Celebrating Difference

by

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Summary

This thesis examines short fiction and some poetry by writers from four different Australian cultural communities, the Indigenous community, and the Jewish, Chinese and Middle-Eastern communities. I have chosen to study the most recent short fiction available from a selection of writing which originates from each culture. In the chapters on Chinese-Australian and Middle-Eastern Australian fiction I have examined some poetry if it contributes to the subject matter under discussion. In this study I show how the short story form is used as a platform for these writers to express views on their own cultures and on their identity within Australian society. Through a close examination of texts this study reveals the strategies by which many of these narratives provide an imaginative literary challenge to Anglo-Celtic cultural dominance, a challenge which contributes to the political nature of this writing and the shifting nature of the short story genre. This study shows that by celebrating difference these narratives can act as a site of resistance and show a capacity to reflect and instigate cultural change. This thesis examines the process by which these narratives create a dialogue between cultures and address the problems inherent in diverse cultural communities living together.
Introduction

The contemporary Australian short fiction which I will study in this thesis reflects the dynamic nature of the short story genre in Australia by revealing voices and perspectives from cultures which are in varying degrees marginal to the Anglo-Celtic culture. I shall show how the short story form is used as a platform for these writers to express views on their own cultures and on their identity within Australian society, views which are at times contentious. This study will show the strategies by which many of these narratives provide an imaginative literary challenge to Anglo-Celtic cultural dominance and which contribute to the political nature of this writing and the shifting nature of the short story genre.

The literature under consideration in this study consists of short fiction by writers from four different Australian cultural communities: the Indigenous community, and the Jewish, Chinese and Middle-Eastern communities. The stories are not bounded by a decade or a particular literary period; rather I have chosen the most recent short fiction available from a selection of writing which originates from each culture. In the chapters on Chinese-Australian and Middle-Eastern Australian fiction I have examined some poetry if it contributes to the subject matter under discussion. I have therefore included some poetry by Ouyang Yu to acknowledge its contribution to the debate on racism and to illustrate the confronting and accusatory nature of his writing. One poem from the anthology *Footprints on Paper* will also be discussed as an example of writing which has been published in
both English and Chinese and engages with Australian experience. As part of the chapter on Middle-Eastern short fiction I have included a discussion of three poems from the anthology *Waiting in Space*. A limited body of short fiction is available for scrutiny from Middle-Eastern cultures and these poems depict immigrant experiences and provide further imaginative perspectives on the subject of Middle-Eastern and Australian relationships. In this particular anthology the boundary between short fiction and poetry is at times porous. Short fiction by all writers will be considered in the context of the cultural perspectives from which they are writing. However, a small number of these stories do not overtly reflect the cultural background of their authors, in the course of the thesis therefore, I will discuss these narratives and their position with regard to other works considered in this study. In this introductory chapter I will provide an overview of the development of the short story genre in Australia and indicate the perspectives which direct the study of this writing. I will also consider the social and political background which has informed these narratives.

The short story genre in Australia can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century and to the growth of a reading public which grew alongside developments in printing and publishing. English authors were often favoured over Australians at this time, and Australia provided one of the chief markets for English publications. However writers such as David Burn, who wrote “Our First Lieutenant and Fugitive Pieces in Prose” in 1842 and Mrs. Vidal who wrote “Tales for The Bush”, published in 1845, were popular with readers, as were the stories of Mrs. Charles Clacy which were published in 1854. Burn’s stories were not set in Australia, but were stories of love and intrigue and were characterised by extravagant, descriptive language, while Mrs. Vidal’s writing was directed towards young women, and promoted strong moral messages (Hadgraft 2). Mrs. Charles
Clacy however drew upon more diverse subject matter. She wrote of the experience of immigration and depicted adventures in the new land. Her narratives used excessively formal language and despite the subject matter were constrained by the style in which they were written (Hadgraft 3). The most significant writer before Henry Lawson was Marcus Clarke, who published seven collections of short fiction, as well as articles, poetry and plays. He was influenced by Edgar Allen Poe who was being published in America in the 1840s and who had made significant contributions to the short story genre (Bennett 3).

Newspapers such as the Melbourne Punch, which operated between 1855 and 1929, and the Australian Journal (1865-1958) as well as the Australasian, a weekly journal which ran between 1864-1946, provided publishing outlets for short story writers. Images of the colonies were filtered through these journals, not only to the reading public in Australia but also to readers back in England. Indigenous people, the presence of gold, convicts and the hardships of the settlers’ life provided a rich source of material for writers. In the 1980s many of these early stories were re-published in two anthologies: The Australian Short Story Before Lawson (1986) and From The Verandah (1987).
Henry Lawson was first published in the *Bulletin* in 1887, and his central role in literature was articulated by A.G. Stephens when he wrote in 1895: “Henry Lawson is the voice of the Bush and the Bush is the heart of Australia” (Qtd. in Barnes 2). The *Bulletin* displayed pro-republican and anti-British feeling and the influence of Stephens and J.F. Archibald, who had established the journal in 1880, affected the direction of literature in Australia. The role of the *Bulletin* became central to the development of literature, when the literary editor, A. G. Stephens, established the Red Page, a literary section of the newspaper in 1896. This page consisted of articles on books and literature in general, and encouraged participation through competitions and correspondence. It provided a focus for writers at this time and also encouraged the reading of texts and articles from overseas. Lawson’s readership associated his vision with the growing nationalistic feelings of the time. His literary voice became associated with being ‘Australian’ and contributed to the vigorous nature of the short story tradition in the 1890s. Lawson’s work at this time was defined by its simple economic style, with short sentences and paragraphs, however his work was criticised by A. G. Stephens for its parochialism. John Docker, in his book *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s*, published in 1991, has pointed out that because of the lively cosmopolitan nature of the intellectual landscape of the 1890s, contributors to the *Dawn* and the *Bulletin* would be surprised at claims in the twentieth century, that they were “obsessed with the bush” (240 - 241). He situates some of Lawson’s characters in the ancient tradition of the carnivalesque, which is described by Bakhtin as: “A boundless world of
humorous forms and manifestations (which) opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture” (Morris 196). This interpretation suggests an added diversity and richness to Lawson’s writing.

Although his reputation tends to dominate this era Lawson was surrounded by other writers of note, such as Arthur Hoey Davis, or Steele Rudd as he was known, whose view of life in the outback was oriented from a masculine perspective. Barbara Baynton had only one story published in the *Bulletin*, but was a well-received author at this time and one of the few women to have a story published in the journal (Bennett 78). Although contributions from women were said to be welcome, the space made available for their work was restricted, and Baynton’s story was heavily edited. Baynton’s *Bush Studies*, was published in 1901, her stories depict a bleak vision of women in the bush and of gender relationships. Its popularity was short-lived, and it went out of print, to be re-published in 1965, inviting new perspectives and a re-appraisal of her writing (Bennett 80). Her peers Rosa Praed, Ada Cambridge and Louise Mack represent female perspectives in a literary world dominated by masculinist attitudes of the Bulletin, although twenty of Mack’s stories were published in the journal over a period of ten years. The *Bulletin* and Lawson can be seen to set a path for short story writing in Australia, however the first thirty years of the twentieth century were not productive ones for the genre. (Goldsworthy xx). Bruce Bennett has noted that the bush realism which defined the writing of the 1890s and the early century was still influential in the 1920s and 1930s. (101)
At the turn of the twentieth century the work of Anton Chekhov was becoming available to readers in England and America. A profuse writer, his collected works had first appeared in Russia in 1889 (Gottlieb 9). His stories showed an impressionist style—a move away from the formal use of plot to an intense evocation of mood, such as in his story “The Kiss”. Chekhov’s contribution to the form of the short story lies in his depiction of the inner psyche of the characters through the use of selected, and at times seemingly trivial, details. His influence has been far-reaching, and can be seen in such writers as James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield and Sherwood Anderson. Joyce and Anderson show a preoccupation with isolation, which can be linked to that of Chekhov (May 17) and can be also seen in Joyce’s collection *Dubliners*. Joyce stated that he had not read Chekhov when he wrote these stories, which although written between 1904 and 1907 were not published until 1914. Each of these writers, including Katherine Mansfield, were at times considered to be writing sketches because of the lack of dependence on plot in their narratives. (May 16) Katherine Mansfield’s admiration for Chekhov is stated in a letter which she wrote in 1919, in which she says: “I have re-read “The Steppe” What can one say? It is simply one of the greatest stories in the world—a kind of *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. I think I will learn this journey by heart” (Stead 137). Her story “The Fly” is often compared to Chekhov’s work. His influence is seen also in the work of later writers Tobias Wolfe and Raymond Carver, whose story “Errand” in the collection *Where I’m Calling From* was written as a homage to Chekhov.
The short fiction of Katharine Susannah Pritchard, Vance Palmer and Judah Waten also reflects the style of Chekhov. Pritchard’s and Palmer’s writing dominated the years of the 1930s and 1940s in Australia. Henry Handel Richardson and Christina Stead wrote at that time in Europe as expatriates; part of a large group of writers who chose to leave Australia, among them George Johnson and Charmian Clift, as well as Patrick White and Hal Porter. In Australia groups such as The Federation of Australian Writers, (which is still operating in 2004) encouraged Australian literary culture. From the 1930s through to the 1950s the short story genre was defined by a realist style, exposing the hardships of working class people and acting as a voice for their experiences. Gavin Casey’s “Dust” and John Morrison’s “Nightshift” are two examples of overtly political stories, while Alan Marshall, Dal Stivens and Frank Hardy used the tradition of the yarn to inform their writing of short fiction.

The 1940s were significant to the development of the short story. 1940 saw the first publication of Meanjin and in 1941 Angus and Robertson published a number of short story anthologies entitled Coast to Coast which ran intermittently from 1941-1970 (Bennett 143). The short fiction of Peter Cowan and Dal Stivens reflected a move away from the Lawson tradition, foreshadowing a trend to be followed by other writers in the 1960s. Marjorie Barnard's “The Persimmon Tree”, published in 1943 (Bennett119) also showed a change in style from the various expressions of realism which had dominated the
form of the short story. In 1945 Vance Palmer wrote in *Coast to Coast*:

… the scope of the short story has been enlarged. We no longer demand that it shall have a formal beginning, a middle and an end; that it shall contain a plot as easily extracted as the backbone of a fish… Nowadays as short story may be a dream a dialogue, a study of character, a poetic reverie; anything that has a certain unity and the movement of life… (qtd. in Hergenhan vii-ix)

Palmer’s comment is significant since it foreshadows the freedom of style and the changed form which was to direct short fiction writing in the later years of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, and which is visible in contemporary short fiction.

A prelude to the writing which is studied in this thesis, can be seen when in the 1950s, a wave of stories appeared on the subject of immigration. Judah Waten’s story “Mother” was published in his highly successful collection *Alien Son* in 1952 (Bennett 153). It depicts the experience of cultural isolation of first generation Jewish immigrants, which is echoed in contemporary stories in this study written by second and third generation Jewish writers. Waten’s writing was informed by his strong political views as a member of the Communist Party, and by his background as the child of Russian immigrants who had come to Australia in 1914 (Webby 241). Herz Bergner, who had migrated to Australia in 1938 also contributed to this genre of migration stories, some of which were translated from Yiddish by
Judah Waten (Bennett 155). Many of his stories depict the experience of Polish Jews in Australia and were published in three collections, *The New House*, (1941), *The House of Jacob Isaacs* (1955) and *Where the Truth Lies* in 1965 (Bennett 155). In 1949 Ludwig Destinyi, or David Martin as he became known, emigrated from Budapest and had stories published in *Overland* and *Meanjin*, as well as *Coast to Coast* and various anthologies. One anthology entitled *Two Ways Meet: Stories of Migrants in Australia* was published in 1963 and can be seen as a forerunner to later anthologies of multicultural writing. The 1950s also saw the publication of the work of Otto Schlunke, the son of German Lutheran immigrants whose stories depict the rural life of the Riverina and the experience of German settlers in farming communities, at a time where assimilation was expected of immigrant families (Bennett 157). Indian culture becomes part of the Australian literary scene with the stories written by Mena Abdullah, many of which were first published in the *Bulletin*. They illustrate the cross-cultural influences of her Muslim father and the Brahmin heritage of her mother. Although born in Australia her stories reflect her Indian background, and were brought together in her collection *In the Time of The Peacock*, published in 1965. (Bennett 158). The work of all these authors is significant because it depicts the experience of European immigrants in the early years after the war and before the advent of the policy of multiculturalism. During this time, acknowledgement of the developing significance of Australian literature was taking place, since in 1955 the first full-year University course in Australian literature was set up at Canberra
University College, to be followed in 1962 with the first chair of Australian literature at Sydney University.

With the 1960s came a move away from realism as writers such as Dal Stivens, John Morrison, Hal Porter and particularly Patrick White brought new social perspectives to bear on Australia and on literature. White’s exploration of the metaphysical opened new avenues in fiction writing and his Nobel Prize in 1973 brought Australian writing into the international arena. His famous comment in 1989 on the “dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism” in Australian writing, (Flynn 16) provides a comment on the style of social realism which had dominated Australian literature since the time of Lawson, and also indicates a direction away from such writing.

Frank Moorhouse’s stories, first published in 1969, reflected the sexually permissive ideas that were to become apparent in the next decade and re-invigorated the short story form by changes in style and subject matter. The easing of censorship restrictions together with the development of the Australia Council and the Literature Board in 1973, resulting in increased funding for writers, contributed to an increase in literary production and is often seen as a turning point in the direction of writing in Australia. Tabloid Story, established in Sydney in 1972 played an important role in encouraging experimental short fiction and reflected the more radical sentiments of those protesting involvement in the Vietnam War (Goldsworthy xxvii). The 1977 publication of The Most Beautiful Lies epitomised a break from realism, (Webby190) which was apparent in the short fiction of
Peter Carey, Michael Wilding and Murray Bail, who all in different ways explored the use of fantasy in their narratives. In this anthology European and American influences become apparent in short story writing so the tradition of the short story epitomised by Lawson, with its emphasis on nationalist ideas was being contested by this new writing. One of the few collections published in the seventies by a woman writer was *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* by Thea Astley (1979), indicating the dominance of male short fiction writers in Australia at that time. Astley however, paved the way for many more women writers in the 1980s, such as Elizabeth Jolley, Marion Halligan, Carmel Bird and Beverley Farmer, a wave of women writers who all contributed to the short story genre in different ways. Helen Garner’s story “The Life of Art” also made a significant contribution to the growing body of short fiction by women writers in the 1980s (Goldsworthy xxix). Women’s writing was affected by changes in feminist perspectives, but male writers such as Peter Goldsworthy, Barry Hill and Tim Winton were also writing about gender relationships in their short fiction.

The magazine *Australian Short Stories*, edited by Bruce Pascoe was influential in publishing short fiction between 1982 and 1998, while Peter Craven’s anthology *The Best Australian Stories* (1999) illustrated the diverse nature of the genre, with narratives ranging from detective stories to erotica. Anthologies published in the year 2000 have included emerging short fiction writers of the 1990s whose writing style reflects postmodernist influences, such as Gail Jones, Gillian Meares and Brenda Walker as well as Gerald Murnane (Bennett 293). The genre of grunge
fiction also emerged in the 1990s, aimed at the market of young readers and foregrounding drugs and sex as subject matter.

The years of the 1980s saw the emergence and official encouragement of multicultural writing, despite the fact that some writers objected to being bound by such categories (Wilding xvi). This change of focus heralded the emergence of writing from diverse cultural groups and opened the way for the fiction which is studied in this thesis. As well as an increase in women’s writing, informed by the international reach of contemporary feminisms, Indigenous literature and gay and lesbian writing contributed to a decrease in the dominance of white Anglo-Celtic male writing. The increased profile of these groups can be linked to an awareness of the position of minorities. Indigenous issues, the rights of women and the situation of immigrants became part of the social and political agenda. A proliferation of small publishers allowed such literature to flourish and the nature of the Australian literary landscape became more diverse and less homogenous.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s speech at the first Aboriginal Writer’s Conference in 1983 established the responsibilities of Indigenous writers to address contentious issues in their literature. The articulation of what she termed “The Black Commandments”, eleven instructions which outlined ways in which Indigenous people could assert both their independence and their identity, opened the way for the political focus of Indigenous literature. As she said: “Let the writers lead the field in advising, criticising and scrutinising the ideas and ideals in the interest of all our
people…” (Qtd. in Narogin 22). The first publication of her poetry in 1964, entitled *We are Going* is often seen as the defining point in the development of Aboriginal writing, although the development of Indigenous writing can be traced back to the publications of David Unaipon in the 1920s (Van Toorn 28).

Writers such as Jack Davis, Mudrooroo and Kevin Gilbert contributed to the growing profile of Indigenous Literature. Jack Davis played an influential role in Indigenous writing, not only through his plays but also by encouraging writers, actors and poets during the 1980s. His productions confronted such issues as Aboriginal deaths in custody and explored the dynamics of racism. In Davis’ theatre, traditional European theatrical traditions merged with representations of Aboriginal life and perspectives (Akerholt 225). The publication of *Gularabulu* in 1983 was the result of a close working relationship between Paddy Roe and Stephen Muecke and indicated the possibilities of inter-cultural collaboration (Narogin107). Archie Weller’s collection *Going Home* published in 1986 presented a bleak vision of Aboriginal life, but is an example of realist fiction which angrily asserts the right for an Indigenous space in the literary and cultural landscape of Australia. Laurie Hergenhan asserts a connection between the emergence of writing from women writers and minority groups as being linked to “an increased questioning” (xxv) of issues of gender, race and ethnic background. Such writing broadened the scope of the short story genre in the 1980s.
Archie Weller’s collection *Going Home*, Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take your Love to Town* (Macintyre 262) and the opening of the publishing-house, Magabala Books in 1987, were landmarks in the development of Indigenous literature during the decade of the 1980s and played a significant role in raising the profile of Indigenous literature. *My Place* faced a mixed reception among Aboriginal readers, but instigated a wave of life-writing; a genre of autobiographical narrative which has been particularly popular with women writers and which makes a significant contribution to the body of Aboriginal writing. Anne Brewster has suggested that the increase in the publication of autobiographical narratives runs parallel with a change in the position of women in Aboriginal society. A determination to support their communities as a result of alcoholism amongst men and the number of men in jail, has raised the profile of Aboriginal women, encouraging self-assertion and independence (Brewster 9). In 1990 an anthology published by Magabala Books, *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings* and in 1998 *Across Country: Stories From Aboriginal Australia*, drew attention to the scope of work emanating from Indigenous writers. (Grossman 1-2) Further anthologies published during the nineties opened up opportunities for short story writers such as Herb Wharton and the anthology *Those Who Remain Will Always Remember*, published in 2000, brings together a number of Indigenous writers and a range of genres. Autobiographical life stories, poetry and essays on identity and history combine, while fiction is less prominent. In 2001 an anthology entitled *Contemporary Australian Short Stories* (2001) was edited by a New Delhi critic, Santosh K. Sereen and included
three short stories from Aboriginal writers. Sareen is currently editing an anthology of Aboriginal stories for Indian students, indicating international interest in Australian Indigenous writing (Bennett 299). Although this thesis is concerned with short fiction, the role of the stories in the *Bringing Them Home* report should be mentioned as a component of the short story genre. Submitted as documentary evidence for the Stolen Generation Report, they engage with history in depicting Indigenous experience.

In his influential book *Writing From the Fringe*, published in 1990, Mudrooroo positioned Indigenous literature in its Australian context by saying: “The Aboriginal writer is a Janus-type figure with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a postmodern, multicultural Australia in which he or she must fight for cultural space” (24). Kim Scott’s novel, published in 1999, *Benang: From the Heart*, which won the Miles Franklin Award in 2000, is a contemporary example of Indigenous writing creating such a cultural space. The award ensures that the novel is recognised by the dominant culture and invites a readership often denied to Indigenous writing.

