem, as the symbol of this "dangerous alterity" which represents "a direct threat to established systems of social order" (Huggan, "Vampires, again" 192). Gelder asserts that the vampire has long been associated with anti-Semitic representations of displaced Eastern European Jews (*After the Celebration* 226). Similarly, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines a vampire as the restless soul of the heretic, criminal or suicide. It is in the interests of these "undead" that Tsiolkas invents a new Eucharist—a new sacramental or memorial re-enactment which says "This is my body" and "This is my blood." There are surreal moments in the novel when Isaac is overcome by bloodlust and feeds vampire-like on the blood of others (*Dead Europe* 257-59). After feasting on Anika's blood he tells us, "There is poetry after Auschwitz: I can taste a juicy drop of Anika's blood on the bottom of my upper lip" (299).

Here we collide with Theodor Adorno who said that it was barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz (qtd in Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* 3). Ulrich Beck takes this even further by stating that "the contrary also holds: all poems speak or remain silent about Auschwitz" (3). Born a Jew in 1903, Adorno saw the enlightenment project as powerless against the rise of fascism. By 1929, when *Nosferatu* the classic vampire film was made, the Weimar republic had become "an explosive melting pot of political extremism, rampant inflation, rigid authoritarianism and moral and social decay (Koller, "Shadow of the Vampire"). Confronted with participating in Isaac's journey through *Dead Europe* we too realise that this past may not be past—that it may not even be dead yet. As Tsiolkas warns us, the West's "last men standing" may yet become vampires feasting on the blood of others; they may well reinvent the Hegelian master/slave relationship in new and more barbarous ways. The primacy of the West and Europe needs to be rethought, the faiths and loves embedded in the nation and religion need to be reassessed so that the twenty first century does not become "the reactional domain of fundamentalisms, religious illusions and ethnic wars" (Kristeva, *Nations* 69). But Tsiolkas warns us that if we only seek the answers in the political and religious cosmologies of the past, they will inevitably fail us.

Queerly Masculine

One of the questions this part of the thesis began with, was whether Dessaix's *Night Letters* and Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* could be said to be working "*in, from,* or *as,* [Q]ueer theory" (Kiley). In Dessaix's case, the definitions of Queer Theory proposed by the theorists quoted in the last chapter were applied so as to firmly state that *Night Letters does* work with Queer Theory even if it does so subversively. Dessaix's nomination to the category of working in Queer Theory is far more likely to be contentious than that of Christos Tsiolkas. Partly, this is due to Dessaix's establishment status as well as the perception that he epitomises "[t]he distinctly Eurocentric and bourgeois construction of 'gay' identity" which Tsiolkas condemns ("Raining on your parade" 15). Young and radical is the unspoken subtext that comes with working in Queer Theory. Being identified as a pioneer in grunge fiction grants Tsiolkas a young and hip status.[2] In fairness, however, the same application of theoretical definition to novel needs to be undertaken with *Dead Europe* as well.

Certainly, Tsiolkas does "denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relations between them" (Sullivan 81). In *Dead Europe,* such signifiers depict orders that can barely be contained by realism. Instead,

they seethe and slide "in ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (Berry and Jagose 11). Similar to the experience of "The Ride", which was described in the thesis introduction, this traverse threatens to spin the novel's literary universe into textual delirium. Nearly everything that Tsiolkas creates within this literary universe appears to be "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin, *Saint Foucault* 62). But "the promise of new meanings, new ways of thinking and acting politically" is never realised (Duggan 11). *Dead Europe* is doggedly dystopic because its European reality and history present "neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics" (Jagose 96). The novel is also "open-ended, multiple, playful" —where "play" is presented in its very darkest sense—echoing Rosenblatt's description of *Dead Europe* as "a Judeo-Christian devil's jumping castle submerged in excrement, blood and foul vapours" (Matthews xvi; "A Place Where Wolves Fuck" 48). All things considered and taking into account that Queer Theory also has a dark sense, *Dead Europe* does work "*in, from,* or *as,* [Q]ueer theory" (Kiley).

The other question that this part of thesis asked, was whether Dessaix's *Night Letters* and Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* broaden conceptions of Australian masculinity. At the end of the last chapter, in Dessaix's instance, the answer was a definite yes. Dessaix's gay, bourgeois male figure, R., is shown to be mortally wounded and destabilised during his European journey. Using his "real" European journey as the model for *Night Letters*, Dessaix admits that once he received his HIV positive diagnosis, he struggled with his mental health, trying not give way "to fear and grief and despair"(Margetts). Equally, Tsiolkas admits that whilst writing *Dead Europe* he was "wrestling with demons" and that he was "in turmoil and despair" (Baum, "The Passion" 28). *Dead Europe* has had wide literary exposure and was lauded (as well as condemned) by critics.[3] This brought the book to the attention of a large audience. From different perspectives and for different reasons, both Dessaix and Tsiolkas depict masculinity in existential crisis, a masculinity which is the very antithesis of that depicted in Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*. Dessaix tries to return R. to the outmoded certainties of European high culture, only to have R. admit that this has been as purposeful as "visiting the grandparents". Extending the analogy, R. explains that in Europe he has been with people who "haven't the faintest idea about, let alone respect for; the things that move *you* and they are never going to change" (*Night Letters* 270). Tsiolkas returns Isaac to Europe, only to bring him to the point of physical and spiritual collapse. Both *Night Letters* and *Dead Europe* place a disoriented Australian male into a globalised (albeit European) world where "the old categories of class, nationality

identity and sexuality mean less, and more than they once did" (Falconer 24). The confident, independent male who stands as a trope of the Australian "values" upon which Australian nationhood is predicated, is thus cast adrift: proving himself in a new world order to be incompetent, vulnerable and desperately wounded—deprived and in need of spiritual renewal. Perhaps, in a new millennium, it is only a queer masculinity which can express this angst.

Fig. 19. Alexis Wright as pictured on the website for Ozarts www.ozarts.com.au/artists/alexis_wright.

6

Burdened by History:

Alexis Wright

> Aboriginal people are still being forced to hold much of their contact history with white people locked away inside themselves. The best parallel which describes that hidden history is to say it is trapped like a bunch of angry hornets inside Pandora's Box. There is a big lock on the outside of this box that white people have slapped a label on called 'reconciliation'. Constraining the sting of the memory of a painful and shameful history will only make it grow more poisonous. All Aboriginal people need to be free to stand up without fear and to be able to tell their own stories themselves ... Every day I hope that some day social justice and the Indigenous rights of Aboriginal people will be a reality.
>
> Alexis Wright, *Grog War* x

Whiteness, Blackness, Aboriginality and Indigeneity

As Ferrier rightly points out, Whiteness theory has been developed specifically "in and for the United States, and is marked by aspects of the particular features of race relations there" ("White Blindfolds" 44). Whiteness, Ferrier goes on to say, is "variable, historical and subjective" (44). Similarly, Anne Brewster observes that Whiteness studies in Australia have evolved along a different trajectory to the US: "Much of the mainstream work by whiteness theorists in the US takes little account of the presence and status of American indigenous peoples. In Australia, by contrast, the field of whiteness studies has been very visibly convoked by Indigenous scholars" ("Writing Whiteness" 5). In *Australian Literature: Post Colonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*, Graham Huggan devotes a whole chapter to "Interrogating Whiteness" wherein he identifies two main strands in Whiteness studies. The first of which, urges "the abolition of whiteness as the shameful legacy of formerly segregated societies" while the second aims "to forge more critically conscious understandings of whiteness as an empowering form of ethnic self-identity" (71).

For Ruth Frankenberg, "the formation of specifically white subject positions has in fact been key, at times as cause and at times as effect, to the socio-political processes inherent in taking land and making nations" (2). Post World War 2, dark-skinned

Europeans and Lebanese immigrants to Australia struggled to establish their Whiteness (*White Nation*, Hage 58). Nowadays, the immigrant problem of Australian Whiteness is constructed around Asians and "Third world looking people" who have to work harder at establishing a claim to national belonging than do migrants of either Southern and Northern European descent (18). Within Australia, migrants—particularly if they are not of Northern European descent—are not considered especially "white" but can occupy graduations of "Whiteness". More recently, Australia Muslims are being grouped together as non-white no matter what their skin colour. Arguing that "Whiteness itself is a fantasy position" and refusing to define it only in terms of skin colour, Hage proposes that up to a certain point "Whiteness and Australianness can be accumulated" (20). People can be said to be "more or less White and Australian" depending on the social and physical attributes that they chose to acquire or that they already possess (20). Blackness in Australia is something different yet again, not operating merely in binary opposition to Whiteness, it too carries graduations of meaning. Today, Australians who are considered truly black are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations (20).

Does black equate to "Indigenous"? Aileen Moreton-Robinson challenges this interpretation: "I use the term 'Indigenous women' to refer to Aboriginal women who identify as such and are accepted by the community as such. I do not include Torres Strait Islander women as Indigenous women, even though they are indigenous to the Torres Straits, as this would be culturally inappropriate (187). For this author of *Talkin' up to the white woman* (1997), an important study of white Australian feminism as seen from the perspective of Indigenous women, "white" as a "skin colour is the objectifying difference in the social construction of 'race'" (xvi). Within contemporary Australia, the act of identification as white or black or, using "the complex and problematic identifiers Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, Indigenous and non-Indigenous", needs to be undertaken with care (Baker, Gumillya and Worby 17). Aboriginality, which has more than seventy legal definitions, is considered by Marcia Langton to be: "mutually defining and born of a constitutive relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (qtd in Baker, Gumillya and Worby 25). Scholars such as Haydie Gooder and Jane Jacobs, go to some lengths to explain their uses of such terms:

> We use the terms 'Indigenous Australians' or 'Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders' to describe the colonised groups of Australia, well aware that the terms 'indigene' and 'Indigenous Australian' have only recently come into use and are very likely related to pan-indigeneity movements. We do not mean to thereby shun specific identifications, but to indicate that in the context of

> contemporary restructurings of national subjectivity, the idea of indigeneity has come to have great importance. (230)

Some descendants of the original British settlers and more recent immigrants, now define themselves negatively as "non-indigenes" in relation to the more positive term "Indigenous" (230). On the other hand, there are others who see no place for markers such as Aboriginality and Aboriginal, viewing these terms "as markers of those characteristic functions of the dominant society—homogenization and appropriation" (Baker, Gumillya and Worby 25).

Such contested modes of representation bring into question what Whiteness, Blackness, indigeneity and aboriginality, mean in Australia today and how they connect to national belonging and participation. Collectivist Aboriginal distinctiveness, which was conferred by the coloniser, homogenised Australia's original inhabitants into a more readily administrable unit. Aboriginal or black identity only arose as problematic with the arrival of the white settlers who named the original peoples Aborigines; before then "there were only peoples defined by nations, clans, skin groups, language groups and moieties" (Heiss 183). Likewise, Wright makes the point that within Australia there are 200 or more different aboriginal nations (qtd in Moss). Differentiating their Blackness from the brown and black of recent "third world looking immigrants", Hage considers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders are now finally acknowledged as belonging to the national space after nearly two centuries of denial (57). It is such struggles to determine real national belonging which gives Australian Whiteness and Blackness their own particular historical evolution and characteristics and which also creates a separate history for Black Australians.

Black History and Indigenous Women's Writing

Australian Whiteness takes into account "physical aspects observable in the body and culturally produced attributes within particular histories" and, as it is embodied in "literary, political, historical and legal discourses", its powerful influence on these discourses cannot be easily discounted (Ferrier "White Blindfolds" 43). Until the 1970s, it was the sort of Whiteness that was derived from the British descent that created Australian history. Before the latter part of the 1960s, a "systematic historiography of Aboriginal-white relations did not exist" and so, blacks and whites rewriting that history made visible an "audible suppressed and silenced history, often called the Black History of white Australia" (Veracini 439; Ferrier 47). Aboriginal history was established as an academic discipline during the 1970s and the 1980s; a discipline which culminated into a fiercely contested terrain of Australian historiographical interpretation during the

"History Wars" of the 1990s.[1] Scholarship charting the disciplinary evolution of Aboriginal history often takes its starting point from W. E.H Stanner's Boyer 1968 lectures. Stanner's lectures followed from the 1967 Referendum which proposed constitutional amendments to allow Aborigines to be counted in the census and to grant the Commonwealth permission to enact legislation for Aboriginal people, where previously this had been the preserve of the states. The referendum was passed with a majority of ninety percent and it is at this historical juncture that Stanner identifies the "inattention" practised by white Australians towards the Aboriginal experience as something much more than "absent mindness": instead, he judges it to be "a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale" (114). During the 1970s, historians reclaimed this "cult of forgetfulness" by foregrounding the contested nature of white invasion. In *Rights for Aborigines* Bain Attwood argues that his retrieval, which provided a story and written narratives of Aboriginal history, ultimately enabled land rights decisions such as the Mabo judgement of the Australian High Court in 1992 (xii).

The first generation of Australian Indigenous writers also began writing in the 1960s for "fear of being written out of history" (Kral 7). From the 1960s onwards, "Indigenous women writers recuperated a lost or silenced history" and found an eager audience in a politicised and mainly white audience wanting to know "what 'we' were not told" (Ferrier "White Blindfolds" 38). Beginning with the publication of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's (Kath Walker's) poetry collection, *We Are Going* (1964), an Indigenous voice emerged to challenge prevailing white attitudes (Lowry 27). Heiss maintains that during the last forty years, the assertion of identity through Aboriginal writing "has increasingly become a political issue, particularly for non-Aboriginal Australia as the demonstration of Aboriginal strength and pride in identity challenges non-Aboriginal Australians to redefine themselves and their connection to country, the place they call home" (182). In 2006–07, recognising the strength of Indigenous writing, Australian Literature's flagship database, AustLit, established the research subset "Black Words". This grouping superseded the previous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers subset and brought the category under Indigenous control. Describing the Indigenous storyteller in the introduction to "Black Words", the poet Yvette Holt writes:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are the traditional keepers of their oral history, we are the custodians presiding over Indigenous Australian literature, each time we translate black words onto white paper we are reclaiming an integral piece of our heritage, culture and language. We canvass an essential and significant position on the vast Australian literary landscape, infusing contemporary and ancestral values through all genres ... ("Black Words" *AustLit*)

Indigenous women writers have sought to locate themselves within a number of traditional white genres ranging from life writing to novel, memoir and biographical fiction/non fiction during the last forty years. Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) is arguably the most well-known and successful biographical fiction written by an Indigenous woman. As with all narratives relying on truth effect and authenticity to legitimise the work, *My Place* did not escape the judgement of both white and Indigenous critics (Nolan and Dawson xii-xiii). Given its intention to create spaces for "non-white voices to be heard or heard more clearly", however well meaning, the realist mode favoured by the first generation of Indigenous women writers often positioned them in "battler genre" struggling with the pressures to "internalise white ideologies and seek cultural assimilation" (Ferrier "White Blindfolds" 38-39). An "Indigenous woman may be unable or unwilling to fragment their identity by leaving the community, kin, family" as her identity is bound to her experience as being an Indigenous person (qtd in Rowse 101). Doubly cursed with the dual responsibility of *truthfully* representing Aboriginal history both to her own people and to white people, the Indigenous woman writer could be accused of reinstating white dominance and forsaking her own community. Compounding her sense of non-belonging, she also worked with forms of narrative expression that were not organically her own. At a time when white feminism had come to prominence, Indigenous women writers also confronted the problem of how to use distinctively European literary forms. The tools and forms of a dominant discourse often accompany a particular social standpoint. Thus, form and function can work together to sustain the trap of "partial knowledge":

> the key understanding that perception and knowledge depend upon one's social standpoint, and that standpoints offer partial knowledge. It has often been asserted, but seldom shown so clearly, that the standpoint or subject position of whiteness in general and white feminism in particular is also partial despite its dominance and self representation as universal truth. (Moreton-Robinson xi)

Validating the role of the Indigenous writer, Aileen Moreton-Robinson considers that the way forward from "partial knowledge" is by having whites and Indigenous people see themselves through Indigenous eyes (xii).

Summarising Frankenberg's assessment of white privilege, Ferrier lists the three features which accompany that positioning, a location of structural advantage, a standpoint of race privilege and participation in cultural practices which are assumed to be normal (Ferrier "White Blindfolds" 44). The three features of white privilege, outlined above, inform this chapter, which goes on to discuss three works by Alexis Wright, *Grog War* and *Plains of Promise* both published in 1997 and *Carpentaria*, published in 2006. Wright belongs to the second generation of Australian Indigenous

women writers who seek to negotiate the racialised and sexualised stereotypes of black women and to represent both white and Indigenous individuals through Indigenous eyes, thus enlarging the partial knowledge of dominant Whiteness. Her work is contextualised during the period of race relations within Australia during which it was written:

> Do not go looking for angels in the Indigenous nest. Communities of people stricken by unrelenting poverty based on their race and culture are not the place to find angels. People just survive, just as they do in wartime, but as also happens in wars, heroic feats are accomplished by Indigenous people. ("Embracing the Indigenous Vision" 104)

This chapter goes on to argue that from the 1990s onwards Alexis Wright established herself as one of the most innovative and exciting writers in Australia (Ferrier '"Disappearing Memory"' 51). Wright advanced not only Indigenous women's writing but Australian writing to a new maturity, in a way that uniquely amplified Australians' partial knowledge, with nuanced narratives that probed definitions of indigeneity and aboriginality, of Australian Blackness and Whiteness, and their respective and unreconciled histories.

Grog War

Ghassan Hage argues that within present day Australia, Blackness acts as a marker allowing non-whites access to white privilege by emphasising the Blackness of Aboriginal people: "we are still a long way from having Blackness valorised in the Australian national field of power" (57). Although Black Australians may have finally been granted national belonging, such belonging is still only "functional and passive", masking inherent racism which denies Indigenous people white privilege (57). Alexis Wright makes this painfully clear in *Grog War*:

> race relations are constantly under threat. Those who have more powerful economic interests can use their influence to break down fragile relationships whenever their hip pocket is affected. This is why many Aboriginal people who still live in third world conditions in towns such as Tennant Creek can truly say that they live with all kinds of fears about the threat of racism on a daily basis. (ix)

Wright prefers to write fiction but she wrote *Grog War* at the behest of Julalikari Council, which represents the Warumungu people who are the traditional owners of Tennant Creek and who "were known to be the most numerous, most intelligent and physically the best tribe in Central Australia" (41). In the history of Aboriginal land rights, the Warumungu land claim was one of the most fiercely contested. Wright describes the book as a "saga", similar to a traditional aboriginal saga, but one which is now displaced into a world possessed by white settlers and maintained in their interests (Interview with Vernay 121). *Grog War*

documents the enormous struggle that Warumungu people faced to introduce restrictions on the sale of alcohol in Tennant Creek. In Wright's opinion, the proposed limits were minor, "simple restrictions on the availability of alcohol" within the town. Nonetheless these limits took ten years to introduce and were fought "every inch of the way" ("Interview with O'Brien" 219). And then, when the restrictions came in, this created even more problems as licencees did not want to honour the limits.

Wright merges the story of a fictional Aboriginal family with a factual account of measures taken to control the grog. This family evolved from the narratives of real Aboriginal residents in Tennant Creek but Wright was asked to use these stories imaginatively (*Grog War* ix). People were happy to give their testimony but as "terrible things happened in their lives because of substance abuse", they chose not to be named "because the issue of alcohol was causing a lot of problems between people in their communities, between families" (Interview with Vernay 121). Consequently, *Grog War's* documentary account of the battle with white government and bureaucracy incorporates two harrowing, fictional chapters. Introducing the book, the first of these chapters is titled "Old people didn't drink like that" and Wright bleakly goes on to detail the impact of white settlement on the Warumungu people. Within forty years of the arrival of the first white man, the explorer John McDouall Stuart in 1860, the world of the Warumungu had altered "terribly and unjustly" without any adequate explanation (33). When ethnologist F.J. Gillen and anthropologist Baldwin Spencer passed through the area in 1901 they found "200 people camped at the telegraph station … 'Many who were in a state of semi-starvation'" (33). As for the present day Aboriginal inhabitants of Tennant Creek whose life is affected by grog, Devine, the aging wife of Wright's fictional family, details its terrors when she speaks to her husband Lucas: "She told him she was frightened of what the police could do to him if they locked him up. 'What you want to be? Bashed Up?'" (9). Devine's and Lucas's relationship is fuelled by alcohol abuse and reciprocated violence. Devine self-mutilates, cutting herself to dull the pain of the loss of her only daughter who died because of the grog (16, 17). But this is a world where women do not go to hospital when their husbands stab them: "Only when you lose too much blood you do" (18). A woman is responsible for her husband and if "something happens to him in gaol the wife is blamed", so Devine looks after herself (18).

Meantime, Lucas drinks and fights and laments the injustices of the white pastoralist. Once, Lucas had been an Aboriginal stockman:

> When that equal wages went through in the 1970s for Aboriginal mob working on cattle stations. Well! That was it. Round up everybody. Chuck them on the back of a truck. Then all them pastoralists just drove everyone into town and we got dumped. No one wanted you to ride their horses anymore. (10)

Helicopters and motorbikes proved to be much cheaper and more efficient than Aboriginal stockmen once equal wages were mandated by law. Today, it is not only white people with British names who profiteer from the Aboriginal people. The next generation of immigrants has also arrived in Tennant Creek. Lucas blames the "book-up" system:

> He owed the taxi driver hundreds and he didn't know how it got to be that way from one week to the next. All he got was another tinga-tinga Greek fella talking to him. Only this one talked half in his own lingo about how much he still owed him, passing a fat finger over a slip of paper and Lucas passed over his cheque in return for a bit of spending money. (12)

Reliant on the next welfare cheque, the book-up system allows Aboriginal recipients to accumulate debt to alcohol suppliers and service providers. By guaranteeing the providers' payment, the book-up system keeps welfare recipients permanently indentured. As a consequence, Aboriginal alcohol dependence is a key part of the economy of Tennant Creek.

Hinting at different origins, some of the alcohol suppliers also have non-British surnames—like Mrs D'Almeida—the licensee of the notorious Tavern where, according to the local policeman, drunks at the tavern and leaving the tavern "are a disgrace and it is nothing unusual. It happens every night!" (92). As Senior Inspector Cronin prepares to lodge a complaint against Mrs D'Almeida's conduct of her business, an intoxicated Aboriginal woman sleeps off the effects of the booze, on the lawn in front of her bar entrance. Unperturbed, maintaining that she is aware of her patrons' tolerance levels and that they are sober, Mrs D'Almeida is concerned that she is "continually being set up" (92). Frank Martino uses battle metaphors to describe drinking in his bar. As the licensee of the Tennant Creek Hotel, he prides himself on his knowledge of the coalface or the frontline. Regular drinking frequently gets out of hand and therefore he has personally designed the furniture in his hotel to be bolted to the floor: "Huge bulky tables and chairs that are too heavy for the average human being to pick up let alone throw across the room" (93). Frank Martino blames a "small vigilante group" for trying to impose a curfew on drinking in Tennant Creek—something which he considers to be "a violation of human rights" (93). Another name which hints at latter day immigrant associations is Jasmine Afianos, the editor of Tennant Creek's local newspaper and former manager of the notorious Rockits nightclub. Wright points out the newspaper's habit of printing offensive cartoons and remarks about Aboriginal people. Complaints

about a cartoon which referred to Aboriginal drinking titled "ABORIGINES SAY NO TO EUTHANASIA" (21.4.95) were upheld by the Australian Press Council (224).[2]

In the meantime, Paul Ruger serves as Mayor of Tennant Creek. Ruger's parents arrived in Australia in the 1930s, his father from Germany and his mother from Liverpool. As a recent immigrant, the Mayor had the unenviable task of trying to realise Tennant Creek's vision of breathing new life into a town once dominated by mining and miners. Wright explains that "the town wants tourists to find its history interesting and give the town life" but this also means liberal alcohol licensing rights (104). Inevitably, this brings the needs of the white community and the Aboriginal community into direct conflict. In such instances, promoting the Blackness of the Indigenous population grants Australian "Whiteness a solidity it does not really have" and advantages the immigrant population (*White Nation,* Hage 57). Mayor Ruger's father was imprisoned during 1940–46, along with a lot of other immigrants of Italian and German background. He recalls that even after the war, the family was given a hard time because of their German ancestry (103). Although more recent immigrants like Mayor Ruger's family may have suffered their own forms of discrimination from the Anglo–Celtic majority, ultimately, most do reasonably well. It is the Aboriginal population of Tennant Creek that is still fighting their community's ongoing disintegration:

> The feeling amongst Aboriginal people about grog is that it is not theirs. They are not the ones selling it. They do not order it and sell it in Tennant Creek. The Aboriginal people who try to help to do something about it such as work voluntary on Night Patrol risk their own lives and rightly feel anger and frustrations whenever they hear white people say it is an Aboriginal problem. (102)

For Wright, the "destructive effect of unregulated alcohol sales on the wellbeing of the lives of Aboriginal men, women and children" is a form of state supported genocide (60). She goes on to cite the United Nations genocide conventions, wherein genocide is defined as, "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (60).

Grog War provided an eerie postscript to two events that occurred on 21 June 2007. Within 24 hours of Wright being declared the winner of the Miles Franklin Prize for *Carpentaria,* then Prime Minister John Howard announced an unparalleled intervention in the Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory. Declaring a national emergency in Indigenous child welfare, due to child sexual abuse resulting from endemic substance abuse, the government ordered military, police and medical personnel into Indigenous communities.[3] Two weeks prior to the government's intercession, two more reports, one from the Northern Territory and one from the Cape

York Institute, had been produced and both reports addressed the same issues that Wright had raised a decade earlier in *Grog War*.

Bringing Them Home

Genocide was also the term that was used to describe the findings of the *Bringing Them Home* report from the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander from Their Families. Published in 1997, Wright's first novel, *Plains of Promise,* coincided with the tabling of this report. The first generation of Indigenous writers expressed the fear of being written out of history. But the second generation, to which Alexis Wright belongs, were also compelled to write stories for fear of Aboriginal history—such as that of the stolen generation—being obliterated. Under the guidelines of an assimilationist government ideology, the *Bringing Them Home* report recognised that the treatment meted out to Australia's Indigenous people was a source of abiding national shame. Tabled in parliament on 26 May 1997, the report gained unparalleled public recognition in Australia and made the key findings that somewhere between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families between 1910 and 1970. Later, the children—who often worked unpaid—were either fostered or adopted out, or placed in church missions and institutions. More often than not, children were at risk of physical and sexual abuse. Recognising that Australia was in breach of international conventions, the report found that welfare officials had failed their duty of care for the "stolen children". Under international law, the report also found that from 1946 onwards, "the policies of forcible removal amount[ed] to genocide" and that the continuation of these distinct policies for Indigenous children after the 1950s "was racially discriminatory" (Dow). Still, long before the publication of *Plains of Promise,* the pain and suffering caused by welfare policies that "had taken children away" had been a recurrent theme in Aboriginal oral histories, art, song and biography.[4]

Plains of Promise

The early explorers of the Gulf of Carpentaria first used the phrase "plains of promise" when they saw the open grassland available for their cattle. But as Wright sees it "it might have been 'plains of promise' for them in terms of good grazing area [...] but it wasn't for us. We've paid a high price for it" (Interview with Vernay 121). Tackling head on what Moorhouse scathingly describes as the centrality of the "sheep station

novel" in Australian literature, Wright explains *her* pastoral traditions in *Plains of Promise*.[5]

> The history of these cattle stations was forged by Aboriginal men and women who lived in slavery, bound to the most uncivilised and cruellest people their world had ever known. Those enslaved were the Aborigines who had escaped the whiteman's bullet, his whip, his butchering and trophy collections-the set of severed ears decorating the lounge-room wall. There was the Aboriginal girl, not killed with all the others, young enough to tame, bought back to the property to work. (133)

Wright's interest in the fictive history that she describes in *Plains of Promise* is also personal.

> In our family my great-great-grandmother was stolen from her family. As a little girl my grandmother used to tell the story of her mother and another girl who were found up in a tree by a pastoralist at that particular time, toward the end of the 19th century, named Frank Hann. Hann kept a diary held in the Western Australia State Library in which he records his thoughts—his distaste for Aboriginal people—and things he did while he occupied our country. We know from various sources that he killed a lot of Aboriginal people. In the case of my great-grandmother and another little girl, they were probably taken as a result of a massacre of their family to be broken in as slaves on Hann's pastoral property. Hann recorded taking my great grandmother as a child. This corresponds with my grandmother's story. We also know that children were also taken for other purposes by these white men who didn't have wives with them. (Interview with Vernay 119)

Chronicling a pitiless generational story, *Plains of Promise* begins with the image of the poinciana tree planted next to the girl's dormitory at St Dominic's Mission for Aborigines. Ivy Koopundi is destined to become one of the girls who are housed in that dormitory. Displaced out of country, transported there by the founding missionary, acting as a life-sucking invader, the poinciana symbolises the mission's meaning for the Aboriginal inmates: "the tree should not have been allowed to grow there on their ancestral country. It was wrong. Their spiritual ancestors grew more and more disturbed by the thirsty, greedy foreign tree intruding into the bowels of their world" (4). This is a tree which invites "Cousin Crow to sit along the branches and draw the cards of death" (4).

Mission life requires that Ivy Koopundi's aboriginality is bred out. As a half-caste, Ivy must breed white, she will only be permitted to discern herself as a half-being. Thus, a sequence of events is set in motion which, by the end of the novel, concludes in Ivy Koopundi's madness:

> At first Ivy's mother had been placed in the compound of large corrugated iron sheds which housed several families tightly packed together, as well as women alone, with or without children. This was where Ivy had been taken from her. The child was termed a "half caste" by the mission bosses and therefore could not be left with the others. Their reasoning: "It would be a bad influence on these children. We should be able to save them from their own kind. If we succeed we will be able to place them in the outside world … And they will of

> course then choose to marry white. Thank goodness. For their children will be whiter and more redeemable. (12)

Ivy's acculturation into "civilised life" begins with a new name: "'Koopundi' and the like would be endured with slight tolerance as long as they did not expect to use such names when they left to live in the civilised world" (5). Henceforth Ivy will be known as Andrews, a "good Christian" name. Ivy's naming out of her culture is followed almost immediately by Errol Jipp informing her that her mother has died that morning (5). As missionary in charge, fat Errol Jipp has full power over the eight hundred or so Aborigines in his charge. For their own protection, Ivy and her mother had been sent to St Dominic's mission and far away from their own country. Separated from her family at a young age by her white station owner masters, to become a "playmate-cum-general help", Ivy's mother grew up knowing that missions were where "bad Aborigines were sent" (12). However hard she tried to be good—"even to the man who seduced her by night she made sure to be good"—Ivy's mother is unable to avoid her fate (12). Deemed a "bad Aborigine", her affairs are handed over to the Regional Protector of Aborigines (12). After all, Ivy's mother who worked as a cook for a shearer's camp had "chucked hot fat over one of the fella's when he just trying to be nice" to the seven year old, half caste Ivy (12).

Aboriginal Women and White Settlers

Historically, what paralleled the white settlers' aggressive land seizure and destructive displacement of its traditional owners was the degradation and exploitation of Aboriginal women. Outright capture, rape, and the prostitution of Aboriginal women were endemic, particularly in the rural areas. Evans argues that imperial racism and sexism are mutually supportive with each exacerbating the other. By taking control of the vanquished group's females, the coloniser establishes his advance in line with Darwinian principles. Denying the vanquished people's access to females of their own group also created the coloniser's superior intergenerational continuity ("Don't You Remember?" 7). Similar to other outback stations of the time, conditions on a Queensland station in 1898 are described as follows:

> thirty or forty women were at work in the woolsheds and as rouseabouts, and six to eight older women were water carriers. These women were divided into three groups for sexual services: the boss's women, not to be interfered with on threat of dismissal; those for the 'jackeroos' (the home country remittance and colonial experience men) and a third larger group for the general hands. At the end of shearing season these women were released without payment. ("Colonial Manhood" Moore 45)

Alternatively, Indigenous women could be employed in homestead domestic service, requiring a very concerned Queensland Governor in 1934 to promote segregation: "95% of the females sent out to domestic service […] returned to have a child by a white father" (Evans 18). White Australia, once having taken pride in preserving the colour line on behalf the white races, could now see the line being breached due to miscegenation. The race once presumed unfit to survive was being perpetuated and "the mixed race progeny were blurring the important colour and physiological distinctions between the racial groups" (18). Part-Aborigines were believed to have "the vices or both races and the virtues of neither" (18).

Consequently, bureaucratic controls such as the Aborigines Protection Act ensured that the right to mother their own children was withheld from Indigenous women. Their children were often bought up by white women in foster homes and institutions. "Indigenous children removed from their families were not imagined in national stories as making new families when they grew up" (Elder, *Being Australian* 85). Australian governments believed that the Aboriginal race would breed out if assimilationist policies were vigorously enforced. Thus, for most of the twentieth century, the Australian story of the mothers' of the nation was also the story "about *which* women *within* the nation should have children" (85). In narratives of national belonging, the mothers of nation were white women who were required to "breed pure". In this sense, racial hostility towards black mothers was seen as a way of preserving the racial integrity of the nation (Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines* 115-116). The Other, the un-Australian mother, the Indigenous woman, survived in the shadow realm of the white mother. As a consequence, much of early Indigenous women's fiction often focussed on the "secret sexual abuse of Aboriginal women by white men" something for which Aboriginal women were held to be responsible (Ferrier, "'Disappearing Memory'" 45).

Ivy was Errol Jipp's first little girl

In *Plains of Promise*, Ivy's mother gives birth to Ivy when she is "little more than a child herself" (12). Abandoned at the end of shearing season, Ivy's mother, "despised as any other 'general gin' who disgraced herself" becomes insulting to everyone: "None of her own people wanted anything to do with her. She was too different, having grown up away from the native compound in the whitefellas' household" (12). Resolute about one thing, keeping her daughter with her, Ivy's mother will not even leave Ivy with her own family. Still, once placed under the care of the Regional Protector of Aborigines and

the regulation of Errol Jipp, head missionary at St Dominic's, Ivy's mother is rendered helpless: "she had screamed and run after them and tried to drag Ivy away" but as it was "for the good of the [half caste] child" Ivy is taken away (13). Left with nothing, relegated to the "lost and the condemned", Ivy's mother exercises the only agency she has left. Pouring kerosene over herself, she sets herself on fire (13-14). The suicide of the black woman, transported far away from her country, is condemned by both the blacks and the whites at the mission. Soon other mysterious suicides follow, casting suspicion on both Ivy and her mother for having bought bad spirits to St Dominic's. Left with no family, Ivy turns out to be an easy target: "Ivy was Errol Jipp's first little girl. He needed, above all else to be discreet" something which he had "learnt from past encounters with Aboriginal women he had put the hard word on" (30). Ivy is repeatedly violated by Jipp but the encounters she dreads the most are those in the vestry:

> [s]he was sick knowing her sin in God's place. But her worthlessness she swallowed to the pit of her stomach. She knew the sight of her nakedness sprawled out indecently in God's place would never be forgiven. Meanwhile, he would, by God, push the evil out of the "she-devil" who was possessing him. (32)

God is much more forgiving to Errol than to Ivy and when his wife suspects his activities, he is able to strike her down with righteous words "you've made me taste the filth. Get out of my sight." (29).

Drawing further loathing to her from blacks and whites, Ivy's abuse is now a well-kept secret. She is already condemned for being light skinned—the outcome of miscegenation—and is tormented by her black schoolmates and by the white missionaries for having "a promiscuous look" (23). Jipp lectures his pious wife on the anomaly of the half-caste, who is the "worst of both kinds, white and black. You know what you get when people interbreed up here. Haven't you ever taken any notice of those sort of women? What decent white man would go with one of them, eh?" (63). Notoriety comes to St Dominic's as the mission becomes known as a place of evil; a place from which "suicides spread throughout the Aboriginal world"; suicides which the elders are convinced are "some dangerous business associated with the death of Ivy's mother" (36). Attendance at Church becomes a serious matter as the mission whites organise vigorous prayer meetings to counter the "many unusual deaths" and the devil's inference in their work "as God's servants to make St Dominic's the heartland of 'God's paradise on earth' " (37). Meanwhile the mission elders prepare to arrange a secret investigation, reinstating the pre-eminence of tribal governing law over the laws of Christian institutional life. However, as Aborigines are not allowed to travel or to move away from the mission without a permit, a young, fit and potential Aboriginal

leader is selected and so, Elliot the Traveller is assigned with the task of slipping through the white man's net and conducting a number of visits to the dead woman's country (37). Although mission life outwardly appears to secure the Bibical word of truth, the reality is that it merely indicates the opposition of a different cultural tradition. Indigenous cultural life may have been obscured but it constantly resurfaces.

Spirituality and Sexuality

It takes the first forty pages of *Plains of Promise* to establish Elliot's quest story. It takes sixty five pages in the standard editions of the Bible to tell the story of Genesis: "the Creation, Eden, Adam and Eve, the Fall, Cain and Abel, the Flood and Noah's Ark, Babel's tower, Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, Jacob and his ladder, Sodom and Gomorrah" (S. Rose viii). According to Steven Rose, the Genesis story speaks to the Christian community because of centuries of commentary through its cultural products, such as sculpture, painting, poetry and prose (viii). Derived from Judeo-Christianity, it was this alien cosmography and these alien stories which were imposed upon the institutionalised Aboriginal. These alien cultural by-products were forced upon them as their own. Aborigines, who had lived according to principles ordered by a "spiritual relationship with the land", were now ruled by a people who believed that the channelling of human energy should be in the service of a protestant work ethic, an ethic which presaged the triumph of the acquisitiveness of Western capitalism and reaffirmed the moral worth of the white settlers. Yet as "individuals were thought to belong to their country by powerful spiritual bonds", belief in the importance of their own spiritual life continued for Aboriginal people well into the period of European settlement (Reynolds, *The Other Side* 32). This sense of belonging to country was rooted in the performance of ceremony, which ensured the proper ordering of nature and maintained "the causal link between tribal ceremony and the turn of the seasons" (59). Whilst the Aboriginal secular world may have been geographically contained, the realm of their spiritual world was vast and vibrant (31). Destroying both Aboriginal secular and spiritual life, the intrusion of the white man was catastrophic, bringing with it disease, high infant mortality rates, land theft and starvation. Aboriginal women were particularly vulnerable to the degradation consequent on white settlement. Ignoring the awful outcomes of venereal disease and kin-alienation, white men claimed that they were not setting a precedent for the ill-treatment of Aboriginal women: in tribal society Aboriginal men had already raped, captured, prostituted and ill treated their women (Evans 15).

However, it was the sexual repression of Judeo-Christian belief that required the body to become an instrument of disgust and sensory denial.

> Thus, when white men depicted Aboriginal women as being dirty, sinful, animalistic, ugly … it was really their own repressed sexuality they were describing-the projection of their shadow selves that they were detecting. Calling the women 'animals' gave them licence to treat them as animals—and the self loathing they experienced about themselves mating with such defined 'animals' was projected outwards in aggression against blacks […] and in the realm of sexuality, upon black women in particular. (Evans 11)

Vernacular expressions entered white language wherein an Aboriginal woman's rape was known as "gin busting"; her capture was called "mustering"; and the women themselves were called "stud gins" or "black velvet" (15). Consequently, for Indigenous women and their children, white intrusion on Aboriginal sexual relations had catastrophic effects. Spatially and spiritually, Indigenous society was dislocated from their known universe. The sacredness of their cosmic cycle of birth, death and regeneration was invalidated and their intergenerational continuity debased. There could no longer be a pre-contact Aboriginal society. This is the Genesis that Alex Wright begins with in *Plains of Promise*—the genesis of Aboriginal society under white reconstruction. Mimicking the symbolism of white imagery—the tree of the Garden of Eden—the poinciana tree shelters the bird that presages death for Aboriginal people: an augury that is realised with the subsequent suicides at the mission leading the missionaries to ponder the dedication of their work at "God's paradise on earth" (37). Although Wright does not actually start with—*In the beginning*—and the crow is not the serpent of original sin, the bird is derived from and represents the consequences of Christian teachings in an Indigenous environment. It is the sexual suppression of Judeo-Christianity which allows Jipp to meet his "animalistic", sexual, shadow self in his abuse of Ivy and which also sanctions the debasement of black women. If Eve was responsible for original sin by tempting Adam, how much more easily could the licentiousness of black women be attributed as provoking white men? Mimicking yet subverting the Genesis tale, *Plains of Promise* begins with the degradation of the matrilineal line of Indigenous women. It is here that Alexis Wright is challenged to move beyond the realism of the first generation of Indigenous women writers, something which she does unequivocally with her next novel, *Carpentaria.*

Carpentaria

In 2007, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Miles Franklin award, Alexis Wright became the first Indigenous writer to win the prestigious literary prize outright for her epic

novel *Carpentaria*. Within Australia, winning the Miles Franklin carries the sort of prestige that the Booker prize has for a Commonwealth author. Critics drew a web of links connecting Wright's text to other notable Australian fiction viewing it, on one hand, as a worthy inclusion to a tradition of Australian writing and an inspiring innovation, on the other. Parallels were drawn between Wright's novel and Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938), in its time, another well-intentioned classic of social protest ("A Great Divide"). Herbert's text, which won the Sesquicentenary Prize, dealt explicitly with aspects of Australian race relations that many did not want to acknowledge, "including dispossession and Aboriginal-settler sexual relations" (Rolls 8). Even so, Wright maintains that *Carpentaria* was not written as "a polemical novel; the book is not a weapon" (qtd in Moss 3). Although it does include the realities of the Indigenous world, the novel was written more as "an attempt to explore what's happening in the Indigenous mind" (3). As such, one Australian critic lauded the novel as "the greatest, most inventive and most mesmerising Indigenous epic ever produced in Australia" (Shoemaker 55). Reported in the English press, readers flocked to *Carpentaria* "hoping to find the Indigenous equivalent of *Cloudstreet*"—the novel by author Tim Winton, who is described as the "pre-eminent voice of Australia's coastal communities" (Baum). Another Australian review argued that *Carpentaria* established transnational connections by drawing on influences from both from within and outside Australian literature. Influenced by Homer and Joyce from the Western literary tradition and the Bible and *The Arabian Nights* from the Middle East, Wright embraced "the storytelling traditions of the world" (Gleeson-White 5).