The unique position of Indigenous people in Australia precludes them from being considered part of the multicultural community; however a report from The National Multicultural Advisory Council in 1999 entitled “Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century, Towards Inclusiveness” emphasised that for Multiculturalism to be successful, reconciliation between Indigenous people and other Australians is a necessity. In a paper presented in 2000,
Neville Roach, the Chair for the Council For Multicultural Australia pointed out that Multicultural Australia is closer to Reconciliation than a mono-cultural Anglo-Celtic Australia could ever have been:

The recognition that diversity is a positive attribute of the Australian nation and, among non-Indigenous Australians we no longer have a single culture into which we all must assimilate should make it all the easier for us to accept, respect and celebrate the different and unique culture and status of the original inhabitants of this land, the Australians who pre-date modern immigration from time immemorial. (Roach117)

In his paper Roach pointed out that both Indigenous groups and multicultural groups must confront the same enemy, discrimination and racism, and called for multicultural groups to come together to provide support for Indigenous people in areas of employment and education.

In the late 1990s the number of Indigenous people in Australia stood at 352,000 compared to 156,000 in 1976. (Macintyre 261) This increase in numbers has helped to raise the profile of Aboriginal people in this country, although the authenticity of Aboriginal heritage has at times become an issue since Mudrooroo, Archie Weller, and Roberta Sykes, have all had their Aboriginal identity questioned. At the close of the twentieth century life expectancy for Indigenous people was fifteen years below the national average, (Macintyre 261) while problems with the administration of welfare have led to accusations of
dependence on government support. An increased awareness and
celebration of Aboriginal culture since the 1980s however has seen the
emergence of Indigenous voices in literature, poetry, theatre and music;
a movement that has been paralleled in countries such as the United
States, Canada and New Zealand, where Indigenous peoples have
asserted their identity. The increased profile of Aboriginal culture in
Australia has been supported by contentious legal changes which will
be referred to in Chapter One of this thesis.

Aboriginal authors are currently being published by several publishing
houses in Australia: University of Queensland Press and Allen and
Unwin publish Indigenous writers and the Indigenous publishing house
Magabala Books plays an integral role in the promotion of Aboriginal
literature. In this way Indigenous writing is entering the domain of
mainstream readers and critics. Aboriginal writers are therefore
subjecting their work to the literary judgement of the culture which has
suppressed them for so many years; however this engagement raises
the profile of Indigenous people in Australia and expands the
opportunities for literary expression. The employment of Aboriginal
editors by literary houses is one way that Indigenous literature is
moving forward and the recent (2003) publication of the book
Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians
makes a significant contribution to contemporary Indigenous culture by
bringing together for the first time, essays by Aboriginal intellectuals,
commenting on social, political and cultural issues. Sonja Kurtzer, in an
essay in the same book notes that:
When Aboriginal people contribute to the discourse on Aboriginality they do not do so from ‘free’ space. Previous discourse constrains and defines the Indigenous response. It becomes a matter of having to speak in terms that ‘white’ audiences recognise as valid, on matters seen as authentic, and in terms that do not threaten. Of concern then, is whether such works really meet the desires of Indigenous Australians to tell their own stories from their own perspectives. (Kurtzer 188)

This comment articulates the difficult position which the expression of Indigenous culture finds itself. But to deny cross-cultural cultural interaction is to isolate Aboriginal cultural practices and promote the silence which has been imposed on Indigenous culture since 1788. Writers have accepted their representative role, since questioning the dominance of cultural discourse allows Aboriginal cultures to reassert the place of Indigenous people in Australia’s history.

Behind the shifting directions of the genre of short fiction in Australia lies political and ideological change. The post-war immigration program which began in 1947 was instigated for three reasons: to boost Australia’s population, a move which was seen to be necessary for defence purposes; to provide manpower for industry; and to give humanitarian aid to Europeans who had suffered during the war (Lopez 44). The program encouraged assimilation into Australian life at the cost of the traditions and practices of the national identity of these migrants. The desire for ethnic and cultural homogeneity was at odds with the diverse
nature of cultural groups entering the country. (Lopez 45) Emerging politicians such as Gough Whitlam and Don Dunstan showed opposition to assimilation and to the White Australia policy which had existed since the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. (The infamous dictation test was not dropped until 1958.) The need for a policy to cater for the existence of ethnic communities with welfare-based problems, was becoming apparent. Anti-racist and anti-parochial views of the 1960s, and an emphasis on cosmopolitanism were conducive to ideas of multiculturalism. (Lopez 85) Social divisions which challenged traditional values were becoming apparent as a result of the influence of student movements, anti-Vietnam War groups, and women’s movements influenced by feminist perspectives. All this contributed to changes in social opinion and contributed to a strong ongoing support base to the ideology of multiculturalism. James Jupp’s study *Arrivals and Departures* published in 1967 provided an influential perspective on migrant problems (Lopez 95) and the 1972 election of the Whitlam government created a new political environment and furthered the cause of the movement towards multiculturalism. The Whitlam government oversaw the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act (Lopez 440) and ensured equal wages for women doing equal work. During the Whitlam years the Office for the Status for Women was also established and the Literature Board was set up to administer funding to writers.

The removal of ethnicity in determining the outcomes of applications for immigration to Australia, was announced by the Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, in January 1973, marking
the official end of the White Australia policy, and as Stuart Macintyre states: “… monoculture yielded to multiculture.” (232) Large-scale immigration from Asia began. There was, however, no official policy of multiculturalism at this time. 1973 saw the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Bill, providing the legal substance for a future multicultural society. A speech written by Jim Houston and delivered by Al Grassby entitled “A Multi-Cultural Society For The Future” marked the first time that the term “multicultural society” was used officially, but it was not until 1974 that a policy of multiculturalism was put forward by the Liberal Party, under the direction of Malcolm Fraser, opposition spokesman on Immigration, indicating the existence of bipartisan attitudes towards the policy. As a result of Parliamentary debate and a speech by Fraser, the term “multicultural society” was entered into Hansard for the first time in March 1974. The idea of multiculturalism emerged during the time of the Whitlam government, but was not officially proposed or planned by it. (Lopez 274) By 1975 the basic ideology of multiculturalism had been articulated and had taken root in public policy. Ethnic radio stations and an ethnic television channel were established during the 1970s to cater for minority groups, commencing operation in 1980. (Lopez 444) In 1984 historian Geoffrey Blainey questioned the number of Asian immigrants entering the country and as a result suffered accusations of racism, while in 1988 John Howard also took issue with the number of Asian immigrants and was forced to retreat from his statements. The Jupp Review of 1986 set out the framework of a policy on the social and economic rights of people from non-English speaking cultures. In the year 1996 Sir James Gobbo’s
National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia published in 1989 served as a basis of multicultural policy and although modified since by the National Multicultural Advisory Council, maintains its significance as an outline of official policy.

The rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party after the 1996 election exposed an undercurrent of extreme nationalism which opposed the tenets of multiculturalism and focused its bigotry on Asian people and Indigenous Australians. Hage points out that debates about multiculturalism “have always centred around the construction of an ‘un-integrated other’ ” (Against Paranoid Nationalism 66). The focus of these debates has moved from targeting people from Asian countries, and now, as a result of terrorist activity, converges on Muslims and Islam.

Support for multiculturalism appears to have wavered with the Howard Government, evidenced by its closure of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and its failure to actively support programmes encouraging cultural diversity both in education and the arts. (Theophanous 54) Reduction in the immigration program (Theophanous 61) and its policy towards refugees, points to negative attitudes towards the ethos of multiculturalism. In a paper given in the year 2000 Dr. Andrew Theophanous noted that the main criticism of Multiculturalism from conservative groups is that it is seen as a threat to a cohesive national identity. Ghassan Hage points out that John Howard’s habit of continually emphasising the ‘essentially good Australian’ in his speeches, “signals the rise of an unprecedented political narcissism: a numb and dumb sense of self-satisfaction
with the national self and a refusal to hear any voice other than one’s own” (Hage, Against Paranoid 76). He continues: “Howard’s fundamentalism encourages a discourse of confirmation rather than a reflexive critical discourse. This has developed into a pathological inability to listen to any voice other than one’s own.” (76) Much of the fiction that I will study provides an example of critical voices which engage with and challenge such attitudes. I will show how the fiction studied in this thesis is informed by this background, interrogating issues which arise out of multiculturalism, exposing attitudes of racism, questioning notions of homogeneity and dominance and celebrating the flux of cultural change.

These cultural, social and political changes have re-directed Australian literature and the short story genre. Xavier Pons has written that Lawson “conceived of himself as the interpreter of Australia” (Pons, Henry Lawson 13). The bush realism of early writers such as Lawson and Baynton held sway over the genre for many years, but in the year 2004 the interpretation of Australia comes from a chorus of diverse literary voices which have emerged from a wide span of cultures, some which I will study in this thesis. The stories I discuss are informed by both geographic and cultural diversity and by the backgrounds of Indigenous people and of immigrants. The format of the stories at times reflects the realist prose of the earlier years of the genre, but at other times is not inhibited by any pre-conceived style, but shows an innovative freedom of expression which brings many perspectives to bear on the genre and on Australian culture.
The diverse nature of this fiction is influenced by the non-homogenous nature of the cultures which inform it. Australian Indigenous people occupy their own unique place in Australian society but the other literature under consideration in this thesis articulates voices from writers influenced by the diasporic origins which inform and define their writing. They are disparate voices, which invoke fascinating imaginative perspectives on the Australian community and provide a glimpse inside other cultures. Despite the diverse origins of these narratives the writing is loosely linked by its position on the margins of mainstream Anglo-Celtic literature and by its investigation of changing notions of identity which emerge through negotiations between and among cultures. The writing is also linked by the strategies which these authors use to intervene into the dominant culture.

Language lies at the forefront of negotiations between cultures and will be discussed in each chapter, since it depicts the most significant point of engagement with the dominant literary discourse. I will show the process by which the transformative effects of language can alter forms of meaning and communication and act as a site of resistance to the hegemony of the dominant culture. Since the concept of place is inextricably associated with language, I will discuss the depiction of place and the way which it acts to challenge previous notions of this concept. I will examine experiences of dislocation, exile and divided loyalties which are significant to this writing and which gives it global as well as local relevance. The re-assessment of history also plays a significant role in many of
these stories, not only the history of Australia, but of the country of origin of many of these writers. I will demonstrate how this engagement with history at times acts to challenge and change existing perspectives and how alternative interpretations emerge through the medium of the genre of short fiction. Although all of these narratives are contemporary, the relationship of the various authors to the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture differs. Some of this writing has been written from the perspective of second-generation immigrants; other narratives depict the experience of those new to Australian culture. Second generation immigrant writers depict a changing perspective, as they straddle between the experience of their parents and their own experience as Australians.

The short fiction that I will study provides only a partial view into these cultures and narrow perspectives on Australian culture. The short story genre is a limited avenue of discourse, at times constrained by publication issues and by a limited audience of readers. Despite the ties linking these texts, which I have mentioned above, each chapter articulates many different voices. In the first chapter I have studied Aboriginal short fictions in relation to their depictions of Aboriginality. As the original occupants of Australia, Indigenous people are not affected by diasporic relationships in the same way as immigrant groups. I have emphasised the non-homogenous nature of Indigenous culture when writing about their literature.

In the chapter on Jewish short fiction the diasporic nature of Jewish culture is discussed since it plays a significant role in this
body of texts. Postcolonial theory does not contribute to a definition of Australian-Jewish literature since there is not the same impulse to resist the dominant culture; this writing does however celebrate cultural difference and speak from the position of a minority. It does not attempt to interpolate and destabilise the dominant culture in the same way as Chinese-Australian writing or Middle-Eastern short fiction. This may indicate the less marginalised position which Jewish culture holds within the Australian community. For the most part these narratives do reflect Australian-Jewish issues of identity and history and are centred on the migrant experience. However some of the stories written by Elliot Perlman and Serge Liberman indicate a conscious move away from writing which reflects their Jewish cultural background. Perhaps this indicates a rejection of boundaries imposed by such writing and a desire to consider more universal issues. These stories will be considered in the chapter on Australian-Jewish writing. The Holocaust casts its spell over many of the stories studied here, most of which are written by the second generation of Jewish immigrant families whose parents have experienced the condition of exile and dislocation. An engagement with history and the past therefore plays an overwhelming role in this writing. The issue of language is not as significant as in the other writing that I am studying, since many of these stories have been written by Australian-born writers, who depict the changing nature of Jewish identity as they reflect upon their parents experiences from the vantage point of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century.
In the chapter on Chinese-Australian short fiction I consider the diasporic nature of Chinese-Australian culture, illustrated by the subject matter and depictions of place in this writing. The role of language and its interaction with English plays a dominant role, since most of these stories are the work of recent immigrants to Australia. In the final chapter of this thesis I have analysed the work of writers from Middle-Eastern countries and again the role of language is foregrounded. As I have pointed out the body of short fiction from these countries is limited; nevertheless it provides an imaginative contemporary perspective on both Australia and on several Middle-Eastern countries and reflects inter-cultural relationships which have particular relevance in the contemporary Australian community of the early twenty-first century.

There are many voices and many perspectives emerging from these stories, but they come together to form part of the Australian literary landscape and the contemporary short story genre. For the most part, they celebrate difference, and explore the many cultural influences which contribute to the body of contemporary Australian literature. Homi Bhabha refers to the significant role of such literature when he states:

The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’. Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, of political
refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature." (Location 12)

The short fiction which I am studying in this thesis plays a small part in the process of change to which Bhabha refers, reflecting the flux of cultures and identities within the contemporary Australian community, and the resilient capacity of literature to adjust to and absorb those changes.

The writing studied in this thesis explores and questions the relationships between the Indigenous community, immigrant groups, and Anglo-Celtic society in Australia. The processes or strategies which intervene in the dominant discourse are referred to by Edward Said as “the voyage in” which he sees as: “the conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalised or suppressed or forgotten histories…” (Culture 260). Ashcroft describes these avenues of access as “interpolation”: “Interpolation describes the range of strategies by which colonized people have historically empowered themselves through a calculated appropriation of aspects of the dominant discourse” (Post-Colonial 49). I will use the term in the course of this thesis, as defined by Ashcroft.

In postcolonial writing where English is the second language of the author, language exposes the site of cultural difference and the point where meaning is communicated. In this process the role of the writer and the reader comes together, through the text, both to reveal the site of difference and also to enable
cross-cultural understanding, creating a three-way interaction which is essential to the construction of meaning. The cross-cultural text therefore creates a discourse between cultures of which the reader is an integral participant. The existence of cultural difference accentuates the position of the writer, and allows the text to resist absorption into the dominant discourse, creating a subtle distance between writer and reader and in doing so brings the culture of the writer into the realms of English narrative. Cultural difference is one of the most significant features of postcolonial writing and during the course of this thesis I will observe the strategies by which this difference is inserted into the text. The use of foreign words or phrases which are either unglossed or unexplained or have their meaning in parenthesis, is one tactic which provides a distance between writer and reader. Cultural allusion can also affirm difference as well as the adaptation of meaning to suit a writer's intention. In some of these stories the Australian vernacular is used in this way. At times difference is installed in the text by writers using language to denote the linguistic rhythm of speech which depicts dialogue seen to represent a particular aspect of that culture.

The political nature of this literature can be seen in the way it asserts and celebrates difference, contesting the marginal position which has been imposed on the culture from which it originates. The nature of resistance which is depicted in most of the writing discussed in this thesis, does not always take the form of overt opposition to the dominant culture through language, or through a re-assessment of history. It is sometimes seen in a depiction of conversation and the cadence of accent, or
a gentle description of life and beliefs. It may take the form of an illustration of the significance of myth, or be conveyed through mockery, humour or the enjoyment of community. It can lie beneath the text as a mere suggestion of difference. Literary resistance is multi-faceted and at times subtle and illustrates the diverse interests and skills of these contemporary writers. The political nature of it lies not only in its ability to interpolate the dominant culture, but is seen in the process of transformation which this interpolation brings about, changes in language, in the concept of place, in interpretations of history all lead to a re-thinking of cultural, political and social issues and a shifting of perspectives. Against this background the literary voices of these cultures have emerged, informed by the ever-changing nature of Australian identity and of their own cultural heritage.

Cultural difference takes diverse forms in the short stories I consider. Roland Barthes has stated that: “Language is legislation, speech is its code. We do not see the power which is in speech because we forget that all speech is a classification, and that all classifications are oppressive…” (460) The narratives that I will study reject such repression and express cultural difference through language in various degrees. It is obvious in the writing of first generation immigrants whose writing is constrained by language. It is apparent in the writing of Australian-Chinese writer Ouyang Yu for example, but less pronounced in the work of Brian Castro. Eva Sallis, on the other hand, whose writing is informed by her Middle–Eastern origins, is Australian-born, and frequently uses Arabic words in her stories. In the Jewish stories studied here, Yiddish or Hebrew words are
inserted to assert difference and English words are manipulated to evoke the rhythm and cadence of Australian-Jewish speech.

A study of Indigenous narratives will reveal many linguistic strategies to denote difference. To write in English is in itself a political issue and this point will be discussed further in the chapter on Indigenous literature. Aboriginal English, the use of Creole and the imitation of Australian vernacular also form part of this writing. Indigenous writing is not constrained by the orality of Indigenous cultures since some authors write Aboriginal words into the text, not only to assert identity and foreground difference, but to encourage cultural revival through language and to ensure the survival of as many Indigenous words as possible. As Lin Onus has written: “Language encodes meanings and perceptions of the universe; ... each language brings with it a unique set of perceptions and understandings of the individual's relationship with the greater society” (94). It is this unique set of perceptions, intrinsic to every culture, which these linguistic strategies explore, by enabling the communication of meaning in cross-cultural texts.

Language not only has the ability to signify difference, it encodes the process of change intrinsic to the literature emerging from other cultures. Linguistic difference confronts and challenges English language traditions and enforces a transformation of language which empowers the cultures from which these influences emerge. It is this process that contributes to shifts in genre and which destabilizes the dominance of English in Australia.
Inextricably tied to the concept of language is the representation of place, which together with language contributes to an exploration of identity. A study of the role that the concept of place plays in these narratives illustrates another point of difference from the dominant discourse and is one of the defining tropes of writing from minority cultures. In this writing place also involves the experience of displacement and at times of exile, which can be both physical and psychological. Depictions of place in this writing form a literary map of the origins of immigrant cultures in the Australian community. The stories range from the Victorian Mallee to the deserts of the Middle East; from Arnold Zable’s Acland St., to Beth Yahp’s Malaysia and from Elliot Perlman’s Russia to Brian Castro’s Shanghai; all mediated through an Australian experience. The concept of place becomes fluid and multi-faceted, as place becomes far more than land; for many Jewish writers the past becomes a place which they want to inhabit and which continually merges with their contemporary life. In Eva Sallis’ writing place sometimes takes on the dimension of fantasy, while for Ouyang Yu place is a suburban Australian back yard with buildings named in Chinese to remind him of his homeland.

In Aboriginal culture place takes on a different meaning, it is both sacred and political. In defining the Aboriginal notion of place, Deborah Bird Rose explains:

A site is a place. The power that created the world is created here, and when a person walks to this place, they
put their body in the locus of creation. The beings who made and make the world have left something here—their body, their power, their consciousness, their Law. To stand here is to be known by that power. (4O)

In Indigenous culture place takes on mythical connotations and the traditional concept of ownership recognised by Western cultures is overturned, since Indigenous people see themselves as owned by the land instead of owning it. Whereas the notion of place in Western societies is inextricably tied to notions of power and control, Aboriginal land rights have ensured that Indigenous culture interacts with western legal structures to reclaim sacred sites: “In Indigenous law sacred sites are not ‘world heritage’. They connect local country and local people to the creation that brought them into being and for which they continue to be responsible” (Rose 42). This process dismantles Anglo-Celtic control of space. In the Aboriginal literature in this study the role of the sacred and the concept of place is significant since it acts as an identifiable point of difference between Indigenous culture and the culture of Anglo-Celtic Australians. In Aboriginal writing the concept of displacement is significant to the political nature of the writing since it is caused by the act of colonisation.

The relevance of place to this study is that it becomes part of the discourse, constantly revealing difference and change and questioning the control of the dominant culture over place. Language depicts place, and in doing so exerts influence over the place which it signifies. It is through language that these texts re-inscribe the concept. The control implicit in colonial presence,
in its literature, in its systems of mapping and naming, is questioned by contemporary minority writing when it re-reinscribes this notion. Graham Huggan points out that:

A characteristic of contemporary Canadian and Australian writing is a multiplication of spatial references which has resulted not only in an increased range of national and international locations but also in a series of ‘territorial disputes’ which pose a challenge to the self-acknowledging ‘mainstreams’ of metropolitan culture, to the hegemonic tendencies of patriarchal and ethnocentric discourses, and implicitly, I would argue, to the homogeneity assumed and/or imposed by colonialist rhetoric. (408)

This challenge contributes to the political nature of this writing. The multiplication of spatial references will become apparent in this study, and the point of difference from ‘mainstream’ culture will be particularly apparent in the study of Indigenous literature.