In the estimation of another English journal, Wright's book "caused a stir in Australia, though most reviewers have dwelt on its bawdy humour rather than on the harrowing revelations of the Aboriginals' circumstances" ("A Great Divide" 89). Be that as it may, *Carpentaria* challenged equally all prior depictions of life in Australia's coastal communities, as well as accounts of Australian race relations and Indigenous and white settler dealings. An expansive epic, "because our country is a very big story", the novel is set in the country's north, the Gulf of Carpentaria, which Wright considers to be her traditional country (*Carpentaria* 411). Although born and raised in Cloncurry, the country which Wright knows best is the Gulf. Fostered by her grandmother's memories, this is the place that she carries in her heart ("Interview with O'Brien" 215). Wright's grandmother was the daughter of a Chinese cook and an Aboriginal woman: a Waanyi woman who was given to the cook in marriage by the white station owner, Frank Hann:

> When my great-grandmother grew older she was given away by Frank Hann to his Chinese cook. That came to be a marriage and they had about eight children. My great-grandfather, who originally came to Australia for mining, was also subject to the White Australia policy. He actually married my great-grandmother—a pretty astounding event—so that his wife and children would not be taken away from him and put into a mission or a reserve because Aboriginal people were wards of the state. He sent the eldest children to China and we don't know what became of them. It was only due to the persistence of my great-grandmother that the two youngest girls were able to stay with her, one of whom was my grandmother. ("Interview with Vernay" 119)

However, once her Chinese great-grandfather passed away, Wright's family had no rights under white man's law "to be on the land that they were on [...] so they moved down to Camooweal and Cloncurry" (119).

Growing up in Cloncurry, Wright is anchored by her grandmother's recollections of her traditional country:

> At an early age from about the time, I think when I was about three, I would run away from my mother and go down to my grandmother's place [...] I just knew the way. So I spent a lot of time with her and with her taking me round in the bush and down the river and all round the place ... And she talked all the time about the Gulf country and always wanting to return there and the way she described it was only something I could imagine at the time. ("Interview with O'Brien" 216)

When a National Park was established in the 1980s, Wright's grandmother was finally able to realise her dream to return to her traditional country. By then, she was in her eighties. Meanwhile, Wright has been back several times and she has also worked with the land council in Carpentaria. Nevertheless, Wright remains pessimistic about the future:

> We have very little land rights over our traditional country. The pastoral properties over our traditional domain are owned by a mining company and subleased to the previous owner, an absentee overseas landlord. The gates to the pastoral properties remain locked. Most of our people have to live outside, most in former reserves and missions. Our language will die soon if we cannot get the last speakers back on traditional country in order to teach the children. (Wright "Breaking Taboos" 1-3)

Wright employs literary representation as a technology of remembering and conduction. Seen from this perspective, *Carpentaria* becomes an act of imaginative reclamation endeavouring to transmit cultural memory, cultural heritage and history between cultures, generations and individuals.

Carpentaria may be a work of fiction but its origins lie in the progression of matrilineal memory and the oral testimony of Wright's Waanyi grandmother. As an act of inspired witness, *Carpentaria* honours and validates Indigenous intergenerational continuance and endurance. Wright wanted the novel to be "told from the viewpoint of old people—how they see the world. What I tried to do is show how old people would tell a child a story about what's important and how to make things meaningful"

(Interview with Vernay 122). Consequently, it is no surprise to find that the land itself becomes the central character in *Carpentaria*, leading one critic to conclude that "Wright's greatest achievement is her invocation of landscape" (Blakeney 70). *Carpentaria's* locale has been described as "both antediluvian and post-apocalyptic [...] where human life clings to the elements" (Bailey 59). Acknowledging Wright's powerful paean to her country, another columnist recognises her celebration of "the claims that land and landscape make upon the human imagination and the spiritual dimensions of these claims" (Bliss 682). Wright develops her novels by seeing "how the land itself might respond to different stories" ("Interview with Vernay" 120). Only after she has "built a place for them", do people come to inhabit Wright's imaginative setting. Then she populates her creative country with images and ideas that relate to "the land as being alive and having important meaning" (120).

Creation Myths

Carpentaria begins with two creation myths. Presented in the first chapter, the first myth is the white man's legend:

> A nation chants, *but we know your story already*. The bells peal everywhere. Church bells calling the faithful to the Tabernacle where the Gates of Heaven will open, but not for the wicked. Calling innocent little black girls from a community where the white dove bearing an olive branch never lands. Little girls who come back home after church on Sunday. Who look around themselves at the human fallout and announce matter-of-factly. *Armageddon begins here*. (1)

Here, the text's "innocent black girls" inhabit the universe of Christian cosmology, of sin and redemption sustained by Christian rituals and tradition: "the faithful", pealing bells, and church on Sunday. Christian pre-ordination is signified by the phrase "*but we know your story already*. Yet for the black community the "olive branch never lands" as "the wicked" are irredeemable. Hence, "after church on Sunday", the choir of little black girls, like a Greek chorus, correctly prophesy the destruction of their own community, stating matter-of-factly that *"Armageddon begins here"*. Opposing the Christian myth, the second creation story narrated immediately after the first, belongs to the Dreamtime mythopoesies of the Indigenous people:

> The ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. [...] Looking down at the serpent's wet body, glistening from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all round the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria. (1)

Being permeable, the creative serpent infuses everything. Undulating deep through the plains, it forms the mudflats and the sunken valleys and the "mighty bending rivers

spread across the vast plains of the Gulf country" (2). Foregrounding Indigenous cosmology is the core belief in the wonder of being saturated with the primodorial power of nature: "a power which pulsates through all creation and which grants the land its sacredness" (Evans 8).

This is Wright's alternative beginning to *Carpentaria*—both book and country. And so Wright sets the scene, to explore some of the big themes of *Carpentaria*: the legacy and nature of memory and inheritance; the permissible and possible avenues of its diffusion and communication; the relationship between history, dispossession, trauma and nation. Furthermore, she also tackles the achievable technologies of remembering and how this transmission enfolds the individual—whether indigene or immigrant—into both a personal and collective history by producing the cultural memory that creates the myth of nation.

Desperance and xenophobic traditions

It is here, on a Gulf river which "spurns human endeavour" like a jilted lover "which has never really been known", that a town named Desperance is built in the early days of colonial vigour (3). Originally, Desperance is meant to serve "as a port for the shipping trade of the hinterland of Northern Australia" but, when the river bafflingly changes course, Desperance becomes a waterless port confronting a crisis of existence (3). Tongue in cheek, evoking the xenophobic traditions of the founding colonial fathers, Wright satirises the ponderings of Desperance citizenry as they confront their existential calamity; effectively capturing the "unreasoning fear" which lies at the heart of Australian race relations (Shoemaker 60). Brave little Desperance decides to continue so as to "safeguard the northern coastline from invasion by the Yellow Peril. A dreadful vision, a long yellow streak marching behind an arrowhead pointing straight for the little town of Desperance" (3). When the "yellow" invasion does not eventuate, the town needs to find "a more contemporary reason for existence" (4). Thus, it becomes everyone's civic duty "to comment on the state of their blacks. To do so was regarded as an economic contribution to State rights then, as an afterthought, to maintaining the decent society of the nation as a whole" (4). Desperance is a town where blacks, whites and "unnaturalised" foreigners live in mutual misconception and misunderstanding (5). Even when they prove useful, dark-skinned foreigners, such as the Afghan brothers who bring goods to the town by camel train, are greeted with suspicion and joked about as "shifty dogs, dodgy dogs, murdering dogs and unreliable" (5). When the brothers disappear along the "lifeline" track that connects the north and south, only to return and

haunt the town with their "Afghan smell", the Uptown folk become spiteful: "That was the trouble with new Australians ... *Even dead ones had no manners.* Unnaturalised. Really un-Australian" (5).

On the other hand, there is Normal Phantom, an old tribal man and patriarch of the Aboriginal mob who have lived all their lives in the dense Pricklebush bush that encircles Desperance. The "descendants of the pioneer families" consider that "the Aboriginal was really not part of the town at all", even if they did sweep the streets and push the dunny cart in bygone years (4). Thus, as an Aboriginal, "Normal" is "Phantom" both by name and by nature, that is, ordinarily invisible to the white folk. In a moment of glorious send-up, the river is renamed after Normal Phantom when Aboriginal voices briefly have control of the council. Because of the anticipated mining boom, there is a perceived need to facilitate conciliatory gestures as Normal's ancestors had lived with the river since time immemorial. At a ceremony paid for by the mining company and swarming with politicians and media, Normal receives the honour of having the town's river renamed after him, "instead of after a long dead 'Imperial Queen'" (9). Much to the laughing delight of his traditional people, Normal's response of thanks is made in the local language and is very uncomplimentary. Unperturbed, as they have not understood Normal's words, the politicians and visiting dignitaries continue to mingle uncomfortably with the crowd in pursuit of photo opportunities (10). Anyway, as Wright ironically observes, the purposes of reconciliation are served as "more new mines became established in the region with little regard to anyone's say-so" (10).

The Pricklebush: Eastside and Westside

In this "honeymoon period" in Desperance race relations, the Aboriginal people who become councillors use their time "in public office to pursue scraps of personal gain for their own families living amidst the muck of third-world poverty" (8). Divided amongst itself between Eastside and Westside, the Aboriginal community lives in the Pricklebush, the fringe camp surrounding the town. Affronted descendants of the pioneer fathers—the Uptown folk of Desperance—cannot for the life of them make sense of "why they were being sandwiched between Aboriginal people" when no-one had told them what was happening (31). But, as Wright dryly observes, "Living in harmony in fringe camps was a policy designed by the invader's governments, and implemented, whenever shacks [...] first began to be called a community" (26). Scrutinised with an affectionate but equally sharp humour, Wright's Aboriginal

communities and their concerns with authentic identity are portrayed with insider knowledge. Much to the disgust of Normal Phantom's group, old Joseph Midnight's mob exile themselves to the Eastside camp, maintaining that only they are the traditional owners of the land. The Eastside mob even make up a name for themselves—"Wangabiya" (52). Occupying the Westside of the Pricklebush, Normal Phantom's mob are taunted as the Gulf tribe of "*Johnny-come-latelies"*. (52). Meantime, old people on the Westside rubbish folk on the Eastside by claiming that they know "nothing about culture" (52). And, as for the "Wangabiya" moniker, even though everyone knows that no such tribe has every existed, lost Wangabiya start turning up from all over: "Brisbane, Sydney and even one who came over from Los Angeles saying he was a Wangabiya and could speak the lost Wangabiya language" (52). Spoofing the erosion of Mabo-type and Wik-type land rights, Wright explains in plain words that personal greed is at the heart of Joseph Midnight's defection. By agreeing to the mine and selling his Native Title rights the "government gave him a lot of money, a thousand dollars" (52).

And so, the "edge" people, both Eastside and Westside, "the blackfella mob living [...] in higgily-piggerly, rubbish dump trash shacks, all popped any old where in the prickly bushes, all along a cobweb of dirt tracks running crooked, left, right and centre outside of town", sit and watch the "white folk of Uptown going about their business" (54). Then again, the Uptown folk can prove that the genesis of "True Desperanians" stretches back for several generations. Genetically, they can be easily identified as blond, blue-eyed, nervy, skinny and freckled. For these Desperanians, history is "a half-flick of the switch of truth—simply a memory no greater than two life spans" (57). Still, they continue to trace their family lines on sheets of paper to "show they did not exist" (57). In an act of divine providence, their ghostly—the white man or woman—"simply turned up one day" (57). In the interim, on the wrong side of town, Uncle Micky works tirelessly to build his alternative museum, collecting "all kinds of cartridges used in the massacre of the local tribes. He had maps, names of witnesses, details, the lot" (11). Uncle Micky even records a "great archive of cassettes" which he leaves to posterity and "the war trials" that he feels sure will "happen one day". (11). But tourists do not come to his museum because this is not "Vaudeville" (11). In one of *Carpentaria's* many changes of register, Wright ends this passage of third person narration with a commentary of personal identification warning that if "you visit the water people. The Gulf country men and women who took our besieged memories to

the grave might just climb out of the mud and tell you the real story of what happened here" (11).

The pathologies of Australia's remote settlements

As well as masterfully evoking a unique geography, Wright sets the scene in the Gulf country to articulate the political truths of contemporary Australia. The emblematic town of Desperance shares many of the "pathologies" of Australia's remote settlements (Devlin-Glass 82). First, there is the obsession with "bigness" (19). Wright ridicules the Town Council's deliberations about "whether to erect a giant something or another in the middle of town. Could it be the world's biggest stubby or the worlds' biggest drunk?" (19). Then there is the deep seated mistrust of Southern bureaucrats, which requires that local independence be asserted by a "two fingers V shaped in the air", signalling—"*Go and get stuffed*" (58). When the "infamous state government" tries to change the town's name to Masterton, enraged residents band together. Desperanians "acting out purposeful community pride", rip out the Masterton signs as quickly as they are "hammered into the ground" (60). In a tactical response, the Uptown locals erect more Desperance signs "just to make sure no one would mistake Desperance for the name of some past his use-by-date Southern politician who wanted to plant his ego in the minds of future generations" (60). Equally, there is Uptown's pathology with the fetishisation of its pioneer history. The town insists that it stays as named after its founder—Captain Mathew Desperance Flinders (Devlin-Glass 82). Confusion on official road maps, between Masterton citations and Desperance signposting leads to road deaths but Uptown is indifferent, as they "never liked to talk much to strangers (60). By establishing herself irrefutably in the local, Wright scathingly interrogates the national by compelling readers with her persuasive rendering the regional. Redneck Desperance, saturated with "gossip, superstition and xenophobia", is so familiar to one critic that she maintains "I've lived there" (Blakeney 70).

Territory as Text

Wright's unique conjuring of the Gulf country earns her comparisons with Faulkner's evocation of the American South. Most significantly, Wright's sense of place is conveyed by the novel's polysyllabic use of language. Whitefella and blackfella vernacular speech are juxtaposed as are their more formal registers. From passages of grim reality to extended poetic interpretation, mood and tone shift rapidly. Time expands and contracts, in rhythms unfamiliar to Western consciousness. In a fifty-page

Dreamtime sequence, time becomes eternal as Norm takes the body of his friend Elias Smith to its final resting place in the ocean's "*pavonazzo*", the groper hole, "an ancient reef crater of a sea palace" (250, 249). Exhausted by his efforts to bury Elias, Norm succumbs to the siren call of the devil woman Gardajala, until, their lust satiated, "they both curled up in foetal positions on their earth beds, hers of grass and his of sand, and went to sleep" (275). Demonstrating Bhabha's assertion that "the word of divine authority is deeply flawed by the assertion of the Indigenous sign and in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid", for Normal Phantom Aboriginal sacred beliefs happily coexist alongside his faith in the word of "the white man's Bible" (*Location* 35, *Carpentaria* 511). Stylistically too, Wright hybridises the master's language. *Carpentaria* may be confined within a Western literary form, however, Wright's stylistic confidence allows her to use the Waanyi language throughout the novel. Therefore, through language, an act of metaphorical reconciliation is performed that allows her to render "on the page the voice of a traditional storyteller" (Lowry 27). Here language reveals the persistent trace, as well as the dissimilarity and slippages that underpin the coloniser's territory. Within the Gulf of Carpentaria a new colonial reality may have overlayed the Indigenous old but in Wright's narrative—where territory becomes text—this is transmuted once again into a new representation.

Ostensibly, the novel's plot evolves as a familial story about the Phantom tribe: the patriarch Norm Phantom, a fisherman who knows as much about the sky as he does the water, his wife Angel Day—"not a lady but a queen"—and their seven children (6, 447). A subplot about mining is carried by Will Phantom, the eldest son of the family, an eco-style guerrilla warrior who is impelled to oppose the invasion of Gurfurritt mine operations on traditional lands. Will's activism alienates him from his father as does his marriage to a fellow activist, Hope, the daughter of Norm's sworn enemy—Joseph Midnight. When they are pursued by Gurfurritt mining operations because of Will's suspected eco-terrorist activity, Hope and Will's son, Bala, are gravely endangered. Ultimately, a familial reconciliation is bought about when Norm intervenes to save his grandson and his daughter-in-law. Symbolically, trust is also restored as Bala's mother departs to find Will and leaves her son to the care of his grandfather. Upon returning to Desperance, Norm and Bala find that the settlement has been ravaged by flood and cyclone with only "bony, hollow ribbed, abandoned dogs" left to roam the main street of a town now emptied of its white folk (518). Accompanied by a massed choir of frogs, Bala walks with Norm as his grandfather prepares to rebuild his home exactly where it

has always been. “It was a mystery, but there was so much song wafting off the watery land, singing the country afresh, as they walked hand in hand out of the town, down the road, Westside, to home” (519). Figuratively and literally emptied of its white settlers, the country is being sung afresh and returned to its traditional owners Normal Phantom’s ancestors, in an allegory of Indigenous endurance and renewal in which Bala represents the hope for the future. However, one critic was to comment that even though Wright “has to be committed to a viable future ... her vision is bleak and separatist” (Devlin-Glass 84). In her melding of Indigenous storytelling and Western literary form, Wright may enact a gesture of metaphorical reconciliation but she concludes the novel pessimistically with an image that suggests that actual reconciliation is unattainable.

Palimpsest Country

In *Carpentaria,* the Gulf becomes emblematic of what Rushdie describes as palimpsest-country which Kral explains as: “the fictive country generated by the interplay of historical references and myths in the narrative, or the hybrid space found in contact zones where pre colonial and colonial rule interact” (8). Bhabha also uses the term “perverse palimpsest of colonial domination” to describe the prewritten codes forced upon both the coloniser and the colonised. Such roles entrap both parties in their given roles (44). This “perverse palimpsest of colonial domination” was very publicly acted out during the Australian History Wars, when rigidly polarised positions were replayed repeatedly, within the public sphere and in the intellectual debates of the 1990s and early 2000s. *Carpentaria*, which took five years to write, had its genesis during the time of Australia’s History Wars, when Wright also spent another two years thinking about how to write the novel (Interview with Vernay 122).[6] At the level of public policy and discourse, the long term effects of the History Wars are still being assessed. However, the bitterness of the debates of the 1990s and early 2000s, affected the optimism regarding the possibility for lasting reconciliation between Indigenous and immigrant Australians. Challenged to find a narrative mode conveying the nature of contemporary Australia’s “perverse palimpsest of colonial domination”, Wright chooses the genre of magic realism. Realised in Australian writing in recent times by authors such as Peter Carey and Richard Flanagan, *Carpentaria* represents a major milestone in the genre. Moreover, Syson recognises that “Wright may well have perfected the art for Australia” by means of giving the magic more grounding in Indigenous sources (85).

As a term, “magic realism” is an oxymoron which describes “the forced relations of irreconcilable terms” (Bowers 1). In itself, the style was ideally suited to

describe the unreconciled relations that existed between Indigenous and immigrant Australians during the History Wars: dealings which bought into contention the very legitimacy of the written word and the relationship between text and reality.[7] As a narrative mode which is most "pertinent to late twentieth-century literature", magic realism offers a means to present alternative approaches to reality, temporality and subjectivity to that of Western philosophy (1). Recently, the genre has become popular in many "post colonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction" like *Carpentaria* where opposing outlooks are reconciled by combining a practical, realist narrative with a matter-of-fact acceptance of magic and superstition in the same novel (1-2). Often considered to be a disruptive narrative mode, magic realism becomes a means for illustrating "the complexity of contact zones where a change in perspective reveals a hidden pattern beneath the surface" (Kral 9).

The Top End: Missionaries, Mercenaries, Misfits and Mystics

As fashioned by Wright, the Gulf country comes to represent that complex contact zone where "the real, the un-real and the God only know coexist" (Bailey 59). The novel is peopled by a huge, eccentric and sometime surreal cast of characters—some of whom are drawn from Aboriginal mythology. But, in its political engagement with the reality of race relations within the region, *Carpentaria* also evokes the white man's legends which celebrate bush eccentricity, "the three M's of the Top End: missionaries, mercenaries and misfits" (Devlin-Glass 82). The town's misfit cop, Truthful E'Strange is on a sea change from his time at Fortitude Valley where he "did whatever it took to survive rort and corruption" (335). Truthful creates a tropical oasis in the town's jail, crowding it with so much foliage that the cells have no room for prisoners. Besotted as he is by Norm's daughter, Girlie, this is an idyllic state of affairs, until Bruiser lands a Death in Custody in "Truthful's planetarium" (311). As a lauded Top End civic mercenary, Mayor Stan Bruiser's motto in life is "if you can't use it, eat it or fuck it, then it's no bloody use to you" (35). The Mayor's remedy for the Aboriginals is to send them back to the cattle stations where they could work for nothing except for board and keep (36). In his younger more vigorous days as a cattleman, Bruiser bragged about branding every Aboriginal woman in town by running them into the ground and raping them (40). Libby Valance, the bleeding heart Town Clerk, another misfit "accused of neither being local nor understanding the region and its values", continually stalls Bruiser's civic vision.

As for missionaries, there is the Irishman Father Dan, God's servant for thirty years in the Gulf of Carpentaria, whose cathedral is the Valiant he drives across the saltpans. In his bush diocese, Father Dan teaches Christianity "through the art of boxing, song and abuse": repaying the Lord "through the many good fighting Catholics" he creates in makeshift boxing rings fashioned on the beaches and the claypans of the Gulf (189). From the realm of the unearthly comes Elias, who mysteriously emerges from the sea to be hailed as one of Uptown's own and honoured with the surname "Smith". All of Uptown is European and named Smith (72). Unable to remember his origins Elias acquires other people's memories (80). Meantime, Normal Phantom is renowned as a master taxidermist of dead fish. In the Pricklebush dump he creates a miraculous fish room, chemically preserving fish and stuffing them with horsehair to create bejewelled artworks of amazing beauty. Dozens of festooned fish hang from the rafters of Norm's workroom, where they eerily sing in "mezzosoprano voices" which float from their conserved mouths (210). Does Norm's taxidermy represent his identity as a man of the sea trying to preserve the legacy of his country? When Norm returns him to the sea, does Elias Smith represent white invasion or separatist hopes? (Devlin-Glass 83). Wright's cosmic cast provokes a multitude of symbolic suggestions. Never overtly signalling only one implication, Wright allows readers to form their own allegorical allusions about her characters. Next there is Big Mozzie Fishman, Normal Phantom's friend and in due course his nemesis. Fishman runs away with Norm's wife, the incandescent Angel Day who goes on to reinvent herself as "La Goddess of Mozzie Fishman" (370). A spiritual leader of a motorcade convoy, Mozzie calls upon sacred knowledge as an Aboriginal traditionalist. His fleet is on an endless pilgrimage, covering the thousands of kilometres of Dreaming tracks across the country: "The pilgrims drove the roads knowing that they had one aim in life. They were totally responsible for keeping the one Law strong by performing this one ceremony from thousands of creation stories for the guardians of Gondwanaland" (124).

Mining and the Top End

For Devlin-Glass, *Carpentaria* shares similar concern to Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* which was published in 1975, namely, "to mobilise Aboriginal sacred knowledge for political purposes" (Devlin-Glass 83). For this critic, there could be no more important political use for a work of literature; one which has serious implications for both mining and land settlement within Australia. Using fabulist material from Indigenous sources, *Carpentaria* argues against mining development by mobilising "the

mythological in order to argue the interconnectedness of the Aboriginal sacred and political and ecological matters" (83). As well as encouraging an appreciation and understanding of the different way in which Indigenous people lived on the continent, Wright is hopeful that current concern about climate change will lead to white Australians wanting "to be more grounded in the Indigenous story" (Perlez 31). Embedded in her grandmother's memories of country, *Carpentaria* also acknowledges its spiritual debt to two Aboriginal land rights activists. The novel's dedication reads: "Inspired by all the beauty that comes from having an ancient homeland that is deeply loved by those who guard it, and especially my countrymen, Murrandoo Yanner and Clarence Waldon". In the late 1990s, Murrandoo Yanner waged an active but ultimately unsuccessful campaign against Federal and Queensland government. Seeking to circumvent the Native Title, both governments supported the establishment of the Century Zinc Mine in the Gulf of Carpentaria (Lowry 26). Murrandoo Yanner, whom Wright has described as "our hero in the Gulf of Carpentaria", has been assumed to be the model for the character of Will Phantom (26). Equally, Gurfurrittt mine can be seen as mock-up for the Century Zinc mine.

From time to time, direct and spoken without pointed humour, irony or poetry, Wright's anger bursts through in *Carpentaria*. Nowhere does she appear to own this anger more than in the passage that describes Mozzie Fishman and his men assisting Will Phantom to blow up the Gurfurrittt mine: a story which is "a modern legend" about "civil morality" (407-413). In one of the novel's many shifts of point of view, this section moves without warning from third person, to first person narration:

> What a turnout. Gee whiz! We were in really serious stuff now. We were burning the white man's very important places and wasting all his money. We must have forgotten our heads. We were really stupid people to just plumb forget like—because the white man was a very important person who was very precious about money. Well! He was the boss. We are not boss. He says he likes to be boss. He says he's got all the money. Well! We haven't got the money neither. And now, all it took was a simple flick. A flick, flick, here and there with a dirt-cheap cigarette lighter, and we could have left the rich people who owned Gurfurrittt mine, destitute and dispossessed of all they owned.
>
> Straight out we should have been asking ourselves—Why are you not hanging your head in shame to the white man? We were supposed to say. Oh! No! You can't do things like that to the, umm, beg your pardon, please and thankyou, to the arrr, em, WHIITE MAN. (408)

Another passage where Wright's anger is almost palpable is in her description of the deaths in custody. But this time, her anger is melancholy rather than triumphant. On a vigilante hunt to solve the murder of a white neighbourhood watchman, three Aboriginal boys are arrested. Wright laments "and this was young hope, the place where optimism should dwell" (333). Faced with flimsy evidence and chasing a confession,

Mayor Bruiser brutalises the boys: "Tristrum and Luke Fishman, aged ten and twelve [and] Aaron Ho Kum, aged eleven. When the flogging stopped, they had scooted under the table away from Bruiser, and huddled against the back wall, petrified, waiting … " (358). Constable E'Strange returns to find the boys hanging from the crossbar at the top of their cell.

Collapsing History

As an Indigenous story teller, Wright clarifies her investment in *Carpentaria* by explaining that Indigenous story telling brings "all the stories of the past, from ancient times and to the stories of the last 200 years" (Interview with O'Brien 216). Consequently, "all times are important" and this permits her to collapse history, assimilating the remote Dreamtime into the present as she does in *Carpentaria* (216). She credits her Indigenous heritage with teaching her:

> How you write a book like *Carpentaria* that incorporates all times. Carlos Fuentes once said: 'All times are important in Mexico, and no time has ever been resolved.' And for Indigenous Australia that is the same, we have the same feeling and understanding. It is about weaving history and myth into the present situation, and that is what I've tried to do, and through the narration of the novel. (216)

Mitchell Rolls points out that a key feature of Aboriginal cultures and societies is that the "new is incorporated into the eternity of the now of the Dreaming" (16). Thus the water buffalo becomes a materialization of the rainbow serpent rather than a recently introduced species. Rolls goes on to argue, that Aboriginal tradition often erases the memory of any historical departures from established norms as well as the vicissitudes of history (16). Commonly, this occurs when Aboriginal groups create the country they now occupy, as perpetually inhabited since the Dreaming (17). Presently, there are also compelling legislative reasons to act in this way.

Australian Aboriginal groups are held captive by the white man's Native Title Act, which requires that they can only claim title if they can prove "unbroken cultural and genealogical continuity with the past"—in itself, something which also ignores the vicissitudes of history (20). Thus the legitimacy of Aboriginal history is enslaved to the overwhelming authority of white historical representation. For anthropologist Lévi-Straus, "historical knowledge" is the myth of modern, Western, bourgeois industrial societies (qtd in H. White 11). Hayden White elaborates on his argument:

> [t]he substance of this myth consisted of the mistaking of a method of representation, narrative, for a content, that is, the notion of a humanity uniquely identified with those societies capable of believing that they *lived* the kinds of stories that Western historian had *told* about them. (11)

For Lévi-Straus, one of the problems of Western historical method is the claim that it studies—"a 'humanity' more fully realised in its 'historical' than its 'pre-historical' manifestations"—a claim which allegedly grants the humanism of Western civilisation its ethical superiority (qtd in H. White 11). On the other hand, as Wright reveals in *Carpentaria*, the moral principles on which the "civilised" West prides itself, appear to be more honoured "in the breach than in the observance" (H. White 12).

Ultimately, for Lévi-Straus there was no solitary "scale for the ordering of events, but rather as many chronologies as there are culture specific ways of representing the passage of time" (qtd in H. White 11). In *Carpentaria*, by weaving together "western and Indigenous paradigms of space and time" Wright imaginatively reclaims her traditional country (Devlin-Glass 83). This not only challenges the authority of white historiography but also makes a serious socio-political statement about the legitimacy of white land rights. As for *Carpentaria's* intervention in the History Wars—conceived and written as it was during that turbulent time—perhaps the last word belongs with Barthes.

> Does the narration of past events, which, in our culture from the time of the Greeks onwards, has generally been subject to the sanction of historical "science," bound to the underlying standard of the "real" and justified by the principles of "rational" exposition—does this form of narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indisputably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama? (7)

or *Carpentaria*?

Fig. 20. Simone Lazaroo as pictured on the website for Murdoch University WA — www.murdoch.edu.au/News/Find-an-expert/English-and-Creative-Arts-experts/.

Fig. 21. Hsu-Ming Teo as pictured on the Allen and Unwin website — www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=311&author=62.

7

Re-siting the Yellow Lady:

Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo

> I confess I am not sorry at this insurmountable repugnance to immigration on the part of the Chinese ladies. The fact is we don't want them. We don't want the flat faces, the pug noses, the yellow complexions, the small feet and the long nails multiplied a thousand fold amongst us, as they would very soon be if the Chinese ladies came to us as well as the gentlemen.
>
> Reverend John Dunmore Lang popular leader
> and supporter of the Australian Republic 1857
> qtd in Broinowski 4

In the first chapter of *Excitable Speech,* which she titles "Burning Acts, Injurious Speech" Judith Butler invokes J.L. Austin's distinction between illocutionary speech — actions performed by virtue of words — and perlocutionary speech — actions that are performed as a consequence of words (44). Butler admits that the distinction is a tricky one, going on to say that in "the perlocutionary view words are instrumental to the accomplishment of actions, but they are not themselves the actions they help to accomplish" (44). On the other hand, illocutionary speech performs itself, such as in the pronouncement of the speech act, "you are now married" where marriage is both pronounced and enacted: "in the course of that performing [marriage] becomes the thing done; the pronouncement is the act of speech at the same time that it is the speaking of an act" (44). For Butler, it is this capacity for the word to both be "done by" and "done in" that entangles the word in action, for not only do words have the power to signify—they also have the power to accomplish (44). Hence, the meaning of the performative act itself lies in this collusion—a complicity which allows the "act-like" quality of a language effect to produce a different order (44). Before she moves the discussion from the individual to the nation-state, Butler goes on to say that the "act-like" quality of the performative requires a subject/actor to perform the action (47).

At the level of the nation-state, it is the body of the judiciary which becomes the subject/actor of the nation-state's acts of violence. Authorised by state power and notions of punishment and retribution encoded into law, the judge then interprets these

words as they apply to the case at hand. Subsequently, the body of the judiciary acts (through others) to contain, injure, render powerless, or even to execute the prisoner, thus normalising the offending body (47). As the epigraph which began this chapter shows, acts of violence, speech, symbolic or actual that are directed towards Asians have a long history within Australia and they are performed at both the level of individual citizen and the nation state. This chapter's opening epigraph, which is directed with particular violence toward Asian women, reflects the emerging citizenry's fear that the nation would not breed "pure" (Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines* 115-116). From its inception as a nation-state in 1901, Australia legislatively deprived "Asians"—who were an ill-defined category at best—the rights and liberties endorsed for its white British citizens.[1] Considering the question of performativity, Butler wonders "what it means to say that 'things might be done with words' […] What does it mean for a word not only to name but also in some sense perform and, in particular to perform what it names?" (43). The White Australia policy enacted what it named and "by 1947 the non-European population, other than Aborigines, was measured by the Census as 0.25 per cent of the total. Australia had become one of the 'whitest' countries in the world outside of north-western Europe" (Jupp *White Australia to Woomera* 10). Yet, nowhere does the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 mention race or White Australia. So, what does it mean to say that language "acts"? By colloquially renaming Australia's immigration laws as the White Australia policy, common language sought to condense the many perlocutionary speech acts that supported the preservation of racial purity. In illocutionary speech "the name performs itself", therefore everyday language sought to express Australia's immigration restrictions in the same manner (Butler 44). As a consequence, the White Australia policy became that name that in the "course of that performing" became the thing done—a White Australia (44).

The Yellow Peril

As an ever-present neighbouring threat, the teeming populations of Asia—the yellow peril—needed to be vigilantly watched and contained outside of Australian borders. Poverty and political upheavals saw 100,000 Chinese come to Australia as either miners or labourers between 1848 and 1900. By 1855, Victoria had imposed an anti-Chinese tax on new arrivals and required them to live in so-called "Chinese protectorates" (Broinowski 16). Similar legislation soon followed in other states. In 1861, during the Lambing Flat riots, near Young in NSW, thousands of Chinese miners were beaten and run off their diggings. The cartoons and novels spanning the three decades of Federation

circulated the fears of the fledgling nation: Asian avarice, cunning, bestiality and depravity were their common themes (Broinowski 16-21). Furthermore, union leaders saw low-paid "coloured" labour as frustrating their aims to establish a just and equal society: one which opposed the injustices of the old world and the mother country. As "workers came to believe that White Australia could prevent their reduction to a class of slaves or a race of helots", political leaders recognised that the foreign threat from Asia, contained by the White Australia policy, was one way to unite "their quarrelsome constituents" (McQueen 16). In *Anxious Nation,* David Walker details the burgeoning anxieties of the young nation, located so perilously close to Asia, yet all the more determined to link its history and genealogy to British origins. Walker argues that the racialising drives in Australian nationalism "would have been a good deal less intense, had it not been for the geo-political threat attributed to awakening Asia from the 1880s" (5).

With the empty continent of Australia so conveniently close, populous Asia emerged as Australia's pre-eminent threat, post and prior to Federation. A strongly expressed nationality was deemed crucial for the infant Australian nation: a weakly expressed nationality could only lead to Asianised disaster. From 1905 until 1965, Australia's prominent news magazine, *The Bulletin,* carried the masthead "Australia for the White Man" (Broinowski 22). During those sixty years of publication, Donald Horne, the editor who removed the offending masthead in the 1960s, found it difficult "to locate positive images of 'coloured people'" (22). In a new millennium, overt expressions of racism are no longer acceptable but the fear of the "yellow peril" can still be reignited under the guise of more modern-day concerns. Introducing her thesis on the Australian novels of the Asian invasion, Catriona Ross recounts the special report—"The Gathering Storm"—which appeared in the 9 October 2007 edition of the Australian *Bulletin* and which details

> predictions of how catastrophic, climate change driven, upheavals across Asia could see the inundation of Australia's vulnerable north with environmental refugees. Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Kelty foresees that lack of rain, rising sea levels, pandemic disease and failing crops may lead to vast movements of populations as people "in their millions" could "begin to look for land and they'll cross oceans and borders to do it. (1)

Given this updated story of "the yellow peril", it comes as no surprise that Ien Ang describes the topic of Asians in Australia as "one that is historically complex, ideologically loaded, and politically and culturally sensitive" ("Asians in Australia" 115).

For most of the twentieth century, Asia has occupied the Australian imagination as the single all-encompassing category of a geographical idea created by Europeans. Countries as diverse as India, Sri Lanka, Burma, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, amongst others, have been lumped together in a single homogenous category. In 2010, what is "Asia" for Australia and where does it begin and end? (Broinowski xii). For Ang, in the Australian context, the word "Asians" still has a performative function in that it represents the "inescapable *racialisation* of Asians in the dominant cultural imaginary; the lumping together and homogenisation of a group of people on the basis of a 'discourse of race' " ("Asians in Australia" 116). For Khoo Tseen-Ling such homogenisation negates the multiple sites of *being* for individuals and communities of Asian descent (*Banana Bending* 156; my italics). In the mid-nineties, the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party revealed that the old sentiments of White Australia still linger and, for that reason, Ang proposes that "the issue of 'Asians in Australia' must be seen as an intense site of symbolic contestation in contemporary Australia" ("Asians in Australia" 117).

Citing *The Yellow Lady* in the 1980s and 1990s

In the 1980s, when Alison Broinowski first suggested researching Asian influences on Australian culture at the Australian National University (ANU) she received the response: "Asian influences on Australian culture? It's not worth doing. There aren't any" (vii). Broinowski went onto to publish her research in *The Yellow Lady*, an important study now much quoted in the area of Asian-Australian studies. *The Yellow Lady* addresses the long-held Western perception of Asia as female, "submissive, emotional, immoral, alluring, repulsive, exploitable and treacherous" (10). Even so, in the 1990s both Jacqueline Lo and Ien Ang take issue with the book's title which they believe reinforces the very Asiatic stereotypes it seeks to expose ("Playing the Yellow Lady" 70; "The Curse of the Smile" 47). Broinowski's title is taken from a poem by Hugh McCrae which was published in 1922 by Norman Lindsay. The poem evokes the exoticised white fantasy of Asian femininity, as the white lover recalls his Chinese lady love with her "tiny rose leaf Chinese foot [...] long pink nails [and] nights of sin" (62). Lindsay went on to make an eroticised etching for the poem. Both Lindsay's etching and McCrae's poem suggest Asia as a beckoning forbidden zone for white men—"where women without shame indulged males whose appetites were sharpened by the guilt of miscegenation" (63). Broinowski finds this attitude still prevails in present-day fiction written by Beilby, Drewe, Koch, and Emery and in films such as *Far East*(1982)

and *Good Woman of Bangkok* (1991) (10). As an academic study, *The Yellow Lady* justifies Australian representations of the Asiatic Other with empirical evidence. Broinowski's research does this exhaustively, exposing and proving the existence of long-held Orientalist assumptions about Asia within Australia.

However, returning to Frow's definition of the "Other" which was presented in the introduction: the "Other" can only exist and be understood within the framework of a culture which it operates (*Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* 3). Bringing these cultural depictions to the fore always risks reinforcing the very stereotypes that are exposed, something which draws the critical attention of Lo and Ang. Nonetheless, a gap, an absence is also established which alerts us to the fakery of what once was solid. Like a photographic backdrop which once convinced us of its three-dimensional perspective in front of which we confidently captured the experiences of real people—the White people. Given this socio-cultural context, Hsu-Ming Teo and Simone Lazaroo enter Australian literature as "the arriving stranger who both defines and transcends the limits of what the host can offer and accept" (Jose 7). Because they are gifted storytellers, Teo and Lazaroo exceed the limits which are imposed on Broinowski's work. Both authors have been rewarded for their literary merit. Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* won the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for fiction and was a finalist for the Kirivama Pacific Book Prize, as well as being optioned for film. Teo's *Love and Vertigo* won the Australian/Vogel Literary Award. Both novels were published in Australia in 2000: a few years after the racial commentary of the Hanson era that had earned the silent compliance of the conservative government. Therefore, meanings derived from *The Australian Fiancé* and *Love and Vertigo* also circulate outside the enclosed form of the novels themselves. At a time when racialised groups were targeted for being culturally and physically unable to assimilate as Anglo–Australians, these novels re-address the compromised cultural participation of Asians in Australia. Consequently, *The Australian Fiancé* and *Love and Vertigo* have become cultural texts which take on significance from the wider social field within which they are incorporated and the social practices with which they communicate (Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" 235).