The writers to be studied in this thesis use different strategies to articulate this notion. In the experience of diaspora, which defines and informs the concept of place in immigrant communities, place spans distance and destabilises geographic boundaries. In these communities place can become a symbol of identity rather than a physical location and it impinges on notions of identity and home. The psychological, mythical and sacred dimensions of place ensure that it is not measurable, but rather a fluid and porous concept which is constantly being re-assessed. This
process is central to its influence in contributing to cultural change and transformation.

Transformation of the dominant discourse can also be seen in the re-assessment and reinscription of history which occurs in many of these narratives and which acts as a form of cultural resistance. Indigenous writing confronts histories of Australia which have made the Aboriginal presence invisible and contributes to a restructuring of that past from an Indigenous perspective. It also explores the marginal place of Indigenous cultures in today’s society, so an ongoing contemporary narrative forms part of that history. Literature is only a small part of this re-visioning, since art, music, dance and the study of Indigenous language contribute towards this process. The genre of life-stories in Aboriginal culture is making a large contribution to this historical remembering, although this writing is not considered in this thesis. Since the writing considered here emerges from several different cultures, the focus of this re-assessment is not always directed toward the history of Australia. Beth Yahp’s writing for example, re-visits the past in Malaysia while many Jewish narratives re-assess the events of the Holocaust in Germany and the experiences of war in Europe. This writing shows a constant interchange between fiction and history. By looking at the way in which this writing engages with history, I will also discuss the role of memory, particularly in relation to the Jewish short fiction studied here.

The stories I discuss confront racist beliefs which have been inherited through perspectives of history and which inform the
attitudes of dominance inherent in the relationship between minority cultures and the Anglo-Celtic culture, forming both an overt and an underlying narrative to much of this literature. The depiction of racism in these stories questions the tolerance of Australia’s multicultural society and interjects into the dominant discourse an alternative story, which encourages readers to re-assess their own attitudes and to look at their own culture through the Indigenous or the immigrant experience. The individual nature of these stories form counter-narratives to challenge previous historical perspectives and provide a wide view of current social habits, behaviour and beliefs. The interpolation of those beliefs into the dominant discourse contributes to the shifting nature of representations of history.

The critique of Orientalism by Said, contributes to an understanding of the position of some of these narratives, and helps to reveal the tension between the hegemony of Anglo-Celtic culture and the Indigenous and Immigrant cultures which engage with it in Australia. Many of the narratives studied in this thesis articulate a response to racist attitudes against cultures which are positioned as Other to the dominant culture. By depicting Orientalism as a system of knowledge and power used to dominate and contain the Orient, the discourse becomes relevant to colonialism and to the complex interplay of cultural and political relationships in Australia. Said stated that: “The world wide hegemony of Orientalism and all it stands for can now be challenged, if we can benefit properly from the general twentieth-century rise to political and historical awareness of so many of the earth’s peoples” (Orientalism 328). This awareness
is an integral part of much of the literature I am studying and contributes to the political nature of these narratives.

The hybrid nature of postcolonial culture influences many of the narratives that are studied in this thesis and results in the articulation of many cultural voices. The use of the hyphen in classifying this literature serves to denote both a link to, and a division from, the term ‘Australian’. It is in itself a symbol of the hybrid form of the cultures under discussion. The hybridity that can be seen in the writing does not simply depict a cross-cultural exchange but reveals the point at which cultures contact and conflict. As Homi Bhabha states: “The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation and meaning and representation” (Third Space 211). Many of these narratives exhibit a cultural interdependence which challenges any depiction of an homogenous culture and at the same time asserts the survival and adaptability of both cultures involved. In commenting on the value of the concept of hybridity Robert Young remarks that: “Colonial discourse analysis can therefore look at the wide variety of texts as something more than mere documentation or ‘evidence’ ” (163). Young’s analysis however warns against the connotations of the word “hybridity” which in the past has had racist implications, since one interpretation of the term presupposed that hybridity could involve a return to a primitive identity. The term mimicry is central to Homi Bhabha’s view of colonial discourse where the colonised replicates the culture of the coloniser “(almost the same but not quite)” (Location 86). This mimicry can be seen as menacing to the
coloniser and therefore can be seen as an “erratic, eccentric strategy of
authority” (Location 90) and therefore empowering to the colonised.
Examples of such mimicry will be further discussed in this thesis.

Ashcroft suggests that “… postcolonial experience demonstrates that
the key to the resistance of the global by the self-determination of the
local lies not in dismissal, isolation and rejection but more often in
engagement and transformation” (Transformation 215). This fiction
depicts the inevitable engagement and relevance of global influences
and issues in the Australian community. At first glance there appears to
be a tension between globalisation and the writing of literature from
local communities which accentuates cultural difference, since
globalisation infers a breakdown of borders and an homogenisation of
culture. Trans-cultural exchange and interaction informs writing from the
margins; these influences have not contributed to an erasure of cultural
difference, but global issues are absorbed and reflected in these
narratives. Examples of this are seen in the hybridity of language and
in changing notions of home; which both reflect global influence and yet
contribute to the expression of a specifically local sense of culture. The
feminist movement is one instance of how global influences inform local
writing and can be seen in the proliferation of women writers in the
1980s and 1990s. Bruce Bennett has noted that women’s short fiction in
the last two decades of the twentieth-century has shown a “frequent
concern with local and particular details” (225). This suggests that
global culture is not antagonistic to a celebration of the local. Rejection
of
globalisation of culture would be difficult given the power of media communication and travel, so engagement is inevitable in some form. It need not necessarily be seen in negative terms or in terms of the erasure or domination of local cultures, but it is capable of contributing to their changing nature.

Australian literature is affected by the increased globalisation of publishing. The tension between Australian publishing companies and the direction towards global publishing and large international publishing groups creates difficulties for Australian fiction. International investment in Australian publishing companies by interests from the U. K. and the United States have affected the buying power of smaller Australian companies. Internationally renowned writers such as Peter Carey, David Malouf, Thomas Kenneally, may override such difficulties; however the vibrant nature of Australian literature is not being exposed to wider markets (Webby 184). The increasing power of these larger publishing companies and the changing market that they provide could affect the type of literature which is being published and change the focus of Australian literature. On the other hand advantage can be gained by publishing local writing in conjunction with other international writers. An example of this is the Indigenous stories published in Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing which is discussed in the chapter on Aboriginal literature. This publication draws on Indigenous stories from Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia and indicates the presence of a linked discourse between Indigenous writers. Peter Craven suggests that there is an absence of local literary structures to support Australian short fiction writing, in
other words a lack of publishing opportunities and magazines to offer opportunities to authors. (xi) These publication difficulties are relevant to the overall power of the short story genre and its ability to interpolate the dominant culture, since this process is dependent on the exposure of this writing to a reading public.

The writing I discuss is informed by its social and political background, by the culture from which it emerges and by the position which that culture occupies in the Australian community, but it would be a mistake not to acknowledge that much of it is also imaginative and entertaining fiction. The reader is drawn into many worlds, both realistic and fantastical and is privileged to see them on the inside. The stories take the reader on an imaginative journey into and between cultures, genders and races. Their geographic scope is wide and varied and the depiction of place which is so central to these narratives is often visual and colourful. There is no possibility that A. G. Stephens could accuse any of these authors of parochialism, yet they are centred in Australian experience and exist because of it. In her book From the Beast to the Blonde Marina Warner notes that: “Storytelling can act to face the objects of derision or fear and sometimes —not always—inspire tolerance and even fellow-feeling; it can realign allegiances and remap terrors. Storytellers can also break through the limits of permitted thought to challenge convention” (410). Warner’s observations indicate the power of the story to influence thought. It is this power which the authors of these narratives wish to harness.
The appropriation of the short story genre and the use of English by immigrant and Indigenous writers creates the means by which these cultures question their place in the Australian community and contest their marginalised status. This thesis will demonstrate that the short story genre accommodates a wide variety of forms and expressions, from traditionally formed stories to the more experimental narratives of such writers as the Palestinian author Sari Kassis. The genre has moved from the bush realism of Lawson and Barbara Baynton to providing a contemporary showcase of cultural influences which reflect Indigenous issues as well as multicultural and global perspectives. The porosity of the genre allows the depiction of the mythical tales of John Bodey and the force and anger of the writing of Ouyang Yu. It looks backwards to the Second World War and the Holocaust and it depicts contemporary problems of Middle-Eastern communities in Australia. I will show how the short story genre takes its place as part of a body of literature which contests and resists imperial versions of history and culture and undermines the dominance and authority of English language. This study will demonstrate the wide span of issues, perspectives and identities that these stories reflect, and their ability to absorb and reflect cultural difference. It will indicate the shifting nature of the genre and illustrate its capacity to encode the processes of change.

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Chapter One
Aboriginal Short Fiction

Introduction

Aboriginal short stories in contemporary Australian literature present an opportunity to examine an encounter between two cultures where Indigenous voices emerge to confront a society which has played a dominant role in their lives for over two hundred years. By examining these stories, the reader becomes part of a dialogue between the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture in Australia and an Indigenous culture which is striving to find a voice. This literature is both a response to such dominance and a challenge to it and is also an exploration of Aboriginal culture and identity.

One of the central questions in the debate about Aboriginal literature is whether these texts by Aboriginal writers replicate the non-Indigenous culture by using literary forms which have entered their culture by a process of assimilation, or whether from this literature a new dialogue is emerging which highlights a cultural form to which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures have contributed. I will argue in this chapter that this literature provides a challenge to the dominance of the non-Indigenous culture through the articulation of a new voice which can be seen through the depiction of Aboriginality in these texts. I will examine this concept firstly through a study of language, secondly through the depiction of the sacred and the spiritual
nature of land, and thirdly by looking at the way these narratives engage with history.

The Concept of Hybridity and Aboriginal Culture

Assimilationist policies imposed by the Australian Government after World War Two were damaging to Aboriginal cultures because they attempted to draw the Aboriginal people into Anglo-Celtic society. Central to these policies was the use of missions as centres for education and welfare. High profile Aborigines were presented as tokens to indicate the success of these policies and it was not until the 1960s that the damage of assimilationist policies became evident. It becomes apparent when looking at Aboriginal short stories that there is a real attempt to challenge that practice by exposing racist attitudes of non-Indigenous Australians towards Aboriginal people, and by presenting a literature which represents alternative attitudes to life and culture. Mudrooroo Narogin states that: “Through research, we the writers must find our own historians…” (Writing 21). The fusion of ideas and language in Aboriginal writing provides an illustration of the hybridity of Aboriginal culture, which has resulted from this imposition of Anglo-Celtic ideas. The hybrid nature of Aboriginal texts can reveal cultural nuances which reflect the ever-changing face of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This fusion must be a two-way process, a cross-cultural meeting of ideas, where the dominated culture finds a voice, using the language of those who have oppressed his/her culture for so long. Its significance to
postcolonial discourse is articulated by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* when he says:

“… the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing a international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (38).

Bhabha sees this space as carrying the “burden” of cultural activity, which resists the tendency to see two cultures at opposite ends of a spectrum, in binary opposition. If we accept this, the notion becomes central to our understanding of the literature that is emerging in the postcolonial world. In referring to Aboriginal short stories it is difficult to see this literature as part of international culture because of the degree of incommensurability between the contributions from each culture, however later in this chapter I will discuss an anthology called *Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing* which does foreground some Indigenous stories as part of the international literary scene. Robert Young warns: “If hybridity has become the issue once more, we may note that it has been, and can be, invoked to imply contrafusion and disjunction (or even separate development) as well as fusion and assimilation” (18). It must be recognized that there are tensions within the concept itself, even though the term implies something that is a unified product, that is merged or fused.
Aboriginal culture is often seen to be centred in the past, however the hybridity that we refer to is an indication of the dynamic nature of present day Aboriginal culture, which counters this negative perspective. The term hybridity implies movement and change. Aboriginal short stories are just one example of this transformation. It can also be seen in dance, in theatre and in art, even in popular music. Consider the paintings of Ginger Reilly which have challenged accepted notions of the nature of Aboriginal Art, as has the music of Yothu Yindi which has captured the imagination of the youth of Australia. Since hybridity involves an exchange and a meeting of ideas and cultural traditions, so the non-Indigenous community also absorbs Aboriginal culture in its many forms. The high profile of Aboriginal participation in the Olympics in Sydney in the year 2000, acted as a showcase to the world in this respect, when the imbalance between cultures was redressed for one significant moment in the two hundred years of domination. To some observers this Aboriginal participation was mere tokenism on the part of a government trying to redress the poor image which it presents to international observers. This may have been the case, nevertheless the profile of Aboriginal people was significantly raised in the eyes of Australian and global audiences. Homi Bhabha sees this hybridity as a crucial aspect of colonial relationships:

The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups, sipahis,
and sahibs, as homogeneous polarized political consciousnesses.

(Location 207)

This conflictual moment reveals itself in many ways: in language, politics culture and race. By examining the short story in Aboriginal literature we can see it manifested in the physical and psychological attributes of the characters, in their re-appraisal of history, in the images used in the stories and in particular in the language. Finally hybridity can be observed through the representation of the sacred in these stories, where land and place are foregrounded as part of Indigenous identity and where the non-indigenous idea of reality is challenged by a spiritual reality foreign to non-Indigenous readers. As Ania Loomba points out:

… Literary texts do not simply reflect dominant ideologies, but encode the tensions, complexities and nuances within colonial cultures… Finally literature is also an important means of appropriating, inverting or challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies" (70).

The short fiction in this study explores these “complexities and nuances” which celebrate and define the differences between cultures. Hybridity is seen to be an empowering force, yet an essay by Vince Marotta, entitled: “The Ambivalence of Borders: The Bicultural and the Multicultural” questions this by suggesting that boundaries or borders are not necessarily destructive:
In the first instance, I argue that it is not only the maintenance, but also the transcendence of boundaries that may deny and repress the identity of others. Secondly, boundaries are constructive because they allow the creation of a self-identity. Finally, the blurring of social and cultural boundaries is not always synonymous with a positive social and cultural experience. (178)

In the study of Aboriginal short stories the ambivalent nature of boundaries becomes evident; Aboriginal identity is celebrated and accentuated and yet at the same time the hybridity which is intrinsic to this writing exposes the incommensurability between the Indigenous and non-indigenous experience and affirms cultural distance. Through this fiction, however Indigenous history is written back into the history of Australia and at least some of the problems facing the Indigenous community are exposed and examined. At the first Aboriginal writers’ conference in 1983, Jack Davis said:

We the Aboriginal people have been recording our history for thousands of years. Our medium has been stone, hair, wood, the walls of caves; a flat surface of rock has been the canvas of our ancestors. Hair string manipulated by fingers can tell a myriad of stories and the land was our drawing board. (9)

This comment illustrates the distance between the rich oral and artistic heritage of Aboriginal culture and the current use of Western genres and language in their literature. In this writing it
is possible to see the ways in which Indigenous writers are using the
genre of the short story to expose the problems and conflicts which face
Aboriginal people in Australia and to celebrate difference from the
dominant culture. Mudrooroo Narogin in his book *Writing From the
Fringe* states that: “Aboriginal literature is often considered to be a
literature of protest, and thus outside the European literary tradition with
its emphasis on universality” (20). The use of language by the authors
whose work I discuss challenges the accepted vocabulary of the
dominant discourse while the notions of history and the sacred which
are illustrated in these stories provide a lens into aspects of a culture
which dispute accepted versions of Anglo-Celtic thinking. Jackie
Huggins comments that: “Reflections on the past for Aboriginal people
is quite different to non-Aboriginal people. White constructions of history
have been charged with this ethnocentrism, which keeps us by and
large excluded and marginalised, on the peripheries of existence” (121).
All authors whom I will discuss, in various ways emphasize cultural
difference, and challenge accepted beliefs inherent in the dominant
culture. At the same time they celebrate Indigenous culture by helping
to define and describe it. It is the expression of these divergent values
which contributes to the political nature of their writing. The genre of the
short story is also related to the oral traditions of Aboriginal culture
because of their ancient tradition of story telling which explained the
natural and spiritual world which surrounded them.

In contemporary literature, Aboriginal writers shape the genre to their
own purpose, emphasising Aboriginality through subject
matter and language. The communication of meaning is dependent on the transformation of language and the distance between writer and reader, which as Ashcroft argues, is not a barrier to meaning being conveyed, but causes a discourse to emerge where: “writing does not merely inscribe the spoken message or represent the message event, it becomes the new event.” (63) The significance of this is that postcolonial writing becomes part of a discourse which encodes a political statement which becomes a meta-narrative to this literature. The use of English becomes a tool to define Indigenous culture and to pass on that knowledge to others, so that in using the language of the dominant culture they are partaking in cross-cultural communication. As a result however it is unavoidable that some perceptions of Indigenous culture, for the non-Indigenous reader, are filtered through the lens of the English language. For many Indigenous writers, English is also their first language so other strategies must be used to promote the Aboriginality of the text. Joan Newman comments that: “… the Aboriginal literary work is always distanced: either removed from some imagined source of Aboriginal authenticity or marginalised in terms of some similarly imagined centre of mainstream Australian culture and experience”(84). This indicates that the use of English is sometimes seen to compromise the Aboriginality of the text, while the marginalised position of Indigenous writers places their work outside Anglo-Celtic practitioners of the genre. This position however contributes to the innovative style of this writing since it is not bounded by pre-conceived perceptions of genre and style and can therefore forge its own literary identity. Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out that: “It is possible through
the use of dominant representations, to conform and resist simultaneously, because conformity enables access to certain knowledges about the white ‘other’ which can be appropriated to use strategically in the act of writing of speaking itself” (130). The short fiction I am studying in this chapter indicates the ability of this literature to both conform to, and resist, the dominant culture.

Any study of Aboriginal writing raises concerns as to the right of non-Indigenous academics to comment on Aboriginal issues. (Further discussion on this subject can be seen in an essay by Aileen Moreton–Robinson, entitled: “Tiddas talkin’ up to the white woman: when Huggins et al. took on Bell”). It is inevitable that these Aboriginal short stories are filtered through the perceptions, perspectives and culture of the reader, yet they form an essential part of the narratives to be studied in this thesis. These stories make a contribution to the way in which non-Indigenous Australians perceive issues relating to Indigenous people and cultures, and form a bridge of knowledge, which can contribute to a change in perspective. The study of this literature allows non-Indigenous readers to engage with voices emerging from Aboriginal communities. As Jackie Huggins notes: “… Aboriginal people will continue to place their writing in the mainstream arena in order to make meaning of their lives and to share this meaning with the wider community”(x). This literary interaction forms part of the relationship between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. To omit Aboriginal narratives from this study would be to ignore these literary voices which provide a strong contribution to the writing of short fiction in
Australia. Owing to the diverse and non-homogeneous nature of Aboriginal communities in Australia this literature must be seen as an articulation of individual voices which come together to provide a wide range of perspectives on Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues relevant to Australian society. Clare Bradford, in her book *Reading Race*, points out that: “Western genres such as the novel and the short story do not readily correspond with Aboriginal schemata, because as Muecke shows, Aboriginal societies do not recognise fiction as a category of discourse” (176). As this chapter will show, there is now however, an emerging body of contemporary short fiction writing which creates an Indigenous literary voice and contributes to the body of short fiction writing in Australia.

**Aboriginality**

In this chapter I will look at some contemporary fiction by Aboriginal writers which articulates a variety of voices from Indigenous Australian cultures. The narratives are revealing, because of the position from which they speak, within the Indigenous community, and because of the way they intersect and engage with issues concerning Anglo-Celtic culture. All authors under consideration celebrate the difference between cultures by writing with a strong degree of “Aboriginality” because they are working within an Anglo-Celtic genre. Mudrooroo Narogin attempted to define this term in his book *Writing From The Fringe* when he said:
The term, Aboriginality has arisen because it provides an ideology by which Aboriginal literature may be judged. It is much more than this however, for it provides a lifeline by which dissociated individuals may be pulled back to their matrical essence. It is the promise of a coming-into-being of not only an Aboriginal aesthetics, but of new social entities which will reflect the underlying humaneness of Aboriginal being. Essentially, it is not a static ideology based on fixed traditional ways of expression and culture, but is as Kevin Gilbert declares in his introduction to *Living Black* (1978) “a way of building a contemporary Aboriginal culture, a radical re-education of Aborigines by Aborigines and at the direction of Aborigines” (48).