By taking on the power to name and speak as identified by Judith Butler, Lazaroo and Teo exact a commitment to questioning previously fixed categories. Butler's interest circulates around the question of "how the social parameters of language and culture actually function to affirm certain subjects and to diminish others" (Kirby 86). She also queries the categories of those who are granted the power to enact

what they name and consequently diminish the individuality and agency of others. Butler uses the word "interpellation" in the Althusserian sense—wherein a subject is generated by practises of address and identification which are prescribed by social norms:

> The one who speaks the performative effectively is understood to operate according to uncontested power. The doctor who receives the child and pronounces—"It's a girl"—begins that long string of interpellations by which the girl is transitively girled: gender is ritualistically repeated […] Kendall Thomas makes a similar argument that the subject is always "raced," transitively racialised by regulatory agencies from its inception. The power to "race" and indeed the power to "gender" precedes the "one" who speaks such power, and yet the one who speaks nevertheless appears to have that power. (*Excitable Speech* 49)

Simone Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* and Hsu-Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo* intercede in this complex discursive field of race and gender which Butler describes, particularly in its present-day Australian manifestation. By taking on Butler's power to name their own subjects/characters, both these authors produce narratives that induce hitherto unknown identifications from their readers. This chapter shows that *Love and Vertigo* and *The Australian Fiancé* provide multiple possibilities for critical engagement. When this engagement occurs in the qualified binary of Asian-Australian literary representations, these texts provide the opportunity to interrogate the absences and complexities that are subsumed and simplified within that term.

The Australian Fiancé

Lazaroo migrated from Singapore to Australia when she was three. As an Asian-Australian author, she sees her work as a coming-to-self, in that her novels re-present her "own familial and cultural remains" ("Memorialising the Lost Past" 434). At least in part, she considers that her novels about Singapore and Malacca have been written

> as an attempt to reconstruct what remains of loss, specifically the loss of continuity with my place of birth and extended Eurasian family; and an attempt to make that loss productive ... Thus, loss and death [become] not merely occasions of grief, but opportunities for reading, interpreting and reconstructing new meanings from remains. (433)

At its most naive level, *The Australian Fiancé* narrates a love story. In Singapore, post-World War 2, a young Eurasian woman meets and falls in love with the son of a rich, Australian, pearling family. In the aftermath of war, she returns with the Fiancé to his family home in Broome to a homestead named, poetically, Elsewhere. Here, she hopes to fashion herself anew and she states simply that she has "been set adrift by my longing for a new life with him" (75). Unaware of the full trauma, in which the war engulfed both Singapore and the Eurasian girl, the Fiancé asks why every second Singapore

business is called "*New World*" (43). The exchange that follows, points to the distance between them, an unbridgeable expanse which will ultimately overwhelm the fledgling romance:

> She turns to him. 'It's the end of the war'.
> 'The beginning of hope?'
> 'If you have the courage.'
> And the luck. She does not say this to him. Just hopes, hopes that this is a man who might never see her ruin, nor ask her to explain her toughness. (44)

In spite of their differences the protagonists are mutually fascinated by each other but their interracial liaison is destined to be short lived. Slowly, the Fiancé comes to the same opinion as his parents. He capitulates to their entrenched racial attitudes and ends the engagement, agreeing to endorse the colonial identity that they have fashioned for him. The Eurasian woman returns to Singapore once more, her hope for a new life at Elsewhere abandoned. Although the woman may have been the loser in the affair, she is the one who retrospectively recounts their love story.

By means of her female protagonist, Lazaroo undertakes the feminist injunction by Cixous that "woman must write woman" (877). Cixous argues that given the psychoanalytic paradigm which constructs women as lacking the phallus and therefore does not acknowledge the differences in their bodies, these differences must be bought into writing. In this way, women alter a patriarchal discourse whose power welds itself to the oppression of imperialism and colonialism (877). By granting her the role of self-conscious narrator, Lazaroo makes the reader aware that the Eurasian woman's experiences have led her to a psychic consciousness and a self-actualisation which is ultimately denied to the Fiancé. As a female body, existing within the physical and symbolic violence of both the Japanese and British colonial regimes, her meaning has been voided within the order of patriarchal dominance. Desolate, stripped of words and "unable to speak of what happened" to her during the war, abandoned by her Australian lover, humiliated by the colonial attitudes of his parents—the Eurasian woman is ultimately able to come to terms with and transform her experiences (15, 1,) (Bryappa 239). The Eurasian woman's unshadowing is presaged by the epigraph which begins the novel: "For this image, I ran through darkness from place to place, carrying my own light with me whilst leaving my camera's shutter open" (1).

In fact, the epigraphs which begin each of the chapters in *The Australian Fiancé* are drawn from H. S. Newcombe's 1948 book, *The Twin-Lens Camera Companion* (Focal Press London), which exists as an actual manual. Acting as an intertext within the novel, Lazaroo playfully acknowledges the handbook, going to say that this

ancillary text, "lent focus to this book" (1). Quotes from this secondary text are attributed as "FROM THE FIANCE's *Twin-Lens Camera Companion*, 1948". If the Eurasian woman is identified with the expressive act of writing, then the Fiancé is identified with the contrary, the photographic metaphor in the novel (Morris 86). For Susan Sontag, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power" (4). Both the Fiancé and the Eurasian woman's father share a common preoccupation with photography. The photographic metaphor, which links both the white father and the Fiancé, implies the confidence of a colonial gaze. Each of them abandons the Eurasian woman with whom they form a relationship: the white father returns to die in his British homeland and the Fiancé marries a suitable white girl in Broome. Ultimately, both men misconstrue and exploit what they seek to possess but never really understand. Thus, photography becomes a metaphor for the sort of visual knowledge which the Eurasian woman associates with both patriarchal and imperial mis/appropriation: one which also implies the right to seize and order the world.

Born into old Singapore, long after the "Empire had come to reign", the Eurasian woman's delivery is "surrounded by the beating of wings" as the old spirits take flight from the "Empire's machinery, its grids, its plans" (5). Acting as a metaphor for her own flight and subsequent fall, the "winged creatures of old Singapore" seek shelter amongst the new colonial monuments—only to plummet to earth as they stun themselves against glass and brick or find themselves pinned to fresh render (5). Likewise, it is these winged creatures that have obsessed the Eurasian woman's father. When he dies, he leaves behind a cigarette tin "full of blurred photographic attempts to capture things that fly" (13). Her father had been determined to prove to her mother that the spirits which she feared were not real. Anything that was captured by his camera was real; anything that was not, it simply did not exist (13). When the father dies however, somewhere in England with his camera, the mother pronounces, "That was as it should be ... Cameras are for the West" (13). In the end, her father has not succeeded in refuting the existence of spirits to her mother. Already appearing in a dream, a bird with frost on his wings arrives to tell her mother of his death.

Robyn Morris provides an extended commentary on "reading photographically" and "the historical correlation between visual knowledge and (an unstated, Western) hegemony" (86). The resilience of her mother's belief in the intuitive truth of what she knows suggests a wellspring of feminine strength, something that her daughter will later be able to access. The authenticity of the white father's photographic representation has

not been able to dissuade the mother of the authority of her own cultural beliefs. Subtle as her resistance is to the all-encompassing truth of Western knowledge, the mother's courage is also juxtaposed to the father's rule. Even at best, the British father, who was "away often on business", is portrayed as an absent and uncertain figure: "an empty space where a father should be" (13, 167). Loyal to the law of feeling, rather than to the logocentric laws of scientific representation, it is the mother who has had the courage to love the British father and to raise her mixed race daughter out of wedlock. It is the mother who "bore the Englishman's instinct for forgetting in her body" to deliver the Eurasian woman "into the world with all the hope that she could summon" (156). Even when this hope is betrayed, it is the mother who finds the courage to go on, misquoting the liturgy from her broken convent education to demonstrate her love: "*Flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood"* (156). Imprisoned by the Japanese herself, it is her mother who restores the body of the Eurasian woman who has been held as a comfort woman during the war and repeatedly raped by Japanese soldiers. Acting as the midwife to her daughter's labour, it is the mother who helps to birth the grandchild that results from this atrocity. It is the mother who wraps her daughter's confinement wounds in "lime and coconut oil" and raises the child on the last tins of condensed milk, claiming her grandchild as her own child and shielding her daughter from further disgrace (166).

On the third afternoon that they spend together in Singapore, the Eurasian girl realises "that the Australian reminds her of someone else she had known" (38). The resemblance of the image of the Australian to that of her father owes less to "that fading image from her childhood" and more to the sense of "well fed confidence" that the Fiancé exudes (38). She makes these connections instinctively between paternal abandonment, the trauma of war and the promise of the Australian, in whom she seems to read "her fate foretold" (38). Equally, he is fascinated by the Eurasian woman as her father once was with her mother. Is it any wonder that, on meeting the Fiancé, she recalls that she "had heard about foreigners falling for the Orient before. Here today, gone tomorrow" (49). In this sense, the story of the Eurasian woman and the Fiancé meshes the account of these separate selves with the story of their separate nations (Bryappa 232). As the protagonists' names are never revealed, they appear to signify the symbolic value which their bodies manifest. As he waits for her on the docks, the Eurasian woman watches the unsuspecting Australian:

> The impression she has of him as she watches is one of imminence and passivity, as if his strength hasn't been tested or come into its own. Perhaps that's the way he is when he is just himself, when she's not with him. Perhaps

> that's really him. At that moment, she's not in awe of him any more, she does not envy his privilege. At that moment, she almost pities him. (38)

In this passage the Fiancé could be read as symbolising the naiveté of his nation and hence his fascination with the Eurasian woman's "toughness" (42). The designation of "Fiancé" which he carries throughout the novel also implies an engagement with Asia which will never be realised. His commitment is impossible due to the colonial interdiction of his parents, a prohibition which he cannot withstand. Once again the national metaphor is invoked. His parents represent Australia's hereditary ties to Britain. Australia aspires to colonial mastery within the Asia–Pacific region by re-enacting similar racial attitudes.[2]

Both feared yet desired, the racialised colonial body, acting as a site that is both a location of attraction and abjection, is a theme which is taken up by Homi Bhabha ("The Other Question" 150). Robert Young also pursues this same premise contending that, coupled with all sorts of threats of "perversion and degeneration", the racially hybrid body threatens the purity of a racial hierarchy predicated on white superiority (*Colonial Desire* 5). It is this underlying horror of miscegenation which alarms the Fiancé's parents when they first meet the engaged couple. Fittingly, the mother arrives with new white linen to fortify the Broome homestead, informing the Eurasian woman that,"it's English" and "very good quality" (106). As a white son of the Empire, the Fiancé is expected to uphold these same virtues. He is obliged to breed white by both his parents and his nation. Australian newspapers are full of pictures of "Asian deportees" as Australian leaders warn of the dangers: "The inscrutability of the Asian. The yellow peril … " (106). As they glimpse the possibility that their lineage might one day mix freely with the blood of the yellow peril, the Eurasian woman registers the look of "dull disbelief" in his parents' eyes when they first see her and Fiancé as a couple (107). While the mother deals with the menace of the Eurasian woman by going "inside for a lie down" the father drinks with his son and heir, throwing "the beer back into his throat as if he might dampen down the very thought of her" (107).

Beer releases the father's venom as he proceeds to relegate the inter-racial union to its proper symbolic place in his family tree:

> I know alla 'bout Asia.... Cheap as chips. But no quality. And Dangerous. Disease everywhere. Gotta watch your arse all the time. Ah well. No pleasure without pain. [...] Tasty. Exotic. I'll give that, love, you're exotic.... But [...] even in this town two wogs don't make a white ... Ah well, son. At least you'll always be able to afford her. (108)

Brutally diminished by the father's attack the Eurasian woman leaves the room, whispering to the Fiancé "now I know all about myself" (108). The father has virulently

sought to bequeath the Eurasian woman a particular self-image. Robyn Morris suggests that Lazaroo exposes “an endemic fear within white Australian culture” which circulates around the thought of the very death of Whiteness (88). Certainly, it is this fear which causes the father to exercise his patriarchal power. In line with his expectations for his heir, the father shows his son that he needs to damage anything which threatens the pre-eminence of his interests. This harm is embodied in the Eurasian woman and in the menace that she presents for the purity of the familial breeding stock. More to the point, the Fiancé makes no effort to depict his union with the Eurasian woman any differently. By passively accepting his father’s diatribe, the Fiancé affirms that he adheres to the strict codes of the white patriarchal order.

Not only upheld by the men, this order is also exactingly preserved by the white women. Whilst they take “afternoon tea”, the mother explains to the Eurasian woman the necessity for the “daughters of the Empire” to always be on guard: “It’s very easy for your standards to drop in a town like this ... To go native” (133). Still, the mother’s façade is shattered by the arrival of the Aboriginal woman who comes regularly to beg at the homestead door. In a fit of fury the mother drives her away but as the black woman retreats, she persists in her claim: “You know it’s all mine too! It’s mine too!” (134). The black woman’s presence emphasises the fragility of the white woman’s position thus forcing her to reassert the dominance of the white patriarchy. For it is on behalf of this order that the white woman ensures that the lineage breeds pure, a duty which in turn ensures her place in this same order. Later on, the Eurasian woman discovers that the Aboriginal woman had once been the father’s mistress before she was discarded and condemned to beg for scraps at Elsewhere’s door. Given his father’s none too secret history, the Fiancé is undoubtedly aware of the racial prohibitions on his liaison. Initially, he appears to circumvent them with ease, as in his dealings with the custom official when he first arrives in Australia with the Eurasian woman.

Enforcing the legal code of the time, the custom’s official demands to know the percentage of “European” in the Eurasian woman: “Full-blood? Half-caste? Quadroon?” (80). Explaining that Australian race fears are close to being encoded into law, the custom official elaborates:

> Last year Mr Calwell said he’d like all immigrants' blood to be at least fifty-one per cent European. Not policy yet, but he sent out some [...] secret rulings. Persons applying for residence must at least satisfy the Department by their appearance that they will have no difficulty in being accepted as European in Australia. (80)

Nonetheless, once the Fiancé gives his word that he will ensure that the Eurasian woman will not “do anything too [...] foreign”, the custom’s official uses a “sliding

scale" to determine her European blood, something which he is entitled to do "until the actual acceptable percentage is made policy by the minister" (80). As they shake hands on a gentleman's agreement, the custom's official reassures the Fiancé: "Can't get a family more Australian than yours. Just being yours makes her ... well ... at least eighty per cent ... I'll issue a certificate of exemption. I'll make sure it's renewed every three months" (81). The Eurasian woman's exemption certificate is "dazzling white, outshining her birth certificate" (81). Much later, the Eurasian woman is able to speak of this experience when her blood was thinned "to nothing" before being fortified by a "sliding scale and certificate of exemption" (92). Laughing hugely at the story, the Asian-Aboriginal housemaid identifies a shared bond. She asks the Eurasian woman about her colonial government in Singapore:

> 'What your people call it, miss, living under that government?'
> 'Swallowing the boss.'
> She laughs hugely, her laugh that understands: 'Eating shit, we call it'. (92)

More astute than the Eurasian woman in the ways of local power, she correctly identifies her relationship with the Fiancé as that of being "the boss boy's flank", just as the Aboriginal beggar woman was once the father's flank (92).

Whether local or imported, livestock carry the monogram of their owners on their flank. Symbolically, it is the Fiancé's "monogram" which gains the Eurasian woman her exemption certificate to enter Australia—just as the Aboriginal woman once had permission to enter the homestead because she carried the father's "monogram". Elsewhere's white linen proudly displays this very monogram which the Fiancé explains is embroidered in Singapore "by some little Chinese ladies [...] Cheap" (93). For the Fiancé, unconsciously imbricated as he is in the power of a white colonial regime, "his self is [always] reflected back to him", just like his nation which is always "importing and exporting its own name" (93). For the Eurasian woman, this realisation comes as a premonition for her future. Once she begins to reflect "his self" back to the Fiancé in a way he can no longer admit, her time at Elsewhere will have to end. To elude the censure of his parents in Broome, the couple escapes to the Fiancé's "horizon blue boat" (125). On the boat, the Eurasian woman dreams of a blue-eyed man who visits her with "hands outstretched [...] beseeching me to believe his helplessness" (128). When she wakes she recognises him as her father:

> My father, to whom the ocean carried the rumour of Asia. My father, who disregarded his inheritance to follow this rumour; carrying his self-made burden of forgetting over three oceans to my mother; to my Eurasian mother, to have her receive and bear his instinct for forgetting again in me. (128)

The Eurasian woman recognizes the gaze of the father in the Fiancé's stare and the way in which he too frames his photographs. But she cannot bring herself to say to the Fiancé: "I was laughing at all the ways you take possession of what you see, before you even know it. With your camera. With your names and monograms. With the ring on my finger" (124).

Sontag proposes that "[p]hotography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks" (23). Like the British father, the Fiancé believes in a world that is as it looks. The Fiancé asks to know it no further, only needing to possess the image so as to proprietarily order it to suit his understanding and his desire. Once the image has satiated the Fiancé's yearning it is catalogued and put aside. Six leather-bound photo albums enclose the Fiancé's knowledge of the world. Looking over them the Eurasian woman sees

> all the places he's been. All the Houses of the National Estate in Europe, all the picturesque small businesses in the slums of Asia .... The faces of people in his photographs are far off and almost unreadable, just part of the scenery, but the scenery is crisp, composed, technically perfect. I see his life as an unbroken itinerary, that every photograph is labelled. I see he takes his photos to help him remember what is his. (125)

This is as much as the Fiancé needs or wants to know of the world. Therefore when the father exposes the Eurasian woman's past as a comfort woman—a prostitute—for the Japanese army and the child that she calls "sister" as being her own, the Fiancé can only respond with "I'm not strong enough to cope with your past" (181).

Inexorably, the parents use their influence to have the exemption certificates for the Eurasian woman and the child withdrawn.

> The fiancé's parents have invoked a higher authority. They have found the perfect image of their feelings about me, not in their hearts or their God, but in the secret rulings and shifting prohibitions of the Immigration Department. The Immigration Officer. What an unimpeachable accomplice to fiancé's parents' desire to deny me. (177)

In 1948, as applied by the Immigration Department, Australian law rendered the Eurasian body the object of intense surveillance. Hence, the Eurasian woman's expulsion from the hoped-for paradise, as well as her exclusion from the possibly mythical, Elsewhere. Moreover, the nation-state's authority supports the sentence of censure already meted out by the Fiancé's parents. Long before she was born, the cultural practice of abjecting the Eurasian body was being inscribed into Australian decrees and regulations.

This chapter began with a discussion of Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech* and her interest in how language acts to affirm some subjects, whilst reducing the individuality

and agency of others. These acts of violence can be performed in language at the level of the individual actor; or at the level of the nation state and the actors which it chooses to empower. Lazaroo identifies her female protagonist as being both raced and gendered by uncontested powers which precede her (Butler 49). It is this process of inscription which Lazaroo literalizes by only ever referring to her as "the Eurasian woman" throughout the novel. This appellation also becomes a signifier for the numerous acts of violence—both symbolic and material—that the Eurasian woman will have to overcome both in Singapore and Australia. In countering this rhetoric of violence the Eurasian only has the incontestable evidence of her body. The Eurasian woman began the retrospective telling of her love story with: "[t]he young woman with body of hunger" and stating that it has taken her a lifetime of loss to "begin here after the war" (17). Lazaroo firmly grounds her novel in the corporeal. Looking back, the Eurasian woman questions the lovers' passionate intensity: "there was too much of the body too early in our engagement [...] But I was young.[...] Our bodies were our greatest certainty" (147). The body and its hunger is an obsessive theme throughout *The Australian Fiancé*, leading the Eurasian woman to reflect on its passage: "as I continue my journey towards my own True Body, I carry that young body of hunger, carry its yearning within me like an undelivered child" (17). The Eurasian woman experiences real and terrible hunger during the war. But here, hunger also substitutes as a metaphor of entitlement. This hunger, this longing to be seen and understood is something which she recognises in the Fiancé: "This sadness, this longing born of never being properly met by someone else. They both have this same sadness" (180).