In his later book, *The Indigenous Literature of Australia Milli Milli Wangka*, Mudrooroo re-defines this concept, preferring to refer to it as “maban reality” or “Indigenality” (199). The term Aboriginality unites the experience of all Indigenous people. Its use linked Aboriginal Australians to third-world liberation movements in the 1960s and has emerged since then as a positive way of identifying Indigenous identity and culture. Anne Brewster points out that: “Concepts of Aboriginality … should be understood as contingent; they will undergo changes in response to changing political contexts and agendas.” (4). The contingent nature of this concept becomes apparent in these narratives, since many of them reflect the flux of contemporary political issues. Marcia Langton defines Aboriginality by saying that it:
“… arises from the subjective experience of both Aboriginal People and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any intercultural dialogue, whether in actual lived experience or through a mediated experience such as a white person watching a program about Aboriginal people on television or reading a book.” (118)

The subjective nature of this concept becomes apparent in the study of Aboriginal short fiction nevertheless, by looking at narrative strategies including the use of language, it is possible to show how Aboriginality is revealed in these narratives and to see how it contributes to the celebration of Aboriginal culture and beliefs.

In this chapter I will examine how Aboriginality is revealed in the texts, since it is through this concept that the points of difference between Aboriginal and Anglo-Celtic writing are most visible and it is the point which, as Bhabha says: “reveals the border line experience” (Location 207). Aboriginality is depicted in these stories through the use of Aboriginal English and Aboriginal words, by the depiction of a different concept of reality and of the sacred, and in connection with this, by the articulation of alternative views of history which contest Western ideas and redress often negative representations of Aboriginal people which have occurred in the past. Many of these stories also foreground contentious social issues within Aboriginal communities, such as alcoholism and violence towards women and the death rate of Aboriginal youth. Cultural appropriation is also a significant issue. Overt depictions of racism lie behind
many of the stories and the question of Reconciliation is raised. By exploring literary works through the lens of its Aboriginality, I will demonstrate the ways in which Aboriginal writers can make their voices heard, celebrate difference and promote the culture of their various communities. In order to be a useful lens into this writing the concept of Aboriginality must encompass the many individual positions and perspectives which emerge from these narratives.

In this chapter I will examine the short fiction of Alf Taylor. In his collection *Long Time Now*, the stories of John Bodey, *When Darkness Falls* and Bruce Pascoe’s collection *Nightjar: Stories of the Australian Night*. Two anthologies, *Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing* and *Fresh Cuttings: A Celebration of Fiction and Poetry from UQP’s Black Writing Series* are also included in this study, as well as two stories by Kim Scott and one by Mudrooroo Nyoongah written with Janine Little. These collections, anthologies and individual stories have been published between the years 2000 and 2003 and were chosen because they manifest many significant features of contemporary Indigenous short fiction and depict the overt political nature of this writing by affirming Aboriginality.

**Language in the Narratives of Alf Taylor**

The collection of short stories by Alf Taylor, published in 2001, entitled *Long Time Now*, is an important contribution to Australian short story writing, since it illustrates the way in which Aboriginal history and language depicts life in a contemporary
Aboriginal community. The narratives are positioned from within small rural towns and depict the close ties which bind members of the Nyoongar community of south-western Australia. Attitudes towards the Anglo-Celtic society are also articulated in these narratives, providing a perspective from within this Indigenous community. Taylor’s writing speaks with a distinctive voice. His use of language depends firstly on the use of Aboriginal English, and secondly on the use of Nyoongar words, with a glossary at the back of the book. The Aboriginality of his texts relies heavily on dialogue. Aboriginal English is a dialect of Australian English which is influenced by a variety of language structures and is open to regional variation. It is used by Indigenous people who speak English as a second language, and also refers to English which is closely aligned to colloquial Australian speech, with the exception of the use of particular Aboriginal words. Aboriginal English is influenced by varieties of pidgin, a language which is developed in the first generation of contact between cultures, (and which is often called a contact language,) and by Creole, a language with its own grammar and vocabulary, which develops after the use of pidgin. Jeanie Bell points out that Creole is: “The fastest growing language in the country as far as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities go. Many people think it is not a good thing. I think it’s a fact of life” (166). Creole represents an adaptation of the structures of English language to serve the purpose of Indigenous people, it therefore becomes a tool to represent Indigenous culture, and its use undermines the status of standard forms of English thus it is an example of a site where language is transformed. The representation of Aboriginality, through
language, shows a connection with oral languages of the Aboriginal past and therefore provides a unique perspective on Aboriginal culture. It also shows the resilience and creativity of Indigenous language and its ability to adapt to the confrontation between cultures which has taken place over the last two hundred and five years. By using Indigenous forms of language these stories assert and reinscribe past history. Jeanie Bell, in an essay entitled: “Australia’s Indigenous Languages” states that:

It’s a mistake to dismiss our languages as part of history, and long gone. They’re not. They are alive and vibrant. They’re in a new phase of growth. They’re part of us as Murri people, as the Indigenous people of the land. Our languages are the voice of the land, and we are the carriers of the languages. (170)

In a significant achievement for Aboriginal people, in the year 2004, a further phase of growth is indicated by the introduction of five Aboriginal languages into the Year 11 school curriculum in Victoria, in a move to reconnect Aboriginal students with their cultures. With the support of Aboriginal elders the work will include the compiling of dictionaries to resurrect language from these communities. (Heinrichs) In these stories language is used to denote Aboriginality and thereby challenge the dominance of English in contemporary Australian writing. It is this challenge that instigates the transformation of English, not only by inserting Indigenous words and phrases, but also by altering forms of grammar and meaning in the text.
Taylor’s fiction evokes the cadence of Aboriginal voices and foregrounds Indigenous words. The vibrancy and changing nature of language can be seen in his stories, where the use of Aboriginal English is repeatedly represented in the text. (166) An example of it can be seen in his story “The Last Drop”: “‘I bin got my ol’ yortj. Eben when I getum yorgah ‘im neber sta’ up like Yagan, ‘im lay down low eben when da yorgahs show me dere tuppies.’ Old Tommie’s laughing got Old Billy into fits of laughter” (124). The ribald nature of this exchange contributes to the humour of the dialogue. Meaning is suggested even without reference to the glossary provided, although individual words need translation. The representation of such language in dialogue not only accentuates the Aboriginality of the text, but indicates the capacity for the regeneration of Aboriginal language. Its depiction also shows the transformative capacity of both languages which change to facilitate inter-cultural communication. The representation of Nyoongah words in these texts reveals the ability of Indigenous words to move from oral to written representation, for example in the dialogue quoted above, the word “yorgah” is a Nyoongah word for woman or girl, “tuppies” is Nyoongah for female private parts. Throughout these stories thirty-one Nyoongah words are repeatedly employed in dialogue. Bell points out that: “Our languages are much more descriptive of the environment and the landscape they developed in. And they’re much more descriptive of relationships in our culture. We have whole kinship systems in Aboriginal society that English just doesn’t have accurate terminology for” (169). The use of such words thus indicates the inadequacy of English to depict certain Indigenous concepts.
In Alf Taylor’s story “Charlie” the narrator points out the difficulty of communicating even within Aboriginal communities: “Gawd a bloke needs an interpreter just to talk on basic subjects” (140). This difficulty with communication indicates the wide variety of dialects which exist in the Indigenous community. Yet as Jackie Huggins points out: “We live in a community where only 20 of our 3000 languages have been preserved” (86). By depicting Indigenous dialogue Alf Taylor’s narratives indicate the central role that language plays in Aboriginal identity and points to the need to resurrect whatever has survived from past Indigenous languages: “Its part of the whole protocol of identifying who you are in this land, and for us that is really important. It tells you that we haven’t been wiped out” (Bell 169). As well as Aboriginal English, the dialogue in Alf Taylor’s stories continually evokes the broad Australian accent of rural Indigenous communities. In the story “Uncle Jacko” an example of this can be seen: “Yeah, dey bin tellin’ me you bin doin’ some paintin.” (151) The word “bin”, in this case denotes past tense when used before a verb, instead of employing the past tense of the verb. This strategy is often seen in Aboriginal English but not in Australian English. Other words such as “doin” and “tellin” are part of Australian vernacular.

Through the use of Aboriginal English the dialogue in Taylor’s stories evokes the sound and cadence of Aboriginal conversation. This combines with humour to affirm the sense of a warm and supportive community. Taylor’s use of dialogue is a central strategy in his portrayal of ribald humour. Sexual references are
constantly employed to affirm the positive and resilient nature of Indigenous life and there is a continual depiction of laughter in these narratives. In his story “The Last Plot” the narrator remarks:

But da wors’ part after I muntjed her, I stole her bottle of plonk and when I walked out her back door, I kicked da piss outta her little poxy dawg. Holy fuck! going into fits of uncontrollable laughter. “gotta stop dis laughin’ too much, makin’ gobberl warra,” he scolded himself harshly while trying to control his laughter. (Taylor 159)

Use of Aboriginal English such as this foregrounds and celebrates difference, but language is only one of the strategies which Alf Taylor uses to depict Aboriginality. Situations which involve alcohol play a dominant role in many of the narratives, but while the depiction of alcohol is central to many of these stories, its use is often overtly criticized by the narrators. In the story “Singer Songwriter” the character Jim comments on the effect this has had on his family. His father was: “A victim of alcoholic onslaught. His uncles, his aunties, and cousins were also caught up in this vicious web. They were like insects, trying to break free” (192). This story also includes a description of an alcohol free community at Wiluna, where the community imposes its own sanctions on those who break rules, thus the narrative considers an alternative way of life for such communities. In the narrative “Uncle Jacko” the narrator refers to the death of many of his relations: “Dat stinkin’ gerbah kill em’ all” (153). Taylor’s stories depict both the attraction of alcohol and the damage it wrecks
on these Indigenous communities and in doing so engages with an issue central to Indigenous life. By addressing issues such as poverty, alcoholism and drugs in his narratives, Alf Taylor’s stories not only encourage debate but, significantly, articulate a critical contemporary voice from within an Indigenous community.

Engaging with History.

Alf Taylor’s narratives affirm Indigenous history, by often referring back to an idyllic past, when land was untouched by white people. In the story “Brenda” the narrator dreams of “Frolicking naked through virgin forest… they splashed under waterfalls and paddled in billabongs” (47). Jackie Huggins, in her book *Sister Girl* discusses this tendency to look back to the past: “We get asked why we talk and live in the past all the time, but not to do so is to deny the fundamental right of our existence. It is also about shaping our future and living in our present”(121). The affirmation of history which occurs in Alf Taylor’s writing accentuates the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous narratives of the past; the idyllic representation of it is a depiction of cultural loss which is ongoing and relevant to the contemporary Indigenous community. In the story “The Last Drop” the opinion of the narrator is bitter and explicit: “Little did Yagan know, he thought, how these fuckin’ watjellas can fuck beauty up so much. I wish dey all fuck off back to Englun’…” (130). By voicing this loss Indigenous people assert the right to their own history and question the place of the non-Indigenous community in contemporary Australia. In the story “Charlie”, the narrator manipulates versions of history to amuse himself:
“Maybe Captain Cook was a blackfella when he left England and when he saw the blackfellas here to welcome him, he turned white with fright” (139). This interpretation subverts the Anglo-Celtic version of history by using humour as a strategy to unsettle the notion that history is both serious and reliable, it therefore acts to resist and destabilise dominant interpretations of it.

**Land and the Sacred in the Stories of Alf Taylor**

Indigenous history is also affirmed in these stories by the foregrounding of the spiritual and the crucial relationship of Indigenous people to the land, a relationship which is, on the one hand, timeless and traditional, and on the other hand, contemporary and political. In Australia in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the ownership of land has become the biggest political issue between the Australian government and the Aboriginal community. This point of contact creates an ongoing dialogue between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous communities in Australia, at the same time ensuring that the notion of land ownership in both communities is a changing, dynamic concept, inextricably connected with the balance of power and the interpretation of culture and identity. In the introduction to the book *Uncanny Australia*, (xii) Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs point out that the land-rights issue raises the question of who is marginalized in Australian society. The dominant group, whether a mining company or a pastoralist group, becomes disempowered when they find that they are challenged by an Aboriginal community with equal rights to
dispute ownership. This equality in the face of the law creates a balance between the rights of the Aboriginal people and wealthy companies who would otherwise financially and politically overpower Indigenous groups. It should be remembered however that the Aboriginal community has to confront the dominant legal system which in the past has been so repressive.

The hegemony of the Anglo-Celtic society was illustrated in February 2002 when the Federal Court ratified an agreement which recognized the native title rights of the Karajarri people of the remote Kimberley region in Western Australia. (Stevens) The judge handed down his decision in an outdoor court in Bidyadanga, in the red dust of the countryside, where it was welcomed by the Aboriginal community there. However the photograph of Justice North, sitting in the flamboyant and formal legal robes which in the past represented the power of the empire, backed by a huge Australian flag, seemed to illustrate in a pictorial as well as a legal sense, the absurdity of the symbols of Imperialism. The Mabo decision and the subsequent Native Title Act of 1993 however, which reversed the concept of Terra Nullius, ensured that by the year 2000 Aboriginal freehold comprised approximately thirteen percent of the Australian continent. (Kleinert 624) Mining rights, pastoral leases and tourism issues have kept Aboriginal Land Rights to the forefront of the Australian political agenda; this confrontation ensures that the sacred is always a contemporary issue. Many non-Indigenous Australians see the land–rights issue as a return to the past and anachronistic notions of history and culture. Fabienne Bayet-
Charlton points to the significance of the relationship between Indigenous people and the land:

Aboriginal people perceive the Australian landscape as their cultural domain. It was their traditional duty to be custodians of the land. The main difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures lies in attitudes to the land and the changes made to the environment through the accessing of resources. (173)

In these narratives the contemporary relationship between Indigenous people and the land is constantly depicted, and as Bayet-Charlton notes provides a significant point of cultural difference. Alf Taylor’s story “The Last Plot” investigates the appropriation of Aboriginal land by colonists and sets up a parallel with the appropriation of bushland for the building of a swimming pool, by contemporary developers. A parallel is drawn in the text between the sacred nature of land in pre-colonial times and the enjoyment of a small patch of bush by three old men who drink there in contemporary times. The sacred nature of land is affirmed in both cases: “These few acres left was their haven.” (164) In the acknowledgements at the end of his collection of stories Alf Taylor gives his thanks: “To all those wonderful people who inspired me to put all these stories together around a flagon and some gunja, around some park, be it in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane or Kalgoorlie. A park is a blackfella’s delight” (230). In “The Last Plot” the park is a meeting place, a central focus for Aboriginal social life and a contemporary urban version of place, which supplies security and a sense of community. In
this story its appropriation by developers serves as a metaphor for the dispossession of land at the time of colonisation.

Taylor’s writing shows the seamless interaction between nature and the spiritual and the everyday life of the community. In the narrative “Granny Daisy” an old woman exerts her power over snakes: “She bent down and picked up a snake right at our feet... She patted its head, stroked its body and put it down and said, ‘Go on, get, they are my blood too’ ” (82). Birds are depicted as forecasters of death and the myths of the ancestors intercept the dreams of the present. The spiritual connotations of nature and the land depict the point at which Aboriginal culture exhibits and celebrates difference. Fabienne Bayet-Charlton points out that: “Aboriginal people are an integral part of the Australian landscape. We are the land, the land is us” (171). Central to this understanding of Aboriginal thought and to the difference between cultures is an appreciation of the Dreaming. This word was adopted by Anthropologists in the late nineteenth century to attempt to describe Aboriginal beliefs. Although it has no relation to the western concept of dreams, it has served in some part to help describe the traditions of religious thought and belief, and was used by Indigenous people in their communication with the non-Indigenous. Deborah Bird Rose refers to the ongoing significance of Dreamings:

The power that created the world is neither dead nor past. In Aboriginal Australian cosmologies, creation is the work of Ancestral beings, of Dreamings. In the foundational moments, Dreamings walked this earth, making this place,
this country, this culture and the people who belong here …
Dreamings are foundational, but the work of sustaining the world is ongoing. It encompasses both Dreaming presence or power and all the work that people do to sustain the connections and the law, that were established by Dreaming. (40)

The ongoing nature of sacred issues in Aboriginal thought and their connection with the land has successfully encountered and challenged the western viewpoint of the Australian government. This encounter has empowered the Indigenous community and forced the non-Indigenous majority to re-assess its own notion of land ownership and its own view of history. It has destabilized the dominance of the Anglo-Celtic majority by questioning the legitimacy of its ownership of land, and the cultural domination of the majority. The depiction of the sacred in contemporary Aboriginal writing is therefore essential to the articulation of cultural difference by affirming the legitimacy of Aboriginal connection to the land. Alf Taylor’s stories centre on the depiction of Aboriginality in small Aboriginal communities. In doing so they promote Aboriginal culture, combining traditional beliefs with the depiction of contemporary life. By re-scribing perceptions of Aboriginal culture and foregrounding Aboriginal language they engage with Anglo-Celtic readers and contribute to the formation of an Indigenous voice in literature.

**Australian Vernacular**
The distinctive language of Alf Taylor’s stories evokes and celebrates the cadence of Australian Aboriginal speech and therefore foregrounds the Aboriginality of the text. A narrative entitled “Family Tries” which was written by Mudrooroo Nyoongah in conjunction with Janine Little, however, uses Australian vernacular instead of specifically Aboriginal forms of language. I have chosen to look at this story for this reason and because the story makes an interesting use of genre, consciously blurring the boundary between life story and fiction. Thirdly, the narrative takes on an unusual form since it is a collaboration of the work of two writers who have chosen to speak with the narrative voice of a female. Although specifically Aboriginal words are not used in this text, the story sustains a distinctive Australian accent. It takes the form of a monologue which consciously and directly engages the reader in an intimate relationship: “My younger brother, you know, was the best one of us. Yeah, he frigging was…” (72) The story of the speaker, Rose, unravels through Rose’s voice and the easy conversational tone of the language belies the subject matter, a story of three husbands, domestic violence and alcoholism which positions the narrator in a poor rural Queensland community: “Don’t expect that many of youse have been to Inala, not posh enough for you, eh? Well I’m Inala born, bred and bashed up and so are my kids…” (74) The authors use the strategy of autobiographical narrative to tell a fictional story, blending genres to produce a personal and direct tone. In doing so the reader is taken inside the local community to view it through the eyes of Rose. Intercepting her story is the plight of her brother Kev, in jail for threatening violence to get access to his children. The phrase “the lower
depth” which Rose has heard on television is repeatedly used in the text to define Rose’s position in life: “Lower depths all right, yeah, sometimes I feel that I can walk under a snake’s belly (73)... Christ that’s life, the lower depths.” (75) The narrative illustrates that Aboriginality can be depicted by employing Australian vernacular and in this case is augmented by the use of social realism to convey a bleak social vision of an Aboriginal community.

**Appropriation of Culture—Stories by Bruce Pascoe and Kim Scott**

The title story of Bruce Pascoe’s collection, *Nightjar: Stories of the Australian Night*, published in the year 2000, addresses the issue of the appropriation of Aboriginal culture by academics, and in particular, anthropologists. In this narrative the author foregrounds dialogue and merges social realism with the representation of an alternative reality to present an argument which is positioned from a non-Indigenous perspective. The dialogue takes place between Gordon, an anthropologist, and a spirit in the form of a bird, who warns him about the appropriation of Aboriginal artefacts. There is an overt and unsubtle political message in the story. Clare Bradford, in her book *Reading Race* discusses the role of anthropologists and points out that their part in studying the Indigenous people of Australia has contributed to attitudes of Aboriginalism: “As recently as the 1980s, for primary school age children to study ‘the Aborigines’ was to be introduced to notions of a primitive, nomadic people living off the land and engaged in strange and
exotic rituals that sharply distinguished ‘them’ from ‘us’” (120). Pascoe’s narrative articulates attitudes towards Aboriginal culture which promote such beliefs. There is an overt reference to the invisibility of the Aboriginal race in the eyes of the non-Indigenous community. The presence of the spirit is real, but at the same time is invisible to the narrator. The narrator’s attitude is an example of Aboriginalism; his reluctance to hear the spirit’s voice, his appropriation of their history, the desire to gain financial and academic power from Indigenous culture, is indicative of this. In “Nightjar” the voice of the spirit derides the time Gordon spends on studying the past, Gordon is told to: “piss off … an’ leave our people alone” (Pascoe 40). Yet he is accused of neglecting contemporary problems in Aboriginal society. There is a contradiction therefore in the message of the narrative. The use of confrontational dialogue in this narrative establishes a cultural distance and contributes to cultural difference. However it also articulates a direct cross-cultural exchange of ideas on Indigenous and non-Indigenous issues. The spirit speaks in Aboriginal English: “Listen, you took the land, you took our kids, you took our spears an’ then you say, look you people all done forgot, what a mob of drunks … You’re a bludger Gordon. You been bludgin’ on our people” (Pascoe 39).