As she watches the Fiancé being "annexed" by his parents she sees "the receding image of who he might have been" (177, 180). Both of the lovers' bodies are enmeshed in the social codes that precede them. With youthfully eager optimism these forces battle for unity and expression through their bodies. His body too has been inscribed by cultural practices, something which Lazaroo once again literalizes by only ever referring to him as "the Fiancé", "the Australian Fiancé" or "the Australian". Although within a white, patriarchal and colonial order, the Fiancé is granted far greater power, in the end this also diminishes him, making him dream and sob for "a safe full of treasure that has been robbed" (164). The lovers are damned, entangled as they are by the vastly different ideologies of nation, race and gender which have been predetermined for them.

For Cixous, "woman" functions as the necessary and rejected Other. Within a patriarchal culture her exclusion is always a necessary precondition; even more so, if her race also demands her prohibition. The Aboriginal woman who begs at Elsewhere

recognises the Eurasian woman's erasure. Seeing her packing her belongings, the Aboriginal woman farewells her: "I know how invisible this family make you feel, miss, I bin his father's flank long time ago" (195). Even though her love affair with the Australian ends unhappily, the Eurasian concedes that it is due to him that she was able to rediscover her body as a "body of pleasure" (192). After the trauma and abuse of the war, she is restored once more to her own body. By locating the voice in her discarded body, the Eurasian woman is able to carry her "own light" by writing and owning her story (1). Her "new life" does not come about because of him or by being accepted by his society (75). Rather, it comes about because she no longer denigrates or masks her true experience: "It is in this owning that the lie—the incomprehensible land of forgetting that lay between the woman I was the woman I have become—comes at last to its end" (197). According to Cixous, only when the body is heard will the immense resources of the unconscious be realised for a woman. In "*seizing* the occasion to *speak*" she makes her "entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*", in writing, she creates a weapon which allows her to become "the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process" (880). It is in recounting her story that the Eurasian woman claims her own "True Body" (17). Consequently, she is fashioned anew by putting "herself into the text [...] into the world and into history—by her own movement" (Cixous 875). This self-initiated momentum brings about the Eurasian woman's self-acceptance and transcendence, returning her once more "to the body which has been more than confiscated from her" (880).

Love and Vertigo

Love and Vertigo is another familial saga which begins with a displacement by locating itself within the Chinese diaspora in Singapore before the family migrates to Australia. In 1978, as the White Australia policy ends and "Australia was in need of medical and dental professionals", the Tay family migrates once more (140). Jonah Tay, the father of the family, is ironically referred to as "the Patriarch" throughout the novel. He reigns, with ever diminishing success, over his wife Pandora, his eldest son Sonny and Grace the younger daughter. The novel is narrated by Grace Tay and she introduces their story: "These are the myths I tell about my family and, like all myths, they are both truths and lies, simultaneous buffers of love and betrayals of trust" (1). Teo's opening lines suggest that diaspora is always a discrepancy of inner memory, a familial memory that is in part shared but never the same (Lee 22). Since migrating, Pandora Tay has only once returned to Singapore. Her daughter wonders if it was then that her mother

realised her displacement: “did she gaze uncomprehendingly around her and realise that this was no longer her home?” (3).

The second time that Pandora visits Singapore she comes to die, turning inwards in silence and self-punishment. Succumbing to vertigo, Pandora commits suicide by jumping from her brother’s apartment. Milan Kundera’s epigraph which introduces the novel explains that “vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us” (i). Both literally and metaphorically, Pandora falls to rest “in her own black hole”, whilst her blood pools around her (279). Beginning the novel’s narration with her return to Singapore for her mother’s funeral, Grace Tay re-assembles her mother’s life. Lying at the bottom of a Singapore apartment building, “a mash of organs and shattered bone”, Pandora’s dismembered body symbolises her dis-remembered past (278). By re-membering Pandora in language, the daughter seeks to transmute the mother. In transforming Pandora’s punished and punishable body into a truthful text, the narrator hopes to redeem her mother’s abjectivity. Here, the sense of this term is as defined by Nikolchina: “Abjectivity is literary assassination that presupposes a baffling inattentiveness toward the texts of the author” (9). Pandora’s is the “transcendental text”, the “culpable” female body to whom Chinese and Western patriarchy deny autonomy. A patriarchy which persists in their negligent misreading until that very body is exposed and abjected, is “incorpsed” and thrown out and from the body proper of knowledge and experience (9). Endowing her daughter Grace with a dubious legacy, Pandora Tay’s suicide symbolically represents this progression. It is this maternal bequest with which Grace grapples with throughout *Love and Vertigo.*

Maternal Corpses

Everyone knew that “Pandora, was born to be a victim” and even she believed that she was “cursed from birth” as she had bought disaster to her childhood neighbourhood (41). Her mother Mei Ling Lim, screamed so hard during her birth that it attracted the attention of the Japanese soldiers who were searching for “*kuniangs*: ‘comfort women’ “ (28). A number of the women who had gathered for Pandora’s birth were taken to the “*Yoshiwara”*, the red light district, for the duration of the occupation but “never returned to their family or friends, so ashamed were they of what they had been forced to do during the war” (28). Rejected by her mother as “another fucking useless cunt of a girl”, Pandora is raised by her mother’s eldest sister, Madame Tan (27). When Madame Tan has a girl-child of her own, Pandora is returned to her mother Mei Lin and the Lim

family. Early rejection leaves Pandora forever frightened and so she sets out to make herself indispensable to her parents and her siblings. From childhood Pandora learns that a woman's boundaries both psychic and corporeal are permeable and easily violated. Madame Tan's sons would sneak into her room at night "rub themselves against her small body and snigger ... They were boys—the little masters of the house so they could do anything, get away with everything" (40).

Donald Duck, Pandora's eldest brother loves her "in his own selfish limited way" but exploits her at every opportunity (53). Caking the young Pandora with makeup "like a china doll", Donald hawks her to old unshaven "Uncles" in Bugis Street who play "father" to her as she is forced into their laps (55). Meantime, Pandora is constantly urged by those around her towards filial duty as "good girls get good husbands" (112). Her marriage to Jonah Tay only leads to further self-alienation: "Pandora had spent her life in service to the Lims. She was the one who hand-washed soiled underwear and scrubbed out toilets. She would continue to do so in the Tay household after her marriage" (112). As a dutiful Chinese daughter-in-law she shares her home with her mother-in-law, Madame Tay, who falls "easily into the time-honoured Chinese tradition of bullying her daughter-in-law" (115). Her married life takes place in a "household where lives, personalities, tempers, needs and desires crisscrossed the bodily envelopes of individuals and blurred their solidity" (120).

Pandora's psychic completeness is constantly undermined by her body. Dutifully she kneads and pounds her mother-in-law's back as her mother-in-law's hands constantly probe her stomach to see if she is expecting, while Jonah, desperate for a loving response, insistently possesses her sexually. Finally, when their child invades her body and her belly balloons like a "septic cyst", she abandons her last year at University (124). As she comes to realize "how her mother felt, carrying her all those years ago", Pandora longs to expel the unwanted "foreign I inside her" (125). When the child, a girl, arrives, it is stillborn, even in death, a girl child is cursed by Madam Tay as a "smelly cunt" (125).

Evolving her psychoanalytic position from Melanie Klein, for whom the loss and separation from the mother must always appear as murder, Kristeva proposes that symbolic matricide is the necessary condition for the "would be speaking being" so it may chart its course into subjectivity and language (qtd in Nikolchina 4). Equally necessary to both sexes, there is something irrevocable about this passage to individuation. Unable to come to terms with the finality of her loss after her mother's

suicide, Grace fantasises about matricide. Following another "hideous dream", she grieves and rages in a tormented monologue:

> Mother, dearest mother, how I hate you. If your body were lying before me now I would snatch up a knife and stab you, stab you, stab you until you opened your eyes and cried out in anguished pain. I would rip open your heart and bather my frozen hands in your warm blood. I would make you look at me and see me. I would make you feel the hunger in my eyes—the eyes of your ghost child returned. But you have disappeared into your black hole. And in doing so, have shattered my own crystalline darkness: the jagged edges of the void inside shred me until I haemorrhage my longing, my desire, my very self into the woman that you might have been. (283)

Kristeva proposes that the mother in language "is not simply dead but murdered, and that murder has gendered repercussions for the speaking subject" (Nikolchina 4). It is this search for the "dead mother" which impels the "rebel subjectivity" of the writer who is presented as "the deviser of new territories and new languages, the producer and reconstructor of culture (4).

In Grace Tay's example, it is the search for her dead mother that impels the creative act of her writing/telling her mother's story. However, it is impossible for the psyche to incorporate or integrate the murdered mother: "Matricide [...] is realised as rejecting or even 'vomiting' the maternal body" (4). This rejection draws the subject's first boundary thus establishing the "I" from what is inside and hence separate from "everything else" (4). It is this refusal, this forcible expulsion that forms the abject and endows it with power and horror. Her mother's suicide forces Grace to separate from her both physically and psychically but it is the psychic severance of their bond that prompts Grace's fantasies of matricide. It is this encounter with "primal, irrecoverable loss" and all the fear that it entails that names the "archaic creative act" (4). Psychoanalytically, the fragile subject's future creative acts are predicated on this forerunner to individuation. For Nikolchina, it is the necessity of this psychic matricide which determines the female affiliation complex and the anxiety of authorship for women writers which Grace Tay experiences as she writes her mother's story.[3]

In redeeming her mother's abjectivity, Grace comes to questions her own authorial reliability: "Death has short-circuited out relationship and now I can't reach you: we will never connect. I stitch down words to the page but your life unravels as soon as I grasp the fraying threads" (284). Lineage is what inspires Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" that is, the affiliation complex which he proposes haunts the male author.[4] For Nikolchina, "Patricide produces lineage; matricide is perpetuated as erasure of the 'name of the mother'" (3). Drawing from Kristeva, Nikolchina explains the crisis for the writing woman differently:

> With its monotonous production of maternal corpses, abjectivity remains trapped by a curious circularity: the victorious murdered appears as the forgetful replica of an earlier supposedly lethal writing that is incorpsed and thrown out of the body proper of literature. The result is a blocking of spatial and temporal discreteness that dooms the writing woman to be forever the first of her kind. (9)

Undoubtedly, the creative act that Grace desires and which will restore her mother's abjectivity induces an existential crisis. The feminine body has no outlet in the symbolic. Within a "phallic culture" it is presented as "castration" (25). Phallic power which is not entrapped by penial performance demands the seizure of "archaic maternal power" (24). But fear of the archaic mother's generative power induces a profound dread that a patrilineal filiation must subdue (24).

In the retelling of her mother's life, and that of her grandmother before her, Grace has to deal with the patrilineal suppression of their power as a subjugation which has been culturally sanctioned.

> The first months of my grandmother's marriage have gone down in the annals of Lim family history, passed on from woman to woman, handed down from mother to daughter, aunt to niece. Nobody was ever quite certain about the point of this story. Was it meant to be an instance of proto-feminist resistance? Or a fable about a Chinese wife's duty of submission to her husband? Or about the eternal cycle of generations of Lim women struggling against their husbands, only to succumb to the inevitability of disillusionment and defeat? But at any gathering of Lim women this story was told and retold until we women understood that ours was a family conceived in violence and rape, raised in sullen resentment and unspoken grief. By the time my mother was born, Mei Ling had already given birth to five children, three of them girls, all of them unwanted. (25)

In voicing the story of the women in her family, Grace Tay must breach a cultural taboo and claim her own creative power. To some degree internalised, however resentfully, this taboo wielded against female power has been accommodated by the women themselves. Sometimes this misplaced creative power found its displacement in the obsessive love the women conceded to their sons. This was the situation in Madame Tay's compulsive love for Jonah, Pandora's fixated love for Sonny, and Mei Ling's adoration of Donald Duck.

The fact that "phallic idealisation is built upon the pedestal of a putting-to-death of the feminine body" is something which Pandora Tay has acted out in her life as it is portrayed in the novel (Nikolchina 24). Following the conduit described by Kristeva, individuation for Grace Tay requires the putting to death of the mother. But for Grace Tay to then be able act to restructure culture, means that she must reclaim the creative power of her mother's phantasm:

> Through this absence, the mother becomes present. For, if an always-thereness, an unbroken physical presence devours the mother through a refusal to distinguish between the mother and her mother, it is the confrontation with the

> mother's absence and with the void that her loss entails that gives her back as a maternal gesture extended across language. (35)

This female creativity is predicated on "a phantasmatic physics" (35). Through bringing their experience into language, Grace Tay transmutes the "maternal gesture" both that of her own mother as well as the generations of Lim women before her (35). Within the paradigm established by Kristeva, the journey that Grace must then undertake is psychoanalytically mandated. However, for Grace this passage is framed within a specific socio-cultural context.[5] Her passage occurs within the broader cultural space of the Chinese diaspora: a framework which poses its own problems of identification. A diasporic subject must confront the irrecoverable loss of a mother country and a mythic homeland, as well as separation from the actual mother. Such a severance also has gendered repercussions.

After China: Diasporas and Motherlands

Reconstructing the days before her mother's suicide, Grace finds that Pandora, now nearly blind, had been found wandering along Serangoon Road: "lost in the city she'd always considered her 'real' home, her white walking stick tapping wildly in front of her" (275). Annoyed by her "increasing incoherence and distress", the taxi diver had dumped his passenger after Pandora had given him the wrong address in trying to find the neighbourhood of her childhood (275). Literally and metaphorically, there is no longer any real home for Pandora. During the 1980s, in a Singapore committed to capitalist improvement, her terraced family shophouse had been torn down to create a shopping mall. Hauntingly signifying the diasporic condition, now only the poignant image of a blinded subject survives as Pandora, unable to make herself understood, searches for a home to which she can never return. Pandora's physical and mental breakdown signifies the unfulfilled promise of return, the disarticulation from a mythic home and homeland that existing in a diasporic space imposes.

A diasporic subject's self-identity is predicated on a sense of difference, an awareness of a self that is perpetually altered. Formed as "a product of cultures and histories in collision and dialogue", a diasporic consciousness is the kernel of a subjectivity forever enclosed by the seed of its own dispersal (Clifford 319). Cast adrift by the separation, the diasporic subject may willingly discard origins in the search for the acceptance of the host. Metaphorically recreating the diasporic subject's persistent distress, Pandora makes offerings at makeshift altars on Sydney's suburban byways. Here, she feeds the Hungry Ghosts, the spirits of the restless dead, those outsiders who roam the earth searching for "fulfilment, acceptance, and peace" (285). Ultimately

Pandora deserts the lore of her Chinese childhood for Anglo–Christian acceptance in Australia. Suspended as Pandora is between two worlds, her daughter imagines her mother's empathy with these spirits of the dislocated dead: "These days I imagine that you have joined the ranks of the unearthly exiles. A Hungry Ghost, phantasmal vagabond, you wander around trying still to fill that bleak black hole inside you. In death, as in life, you remain displaced" (285). As a diasporic subject, Pandora's predicament echoes the fate of the Hungry Ghosts that she tries so desperately to nurture: a nurturing which she is unable to extend towards herself.

Whether Jewish, Irish, Greek, African or otherwise, "each diaspora carries its own kind of global resonance" (Lee 9). This is equally true for the world-wide Chinese diaspora which encompasses a vast territory that includes amongst its multiple destinations Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Taiwan, the USA, South Africa, Canada, Latin America and Australia. For Ien Ang, "China", can no longer be fixed narrowly to the geographical area of its "official spatial and cultural boundaries, nor can it be held up as providing the authentic, authoritative, and uncontested standard for all things Chinese" (*On Not Speaking Chinese* 38). Replacing the essentialism of universal authenticity, Chineseness now operates as an "open and indeterminate signifier", renegotiating and expressing different meanings within the broad spaces of the Chinese diaspora (38). *Love and Vertigo* is a meditation on the Chinese diaspora; a mourning for both the real mother and the archetypal mother, the home and motherland that can never return, and the accommodations that are made in her absence.

Following Malaysia and Singapore, Australia is the Tay family's third upheaval from the certainty and undiluted purity of Chinese origin. Pandora's family, the Lims, migrated at the turn of the century, departing from an "unknown and largely unremembered" ancestral village in China to settle in Singapore (17). None of the Lim clan had since returned to China to "rediscover their roots" (17). Although the family professes Buddhism as their religion, Chinese superstition is the mainstay. Grace Tay discovers them seeking the future "in the spinning spears of tourmaline crystals", consulting local Chinese fortune-tellers and visiting Fu Kay practitioners for automatic writing prophecies (14). In a gesture that symbolises and, at the same time parodies, the fragile nature of the social aspects of diasporic memory, Donald Duck invents a burial ritual that requires the family to wear white for Pandora's funeral. He insists that this is the Lims' traditional, Chinese village custom. At this point, tradition both prevails and fails. Without demur, the family obey Donald's instructions because he is the "Eldest

Brother and Head of the House of Lim" (17). Diasporic memory is frail, easily broken and often imaginary.

In contrast, Jonah Tay is Chinese but separated from the Lims by both class and religion. Jonah is the privileged, eldest son of a Chinese rubber planter in Malaysia. After the war, in the 1950s, Jonah and his mother, Madame Tay, relocate to Singapore. As "they were a Christian family who not only owned four large rubber estates but who also traded rubber and rice with the British"—the Tay family fears they will be targeted by Malay communist guerrillas (85). Language also separates Jonah from the Lims. In descending order of familiarity, Jonah speaks Hokkein, English, Cantonese and Mandarin. Pandora's family dialect is Teochew. When Jonah first meets the Lims, Pandora translates for him, not through the medium of a shared Chinese speech, but through English the common language which they both understand. Like Jonah, Pandora is English-educated and once their romance develops they communicate in "the local Singlish patois" (101).

Even so, in *Love and Vertigo* both the Lims and the Tays retain a certainty about their Chineseness which in Jonah's case is also an adjunct to a sense of pride. Stuart Hall marks out the sundry, spatial situation of the diasporic subject's belonging to a homeland culture:

> They bear upon them traces of the particular cultures, cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be unified in the old sense, because they are the irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes'. (qtd in Kalra, Kaur,,and Hutnyk 28)

It is this provisional, diasporic belonging created by "the sediment of different times, histories and cultures" which brings about the Tay family's breakdown in Australia (224). As coloured colonial subjects who "loved all things British", Jonah and Pandora have a labyrinthine relationship with both whiteness and Britishness (178). Pandora is "afraid and intimidated by the *ang mohs* all her life" (216). She only overcomes her fear of white people when she joins a white Pentecostal church in Sydney. Pandora's and Jonah's sense of Chineseness, as well as their reverence for Britishness, is established in a different moment in time, a different colonial history and a different colonial territory, to the one that their children need to negotiate in Australia.

Of Mimicry and Man

Seeking to portray the situation of the colonial subject, Homi Bhabha introduces his influential essay, "Of Mimicry and Man", with an epigraph from Lacan:

> Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage…. It is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare. ("Of Mimicry and Man" 125)

Here, mimicry is described as revealing something different and distinct from what is left behind. The true purpose of mimicry is camouflage, as it is used in battle, not to harmonise with the backdrop but, to appear as if mottled "against a mottled background" (125). Consequently, colonialism often produces a text underwritten by "irony, mimicry and repetition" as in the case of post-war Singapore (125). When the Japanese occupation ends in Singapore, Madame Tan—Pandora's aunt and foster mother—renames all the Tan and Lim children. Once the British return, she is adamant that "English names and English education would be the route to advancement and prosperity" in post-war Singapore (34). In the end, the Lim brothers are renamed Donald, Winston and Henry or, depending on who is speaking, Henly. Four-year-old Pandora and her sisters Lida, Daphne and Persephone (or Percy-phone as the Lims pronounce it) are renamed from a Reader's Digest book of classical myths. Madame Tan does not understand the legends, she merely recognises and repeats the names.