As well as speaking against the role of anthropologists, the issue of Reconciliation and saying ‘sorry’ are discussed in the dialogue. The spirit voice derides Gordon’s position as Chair of the Reconciliation Committee, and the message is accusing and explicitly political when Gordon suggests that the whole country should be reconciled:
Whole country. What bullshit that, Gordon? Whole country Whole country. Whole country ours… Fellas like you feel good ‘protecting’ our things, ‘protecting’ our people ‘protecting’ the reconciliation process. That bullshit. Don’t say sorry to me Gordon… (Pascoe 40).

This dialogue not only questions reconciliation but is contentious because it challenges the idea of a unified Australia and thus confronts one of the central issues facing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. At a later point in the story however, the spirit voice calls for more libraries for school children: “… the things our kids need if they’re goin’ to be reconciled” (Pascoe 41). So the message of the text is occasionally contradictory. A narrator in a later story “Middens” presents a more ambivalent view: “Maybe it’s too late to apologise for barging in, maybe not” (Pascoe120). This narrative challenges the hegemony of the dominant society by defending the right of Aborigines to their cultural property and by using direct dialogue and the depiction of the sacred to engage in a confrontational exchange of ideas. By using the spirit as a participant in the dialogue the author challenges the Anglo-Celtic notion of reality. The voice of the spirit intrudes into the text, and in doing so, questions that reality. The short story format, and the use of a dialogue between cultures, provides a vehicle for Pascoe to vent contentious political opinions.

The difference in culture which Pascoe articulates appears so confrontational that a coming together of ideas seems unlikely.
As a result his narrative presents a bleak picture. However, in the process of writing this literature, the author is articulating a form of resistance to the dominant modes of literary production, and in doing so is creating a literary voice, which Homi Bhabha refers to as: “new forms of meaning” (Location 162). A site for negotiation is being set up by the text because the Aboriginal voice is being heard. In this way, the specifically negative voice of the narrative turns to a positive and acts as a site of resistance. Mudrooroo remarks that: “They (Aboriginal writers) believe that a literature to be worthwhile must have social value not only to the individual, but to the community as well” (Fringe 25). The political nature of this writing underlies all of these texts and gives this literature a significance beyond the stories themselves.

The story “Capture” by Kim Scott, published in 2002, also addresses the place of anthropology and its role in the study of Indigenous culture. This narrative is a powerfully written, deeply ironic story which depicts the capture and study of a strange, Indigenous, human-like creature which is going to contribute to the academic reputations of its captors. The narrative relies on images of entrapment to foreground the negative connotations of anthropological research. The creature is depicted as half-animal and half-human, spirit-like: “Humanoid, it seemed. Human-like. Sort of” (Scott 3), reflecting the detached approach of scientific research into Indigenous Australians in the past and the current exploitation of Aboriginal culture. The text sets up a binary between the observer and the observed by using the formal language of scientific classification which the captors use
to observe the creature: “Its teeth in number and in kind, were similar to a human’s, and brilliantly white. The lips were capable of great mobility and expression. Genitals? Man and woman observing it nodded in agreement; the genitals were those of an adult human.”(4) The language of the text mimics and mocks the role of the two anthropologists to the extent of using Latin terms for the various exhibits collected by the husband and wife team: “Dromaius Novaehollandie: An Emu… Chalinobus Gouldii: A bat…” and in doing so disempowers their position by parodying it, reflecting the strategy which Bhabha refers to as mimicry, which is: “at once resemblance and menace.” (Loc. 86) Both resemblance and menace are apparent in this story. Kim Scott has acknowledged that in his writing he uses the language which he has encountered in his research: “It is as if there is a presence outside of and greater than the language, outside of the story. It’s as if using the tools of the colonising society, but writing from a different motivating impulse or spirit, means you end up with something else.” (Brewster 170). The continual engagement of irony and mimicry in this story, together with evocative images, gives it its power by imbuing the narrative with political significance:

The observers talked excitedly as they measured, weighed, pulled back lips and inspected teeth; studied fur, hands, feet, genitals. They could not keep their hands off the creature. And having completed their observation, they immediately began all over again. Verifying. Oh they were ecstatic. If the creature had impassioned Cory’s PhD thesis, so too had its capture energized Peter. (Scott 4)
The two academics represent non-Indigenous Australian culture, while the constantly observed, entrapped creature, is a metaphor for Aboriginal culture, which becomes an irresistible commodity for academic exploitation. The relationship of non-Indigenous Australians to nature also comes under scrutiny in this narrative: “Environmental history, he was fond of saying, allows us all to reach into deep time and discover the continuity; to be more than just a colony. It was about identity” (Scott 5). The mockery implicit in this statement undermines academic analysis and in doing so infers the superficial nature of the relationship of the non-Indigenous to the land and to history. Through parody Scott’s story subverts the power of the two academics in the story, in parallel with this the creature that they have captured becomes aggressive and violent and in the ensuing altercation articulates the words: “Let us be” “Allow us” “Listen” (9). The words however are ignored, as if never spoken, denoting the lack of attention payed to Indigenous voices in the past.

The message that the story sends is obvious and powerfully told. It is also a bleak projection of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and the incommensurability of their positions: “The creature stirred, and Peter and Cory—with no need for consultation—shackled the creature so that when it regained consciousness it would endanger neither them nor itself. Meanwhile they would need to prepare another more suitable sedative.” (10) This depiction of the shackled creature is a negative vision of relationships between the indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. The highly descriptive depiction of the
creature is central to this narrative since it is presented as both fascinating and frightening, powerful and potentially aggressive, a symbolic image which reflects Aboriginal culture and the way in which Indigenous people have at times been perceived. The image also embodies illness: “blood and mucus seeping from the cracked skin of its nostrils and lips.” (4) But perhaps the most cynical statement in the narrative comments on the role which Anglo-Celtic Australia has played in the destruction of that culture: “Having rescued it from extinction and oblivion, they would now nurse it back … and document the entire process. (4) Kim Scott’s story is multifaceted and cynical. Underlying the irony and occasional humour of the text is a deep sense of resistance and a call for voices of Aboriginal cultures to be heard.

The two narratives written by Kim Scott engage with the dominant culture through the manipulation of imagery to denote relationships between cultures. They are distinguished by the use of a formal style of English and by the fact that engagement with Aboriginal culture is indirect or symbolic and not apparent in the dialogue or language. In his story “Into The Light (After Hans Heysen’s painting of the same name)” the narrative follows an actual and a reflective journey of a white Australian who leaves his Aboriginal wife and children. There is a constant tension between white and black so the story is at once personal and symbolic: “He’d been among the first, the first white men.” (Scott, “Into” 122) Past and present run parallel in the narrative to give a sense of a journey through history as well as his own slow ride on horseback through the bush towards death. Scott’s narrative leaves unexplained images which are open to
interpretation. Blood on a stick suggests violence, not only to the rabbits which he kills but also to his wife: “She had laughed at him even as he struck”(121). The language is filmic and suggestive and as the narrative unravels, the engagement between it and Hans Heysen’s picture becomes apparent. Light is used to evoke the association between the two: “It was the sort of light that dissolved shadows. It was the sort that should have revealed Angels. The sheep ahead of him were disappearing into it…” (122) The narrator is distanced from the subject of the story so there is a continual commentary on his thoughts and actions as well as a the employment of metaphysical images invoked by the use of biblical references: “He and his own, it seemed they had somehow strayed and only he could lead them out of darkness and into the light. He was their shepherd, they should not want. He would uplift them” (121). The narrative is circular, since the man’s burnt body, which had been in supplicating pose, disintegrates into “leaves, charred cloth, flesh bone” (124), it resembles an arrangement in the soil which his children could have made, and which is mentioned in the first paragraph of the story. Kim Scott’s writing is dense with imagery and suggestion. There is no use of mimicry or irony in this story but the burnt figure of the white man at the end, asking for forgiveness is a powerful reference to the question of saying sorry and therefore overtly engages with contemporary politics.

The Fiction of John Bodey and An Engagement with the Past
Kim Scott’s writing comments on contemporary cultural and political issues while John Bodey’s writing draws on the past to affirm Aboriginal culture and the significance of Indigenous history. His collection of stories *When Darkness Falls*, published in 2000, depicts the role of the sacred in Aboriginal life and celebrates and makes visible the role of women in Indigenous history. The stories are far less confronting than Pascoe’s writing and their vision is not as bleak as that of Kim Scott. Set in the Kimberley regions of Western Australia, they tell tales of Aboriginal life long ago. The significance of John Bodey’s writing lies in the fact that his stories engage with myth and in doing so reinscribe the past. Mudrooroo Narogin defines myth as “… a re-telling of what is seen as the past, but a past pregnant with present meaning” (*Writing* 169). Webster’s dictionary defines myth as:

> A Story, the origin of which is forgotten, that ostensibly relates historical events, which are usually of such character as to serve to explain some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomenon. Myths are especially associated with religious rites and beliefs so that mythology is generally reckoned a part of primitive religion.

By using the form of myth as a vehicle for reaffirming Indigenous history Bodey’s stories legitimise the past, where the sacred and reality exist side by side, and in doing so affirms their relationship to the present. It is not clear whether all these stories are a contemporary imitation of mythical tales or whether the author uses traditional stories from the past. One narrative, “The Blood
Berry Vine” however is attributed to the author’s grandmother. In the foreword to the book the author describes the process of his story telling by saying: “my mind unfolded a story from within”. Whether these stories echo traditional tales from the past or whether they create contemporary versions of them, they imaginatively span the distance between ancient and contemporary times.

In Bodey’s story “The Weeping Trees” the reader is led into the world of Indigenous Australia, in a previous time, where there are no cities, no urban communications and no confrontations with non-Indigenous people. The subject matter of the narratives is pre-colonial. Within these stories there is no conflict of cultures; there are, however, conflicts between the Aboriginal characters and their tribes, so the way of life is not idealized since violence, death and betrayal occur. The reader is aware of being in a past time because the voice of the grandfather and his grandson introduce the narratives, and comment on them at the end, speaking from the present. There is a repeated movement then, between the present and the distant past where the stories are situated. Each story also has a short introduction by the author, to comment on the places where the narratives are set, a literary map which defines a sense of place for each story and points to its historic significance in the life of the author. The tales are therefore commented on twice, firstly by the author in this short introduction, secondly by the grandfather who is the contemporary narrator.
The narrative structure is important for two reasons. Firstly, by using this triple-layered effect the author makes the reader aware of the past and of the present existing side by side in contemporary Australia, so that the two cultures are presented in a subtle way, within the same time frame. Time is not presented as linear, and cross-cultural references are implicit rather than explicit because of this structure. Contemporary Aboriginal land claims are affirmed by the fact that Western society is not represented in the stories at all. The present exists only by the presence of the two contemporary characters, grandfather and grandson, who comment at the beginning and end of each story. Secondly, the significance of the structure of these stories is that they mimic the tradition of oral story telling from the old to the young, who are therefore not set up in opposition in the narrative.

Bodey’s stories foreground the importance of the history of the Indigenous people of the Kimberley before the arrival and dominance of the Anglo-Celtic community. The existence of these tribes “in the days of our dreaming” (31) reinforces the legitimacy of the Indigenous people and their existence in a time past, and shatters the idea of ‘terra nullius’ which took so long for non-Indigenous Australians to reject. The presence of the grandfather as narrator, and his audience, his grandson, accentuates the oral nature of these stories and illustrates this desire for cultural continuity by passing on tales from generation to generation. *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* links Aboriginal writing to its traditional oral traditions when it states: “This tradition of yarning, of telling stories which
maintain cultural continuity and provide the hearer with interpretations of contemporary social reality, is the basis for Aboriginal writing” (313). It is this tradition which Bodey’s narratives mimic.

By illustrating the history of this Aboriginal community, its traditions, its way of life, Bodey’s stories also foreground Aboriginal history as the history of Australia, challenging the more recent version of history which has been imposed by the dominant society. Two hundred years of colonial history recedes in importance in the face of Aboriginal history extending so far back in time: “many thousand years past” (Bodey 30). As Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra have pointed out: “Aboriginal society has its own versions of history which do not exist in a different plane but are able to contest the versions of history transmitted through the education system” (102). This challenge to white imperialist history indicates that these texts are making a statement which is not apparent in the narratives, but is nevertheless integral to our interpretation of them. It is a message that exists beneath the texts, but none the less emerges from them.

Connected with the foregrounding of an alternative history “The Weeping Trees” illustrates an alternative ‘reality’, where the spirit world continually comes into contact with the material and natural world. Mudrooroo refers to this concept as Maban reality: “… Maban reality is not about the natural world as constructed by the European natural sciences: it is about describing a world which is as existent and as real as that constructed by European
thought." (The Indigenous 98). It speaks of Aboriginal traditions and a way of life uncontaminated by Western culture, but does so by using the language of the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. An evocation of the past is apparent in every story in John Bodey’s collection. “Ningaloo” is the tale of an Aboriginal boy in times past who was born of a dugong. The grandfather and narrator who introduces the tale to his grandson, explains its provenance, as it was told to him by his grandmother to explain the beginning of her tribe and to depict the significance of sexual union and love, which is revealed when Ningaloo observes the mating ritual of dugongs. The narrator uses the myth to reinscribe the history of his tribe and pass on information about sex to his grandson: “If mammals in those times long gone, experienced ‘love,’ then it must have started with them” is just one of the messages carried by the story. (Bodey154)

The dynamic nature of myth and storytelling is emphasised by the author’s short introduction to the narrative:

Where are the Indigenous people of this land? The people are still there, guddias, they might not have human form, but the spirits of people like Ningaloo and all those gone ahead still live. They live in the land and the trees, the rocks and the reefs, the rivers and the creeks, the beach sands —and my story. (128)

This comment points to the significance of the role which Indigenous writers and the genre of the short story are playing in Aboriginal culture. By revisiting and passing on the historic
stories of the past Indigenous writing can not only help to celebrate that past but preserve what has been retained through memory.

**Women and their Place in Indigenous History**

In Bodey’s stories, “The Weeping Trees,” and “The Parrots and the Vine” the central role of women in both family and spiritual life is celebrated. In the first story a mother saves the children of her tribe from thirst and death, brought on by the men in the tribe who left them to die. It is this spiritual reality which ultimately explains the existence of the weeping willows which also represent seven women who survived the long journey of their tribe through the desert, only to die, desolate, beside the river. In the story “The Parrots and the Vine”, the central female character is a healer, who uses nature and common sense to heal the sick, and passes on her skills to her daughter. Both of these stories foreground the strength of women in these Aboriginal communities. They are not only survivors, but also leaders, so the idea of women being marginalised within their own community is inverted and they are empowered in the narrative.

Bodey presents the main female character as strong, resourceful and angry that she and many others have been left by their tribe to die in the desert. The character is not given a name until the end, as until then she is called “Mother” or “Aunty.” This seems to indicate that she fulfils a symbolic role. The narrative depicts the men in the group as selfish and arrogant: “The arrogance of our elders has created a disaster. Just how many people will die
before the tribe reaches our homeland” (43). The woman leads the abandoned group to safety with the help of a spirit who is also female and at the end of the story; only women survive from the original tribe which had left the group to die in the desert. The woman’s role is at all times foregrounded in the text. At first “Mother” excuses the rest of the tribe for abandoning them, however later changes her mind: “Never… never again for as long as I have a say will the weak be left behind for the good of the tribe.” Bodey is presenting a powerful image of an Aboriginal woman. The ensuing journey to safety is told from a female perspective, as she becomes the spokesperson of the tribe, as well as “teaching them all she knows of the laws and the ways of men” (59). Bodey is redressing perceptions about Aboriginal women which are predominant in non-Indigenous society, since it is said that Aboriginal women are doubly marginalized, by racism and as women within their own communities. This situation is commented on by Anne Pattel-Gray, in her essay “Black Truth White Fiction”:

As an Aboriginal woman living within contemporary Australian society, being engulfed in the growing trend of gender concerns and awareness, and as a womanist scholar, I cannot overlook the enormous void in academic literature regarding the role of Aboriginal women in the many recordings of history, anthropology, and religious studies. This male dominated world of scholarship has presented a very unbalanced view of Aboriginal society. Further when Aboriginal women happen to be given a mention, it is usually in the form of a racist and sexist stereotype, sustaining
John Bodey’s narratives redress such perceptions by depicting women in a dominant role in the Indigenous community. In an essay in *The Strength of Us as Women: Black Women Speak*, Vicki Ann M. Speechley-Golden asserts the existence of gender oppression within Aboriginal society, but sees it as a behavioural trait learnt from non-indigenous Australians. Speechley-Golden disassociates Aboriginal women from feminist beliefs and regards racism as the major factor to overcome, including racism between non-Indigenous and Indigenous women.

In Bodey’s story “The Weeping Trees” the main female character is empowered by the absence of male leaders. Bodey explores the relationship which the mother has with nature and illustrates its sacred connotations, thus in her interaction with the female spirit the nourishing power of the natural resources of the desert is revealed, which saves their lives. In this story the mother herself is physically the nurturer, supplying food for the abandoned children. This narrative is a journey of endurance, not only of individuals, but also of a tribe and a race, therefore the story embodies the notion of Aboriginal survival and is an illustration of the integral connection between nature, the sacred and Indigenous woman. Anne Pattel-Gray comments that academic studies have portrayed Aboriginal women as: “… religious paupers and, therefore as profane, restricted to the margins and devoid of possessing any spiritual divinity, and lacking within their own humanity any resemblance of the sacred”
Bodey’s stories challenge such perceptions by foregrounding the role of Indigenous women in his narratives, and through the narrative structure of his stories, promotes this image to younger generations, depicting them as visible and powerful in Indigenous culture.

If Aboriginal women and their relationship to the sacred have been misrepresented in academic studies, the situation is changing as the voice of Indigenous women in literature and politics becomes stronger. I will not discuss particular narratives from the genre of life stories, however it must be acknowledged as a literary vehicle for Indigenous women to speak, articulating the history that non-Indigenous Australians have denied them. This literature is often centred in the past; a collection of autobiographical stories by Ruby Langford Ginibi, entitled *Real Deadly* is an example of this and as Narogin notes: “It is only in the past few years that black literary texts have been allowed to speak for themselves: that is the Aborigine is allowed to say what he or she wants to say and in the language he or she wishes it to be said” (Narogin, *Writing* 157-8). The concept of Aboriginality which informs and directs Indigenous writing permits such freedom of language and expression. Ruby Langford Ginibi comments on Aboriginal women’s writing in an essay entitled “MY Mob, My Self” where she rejects the notion that these autobiographical stories are not ‘real’ literature, and defends the right of Aborigines to write with their own English, unadulterated by white editors who have been inclined to anglicise the text. Langford Ginibi stresses the significance of this literature:
And the writing of our stories, our biographies and autobiographies is our documentation of our histories and stories, from our Aboriginal perspectives, and they need to be read and heard all over this great land, for too long, we have had other people defining us, and telling us who we are. (19)

Indigenous life-stories then, articulate a political as well as a literary voice and provide the opportunity for Indigenous people to document their own history.

Although many Aboriginal writers resent the use of their culture for academic purposes, Bodey’s writing is creating a dialogue with non-Indigenous readers which is integral to the ongoing relationship between Australians. It moves the reader into another world where language informs the imagination and illustrates to white society a way of life which they may not otherwise see, merging history and narrative into literary form. The presence of the spiritual aspect of the story in these narratives enables a multi-layered interpretation of it. Accepted but not explained, showing a set of beliefs foreign to the Anglo–Celtic experience, the spirits in these stories are not a mere presence, or a fantasy but play an active role in the life of the Aboriginal people. Mudrooroo points out that this alternative reality is “… political in that it seeks to establish an indigenous reality which is counter to the dominant natural reality of the invaders.” (Mudrooroo, The Indigenous 100). John Bodey’s representation of Aboriginal reality encourages a re-appraisal of Euro-centric notions of history and religion and
challenges the idea that there is only one way to perceive the Australian past. Unlike Bruce Pascoe’s stories Bodey’s literature is centred in the past and does not present a dichotomous view of two opposing societies in his narratives, but illustrates an Aboriginal world where the sacred is part of everyday life. The colonial presence is implicit, however, by the use of English which filters the perceptions of the Indigenous past. By this literary representation of the sacred Bodey articulates an encounter with Western society in contemporary times. He does not try to represent the sacred as being beyond Western understanding, neither is his dialogue confrontational, yet his stories illustrate beliefs which depict an alternative to those held by the dominant Australian society.

Narratives such as this allow knowledge of Aboriginal beliefs to seep into the Anglo-Celtic culture by inviting a change of perspective. Non-Indigenous Australians often see Aboriginal attachment to land as a threat to the legitimacy of their ownership and as land title passes over to various Aboriginal groups, the plight of Indigenous cultures becomes obscured by the fear that Indigenous land claims have equal authority before a court of law. Implicit in Bodey’s stories is the traditional and historic right of Aboriginal people to the land.

As we have seen there is a merging of narrative practices in the language and structure of “The Weeping Trees”, but it is the ideas that emerge from the story which invite comparison between cultures, and which offer an Indigenous challenge to the Anglo-Celtic way of thinking and contribute to what Homi Bhabha
refers to as a “discourse of cultural difference” (Location 162). In Bodey’s stories past and present merge to meet with and inform contemporary society. Through the evocation of the sacred, the depiction of an alternative reality forms an integral part of these narratives and becomes a site of cultural difference in these imaginative stories.

Aboriginality in the writing of John Bodey is also manifest in the use of Aboriginal English in the text. As Clare Bradford says in her book *Reading Race*: “One of the most powerful strategies of British Imperialism was always the displacement of Indigenous languages by English” (140). The replacement of English with Aboriginal words attempts to resist and counter that practice and challenge the dominance of English in Aboriginal culture. Bodey uses Aboriginal English in the following snatch of dialogue of his story “The Weeping Trees”:

Munkjarra. Min yiminny. You propa woman this time, all same dat belong young time. Who this pulla?
This pulla? You don’t know him? This one you bin carry, you bin sing, you bin cry when he bin leeb you.(61).

Again, the word “bin” denotes past tense and there is an absence of some words which would be used in Standard English such as ‘a’ and ‘are’ in the first sentence. There is no glossary to explain the meaning of words used and the use of Aboriginal English in this story provides a strong contrast to the formal, standard English used throughout the rest of the narrative. By using Aboriginal English in dialogue, a cultural distance emerges
which acts as a site of difference in the text. In the process of this it contributes towards evoking an identity other than the Anglo-Celtic but also acts to form a bridge of meaning between cultures.

The use of Aboriginal words is a step towards creating a cultural voice for non-Indigenous people. The author is creating an opportunity for the non-Aboriginal reader to engage with the text and meet it somewhere between the two cultures. As Mikhail Bakhtin wrote in his essay “Discourse in the Novel”:

“All languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views. Each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values” (34).

These words then, open the way to another cultural world where non-Indigenous readers enter an unfamiliar world, hear an unfamiliar sound which reveal or suggest these alternative views. This can lead to an perception that those words are foreign and secondary to Standard English because the dominant language is seen to be the legitimate language of literature in Australia, however Bradford points out that: “Standard English is as much a dialect as Aboriginal English, but carries much higher status within Australian culture” (143). The Indigenous writer, through the use of these words empowers himself, and challenges that status. These words function to allow non-Indigenous readers to take a different avenue of communication which brings the two
cultures a small step closer to each other but at the same time reveals and exposes difference. Bakhtin continues: “Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life” (35). This comment suggests the dynamic nature of language, its ability to change, absorb and transmit cultural meaning, and in this case denote Aboriginality in the text.

Aboriginal language confronts the use of Standard English in literature and foregrounds another culture. In challenging the status of Standard English, the authors are contributing to the creation of a new literary voice. By merging language, genre and culture the literary traditions of Australia are altered and the shifting nature of the genre and of language become exposed. The Aboriginality of the text proclaims the identity of the writing and contributes to the reinvention of a cultural space.

**Fresh Cuttings and the Concepts of ‘Home’ and ‘Place’**

Individual authors use different narrative strategies to depict Aboriginality. Further perspectives on this concept can be seen by studying the narratives in an anthology published in 2003, entitled *Fresh Cuttings: A Celebration of Fiction and Poetry from UQP’s Black Writing Series*. This anthology is a collection of extracts or “cuttings” from the works of Indigenous writers some of whom have been the recipient of, or have received commendation in, the David Unaipon Award which was set up in 1988 to honour the first published Indigenous writer. The
anthology spans a variety of genres: poetry, prose and autobiographical narrative. As with the writing of Taylor, Pascoe, Scott and Bodey the works celebrate Aboriginality but articulate a wide variety of voices and issues, indicating the complex nature of Indigenous identity.

The first two stories which I will consider in this anthology, “Home” by Larissa Behrendt And “Plains of Promise” by Alexis Wright, depict the removal of young women from their families and so address one of the most significant issues affecting Aboriginal culture. The first is set in colonial times when young girls were used as household servants and the second in the twentieth century where children were taken from their mothers if they had mixed racial heritage and could be integrated into Anglo-Celtic society. Henry Reynolds has commented on the situation which these stories articulate: “It was tragic that when, in the twentieth century, state and federal governments decided to remove children from their families they repeated most of the mistakes and cruelties perpetrated by individuals in the colonial period” (Bird 184).

The concept of ‘home’ which is integral to this identity and which is central to the Aboriginality of the text, is the focus of the story by Larissa Behrendt, and is an extract from her book which won the 2002 David Unaipon Prize. Entitled “Home”, the narrative examines the loss of security and sense of identity when a young Aboriginal woman, Garbooli, or Elizabeth, as she is renamed, is taken from her home to work as a domestic servant in a grand colonial home. An Aboriginal sense of home is defined
indirectly in this narrative, not by its presence, but by its absence, by the sustained sense of despair and loss which structures the narrative and defines Garibooli’s experience. Intercepting the text is an Indigenous mythical tale of rescue which serves to comfort her and closes the distance between her and her family and her true home: “Looking at the familiar patterns in the night sky and recalling these stories made her feel as though she were lying only a few feet from her home, as if she could look across and see the fire and the shadows of her family” (Behrendt 135). The narrative crosses between this tale from her ancestral past and the reality of her domestic work, so past and present merge in the story. Despite the fact that she is expected to “model herself after Christ, the Suffering Servant” (126), it is the Aboriginal spirituality which provides the most comfort to her.

A constant awareness of cultural and racial difference and oppressive social structures inform this narrative, since it depicts the tension between coloniser and colonised, and between white and black. Implicit in this tension is the presence of power and a presumption by the coloniser of the right to dominate and govern, justified by the civilizing process. The hierarchical nature of the household is emphasised in the text: “They would sweep past her, sparingly acknowledging her, she could have been painted into the fine floral wallpaper” (Behrendt 129). Garibooli’s inferior position places her at the bottom of the hierarchy of staff within the house and relegates her to a totally powerless existence. The colonial splendour of the house and its mimicry of English rituals are contrasted with Elizabeth’s misery and naivety.
The oppression emphasises the sense of loss experienced by Garibooli. “‘Look at me when I speak to you Elizabeth.’ The girl lifted her face and looked across into the blue eyes. She had been taught to look away when an older person addressed her” (Behrendt 121). This portrayal of difference foregrounds the Aboriginality of the subject. It is this presumption of superiority which creates the social distance between the two characters. Franz Fanon articulates the feeling of inferiority which is imposed on the Indigenous person, when he says:

The black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other. Of course I have talked about the black problem with friends, or more rarely with American Negroes. Together we protested, we asserted the equality of all men in the world… And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. (78)

Behrendt’s narrative shows that a sense of this inequality is promoted and enforced in the relationships between the Aboriginal girl and her employers and that she has no power to challenge their claims. The sense of home which the big house represents, and the sense of home which Garibooli mourns constitute two opposites, one pretentious and dominant representing the imperial presence, the other instinctive and necessary to Garibooli’s existence. The narrative manages to subvert the power of the dominant culture by emphasizing the
simplicity and integrity of Garibooli and her sense of home:
“‘where do you come from?’ Xiao-ying had asked her. ‘Away. My family lives far away from here in the place where the rivers meet’” (131). This simple reply voices a distance between Garibooli’s sense of home and place and that of her friend. Home for Garibooli is defined only by its proximity to a specific natural landmark. Although she is at all times powerless, Aboriginal identity is constantly reaffirmed in the story. When she is forced to change her name from Garibooli to Elizabeth she repeats the refrain: “My name is Garibooli. Whisper it. Whisper it over and over again” (124). The narrative focuses on the Aboriginal girl and makes her experience central to the narrative, drawing the sympathy of the reader towards Indigenous experience.

By revisiting history this story depicts the damage done to Aboriginal culture and identity by the enforced separation of children from their families. Jackie Huggins notes that this practice has been documented in Aboriginal women’s writing and that domestic servants: “… were gripped by a racist mythology which claimed that Blacks were inferior and were poor workers who needed to be firmly controlled by the ‘super race’… This ideology had to be upheld at all times” (82). Behrendt’s story illustrates the power implicit in that myth since Garibooli is not only racially oppressed but is taken advantage of sexually by the owner. The sexual encounter which takes place implicates the role of white colonists in their relationships with Aboriginal women, and thus history is re-written from both an Indigenous and a female perspective. Racial oppression in this story comes from the female owner of the house Mrs. Howard “who was
uncivil towards her” (128) and sexual oppression from the male. Jackie Huggins notes that: “It is imperative that any discussion of race and gender includes the issue of Black women and, in particular, female employers and their Aboriginal servants” (28). The powerless nature of Garibooli’s position makes her incapable of resisting oppression from either gender thus the colonial power structure is represented in this story as a totally dominant one in the colonial domestic environment and suggests the complex role played by women, as both the oppressed and the oppressors. Since the narrative depicts the position of an Aboriginal woman in colonial times, the story affirms her place in history and contributes to a new view of the Indigenous woman’s role. The depiction of the role of Aboriginal women as central to these texts is one of the narrative strategies used to depict Aboriginality in contemporary Indigenous fiction.

Since the revisiting of the past is also important to Indigenous writing, the role of Christianity becomes one of the focal points of some of these texts. In Alexis Wright’s story “Plains of Promise”, an extract from a novel of the same name, the role of missionaries comes under scrutiny. The narrative parallels the spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people who live on a mission and the Christian teaching which has been imposed on them by missionaries. The missionaries in the story take upon themselves the task of separating what they term “half-caste children” (Wright101) from their mothers in order that they marry white men and produce white children: “Their children will be whiter and more redeemable in the likeness of God the Father Almighty”
(102). In this context then, Christianity is used to justify this practice. The ensuing suicide of the mother as a result of the separation from her child sets up a debate amongst her Aboriginal peer group: “God’s people take her child away and leave her crying like an animal afterwards ... Did whiteman’s God hear that?” (99) The parallel portrayal of Aboriginal spirituality depicts the threatening and frightening presence of the spirits who come to take the life of the mother: “They slid down the ropes from the stormy skies, lowering their dirty wet bodies until they reached the ground outside the hut where she slept. There in silence they went after her, pulling at her skin, trying to rip her apart (105).” This evocative description indicates the hold which the spirits have over the woman and the sinister nature of her experience which counteracts and overrides the beliefs of Christianity which are expounded at the mission and emphasise the power of Indigenous beliefs in the life of this Aboriginal woman.

Both the story “Home” and “Plains of Promise” depict a system of control which governed the lives of Aboriginal people, and included in that system is the imposition of Christian beliefs on the lives of Aboriginal people through contact with Christian missionaries. The two stories discussed above indicate that Christianity did not always replace Aboriginal beliefs which were resilient enough to withstand Christian influences. These stories indicate the presence of oppressive government structures to control Aboriginal lives. In his book The Tears of Strangers Stan Grant notes: “Now we pick over their misery, reducing the fact of their lives to an argument” (145). However the imaginative
depiction of these practices keeps alive the debate about the “Stolen Generation” and enforces recognition of the actions of the past.

**Memory**

One of the strategies used to revisit the past in the short stories I have selected is the use of story telling within the narrative. In Vivien Cleven’s story “Her Sister’s Eye”, also in the anthology *Fresh Cuttings*, the narrator revisits the past and in doing so: “Slips back in memory” (197) while talking to her granddaughter. Homi Bhabha has noted that: “remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection, it is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (*Location* 63). The pain of the past is indicated in this story by emotional interruptions to the narrative: “the old woman stops, her milky eyes straining…Memories and grief wash over her face” (Cleven196). The structure of the story echoes the tradition of oral story-telling, similar to the narrative strategy used in John Bodey’s stories which are discussed above. The relationship between the listener and the storyteller becomes part of the narrative, and lies parallel to the historical story. The significance of memory is emphasised in the process of revisiting the past, the oral nature of traditional Aboriginal culture therefore becomes represented in the text and the role of the elderly to pass on those memories is foregrounded. As the grandmother says: “People need to know their history, otherwise there’s this terrible feeling of being lost” (193).
The use of memory in this writing is a strategy to direct the narrative but also has political connotations since it is memory that informs the affirmation of the past which occurs in this writing. The revisiting of that past through memory confirms the continuity of identity. In the introduction to *Those Who Remain Will Always Remember* it is noted that: “Where there is remembering there is also forgetting and when Aboriginal people remember it is often what the dominant culture chooses to forget” (Brewster 13). Aboriginal memory serves to redress these breaches in history imposed by the dominant culture and challenge and confront its interpretation. The political nature of memory ensures that it informs both the present and the past, while the personal memories become part of a more collective source of reference.

In “Her Sister’s Eye” the story travels through memory back in time and tells of the shooting of an Aboriginal girl by a white neighbour who accused an Aboriginal group of trespassing. It is a story of murder and racism, but at the heart of it is the issue of land ownership and the divergent attitudes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous towards it: “‘Joseph told her they were all *trespassing*! Claimed it were all his river n all … The river! He claimed to own the river.’ Anger ripples Doris’ face.” (Cleven194). The old woman’s story is a family story but it contests white ownership of land and in doing so addresses one of the most significant issues in Aboriginal culture. This dialogue indicates the place: “where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch” (Bhabha, *Location*107) since the narrator
articulates the point of difference in notions of land ownership, and in this way exposes the Aboriginality of the narrative. The vision of this story is one of resilience and hope. The narrator sees the future for her people in the hands of her granddaughter: “You got the power to change things Doris” (Cleven 200). This comment emphasises a belief in the future and a belief in the possibility for change.

The subject of mixed race identity which is raised in “Plains of Promise”, takes on contemporary significance in Melissa Lukashenko’s story “Steam Pigs”, an extract from her novel of the same name. The issue of domestic violence in the Indigenous community forms the focus of the narrative when a bashed light-skinned Aboriginal woman, Sue, turns for support to a group of Indigenous females in the local community. This story is an example of Indigenous writers examining their own problems, rather than being the subject of Anglo-Celtic scrutiny. The issue of domestic violence is also depicted in Lisa Bellear’s poetry in the same anthology. In this story the nurturing presence of a group of women provides psychological support and merges, through the dialogue with larger questions of cultural loss which are seen to be the cause of such social problems as domestic violence: “Kerry stares Sue down, not angry with her, but angry with a system that could do this to people, fucked up Murries all over the damn country Land—gone, families—gone, dignity—gone, culture—gone…” (Lucashenko 49). The problem of domestic violence is seen to be part, then of the larger picture of colonisation and the way which Indigenous people see themselves. The idea that: “There’s nothing more to being
Aboriginal than drinking and fighting and being poor” (51), according to this narrator is a perception imposed by the dominant white community. W.E.B. Du Bois discusses this situation in his essay “The Souls of Black Folk” when he says:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body… (869).

Positive self perception and self-definition then, becomes an all important aim of contemporary Indigenous culture, since the negative image which Du Bois depicts, is referred to in “Steam Pigs” as: “manipulative bullshit that whites use to fuck minorities all the time, internalised oppression…” (Lucashenko 50) Being defined through the eyes of the non-Indigenous culture is therefore seen as a conscious strategy of oppression. Franz Fanon comments on this with regard to his own identity when he says: “I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics: and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships…” (79) By writing from the point of view of Indigenous people this Aboriginal fiction attempts to redress such stereotypical perspectives which have been imposed on people who are not white and which indicate one of the more pernicious strategies of cultural oppression.
The complex issue of Aboriginal identity is addressed in “Steam Pigs” since the central Aboriginal character, Sue, was brought up as a white person, due to the pale colour of her skin. Her association with Indigenous women emphasises her desire to be considered black: “Like you’ve got the white skin (Sue is insulted, she’s at least olive)…” (Lucashenko 50). Black skin, therefore is presented as the ideal but her physical appearance is not seen as an impediment to her position in Aboriginal society: “You could live in a palace and still be Murri in your heart” (51). Nevertheless she considers herself marginalised by both Indigenous and non-indigenous society and in the narrator’s terminology is a “steam pig”, a railway term for equipment which does not fit: “A mongrel. Something not really definable, you know? A white blackfella…” (49) By addressing the issue of mixed racial identity this narrative legitimates the Aboriginal identity of such people, despite the antipathy of some within the Indigenous community: “… it hurt when some other Murries reminded her she had a family of coconuts” (48). This story challenges the notion that white skin is a preferred colour. Richard Dyer comments that:

White people have power and believe that they think feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other peoples; white people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail. (9)
By choosing not to be considered white this character contests the dominant nature of this construction and rejects structures of power and privilege which it implies, creating an alternative perspective on racial identity. This narrative sets up a tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in both a physical and a cultural sense. Ian Anderson suggests: “In the ethnographic context, this widespread and contemporary Aboriginal experience is portrayed only as a titanic struggle between the opposing black and white bits” (51). Anderson indicates the offensive nature of such terms as ‘half-caste’ in denoting identity. He goes on to indicate the dynamic nature of Aboriginal identity which is “constantly re-forming as we engage and re-engage our world.” Indigenous literature contributes to a changing Aboriginal politics of identity which can challenge and alter the self-perception of Indigenous people and contribute to a re-definition of Aboriginal identity which is not filtered through the eyes of the dominant culture.

Through stories such as “Steam Pigs” exposure and debate on domestic violence and associated problems encourages public awareness. Audre Lorde comments on similar situations in America by saying: “Sexual hostility against black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but implemented within our black communities as well” (634). In “Steam Pigs” the bashed woman at the centre of the narrative finds refuge within a group of supportive women. The narrative therefore foregrounds the resilience and strength of this female community.
as well as the nurturing role which it provides for the “Steam Pigs” in that community.

Stories such as “Steam Pigs” set up a site where women define their own sense of the female experience in an Indigenous community and therefore position race as an integral part of feminist perspectives. Jackie Huggins, in a dialogue with bel hooks articulates this when she says: “Feminism that has the elimination of oppression as its agenda, rather than just one or more of its symptoms truly transcends any other critical ideology” (70). By speaking about the roles and beliefs of Indigenous women, this writing emphasises the Aboriginality of the text. In doing so it re-positions both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attitudes and acts to alter the perspective regarding the issues depicted in the story.