Pandora and Jonah are shaped by a colonial history which envisions the role of Empire as creating "a class of persons [...] English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect" however different they may be in "blood and colour" (Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 128). Raised in the English school, this class of mimic man/woman interprets and maintains the colony for their colonial masters. Yet, as they themselves desire to "mottle" their cultural practice, this "mimicry" is not imposed upon the Tan and Lim families. Given the historically complex existence of the Chinese diaspora in South East Asia—where the Chinese have been dubbed "the Jews of the Orient"—mottling only enhances the prospects of survival.[6] Upholding Madame Tan's enthusiasm for British colonialism, the Lim girls attend an Anglican school for Chinese girls where Pandora becomes "an absurd lampoon of an English schoolgirl" (62). She plays hockey, sings "Land of Hope and Glory" and is given elocution lessons to erase her accent beneath a "borrowed veneer of pseudo-BBC English" (62). In the end, all this serves to "keep Pandora an ardent royalist [...] on the side of God, the Queen and Bruce Ruxton" until the day she dies (63). Due to his class, Jonah aspires to a superior form of colonial mimicry: "he would inherit and run his father's rubber estates, living a life of indolent luxury, driving around in his silver Mercedes-Benz, wearing a gold Rolex watch on his wrist and carrying a Mont Blanc fountain pen [...] as he hobnobbed with British businessmen and colonial officers" (85).

Ultimately, Pandora and Jonah become "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized, is *emphatically* not to be English" (Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 128). Growing up in Australia in the pre-multicultural 1970s, the Tay children need to negotiate their identity by means of a different route to their parents. For them, Australian Chineseness is a fraught experience, crammed with external, insistent negations that also pave the way to self-rejection. Grace confesses that "we grew to hate the sound of our voices, and those of our parents" (178). She is taunted and Sonny is terrorised in the playground as Chink, Slit eyes or "Ching-chong Chinaman" (176). As teenagers, their self-identity emerges as a struggle with their racial and cultural difference against the dominant force of white Australia. Until other Chinese immigrants arrive, Sonny joins the other migrant children who are Italian and Lebanese. But as Sonny does not speak Cantonese, (or any other Chinese dialect) he is once again scorned by his Chinese friends: "To them, he was an Aussie; he didn't belong" (179). Sonny's diasporic consciousness is formed by a sense of permanent *impermanence*: he comes to realise that he is misplaced, "*from* one place but *of* another" (Kalra, Kaur, and Hutynk 29). True belonging to either domain is denied. As a result, Sonny adopts a multimodal form of belonging and "he did his best to become black ... Black was beautiful, black was best" (179). But in the aftermath of the 1992 Rodney King riots in LA, when footage of "black Americans looting and beating up Asian shopkeepers" is telecast around the world, Sonny abandons blackness (179). Up till then, he had only thought of the white Aussies and the Chinese as racists.

Negotiating a sense of self proves to be no easier for Grace Tay, who desperately longs to assimilate. She longs to wash herself "into clean whiteness", to bleach herself "into Advanced Australian Fairness" (183). Returning to visit Singapore with her mother, the teenage Grace is dismayed:

> I was baffled that my mother could belong to these people. For the first time in my life I saw my mother in relation to her family and I did not recognise her any more. Her carefully maintained English disintegrated and she lapsed into the local Singlish patois, her vocabulary a melange of English, Malay and Chinese; her syntax abbreviated, chopped and wrenched into disconcerting unfamiliarity. These Singaporean roots of hers, this side of her—and possibly of me too—were unacceptable [...] I was determined not to belong, not to fit in, because I was Australian, and Mum ought to be Australian too. This tug of her roots, the blurring of her role from wife and mother to sister and aunt, angered and frightened me. (3)

Some contemporary critics associate hybridity with "transgressive triumph, innovative creativity and audacious cultural fusion" (Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese* 70). Such critics go on to build a postmodern discourse about a cosmopolitan ideology that evolves as a result of transcultural exchange. But in the story that Grace Tay narrates,

her family's struggle to establish a sense of belonging in 1980s Australia is both sadder and more mundane. Rather than being seen as celebratory, the family's hybridity confounds and embarrasses their Asian-Australian children and ultimately desolates their Anglicised, but still Asian, parents.

Relocation from one locale of the British Empire, Singapore, where the Tays' had hybridised successfully, to another locale of that same Empire, Australia, undoes the Tays' acculturation with all things British. Within Singapore, the members of a substantial Chinese diaspora were prominent subjects within the British Empire. In Australia, it is the white diaspora which is in the majority. Here, Whiteness intersects with hybridity to complicate the diasporic paradigm. Although in recent academic work Whiteness has come to be seen as a system of power, Whiteness theory "has [still] not been cohesively applied to studies of diaspora and hybridity" (Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk 106). Richard Dyer argues for a hierarchy of Whiteness where the ideal of Whiteness is achieved when Anglo-Saxon status is conceded to an ethnic group: "Latins, the Irish and Jews, for instance, are rather less securely white than Anglos, Teutons and Nordics; indeed, if Jews are white at all, it is only Ashkenazi Jews, since the Holocaust, in a few places" (12).

In Australia, Jonah's and Pandora's colonial mimicry is uncovered for what it is: the very absence of identity as it "conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 129). With a teenager's unerring eye, Grace exposes the fabrications of her parents who "loved all things British, but they couldn't speak English. Their accents, their syntax and their vocabulary mirrored in language our cultural difference and our social leprosy before the age of multiculturalism" (178). As stated in the previous paragraph, the Tays have relocated from a mainly Chinese diaspora in Singapore to a predominately white diaspora in Australia. The commonality of these diasporas lies in the legacy of British colonial rule. Their divide lies in the racialising discourse which grants to white Australians the status of "discoverers" and "pioneers" instead of "migrants": a divide which does not acknowledge *their* diasporic consciousness which is tied to the imaginary homeland of Britain (Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk 106). Certainly, the length of settlement does not explain why a group is tagged as "diasporic" since the Chinese were one of the earliest settler populations on the Australian continent. What does it mean to upset the racialising hierarchy and "consider diaspora in relation to the movement of white communities", to locate Australia within the "white diasporas of the New World"? (106-7). Although *Love and Vertigo* does not

explicitly answer this question, the novel *implicitly* constructs its narrative around the subject.

As a former colony of the British Empire, the white diaspora of Australia is arguably subject to the same "menace of mimicry" as the Empire's coloured subjects (Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 129). In the 1970s, when the Tay family relocates, Australia had not claimed fully independent nationhood from Britain. To the present day, the British Queen is still Australia's head of state. For Bhabha, colonial mimicry disrupts colonial authority by revealing its ambivalence, resulting in "partial representation/recognition of the colonial object". Historically, Australians are also "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized, is *emphatically* not to be English" (128). For this white diaspora however, the colonial authority also represents originary authenticity and the vanished homeland. Hence their "flawed colonial mimesis" which produces an Australian variation of "Anglicised but not English" predicated on imitative Whiteness. This excessive emphasis on Whiteness differentiates the colonial mimicry of Australians from that of the other coloured subjects of the British Empire. Australians may have been "*almost the same but not quite*" as their British masters but the difference was that they were White (130).

Bhabha makes a complex argument indebted to the Freudian interpretation of, and the psychic difference which Lacan delineates between, the linguistic devices of metonymy and metaphor that inform this assertion:

> [t]hose inappropriate signifiers of colonial discourse—the difference between being English and being Anglicised; the identity between stereotypes which, through repetition, also become different; the discriminatory identities constructed across traditional cultural norms and classifications, the Simian Black, the Lying Asiatic all these are metonymies of presence.... These instances of metonymy are the nonrepressive productions of contradictory and multiple belief. They cross the boundaries of the culture of enunciation through strategic confusion of the metaphoric and metonymic axes of the cultural production of meaning. (*Of Mimicry* 130)

Metonymy means that one thing represents another, as a part stands in for the whole. In a colonial paradigm, where the whole is represented by the colonial ruler, the mimicing colonial subject is granted the proxy role of partially representing the master. On the other hand, a metaphor such as—the Singaporean Chinese and White Australians who are British to their bootstraps—compresses two different characteristics into a single representation. When the Tays cross the geographical boundary into Australia, they destabilise "the metaphoric and metonymic axes of the cultural production of meaning" on which both their identity and the identity of White Australians as colonial subjects is predicated (130). In encountering each other, *both* are exposed as non-identities. Rather,

as in the metaphor of camouflage, they risk discovering themselves and each other as mere resemblances that differ and defend their presence by "mottling" into the dominant background of the colonial master (131). For Bhabha, herein lies the menace of mimicry: "its threat [...] comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity effects' in the play of a power that it elusive because it hides no real essence" (131). Accordingly, the arrival of the Tay family in Australia, shortly after the official ending of the White Australia policy, symbolically and unconsciously destabilises and threatens both the Tay family and the White Australians they encounter. Ultimately, it is the family's Asian-Australian narrator, Grace Tay who manages to integrate and accept both aspects, going on to fashion an identity and an "essence" of her own.

Conclusion

Newly published Asian-Australian novels by women often draw comparisons with Chinese American writers like Amy Tan and Jung Chang (Tseen-Ling 158). Nicholas Jose points out that, internationally, Asian writing has moved from the margins to centre stage (8). Since its inception in 1969, the Man Booker Prize has now been awarded to more Commonwealth than British authors. Many of these authors are Asian, like the recently lauded Aravind Adiga, who is sometimes identified as an Indian-Australian writer. This descriptor, whether standing alone or hyphenated with another term such as Asian-American or British-American, now encompasses a generationally diverse and international group of authors, "those translated, those writing in English, mobile, global, [and] local" (8). Mapping into an international milieu, *Love and Vertigo* and *The Australian Fiancé* insert themselves into the context of other diasporic Asian writing. Globally, these two authors grant Australian writing a transcultural presence, enlarging and augmenting conceptions of Australian literary fiction—both at home and abroad.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyse a subset of contemporary Australian literary fictions published between 1988-2008: a period which is referred to as a coming of age for Australia. During these twenty years the country moved on from the bicentennial celebrations of British settlement and into a new millennium. Such progress occurred during sober and unsettling times, when a new transnational era, supported by innovative and at times disturbing communication technologies and information flows, meant that the relationships between "territory, border, space and capital" were being realigned (Allon). Issues of national identity, already accorded the status of "a national obsession", were vigorously contested (R. White viii). Concepts such as nation, multiculturalism and globalisation became topics for heated discussion in the public sphere.[1] These words turned into unstable, floating signifiers as they were appropriated by interest groups throughout this period, to put forward their claims as to what constituted "real" national belonging. Thus, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, from 1988 onwards "to name *who* someone was, as well as *what* he/she represented as *being Australian*" became a mounting problem of definition (*Thesis* 19). Australia's literary communities were not immune or isolated from the ongoing discussions in the wider public sphere.

All the texts read in this thesis have already been recognised for their literary value and have received peer recognition of some sort or another from the Australian literary community as well as, in some instances, internationally. Consequently, this thesis sought to read for literary value whilst also recognising the textual politics of race, class, gender and colonisation that are inherent in the unique literary worlds created by these various contemporary Australian authors. To that end, a subset of "un-Australian fictions" was created. This thesis is not an exhaustive reading of the literary fictions published during the coming of age period which could claim such a nomenclature. This subset of "un-Australian fictions" represents the challenges and breachings which these texts, in their own unique way, bought to Australian myths of

nation: such as masculism; a bush ethos; the pre-eminence of white colonial settlement; connectedness to an imaginative European geography; as well as an unbreakable tie to Britain. As un-Australian fictions, these texts reflect the destabilisation of what were once certain, spatial and psychic borders and orders of Australianness. They affect as well as reflect, the wider conversation that continues today about what *being Australian* means in a new millennium. In discussing these un-Australian fictions, I sought to interweave "the nation's political and social discourse i.e. the public realm and the subjective, private and fictionalized discourse in the world of the author" (*Thesis* 20). Both nationally and internationally, during a time of escalating fear and conservatism, Australian literature through its un-Australian fictions, claimed and legitimated many and diverse ways of *being Australian*. This thesis has been written with the hope of the acknowledgment of this fact.

In the 1950s, Indigenous Australians were not recognised as citizens, nor did they have the right to vote. Assimilation was the favoured method of dealing with the massive influx of post-war immigrants to Australia. The Immigration Department ran Good Neighbour conferences that demonstrated and upheld the success of assimilationist policy (Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera* 20). In turn, these conferences ran competitions where photos of selected immigrant children were proudly displayed. Delegates were set the challenge of picking the "Australian"—the physical appearance of the photographed children was so like the desired "Australian" prototype (20). With hindsight, such overt racial profiling provokes cringing embarrassment. In just over fifty years, Australia has moved on from being an allegedly homogenous, monocultural and monolingual British society. However, there is still much left to be done, particularly in the area of Indigenous relations and Indigenous marginalization. As well, Australia's refugee policy remains an issue of ongoing humanitarian concern. Assimilationist policy still runs the risk of being reinvented as "acculturation" policy, particularly with regard to Muslim immigrants. African and Asian immigrants are also suspicious that the White Australia policy still lingers on in the nation's psyche. Whilst acknowledging that predicting social trends is difficult, James Jupp foresees that due to a changing geo-political climate: "Australia will witness an ethnic shift away from its European origins as powerful as the previous shift away from its British roots" (216). Consequently, Jupp foreshadows the need for Australia to separate, or redefine its place within a "European imaginative geography"—a conceptual spatiality which has frequently been referred to throughout this thesis. The strong literary voices and the vivid subjective narratives of these coming of age authors, anticipate as well as

participate in such wider social cultural concerns. This thesis has been written with the hope of acknowledging this fact.

However, the literary merit of the studied texts does not accrue from their engagement with these wider social and cultural concerns. Rather, it is because these authors are gifted storytellers in their own right that their narratives have the power to engage the reader. As this thesis was being finalised, Geordie Williamson celebrated Australia's cosmopolitan literature and the space that "globalised, transnational literature" seems to have found in Australia (16). At the same time, Williamson celebrates the death of a distinctive antipodean canon which has seen a reduction of students studying Australian literature.[2] Even if the desire is for Australian literature to be able to respond to a fluid global culture which makes "itself at home in motion rather than place" *transnational* still demands a "national" (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* 213). Whether Australian literature is defined as: literature by Australians; literature written in Australia; literature written by Australians overseas; or literature by "foreigners" in Australia—what is in contention is the nature of the composition of the body of Australian literature in a new era that is no longer simply "national". Yet, in an interpenetrating world where the "local, national, ethnic and religious cultures" mix and intermingle, a cosmopolitan outlook is meaningless unless it is grounded in the some sense of national (Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* 7).[3] No matter what rubric is used to comprehend the new geo-political environment: postnational, cosmopolitan, transnational, global, transcultural or some other such nomenclature: Beck emphasises the importance of recognizing the "impossibility of living without borders" (7). Often times, the consequence of this is a "resulting compulsion to redraw old boundaries and rebuild old walls" (7). It is this very problem with the "national" which has led to the restrictive border controls (symbolic and real) of Australia in the past twenty years.

In the 1990s, Prime Minister Paul Keating sought to inspire the country with his republican vision. Seen to be out of touch with "ordinary Australians", Keating lost office to his conservative opponents. Fin-de-siècle , "ordinary Australians", all sharing the same values, became the mainstay of conservative rhetoric. Having attained office on this basis, Prime Minister John Howard sought to define the nation for the new century. But the rhetoric of "ordinary Australians" could not admit the diversity that *being Australian* now encompasses. Socially, Howard's conservative government proved unable to move beyond Federation and Menzies-era principles. The impasse between old and new Australia was resolved by reasserting old Australian values:

leaving the questions which arose from this impasse to linger. Is old Australia to remain forever indebted and attached to its British diaspora and willing to sacrifice its distinctiveness by adopting these same values?[4] Or will Australia seek the independent status of republican nationhood? Will Australia attain a status that will allow the nation to champion its greatest ideals—whatever they are agreed to be—whilst acknowledging its failures? An ongoing debate about the *ethnoscape* of Australian literature, its Others, and the rightful composition of an antipodean canon can only inform the necessary republican debates of the future. The recent, welcome publication of the Macquarie *PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* edited by Nicholas Jose, reinvigorated the discussion about the appropriateness of Australia's literary and cultural heritage as the nation headed into a new millennium (Salusinszky 8; Indyk 6). The un-Australian fictions studied in this thesis point to the active participation of contemporary authors in voicing a broad range of Australian identities for the Australia of the future.[5] Far from being dead, Australian literature is due for a resurrection and a “republican” debate of its very own. It is in the hope of contributing to such a debate that this thesis was written.

Endnotes

Preface

[1.] See thesis page 30, for an explanation of the use of the term Multiculture~~alism~~ in this dissertation.

Chapter One: Introduction

[1] Quite rightly, Richard White states that historians are image makers as well (*Inventing Australia* viii). Hence, amongst historians the foundational narrative for Australia is a disputed one with the Dutch, Portuguese and Chinese being seen as having possible claims for first discovery of the continent. Kenneth McIntyre identifies some fundamentals for the insistence and persistence of the narrative of British discovery. Firstly, "British nationalism" and Australian "Britishism" were conjoined and conflated in the decade prior to and post Federation: "In that era worship of England meant worship of Cook. Even the Dutch discoveries were underplayed" (McIntyre 213). Most Australians of the time categorically believed that Captain Cook discovered Australia. The only permitted possibilities were the ones that tied Australian history to British history. In Collingridge's time (Collingridge was born 1847, died 1931) Professor Spate also cites a "Nordic bias" in Australia—anything beyond the Dutch discovery was immaterial. If it had to be conceded that the Dutch landed first on Australian shores then at least they were from northern Europe and Protestant and their discoveries had very little to do with the south eastern shore where the majority of Australians live (xxii). McIntyre also cites the issue of sectarian divisiveness in 1890s, as affecting the parameters of permissible discussion about priority in Australian discovery. The support for nation formation, coupled with the sectarian divisiveness of the time, made it imperative that any suggestion of Iberian priority in Australian discovery was vehemently discounted:

> Archbishop Moran's attempt to prove that the Spaniards, under Queiros, had celebrated Mass at Port Curtis long before any Protestant religious service was held in Australia, was seen by many as some kind of Popish plot to pre-empt Australia. The fact that following Archbishop Moran, this supposed Spanish Priority was taught in Catholic schools, whilst Cook's English priority was taught in the other schools, increased and perpetuated this divisiveness. (McIntyre 213)

Nor is it the whole story to claim European priority in the discovery of Australia. Muslim trepangers (sea cucumber fisherman known as Macassans), from the eastern part of modern day Indonesia, sailing from the port of Makassar on the island of Sulawesi were visiting and trading in northern Australia some one hundred years before European settlement. In their heyday, in the late 1700s and early 1800s, these were significant expeditions involving 1000 men and 50 vessels annually. However, the trade was terminated in 1906 by government legislation "reflecting the creeping distrust that many post-Federation white Australia policy makers felt toward its northern neighbours" ("Monsoon Traders" *NT Government NRETA*). Eric Rolls also tells the story of Matteo Ricci, a Portuguese Jesuit who resided in China, noting on an early map of the world in 1603 in the space where Australia should have been: "No-one has been to the land of the south hence we know nothing about it." He also brushed the Chinese characters "Fire Land" and "Land of Parrots" (Rolls11). This presupposes that the Chinese may have known of or even visited Australia. Indeed, a recent article in the *Economist* stated unequivocally that: "cartographers no longer doubt that Australia and New Zealand were discovered by Chinese seamen centuries before Captain Cook arrived on the scene" ("China beat Columbus to it, perhaps").

[2] In *The Longest Decade* George Megalogenis argues that Prime Ministers' Howard and Keating fundamentally changed Australia. Megalogenis regards them both as overseers of a fin-de-siècle revolution, encompassing both trauma and recovery, which saw a much more complex society emerge within Australia.