**Colonialism Gender and Race**

The sense of Aboriginality which is foregrounded in all these writings is used in a particularly imaginative way in the opening story to this anthology. Entitled “bitin back” it is an extract from a novel of the same name by Vivienne Cleven. The story is both a comedy and a farce and employs fast talking dialogue to tell the story of an Aboriginal boy, Nevil, who suddenly wishes to dress as a white woman and be known as the writer Jean Rhys: “Now where are my clothes he asks in a pissy sorta way, runnin his tongue cross his thick–set lips as he catches a glance at hisself in the mirror.” (7) The narrative disturbances all categories and
boundaries which surround notions of gender and race. The central character not only becomes trans-sexual but also trans-racial. Nevil takes on power as a white woman to the bewilderment of his mother: “I walk past the bathroom. Nevil’s voice sings out loud and deep: ‘I am woman hear me roar!’ ”(12) The strength of the story lies not only in its comedy, but in the depiction of the mother’s personality through her dialogue which has the accent of Australian vernacular: “Ain’t like Nev to be arsin bout like this. Talkin mad, sorta like he got that possessin stuff. A manwomanmanwoman. Like the boy mixin his real self up whit another person.”(8) This accented language contributes to the Aboriginality of the text by invoking the sound of Aboriginal dialogue. By provoking laughter the story engages a different reaction in the reader, the serious issues of racial and gender difference become theatrical and ridiculous and yet the underlying issues are just as significant. The horrified reaction of his mother and uncle accentuate the undesirability of being white so the narrative is very much centred from an Aboriginal perspective. The main characters continual insistence on being called Jean Rhys establishes a connection to her book “The Wide Sargasso Sea” which rewrites the story of Rochester’s mad wife in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys’ book links with the effects of colonialism and the experience of cultural displacement caused by colonisers. The use of comedy, together with these intertextual references, denotes a significant change in style from other fictional writing which I have examined in this chapter.

The Aboriginality of these texts is constantly intertwined with the political nature of the issues which are the subject of these
tales. Melissa Lukashenko’s story “Hard Yards”, also in the anthology *Fresh Cuttings*, addresses the issues surrounding the deaths of Aboriginal youth. The story centres on the funeral of an Aboriginal boy. The cause of his death is not mentioned in this extract but those responsible are accused: “They cursed the police, the screws, the doctors, the migs, the whole white world.” (210) The narrative uses the depiction of anger and grief towards the non-Indigenous population: “How many times’ve we seen each other at the funerals of young ones, young fellas this year? And what about last year? Or the year before that?” (214) The story slips easily from the personal nature of the funeral experience to the wider issues of racism and violence which define the lives of the family. But knowledge that the dead boy’s spirit returns to the land contributes to the positive sense of resilience which is emphasised in the text. “They can hate us. They can even kill us, but they can’t do nothin’ bout that, we belong ‘ere.” (216) The funeral can be seen in this narrative as a metaphor for Aboriginal culture, the tension between death and survival is constantly negotiated in the story and mourning is its main focus. But it is the awareness of spiritual strength and of the spiritual presence of the dead boy which pervades the story and affirms the Aboriginality of the writing.

The anthology *Fresh Cuttings* provides a significant contribution to Australian literature because it displays some of the best contemporary Aboriginal writing in Australia and in doing so can act as an inspiration to other Indigenous writers. By presenting cuttings or extracts from this writing the boundaries of genre become blurred, fictional novels become short stories and a wide
cross-section of writing becomes available to the reader. Life stories and poetry are also included. The Aboriginality of the texts contributes to an Aboriginal discourse which can change the way in which the Indigenous experience is defined and which contests Anglo-Celtic ways of thinking.

A Global Profile. *Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing*

Aboriginal writing discussed so far in this chapter has been seen in the context of Australian literature. The anthology *Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing* however, published in 2000, positions Australian Indigenous writing in a global context, by including other literature from Indigenous communities in Canada, U.S.A. and New Zealand. In doing this Aboriginal short fiction becomes part of an international literary scene and can be linked to writing from cultures which have all been marginalised by dominant cultures. In the preface to the anthology the editor notes:

Most of us believe our creative work has a function well beyond self-expression. It expresses the values and aesthetics of our people and connects us to them and to our ancestors and future generations. It is a form of activism that both maintains and affirms who we are and protests against colonization and assimilation.

(Akiwenzie-Damm vi)

The stories affirm the connection of these writers with their land and their history and despite displacement caused by
colonization share a sense of resilience and survival. The anthology brings about an awareness of Australian Aboriginal writing as part of a global discourse. The Australian section of this anthology has stories by six Indigenous writers, addressing a wide scope of issues and writing with differing styles and voices. The Aboriginality of the stories affirms the connection which these writers have with their own culture but they write from quite different perspectives. The story in this anthology by Melissa Lucashenko “Let Me Tell You What I Want” stands apart from other Australian Indigenous writing which has been examined in this chapter. It explores attitudes towards sexuality from a personal and a racial perspective. The narrator firstly depicts the attraction her brother has to both women and men, and then moves to her own desire for a sexual relationship with a particular white man. The narrative is an intense depiction of her desire, not only for this union, but also for liberation from marriage: “Our egos lie quietly for a while, dormant on the floors of marriage, looking silently through the bars, and then one day they get up and stretch and yawn at the audience, showing those massive frightening teeth, and claws for ripping things apart” (106). The prose in this narrative is both evocative and threatening, and the language and imagery is at times confronting.

The personal and intense nature of the experience which is depicted and strong sexual imagery sets this story apart from other Indigenous writing. The narrator refers to “dangerous fuck-you-nigger eyes” (105) so sexual imagery is enmeshed with racism. The explicit language is confronting and suggests the
desire for female sexual power: “Oh, fuck with me whiteboy, fuck with me. I want to bite you scratch you suck you, I want to enslave you …” (105). But while some language in this narrative is explicit, other language is subtle and suggestive of things unspoken: “You ring before you come over, a short dance of mild nothings on the phone, all the unsayables tucked into our (or at least my) back pockets … I am pretty sure we both have unsayables” (106).

This narrative explores both the articulation of sexual desire from a female perspective and the capacity to articulate feelings. It ends with the words: “But then I never say what I really want” (107) so language and self-expression are emphasised throughout the text. The confronting and introspective nature of the story changes perceptions of Indigenous writing by challenging accepted notions of subject matter and foregrounding personal experience.

Richard Frankland’s story “Who Took The Children Away”, also from the anthology Skins draws on the issue of black deaths in custody and therefore addresses an extremely political issue, since the narrator is an interviewing officer for the Royal Commission which was set up in 1987. Centred in a country motel room and a country pub, with the television on, Frankland’s story is bleak, making constant parallels between the unreality and glamour of life depicted on television and the harsh reality of Aboriginal families losing loved ones to suicide in jail. The story uses the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody as its focus, but goes behind the façade of the reports to the
personal issues facing one of the interviewers. The story emphasises the impersonal nature of the reports, the way they were misconstrued in the newspapers and the racist attitudes of the white people in the town. Such remarks as: “bloody good footy players…” and “Good on the knuckle too …” articulate this relationship and the conclusion “Drink too bloody much though” sums up the stereotypical perception of Indigenous people which define relationships in that community. (Frankland 95) Homi Bhabha has noted that:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural / historical / racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated…” (Location 66)

By depicting such rigid attitudes contemporary Indigenous literature plays an important role in rejecting and changing those stereotypical perceptions which accentuate otherness. The Aboriginality of the text is foregrounded by emphasising these fixed perspectives and by showing both anger and despair at them. The narrator in Frankland’s story sees a divided, dichotomous world: “There’s no way they could live in my world,
they could never know my world…” (96), the vision of the story is therefore bleak, but it considers a central issue in Aboriginal culture, the damaging perception of Anglo-Celtic Australians which defines relationships between cultures and creates barriers to intercultural understanding.

Aboriginal stories in the anthology *Skins* span a range of issues which centre upon Indigenous life and are specific to Australian Aboriginal experience. Bruce Pascoe’s story “Tired Sailor” is an extract from his book *Shark* which was published in 1999. The story recreates the settlement of white people in an Aboriginal community known as Weeaproinah and shatters the myth that it was peaceful. The narrative uses a dispassionate tone and an elegant style of English to tell a tale of dispossession and violence on the coming of the “white ghosts” who settled there and re-named the town Tired Sailor:

> Of course it was these same old men who had shot and poisoned the black people, fucked their wives and drowned their children. But the old sailors reasoned that they had a king and an empire and the logical course for the peoples of Empire was to become imperial and shift aside those who were not. (Pascoe112)

The reference to sexual violence in the use of the word “fuck” disrupts the use of Standard English to emphasise the violence of the encounter. The story, articulates and rejects one of the justifications for the settlement of Australia, the imperial world
view which lay behind the colonial encounter. As Edward Said has written:

The actual geographical possession of land is what Empire in the final analysis is all about. At the moment when a coincidence occurs between real control and power, the idea of what a given place was (could be, might become), and an actual place -- at that moment the struggle for Empire is launched. (Culture 93)

This narrative uses irony to rewrite that moment, as the narrator says: “… you couldn’t have savages idling about on some of the best pasture land God had created” (Pascoe112). The mocking tone of this language challenges and destabilises the view of history imposed by the colonisers and therefore contributes to a rescription of that history.

This story is not only one of dispossession but also torture and violence: “Most of the pipe smoking men in the sun regretted that Frazer had tied a child as bait to the bottom of a craypot and sent him into the deep still kicking and waving his arms (112). The depiction of such violence defies and refutes any justification of it. The power of Empire is not the only justification for invasion and settlement, the spread of Christianity lies behind the event as well, and the story employs irony to say what went with it: “… it could not be imagined that God had not willed them, demanded them, to take the Bible, holiness, cholera and syphilis into all the Godless places of the world” (112). Pascoe’s story voices a version of history which
implicates the colonisers in acts of violence, murder, rape and dispossession. Henry Reynolds points out that with regard to history Aboriginal people: “... want us to take it seriously and treat it with gravity, to recognise that violence was not just an aberration or an accident but that it was central to the creation of modern Australia” (126). Reynolds states that this alternative view of Australia’s history is central to the process of reconciliation, that it is necessary to reconcile the divergent views of what happened when the colonisers met the indigenous people of Australia. (126) Pascoe’s tale becomes an obvious selection to be included in an anthology of international Indigenous writing, because it focuses on this initial confrontation and changes the perspective from which it can be viewed and therefore changes the national and global perception of Australian History.

The Ancestral Serpent

Stories which rewrite this confrontation legitimate ownership of land by the Indigenous people of Australia and reject the idea of terra nullius. Alexis Wright’s story “The Serpent’s Covenant” however goes further back in time to the creation of the Australia by the Ancestral Serpent. The spiritual nature of the Aboriginal relationship with the land is beautifully articulated in this story as the narrator tells of the sinuous movement of the Serpent: “a creature larger than storm clouds” as it creates the valleys, mountains and rivers of Australia: “Picture the creative serpent scoring deep, scouring down through the slippery underground of the mud flats, leaving in its wake the thunderous
sounds of tunnels collapsing to form deep sunken valleys” (115). This evocative description reconstructs a myth which indicates the depth of tradition and belief which defines the lives of these Indigenous people. The story connects Indigenous knowledge of the land and particular knowledge of a river to this ancient tale. The central character is at one with nature: “The prickle bush mob say that Norm could grab hold of the river in his mind… He knew fish and was on friendly terms with gropers … they’d move right up the river, following his boat for company.” (118) The emphasis on this relationship with nature is one of the most recurring motifs of Indigenous literature, since it depicts the spiritual nature of man’s association with the land and therefore the political nature of the dispossession which took place.

An essay by John Morton emphasises the need to pass on traditional knowledge: “Virtue in Aboriginal religion lies in the obligation to follow ancestral precedent, which involves keeping the stories and countries alive as part of a living tradition, steeped in ritual sensibilities and regulations” (13). As part of contemporary Indigenous literature “The Serpent’s Covenant” forms part of that tradition, but its message becomes intensely political when the narrative moves to contemporary times and considers two significant issues: firstly, the existence of evidence proving the slaying of local tribes in the region of the Gulf Country and secondly, the intrusive nature of mining in the area. The narrator points to the existence of two stories: “If you are someone who visits old cemeteries, wait a while if you visit the water people. The old 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” (Wright 122).

The Aboriginality of this narrative is reinforced by the tale of the serpent which opens the story foregrounding the continuity of the Aboriginal race and its existence far back in time and emphasising the powerful bond between Indigenous people and their land. Like the story “Tired Sailor” it emphasises the fact that there are different versions of Australian history, some which silence the role of Indigenous people and which involve violence and dispossession. The relationship of Aboriginal people towards non-Indigenous people of the Gulf Country is depicted as bitter: “If you had your patch destroyed you’d be screaming too” (Wright 122). This writing enables the articulation of such attitudes and encourages dialogue on issues which have contemporary significance to Indigenous identity.

In Kenny Laughton’s story “Night Games”, in the anthology Skins, the contemporary nature of the bond between land and Indigenous beliefs directs the narrative. Told in the voice of a child, the story depicts the passing on of traditional knowledge to two young boys, by an Aboriginal elder who takes them from Alice Springs out into the bush: “We were going back to school, not whitefella way, not times table and alphabet. No, we would hunt, learn how to track and dig out atyunpe, the juicy parentie, and eat his fat” (97). Different versions of educational practice are depicted as the boys are taught to hunt for food and prepare it for eating. The story shows the contemporary connection with traditional lands, the land of their grandfather’s Dreaming, there
is a strong link therefore between place and identity, past and present. Howard Morphy, in the introduction to his book *Aboriginal Art* describes the Dreaming as “a uniquely Aboriginal way of placing people in time and space.” He points out that in Indigenous belief the Dreaming is not identifiable with linear time. (68) Thus the Dreaming is ever-present and has always existed.

The focus of the narrative turns from the idyllic to a portrayal of fear and terror when the presence of a threatening spirit, the dreaded kadaitcha man, intrudes onto the scene. Morton points out that: “Aboriginal people have been romanticized and celebrated in terms of their deep spirituality, but they have also been denigrated for being primitive and childlike” (578). However the depiction of an alternative reality in contemporary writing would seem to deny primitive connotations. It is the reality of this experience in the present which denotes the ongoing nature of the spiritual in contemporary Indigenous and its continuing survival from beliefs which are centred deep in the past. The presence of this evil influence in the story and the fear which it engenders accentuates the reality and the relevance of the spiritual to contemporary Indigenous experience.

The Aboriginality of this story lies not only in the subject matter, but in the emphasis on language: “Ung Ung and Dad were laughing and talking—sometimes in English, sometimes Arrernte. My young ears strained to decipher both languages, but there was too much interference, too many distractions” (Laughton 98). Aboriginal words are at times included in the text: “Aretyenhenge, aretyenhenge—see you later,” (99) reflecting
the process of resurrecting and maintaining Indigenous languages which has been taking place since the 1960s in order to resist the dominance of English. Lin Onus, in an essay entitled: “Language and Lasers” discusses the resurrection of interest in language, and points out that Aboriginal people are taking courses to learn their own languages. He sees this as playing a central role in cultural survival (Onus 94). In Kenny Laughton’s story knowledge of language is part of his association with place, in this case the area around Alice Springs, and therefore with his own identity. The boy is exposed to language by the older members of his family and is aware that he must listen and concentrate to pick up what they are saying. The significance of Leighton’s story lies in the fact that it brings the beliefs and traditional practices of the past into the present, and emphasises their relevance to contemporary life.

The Indigenous short stories selected for the anthology Skins span a range of issues which are significant to Indigenous identity. It is not surprising that Sally Morgan’s very short story “The Letter” is included in it, since it focuses on a letter written by a mother to her daughter who was taken from her as a baby. The letter is an emotional plea for understanding and recognition on the part of the Aboriginal mother and emphasises the powerless nature of her position when her daughter was taken away: “I started looking for you when I was thirty. No one would tell me where you’d gone” (Morgan 109). The tragedy of this story lies, not only in the initial act of taking the baby but also in the rejection of the relationship by her fair-skinned daughter, who ultimately accepts the situation only when her mother has
died. By focusing on the letter and a small tin box of items, the story personalises the tragedy and indicates the extent of the damage wrought on Aboriginal culture and lives by the practice of removing children from their mothers. Responses to the trauma can be seen in poetry, art, song, film and literature and represent personal loss as well as depicting a national policy which resulted in what Ronald Wilson has called: “Gross violations of human rights” (Bird xv). The narrative is therefore both emotional and political.

The Indigenous stories in *Skins* span issues significant to Aboriginal culture, but also represent a range of writing styles indicating the sophisticated nature of contemporary Aboriginal literary culture. From the provocative writing of Melissa Lucashenko to stories drawing on more traditional themes, such as “The Serpent’s Covenant” these tales make a significant contribution to Australian literature and to the wider scene of international Indigenous writing. Joan Newman suggests that the publication of a range of Indigenous writing from around the world creates: “a new encounter between Indigenous cultures and structures of national and international literary canons” (89). By publishing Australian Aboriginal writing in a context with other Indigenous literature this encounter becomes empowering to Indigenous culture and raises the global profile of Aboriginal writing.

The engagement between the concept of Aboriginality and the genre of short fiction contributes to the emergence of an Aboriginal politics of identity and to an Aboriginal discourse. By
looking at the way Aboriginality can be identified in these narratives the points of cultural difference become apparent and the individual voices of the authors contribute to a discourse which contests and refutes Anglo-Celtic perceptions and distortions of Aboriginal culture and history. As Homi Bhabha has noted: “… The Anglo-Celtic canon of Australian literature and cinema is being re-written from the perspective of Aboriginal political and cultural imperatives” (Culture 5). Indigenous short fiction is part of this movement; confronting, resistant and always politically relevant, it claims a literary space to articulate many perspectives on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

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Chapter Two
Australian-Jewish Short Fiction

Introduction

As Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal people and their literature speak from within the confines of colonial oppression and suffer the disadvantage of having to articulate in the language of the dominant culture. A distance must be acknowledged between this literature and that of those who have migrated to Australia since the Second World War. Whereas in the past Aboriginal people and migrant cultures have sometimes been categorized together as the “excluded other” (Docker, Race 29), the Aboriginal experience is unique, not only because they are the original occupiers of the country, but because their connection to the land is such an integral part of their identity, and the dispossession that took place resonates still within their culture. The racism which was, and is still, directed towards them, makes the perspective from which they speak more marginalized than the Australian-Jewish literature which I will study in the following chapter. This Jewish literature emerges from a culture which has been an accepted presence within the Australian community for over two hundred years. However, as with Aboriginal literature, contemporary Jewish short fiction speaks from the perspective of a minority group and contributes to a larger voice in Australian literary production. In the following chapter I will show that contemporary Jewish short fiction in Australia is defined and informed by its diasporic origins and
the migrant experience, and undergoes a process of negotiation with contemporary Australian culture.

A study of Australian-Jewish short fiction provides a window into Jewish culture, however since the Australian Jewish community is by no means homogenous, and contains many threads of religion, race and identity, this literature cannot be seen to be representative of the culture as a whole but rather provides glimpses into ways of life which encompass a range of Jewish beliefs and attitudes. As Roger Bromley states: “It cannot be presumed (either) that simply being within a particular diasporic community confers an automatic and common shared identity” (7). While the literary view provided by these stories is a confined one, it nevertheless contributes to a voice which meets with and confronts existing notions of literature, language and identity. From the site of this marginal perspective this literature contributes to “political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multicultural cause” (Bhabha, Location 3). Its contribution, however small, helps to redefine cultural identities and challenge the concept of an homogenous culture.

At the interface of this exchange a site of negotiation emerges, providing what Homi Bhabha refers to as the “interstitial perspective” (Location 3), at which point the emergence of a new voice becomes possible. In his words:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference,
from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (Bhabha, *Location 2*)

By studying Jewish short fiction this site of negotiation comes under scrutiny. This writing confronts the past of the post-war migrant generation and reinterprets and reinvents that experience. The significance of the study of literature from minority cultures lies in the fact that:

… the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*… (*Location 5*)

This writing both reflects, and is relevant to, the contemporary social processes which Bhabha articulates. In the following chapter I will study Jewish short stories through a close examination of texts, considering a range of interrelated issues which provide a lens into Jewish experience. These themes reflect the diasporic consciousness and indicate the interaction of this Jewish literature with contemporary issues of Australian society; cultural, political and psychological. The texts illustrate not only differences between cultures, but also examples of hybridity. Sneja Gunew warns that the thematic approach can
cause such problems as “reductive homogenization and ‘representation’ by tokenism” (23) however this will be overcome by a close relationship with individual texts and a consideration of the role of the individual writer. This thematic approach also serves to denote common experience.