[3.] In response to Prime Minister John Howard's call for "root and branch renewal" of history teaching in Australian schools, the government sponsored the Australian History Summit in 2006 (Address to the National Press Club 25 Jan. 2006). The summit bought together a group of the country's leading public figures, teachers, historians and academics. The invitees sought agreement on a teaching

approach which was refocussed on "narrative". Yet, once again it proved difficult to find accord. This time, eminent historian Geoffrey Bolton challenged the concept of a *national* history from a different perspective; pointing out that as of Federation in 1901, Australia was not a unified whole but a coalition of colonies. Nor did initial British settlement emanate from an integrally cohesive Britain. Bolton's comments once again revealed, amongst other things, the false concord of the term "Anglo–Celtic". In spite of its length, Bolton's argument is worth quoting in full:

> First of all, during at least the first 40 or 50 years of British settlement, Britain itself was not a united place in terms of the fact that the railway and the telegraph had not unified a lot of provincial cultures. The cultural baggage that a Galway transportee would have brought with him would have been different to the baggage that a London pickpocket would have brought. It would have been different from the Scottish investor. You had a whole lot of different Britains into which the Australian settlers were coming. Secondly—and I speak parochially here—I am very bored with the number of people who try to explain the Australian heritage in terms of the convict background when there are places like South Australia that never had convicts. In South Australia, the cross–section of people that settled there 50 years after the first settlement was a totally different cross-section to what settled in New South Wales. It was different again to the shabby genteel colonists that came to Western Australia and different again to the enterprising early Victorians who came after gold in the 1850s. It is not one national stereotype. Still less, Western Australia didn't have much of a 19th century until about 1890. Many of the institutions, Constitutional developments, buildings and railways which were part of Victorian or New South Wales history didn't develop there. In fact, in Western Australia, until late in the 19th century, the majority of people were Aboriginal, not that they would have described themselves as Aboriginal. They would have described themselves as Bardi, Bunaba or Mirriuwung–Gadgerong. 'Aborigine' was a legal concept introduced by the settlers. One of the fascinating stories of the 20th century has been the making of Aboriginality as a result of those pressures. These issues are far too complex, I think, to be boiled down … What we will finish up with is a fairly standardised south-east narrative starting with the Gold Rush and ending with the Eureka stockade. (*Australian Government (DEST)*, "The Australian History Summit: Transcript of Proceedings" 40)

[4] See Patrick O'Farrell's *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the present*. O'Farrell's book is essential reading for anyone interested in the historical background to the Anglo vs Celtic separation and sectarian divineness within Australian.

[5] In the sense that it is used here, "remoralisation" can also be applied in the radical sense, meaning revolution, radical overhaul and even destruction of the existing system. I am not restating the ideas of Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis, where literature acts a means of stabilising a middle class society.

[6] For a more comprehensive coverage of Australian fiction during a similar period refer to Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989-2007* and Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Post Colonialism, Racism, Transnationalism*.

[7] For an excellent article discussing this contested disciplinary territory, refer to Eduardo (Marks) de Marques "Understanding Australia: notes on the Australian studies vs Australian cultural studies debate".

[8] During the period that I survey (1988-2008) two important non-fiction texts addressed the pre-eminence of the White Australia Fantasy within the Australian imaginary. In *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australia Fantasy* Jennifer Rutherford addresses Australian aggression to its non-white others from a psychoanalytic perspective. In *White Nation*, Ghassan Hage addresses the fantasy of "White Supremacy" primarily through the ideas of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, developing Bourdieu's concepts of "cultural capital" and "habitus" within an Australian context. For an opposing point of view, see Miriam Dixson's *The imaginary Australian*: *Anglo–Celts and identity – 1788 to the present*. Miriam Dixson sees ethnic divisions as being Australia's greatest threat.

Dixson urges that the Anglo–Celtic "core" culture must continue to play the key cohesive role that it had enacted to date—particularly during periods of consolidation. However, for the core culture to continue to act in this role it must "develop a less negative, and more assured sense of itself" (3).

[9] Bob Hodge and John O'Carroll consider this to be a simplistic analysis see *Borderwork in Multicultural Australia*, index entry under Al Grassby.

[10] Pauline Hanson was elected in 1996, at the end of the Keating's term as Prime Minister when John Howard was elected. Hanson gained office due to community alienation because of Paul Keating's policies. However, her "racist" political stance was given "oxygen" by John Howard who refused to take a stand against her and her supporters.

[11] Two incidents in particular drew international attention, firstly the Tampa incident and secondly the incident known as SIEV X. The Tampa incident refers to the series of events which occurred when a Norwegian freighter *Tampa* took onboard 433 Afghan refugees, rescuing them from their sinking vessel in September 2001. The Howard government used military force to prevent the *Tampa* from landing at Christmas Island which was only a matter of a few kilometres away. The captain of the *Tampa* was forced to take the refugees to the Pacific island of Nauru for the "off shore processing" of their refugee status. The incident drew international condemnation. However, the Howard government's escalation of the incident and militant response was regarded by many commentators as a pivotal event in securing their success at the 2001 election. The SIEV X incident—codified in Orwellian 1984 language, as "Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel number 10"—refers to the death of 353 people presumed to be seeking refugee status in Australia. In October 2001, the SIEV X sank in waters patrolled by Australian forces that did not come to the aid of the stricken vessel and its passengers. However, it has never been conclusively proved that the defence forces had detected the vessel's existence.

[12] For a diverse collection of essays addressing this issue see, Jon Altman's and Melinda Hinkson's, *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia*.

[13] Feminist historian Ann Curthoys voices her ambivalence about the Anglo–Celtic category as follows: "I cannot find words for myself, stumbling around with phrases like Anglo–Australian […] or Anglo–Celtic Australian, feeling ever more clumsily named and ever less clear about how to describe and situate myself" ("History and Identity" 24).

Chapter Two: Multicultural Texts in the 1990s: *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* and *Romulus, My Father*

[1] Immigrating post-war British subjects were offered better conditions see R T Appleyard, "Post-War British Immigration." in *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins* 65.

[2] Here the definition of who is a multicultural writer is applied as per the criterion set for inclusion in the subset of "Multicultural Authors" in the *AustLit* Database, which describes its scope for this subset as follows:

> The Australian Multicultural Writers subset includes biographical information about Australian writers who identify with particular heritages other than Australian (non English speaking and English speaking), cultural heritages and bibliographical information about their works.
>
> http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/MV

Thousands of records were migrated to this *AustLit* subset from *The Bibliography of Australian Multicultural Writers* by Sneja Gunew, Loló Houbien, Alexandra Karakostas-Seda, and Jan Mahyuddin. This bibliography extended coverage from first-generation migration emphasis to include second and third generation writers from non-English speaking backgrounds. In the ASAL paper presented by Kerry Kilner and discussed in this chapter, Kilner makes the point that the definition of "multicultural author" is sometimes disputed by the very same writers who are identified in this way.

[3] See Richard Flanagan: "Another Country: A Short Soul History of Tasmanian Writing".

[4] This is a disputed point and a source of much contention in the Australian History Wars of the 1990s and 2000s. It has been much debated amongst historians, for example see Docker and Curthoys *Is History Fiction*, particularly 229-32.

[5]Adi Wimmer gives a short but excellent historical summary of conditions in pre-war and post-war Yugoslavia which contextualises the Buloh family trauma:

> Let me begin with the historical context. Hitler invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941. The treatment of the civilian population during the subsequent years of occupation (the last military units were withdrawn as late as in March 1945) was, for ideological reasons, much harsher than in France, Denmark or the Netherlands: the Slavs were considered non-Aryan and thus subhuman. As a result, irregular military units began to resist the Nazi occupation in the winter of 1941-42. Soon the resistance was so entrenched that the Wehrmacht was forced to withdraw badly needed divisions from other theatres of war in order to cope. Ruthless repression was supposed to stop the resistance. Some of the worst massacres that the Wehrmacht and the SS perpetrated in the entire war happened in Yugoslavia. For example, when in October 1941 a German military convoy was attacked near the central Yugoslav city of Kragujevac and seventy German soldiers were killed or injured, the Wehrmacht and SS rounded up all the men of Kragujevac over the age of sixteen and executed them. The official death list comprises 2324 names. Yugoslav historians later put the figure at 7000.
>
> But that is only half of the story. Yugoslavia (more particularly Croatia and Slovenia) was not solidly against the Germans, there was collaboration with the Nazis resulting in something akin to civil war. In Slovenia, the collaborators were called the "Domobranci", recruiting themselves primarily from Catholics who found Tito's communism unacceptable. In the story, it is a Catholic priest who triggers the tragic cycle of events: because of his spying, Maria's father is captured and killed before his family's eyes. Maria is then raped. Because of that rape, she can no longer feel at home in her Slovenian village. She and Bojan must escape, ending up in Tasmania. But the ghosts of the past follow her into exile and bring about her suicide. Because of the suicide, Bojan becomes an alcoholic, abusive of Sonja, and their lives are permanently damaged.
>
> "Richard Flanagan's Novel and Film 'the Sound of One Hand Clapping' and Australia's Multicultural Film Genre" *Westerly*, 48, Nov. 2003: 130-31.

[6] See also McMahon "Points of Origin" (91-92) about the possibilities for "multiversion" text readings offered by both the film and the novel of *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*.

[7] Thematically, the mother anxiety, also presented itself in a more mainstream novel of the time, Peter Carey's *The True History of the Kelly Gang* published in 2000.

[8] Internet references established for both films provided excellent teaching support, see particularly: <http://www.romulusmyfather.com.au/index.html>.

Chapter Four: The Queer and European Journey of Robert Dessaix and *Night Letters*

[1] See Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Susan Sheridan. *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing 1880-1930s*. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*.

[2] Within Australia, homosexuality was progressively decriminalised from the 1970s onwards. The last state to decriminalise homosexuality was Tasmania, where it was legalised in 1998. Nonetheless, in spite of the celebrated manliness of the national character, prominent male writers such as Patrick White, Australia's solitary Nobel writing laureate, and David Malouf openly identify as homosexual. In fact, White's *The Twyborn Affair* which was published in 1979) and has multiple sexual and

gender identities, could easily invite a study in queer theory. Frank Moorhouse, who is discussed in an earlier thesis chapter also writes about and claims, complex sexual and gender identities See Richard Guilliatt, "His Dark Material".

[3] On the other hand, John Docker takes issue with Lake's interpretation stating: "The Feminist Legend [Lake's article] is following the historicist side of Foucault, perceiving the domination everywhere in its chosen historical period of a single Power, masculinism" (19). See "The Feminist Legend: A new historicism."

[4] In "Un-Queer Anti-Theory", Dean Kiley minimally lists the stake holders as Steven Angelides, Virginia Barrett, Chris Berry, Rebecca Cox, Stephen Dunne, Kathleen Mary Fallon, Melissa Jane Hardie, Michael Hurley, Kate Lilley, Fiona McGregor, Kimberly O'Sullivan, Dorothy Porter, Elspeth Probyn, Leigh Raymond, Robert Reynolds, Robert Schubert, Sam Searle, McKenzie Wark, Audrey Yue, Annamarie Jagose, Elizabeth Grosz, Jill Matthews, Gray Wotherspoon and Denis Altman (Altman's foundational role in Australian gay, male studies is ambivalently reappraised).

[5] Refer to Dessaix's vigorous polemic on multicultural identity politics in "Nice Work If You Can Get It". During the 1990s and 2000s, identity politics became fraught matters. McKenzie Wark writes of being in the audience during the 1993 QueerLit conference: "when Robert Dessaix copped a verbal lashing for omitting prominent Sydney gay writers from his anthology of Australian gay and lesbian writing" ("Bisexual Meditations: Beyond the Third Term" 72).

[6] Carter nominates a number of authors in this group including (but not exhaustively): Helen Garner, Raimond Gaita, Inga Clendinnen and Andrew Reimer for their respective "ficto-memoirs" see "Public Intellectuals".

[7] William, Lithgow *The Totalle Discourse of the Rare Adventures, and Painefull Peregrinations of long Nineteen Yeares Travayles, from Scotland, to the most famous Kingdomes in Europe, Asia and Affrica* (1632). James, Howell *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (1642).

[8] In *The Literary Encyclopedia*, Narelle Shaw's entry for Robert Dessaix describes him as an: "Autobiographer, Essayist, Travel Writer, Linguistician, Translator, Radio Producer, Editor, Anthologist", who is active in "Australia, Australasia, Russia, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Continental Europe."

[9] In *And So Forth*, Dessaix refers to *A Mother's Disgrace* as "my autobiography, which some regard as a novel posing as an autobiography" (415). In *The Literary Encyclopedia*, under the entry for Dessaix Narelle Shaw writes: "Paradoxically, the first line of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and epigraph of *Night Letters* imports into the autobiography the idea of a pristine beginning. *A Mother's Disgrace* goes back to Dessaix's conception. Analogously, it is the story of his creative gestation."

[10] After Martin Heidegger's "Dasein zum Tod", see draft paper by Dr. Slobodanka Millicent Vladiv-Glover: "AIDS as the Ultimate 'Real' of the Writer: Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*."

[11] Javant Biarujia vehemently disputes idea that *Night Letters* is a gay novel stating emphatically that *Night Letters* "is *not* gay fiction, not even a fictional 'gay confession'" ("The Homotextual Dissimulation of Robert Dessaix" 71).

Chapter Five: The Queer and European Journey of Christos Tsiolkas and *Dead Europe*

[1] I am indebted to Professor Helen Tiffin for this quote from Art Spiegelman's, *The Complete Maus*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, 4.

[2] See Murray Waldren's 1995 article on grunge literature in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*: "Lit. Grit Invades OzLit." 24-25 June 13-17.

[3] As per the *AustLit* database, the prize history for *Dead Europe is as follows:*
Miles Franklin Literary Award, 2006: **longlisted**
New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, 2006: **shortlisted**
Australian Literature Society Gold Medal, 2006: **shortlisted**

The Age Book of the Year Award, Fiction Prize, 2006: **winner**
Melbourne Prize, Best Writing Award, 2006: **inaugural winner**
Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, Best Fiction Book, 2005: **shortlisted**.

Chapter Six: Burdened by History: Alexis Wright

[1] See Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark. *The History Wars*; Keith Windschuttle, The *Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1847*; as well as Tony Taylor, *Denial: history betrayed* 174-209.

[2] Like many of the Northern Territory's diverse population, Jasmin Affianos is a fascinating and complex character—not easily pigeonholed, see Jasmin Affianos. Interview. "2 of Us".

[3] The Northern Territory intervention divided opinion across Australia, for a range of essays and opinions see John Altman and Melinda Hinkson, ed. *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia*.

[4] See Appendix 1, Cora Dow. "Background Note 'Sorry': The Unfinished Business of the *Bringing Them Home* Report" which makes the following statement:

> see Songs: Bob Randall, 'My brown skin baby they take him away', 1969?; Archie Roach Took the children away', 1990. Biographies: Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1975; Jimmie Barker, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1977; Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1977; Sally Morgan, *My Place*, Fremantle Arts Centre Pres, Fremantle, WA, 1987. Oral histories: Peter and Jay Read, *Long Time Olden Time: Aboriginal Accounts of Northern Territory History*, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, 1991; Coral Edwards and Peter Read, *The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken from their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggle to Find their Natural Parents*, Doubleday, Sydney, 1989. Poetry: 'A letter to my mother' by Eva Johnson; 'Mary's plea' by Daisy Utemorrah; Torn apart' by Pam Tjanara Williams; and 'Kidnappers' by Iris Clayton in *Inside Black Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, Vic., 1988. Films: *Lousy Little Sixpence*, 1982; *Women of the Sun*, 1981; *Link-Up Diary*, 1987; Non-Fiction: Barbara Cummings, *Take This Child*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990. Visual art: work of Sally Morgan, Julie Dowling. Since Bringing Them Home materials on the topic have proliferated, most notably the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002).

[5] Refer to Chapter 3, page 93 of this thesis.

[6] *Carpentaria* was published before the Rudd government issued a formal apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples' on 13 Feb 2008 in Parliament House, Canberra.

[7] As well as the *Bringing Them Home* Report, see A. Butu, *A Matter of Conscience* from the biography of Sir Ronald Wilson, who with Mick Dodson, co-chaired the enquiry into The Stolen Generations (301-348). Also J. Frow, "Discursive Justice".

Chapter Seven: Resiting the Yellow Lady: Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo

[1] See Jon Stratton, *Race Daze* for a discussion regarding the problem of who should be classified as Asian (60).

[2] As a "genuine Australian imperialist", Prime Minister Alfred Deakin asserted that: "We intend to be masters of the Pacific by and by" from *Essays in Australian Federation* by Allan William Martin (31).

[3] See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The madwoman in the attic*.

[4] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a theory of poetry*.

[5] The use of Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory in this context can invite a discussion about her book *On Chinese women*—a contentious text. With hindsight, Kristeva's musings as a cultural tourist in China have not proved to be as significant as her theoretical impact in other areas. This should not preclude the use of her psychoanalytic theory. Theorists do not necessarily stay consistent throughout their career. For me, Kristeva is at her most interesting (and perplexing) when she forgoes, "a rationalist conception of a unified subject laying claim to a particular group or "clan'"—and turns our attention instead to—"such borderline states as abjection, children's language, 'foreignness'" (Guberman, Introduction. *Julia Kristeva Interviews* xiv). Thus, Kristeva's avant-garde practice "help us confront the grief-ridden crises of the contemporary world" (xiv).

[6] See Ien Ang *On Not Speaking Chinese* especially pages 62-70.

Conclusion

[1] Just as this thesis was being prepared for submission, the Gillard government, through its Immigration Minister Chris Bowen "unveiled a new multicultural strategy for Australia" (Malley and Aikman 1). "Bowen offered an impassioned defence of Australian multiculturalism—rejecting a rising tide of criticism directed at the policy by European leaders" (1). He went on to claim that multiculturalism "has worked. But it is a unique, Australian multiculturalism, built differently to other models around the world" (1). The *Age* editorial which appeared on 19 February 2011, also provides a summary of the fluctuations of definition and public policy that have circulated around Multiculturalism in recent years. The editorial is replicated in full below.

> FOUR years ago then prime minister John Howard used a cabinet reshuffle to try to erase a previously bipartisan ideal from Australian public policy. Amanda Vanstone, minister for immigration and multicultural affairs, was replaced by Kevin Andrews, who became minister for immigration and citizenship. Mr Howard coyly denied that he was attacking multiculturalism, a notion that had been introduced by the Whitlam government and upheld under the Fraser government. "I don't think that the term is defunct," he said. "I think the desired progression is for an immigrant to become an Australian. Simple as that." A possible inference from these words, however, was that becoming an Australian had not really been "the desired progression" under multiculturalism. This was false, but opponents of multiculturalism were thereby validated in their belief that it was inconsistent with acceptance of an Australian identity, and quietly encouraged in their denunciations of the discarded term and its defenders.
>
> But this week the M-word came roaring back. The present Immigration and Citizenship Minister, Chris Bowen, used a speech in Sydney to reinstate both the term—his colleague Senator Kate Lundy will become Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs—and the ideal it proclaims. He mounted a robust and long overdue defence of what has been achieved under policies inspired by that ideal: Australia today is one of the most conspicuously successful examples of a society that combines broad cultural diversity and tolerance of difference with shared allegiance to the nation. That allegiance, in turn, is underpinned by acceptance of English as the common language and by a shared understanding of citizenship, founded on respect for the rule of law, for free speech, and for the equal dignity and rights of all, regardless of race, gender or sexuality. This civic ideal is not how multiculturalism has been understood in some other countries, such as Germany, where Chancellor Angela Merkel has described it as having failed utterly, or Britain, where Prime Minister David Cameron has questioned its compatibility with liberal democracy. But it is how it was conceived by Al Grassby, the Whitlam government immigration minister who first embraced it as policy. Contrary to John Howard's later insinuation that there might be a difference between professing multiculturalism and desiring that immigrants should become Australians, the "desired progression" is what multiculturalism was intended to facilitate, and it did.
>
> The genie Mr Howard unleashed is still out of the bottle and bent on mischief. While Mr Bowen was reinvigorating multiculturalism, his opposition counterpart, Scott Morrison, was embroiled in a dispute over remarks he made at a shadow cabinet meeting in December. Mr Morrison reportedly urged the

> Coalition to exploit concerns about the "inability" of Muslim immigrants to integrate in the wider community. This contention was vigorously opposed by some of his colleagues, but others have since complained that his remarks were reported out of context. They have not, however, explained what context makes it acceptable to use racial or religious bigotry for electoral gain, nor could they credibly do so. Multiculturalism's critics typically portray it as a doctrine that divides Australians; it is the insidious dog-whistling of politicians, however, that is the true threat to national unity. ("Welcome back, the M word")

[2] In her review essay "Going Global", Kerryn Goldsworthy reflects on the evolution of the concept of Australian Literature. Her essay provides an excellent summary.

[3] The actual word (translated from German) which Beck uses is "provincialism".

[4] Historian John Hirst states, "I think the British heritage of Australia will be seen more clearly when the constitutional links with Britain are finally broken" ("No bar to democracy" 12).

[5] Since the end of 2007, Australian has seen two changes of government and two new Labour Prime Ministers: Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard—who is also Australia's first woman Prime Minister. The recent 2010 election resulted in a hung parliament indicating how diverse the Australian community has become and how fragmented the political spectrum now is: something which perhaps these contemporary un-Australian fictions anticipate.

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