The first issue that I will discuss in this chapter is the notion of diaspora and attendant themes of exile and dislocation which are central to many of these texts. This involves a discussion of notions of ‘place’ and ‘home’ in these narratives, concepts which are central to this writing and all the literature in this thesis. Secondly, I will examine the significance of the Holocaust in this writing. By revisiting the Holocaust this literature at times rescripts history and affirms the significance of it in contemporary Jewish life in Australia. The Jewish experience of the Holocaust is inextricably entwined with notions of exile and dislocation and issues such as the use of reconstructed memory, the silence in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and the essential role of the past in Holocaust literature, will be considered in relation to these texts. Thirdly, I will illustrate how language contributes to the depiction of cultural difference in these narratives. A study of the role of language in these narratives will reveal that European influences become part of the reading experience.

A preoccupation with the past in much of this literature and a revisiting of the past is an essential aspect of these first two themes and is significant to the articulation of what Homi Bhabha calls a “sense of the new” (Location 7). However Ania Loomba
reminds us that: “… It is always tempting to present (exile) in universalized terms. But while of course there are themes in common across different kinds of diasporic experiences and exiles, there are also enormous differences between them” (180). These differences will become apparent as I examine the individual stories, since they convey a wide range of personal experiences, and reflect many different aspects of Jewish culture. Finally, I will discuss the role of the Jewish writer in the Australian community, a role which is often referred to in these narratives and one which is frequently fulfilled by writers who are the children of post-war migrants.

The study of these themes depicts interaction between cultures, articulating voices from within a minority community and helping to expose the relationship between this literature and the dominant culture and as Sneja Gunew states: “Minority discourse is not simply an oppositional or counter discourse: it also undoes the power of dominant discourses to represent themselves as universal”(42). The central consideration of this study is to show how this literature contributes to the formation of changing perspectives and through imaginative narrative, acts to reinscribe the experiences of the past and undermine the power to which Gunew refers.

**Short History**

Since the arrival of eight Jewish convicts with the First Fleet in 1788, Jewish people have contributed to the intellectual and cultural life of Australia (Turnbull 9). The present day community
has been forged from a wide range of countries; while nearly half of Australian Jews emanate from England, they have been joined by those from Eastern Europe, Asia, India, Iraq, Egypt and Ethiopia, Israel and South America. South African Jews also form part of the Australian Jewish population (Rutland 392). These diverse cultural backgrounds would appear to provide a rich source of material for writers, although contemporary Australian-Jewish short fiction does not yet reflect this diversity.

Jewish writers in the late 1940s and 1950s, already mentioned in the introduction, were instrumental in paving the way for short fiction writers wanting to articulate the theme of the Jewish immigrant, a theme which is still being explored in contemporary Jewish literature. It was not until 1978 that an anthology of Jewish fiction was published: Shalom was followed in 1988 by Pomegranates: A Century of Jewish-Australian Writing, thus providing a continuing showcase for Jewish literary culture and a perspective on Jewish-Australian identity. For the purpose of this study I will examine the most recent short fiction of Serge Liberman, Elliot Perlman, Arnold Zable and the anthology of Jewish stories entitled Enough Already: An Anthology of Australian-Jewish Writing, all published in the years 1999 and 2000. I shall also look at one story from a collection by a South African–Australian writer, Rose Zwi, which was published in 2002. Lily Brett’s short story collection will not be included, since they were published in 1990, and written during the 1970s and 1980s. However I will consider her views as an expatriate Australian-Jewish writer.
The Genre

The genre of short fiction only loosely encapsulates the stories being examined in this study. Personal voices intrude into fictional narratives and some of the stories considered read more like biographical essays. In *Enough Already*, five of the stories are excerpts from novels, while Arnold Zable’s work, *Café Scheherazade* is a book of stories which are lightly linked to form a whole. The choice of the short fiction genre by these authors and by the editor of the anthology, illustrate the flexibility of the genre, which allows the boundaries of short fiction to be expanded, accommodating various styles and providing an opportunity for readers to view aspects of Australian-Jewish culture through the lens of its short fiction.

Just as the genre is flexible, so too is the category ‘Jewish’ stories. Not all stories under consideration explore Jewish themes. In Elliot Perlman’s collection, *Voices From the Corner* the majority of stories are not concerned with Jewish issues. (This will be discussed later in the chapter.) Robert Alter, in an essay entitled “Jewish Dreams and Nightmares” warns that:

> There is something presumptuously proprietary about the whole idea of sorting out writers according to national, ethnic or religious origins, like so many potatoes…Obviously enough the primary focus for useful criticism of any original writer must be on the stubbornly individual imagination that has sort to articulate a personal sense of self and world through the literary medium… (53)
At the same time, Alter recognizes the relevance of the Jewishness of writers and the traditions reflected in their literature and admits that they are a “perplexing group to define” (53). The anthology *Enough Already* consciously brings together writing by Jewish authors, while Zable’s writing draws on Jewish culture and history. Many of the authors therefore celebrate their Jewishness and their writing is defined accordingly.

**Jewish and Indigenous Cultures—Linked Identities**

Before entering into a discussion of the themes which I have listed above I would like to establish some specific links between Aboriginal and Jewish cultures which occur in the Jewish literature that I am studying in this chapter. These indicate that an ongoing dialogue exists between these two cultures. The first example of this link is articulated in the opening essay in the collection *Enough Already*, written by Andrea Goldsmith, who, as a fifth generation Australian Jew, describes her personal search for identity. As well as delving into her Jewish past she travels to the Northern Territory and feels a connection with the Aboriginal experience on several fronts: “Expulsion, massacre, genocide, eternal scape-goats: Jews and Black Australians are equally experienced” (Goldsmith 13). Apart from drawing these parallels she identifies with the sacred nature of the land and the rock-art which she sees there. While admitting that she is a stranger in the Aboriginal community, the connection is powerful: “I don’t understand, and yet I connect with a presence that is palpable.” (13) The feelings invoked by the ancient nature of the land are
intangible. Yet the connection that she draws between the “Two incidences of genocide: different places, different times, different methods” (15), are specific. Goldsmith points out that the use of this term with regard to the Aboriginal situation is controversial, yet chooses to see an equation between the two, by referring to the situation where Aboriginal children were removed from their parents for the purposes of racial eugenics: “Eugenics are slower than gas ovens but just as effective” (Goldsmith 15).

The term “genocide” with relation to the Aboriginal people invokes differing responses. Historian Henry Reynolds reveals that:

The terrible truth was that in those frontier areas where white and black lived side-by-side, European men virtually had power of life and death over Aborigines. This was so in the more remote parts of Australia until the 1930s. Anyone could kill an Aboriginal man or rape an Aboriginal woman with little chance of ever been brought before a court. Social disapproval might follow, but it would rarely be universal. (Reynolds, *Why* 122)

Reynold’s observations contribute to a revisioning of the past, an acknowledgement which is central to the process of Reconciliation. However Robert Manne, in an article in the *Australian Jewish News* acknowledges the parallel between genocide in the Jewish Holocaust and the genocide of Aboriginal people but considers that it can be taken too far:
There is a serious argument about genocide or genocidal thinning in Australia before World War Two but I don’t think there is any comparison with the Holocaust. None of the people I have looked at considered physical harm, although one did consider sterilization of half-castes, but that was regarded as fairly extreme. (Manne 15)

However the report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission entitled *Bringing Them Home* affirms the use of the term in reference to the removal of children from their parents. It states that:

The Australian practice of Indigenous child removal involved both systematic racial discrimination and genocide as defined by international law. Yet it continued to be practiced as official policy long after being clearly prohibited by treaties to which Australia had voluntarily subscribed. (Australia 1)

In support of this, an address at the Monash University Indigenous Forum in 1998 by the late Ron Castan, a Jewish barrister who often worked for the Aboriginal cause, pointed out that while direct killing of Aboriginal people had become unacceptable by the 1930s, there was nevertheless an intention to wipe out the Aboriginal race. He cites the Commonwealth Conference on Aboriginal Welfare in 1937, the proceedings of which first came under public scrutiny in the *Stolen Generation*
Report of 1997, and links it to the Wannsee conference of 1941 where the genocide of the Jewish race was planned:

The aim was the same as at Wannsee—the destruction of an entire people. In Australia the mechanisms were different—deliberately letting the so-called full bloods die out by dispossession, neglect, and deprivation of all of the means of survival, and the deliberate removal of so-called half-caste children, and the denial to them of any connection to their family, while they were bred out into more and more “white blood.”
(Castan 5)

In his speech Castan goes on to equate the refusal of the Australian government to apologize for wrongs done to the Aboriginal people, with those who refuse to admit to the existence of the Jewish Holocaust, and sees this acknowledgement as essential to the process of reconciliation. Paula Hamilton, in her essay “The Knife Edge: Debates about Memory and History” points out that: “many now accept the destruction of Aboriginal society as the dominant narrative of Aboriginal history, though accepting responsibility and mourning is another matter” (140). This view was challenged recently by the publication of Keith Windschuttle’s book The Fabrication of Aboriginal History dealing with the question of genocide in Van Diemen’s Land. The account criticized the conclusions of contemporary historians such as Henry Reynolds, and was supported in part by historian Geoffrey Blainey in a review reported in the Australian. (Lane). Windschuttle’s view has since been challenged in a book edited by Robert Manne, entitled
Whitewash. Ruth Wajnryb looks at the term from a different perspective and refers to the “cultural genocide” brought about by the virtual abolition of Aboriginal language. (307) However Edward Alexander states that: “of course the Holocaust can and should be compared to other acts of genocidal savagery, but to compare is not to equate” (5).

The significance of this ongoing debate about genocide is that it can create a point of mutual identification between the two cultures concerned and a site for ongoing interaction and, significantly, that if genocide did take place, the history of Australia needs to be rewritten, focusing on the position of the Aboriginal. Thus central to this debate is the question of acknowledgement of Aboriginal history. In the review of the book mentioned above, Geoffrey Blainey notes that the policy of genocide is often regarded as: “a forerunner of what happened a century later in Hitler’s Europe” (Lane).

The mutual acknowledgement between the two cultures is part of an ongoing discourse, since Aboriginal support of the Jewish community can be seen as far back as 1938 when the Argus reported that: At a meeting of the Australian Aborigines League the resolution was carried protesting against ‘the cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government of Germany’, and asking that the persecution be brought to an end” (“Deputation”). The deputation went to the German consul, which refused admittance. A copy of the relevant article is now framed in the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre in
Melbourne. There is also a plaque acknowledging the Aboriginal people for their actions at this time.

The significance of the link which Andrea Goldsmith establishes with Aboriginal Australia in her essay *Enough Already*, lies in the fact that it contributes to and helps to define her identity as “Australian Jew or Jewish Australian” (Goldsmith 3). She describes it by saying: “The portable, rootless text has illuminated my Jewishness, and the land—enduring, obdurate and steeped in Aboriginality—has given me some Australianness.” (16) By identifying with the land Goldsmith acknowledges Aboriginal history which Anglo-Celtic Australia, has in the past tried to erase, as well as creating a bond with the land which in turn feeds her need for cultural identification. Goldsmith’s reaction to the rock art is to “feel with shocking clarity a sense of the sacred” (14). Although she sees herself as an outsider—an observer, her essay sets up a site of interaction where Aboriginal history becomes relevant to contemporary non-indigenous identity. In her case this link goes beyond mere cultural appreciation to feed a personal emotional and psychological need. The association with Aboriginal identity illustrates a need for recognition, and suggests the desire for a share in the experience of Aboriginality.

The second example of a connection between Aboriginal and Jewish cultures in the narratives I am studying, occurs in Arnold Zable’s *Café Scheherazade* where he dedicates the book: “To Melbourne’s first story tellers: the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people. And to all those who are still in search of a haven, a place
they can call home” (Zable, foreword). This provides yet another perspective on the connection between the two cultures. Zable’s stories in some ways mimic the tradition of oral story telling, which is so much part of Aboriginal culture. His characters speak in the first person, and they all have a tale to tell which they want to pass on to other generations. The concept of “home”, which Zable mentions, is vastly different in both situations, but is intrinsic to both individual and collective identity in both races. Zable’s stories explore the experience of Jewish refugees who fled to Australia after or during the Second World War, so their dispossession and dislocation reflects the Indigenous experience. Both communities experience the condition of exile, not only from the land, but from their respective languages and culture. Zable’s dedication recognizes Indigenous ownership of the land on which Melbourne is built, thereby acknowledging Indigenous history and by this acknowledgement brings together two instances of communities that share the experience of dispossession.

The Jewish Diaspora

A study of Jewish contemporary literature entails a consideration of the diasporic nature of Jewish culture. Ranen Omer-Sherman explains the word ‘diaspora’ in the following terms: “The term ‘diaspora’ first appears in the Septuagint, the Egyptian Jewish translation of the Jewish Bible into Greek in 250 B.C.E. The literal translation ‘to be scattered’ (like seeds) derives from the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 28: 64, v’hefitzcha (‘You will be scattered’)” (Omer-Sherman 299). In contemporary times diaspora is a term
which encompasses a range of experiences and displaced populations. This scattering or dispersion is the central experience which causes dislocation, where cultural and emotional distance creates feelings of displacement and nostalgic grief. Intrinsic to this notion of diaspora is a depiction of the past, and the illustration of the two concepts of ‘home’ and of ‘exile’ which intertwine with contemporary experience. The diasporic existence involves overlapping identities, conflicting loyalties, and as Homi Bhabha says: “new internationalism” Location 5). James Clifford points out that “we should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like diaspora by recourse to an ‘ideal type’…” (Clifford, Routes 249), nevertheless as he points out: “… it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement.” (254) This discourse is necessarily a changing one, not only according to the particular culture being discussed, but as generations move, settle, adapt and appropriate other cultural experiences, the diasporic existence must evolve. The experience, as I shall show, is not always a positive one. Dislocation and exclusion can be part of the experience, as well as psychological turmoil. These cultures absorb influences from several sources: their country of origin, the host country and in the case of the Jewish diaspora, the spiritual home of Israel is often influential.

In this chapter I will examine the significance of the diasporic consciousness and its expression in contemporary Jewish short fiction by a close textual analysis, examining themes which intersect and intertwine in these texts. It is by the depiction of
the diasporic experience that this literature articulates aspects of Jewish life within the Australian community, and it this articulation which contributes to a re-assessment of the past and a re-definition of issues relevant to contemporary society.

*Café Scheherazade* and the Depiction of Diaspora

Through the illustration of themes of ‘home’ and ‘exile’ and by its preoccupation with the past, the subject matter and the narrative construction of Arnold Zable’s book *Café Scheherazade* depict and illustrate the diasporic nature of the life of its characters. The patrons of the café originate from an array of European countries. Each character tells the tale of his past to a journalist who acts as a commentator and a link between the narratives. The re-examination and rewriting of the past is an essential ingredient of much of the literature which I am studying in this chapter, and as part of that theme the concept of ‘home’ is central to it.

In *Café Scheherazade* there is a sense of place and distance, intrinsic to the notion of diaspora. It is a cultural and geographic distance, connected to the emotional and psychological concept of ‘home’. The central focus of these stories is the café in Acland Street Melbourne, known for its Jewish culture, but the stories reach out to Europe—to Odessa, Warsaw and particularly the Lithuanian city of Vilna which became home to many refugees before the Second World War. Each chapter tells a different tale, which defines the varying identities of the narrators. There is a constant sense of distance in the stories; a sense of movement.
between the babble of Jewish voices in the Melbourne café and the European past. Zable spins a web between the two.

In the introductory chapter to Café Scheherazade the proprietor, Avram, considers the past as a place which he prefers to inhabit: “His mind is fixed on the distant past like a man possessed” (13). Zable links the Odessa of that time, where Avram’s parents, Ukrainian Jews, made their home, with the beach in St. Kilda in the 1990s, not far from the café, where many Russian Jews meet. His tale is one of flight, of persecution and of rebellion. Interspersed with this narrative is the story of the café, a contemporary story, which anchors the tales in the present and in the multicultural city of Melbourne. The city of Vilna also had its café, Wolfke’s: “The Scheherazade of Vilna” (24). So there is a doubling of images, past and present, European and Australian. The image of ‘home’ thereby becomes multi-faceted, reflecting the diasporic experience. In an essay called “Writing the Shoa” Zable comments on the characters which he has created by saying:

If there is one term that sums up the five major characters of Café Scherehazade, it is the Yiddish term, luftmensch, ‘person of air.’ The luftmensch is stateless, a displaced person. He has been on the run for many years, through many lands… even after the luftmensch found refuge in distant Australia, it would take him years to be grounded, to feel fully at home. (136)
This experience of displacement defines the lives of the characters in *Café Scheherazade* and directs the narrative structure of these stories, which move easily between past and present, Europe and Australia. The Jewish characters inhabit their past with an obsessive relish. It exists for them in the present. Yossel, the second character to tell his tale … “still stalks the streets of Warsaw. He still hovers in its shadows” (Zable 25). Yossell’s attitude depicts the intense sense of displacement which comes with his refugee status. In Edward Said’s *Reflections on Exile* he observes that: “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home: exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that, to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal” (186). Said’s views illustrate that the present is intertwined with the past, reacting with it and against it in constant movement, which can be seen in Zable’s narrative.

The characters in *Café Scheherazade* have been forced from their homelands and to that extent are exiles, yet this café indicates that the Jewish culture survives and flourishes, even though it is on the other side of the world. The café draws people together who have disparate Jewish identities but who come together to form a community. In this way it forms a small example of the diasporic community itself, a cultural enclave within the wider setting of a host community. In its own way the café is a home to this community. The patrons of the café have re-started their lives prompted by dislocation and trauma. Docker and Fischer point out that the diasporic existence enables an “opportunity
for surprising self-fashioning” (Docker, *Race* 15). This is at odds with the notions of exile and dislocation which can also be intrinsic to the diasporic existence, but the sense of a re-fashioned community is articulated by Neer Korn:

Regardless of their background, religious affiliation, age and profession there seems to be an inherent connection between Jews which is not always easy to articulate. Yet it is this connection, in fact beyond all the categories of religion and country of origin, which defines the Jewish community. (15)

The underlying narrative of *Café Scheherazade* the voices of the patrons vying for attention, the accents, the foreign words, the Jewish cadence, and most of all the pictures conjured up by the storytellers, reflect this plurality of vision and this connection, articulated in one small vibrant space which is a contemporary depiction of place in a diasporic community.

**Voices From The Corner. Diaspora and Exile in the Narratives of Serge Liberman**

The diasporic experience is also integral to several of the stories in Serge Liberman’s collection, *Voices From the Corner*. His story “The Promise” is an example of this, and as with *Café Scheherazade* the past is essential to the narrative. In this story Liberman explores the theme of exile through the character of Shimen, who re-visits his home in Warsaw as a “a long gone exile” (18). He sees his family at the Passover Table in sepia, depicting
a photographic image from the past, and indicating that they are
encapsulated in both time and memory. But they are an image only,
since they were killed during the war. Although he is an exile returning
to his family and homeland, Shimen remains a stranger to them, since
because of his cultural experience in Australia he is forever changed.
By telling his father of his life Shimen tries to articulate the points of
difference which Jews have encountered in moving here and to justify
his lapsed religious practices: “...the way one lives in Australia, and its
people, its spaces, its climate, and what it means to be a newcomer
there, a stranger, a Jew...” So he is doubly exiled, once in Australia and
also in his homeland in the presence of his family. The author depicts
Shimen’s conflicting loyalties since his home is not only in Warsaw, it is
also in Australia, and as the narrator mentions to his father: “We also
have our own home now... in Eretz, Israel” (22). The concept of ‘home’
is therefore used in both a personal and a political sense. The presence
of Israel as home lies in the background of several of the stories that I
am considering but is not necessarily a spiritual centre for all Jews, thus
the centre of the diaspora is not fixed, but a changing concept
according to individual affiliations.

This notion of being a stranger is intrinsic to the diasporic condition and
to the experience of the migrant and the refugee. It is articulated by
Georg Simmel, when he discusses the term and its implications:

    For a stranger to the country, the city, the race, and so on, what is
    stressed is nothing individual, but alien origin, a
quality which he has, or could have, in common with many other strangers. For this reason strangers are not really perceived as individuals, but as strangers of a certain type. Their remoteness is no less general than their nearness. (148)

Shimen embodies this idea of the ‘stranger’ since his identity has been separated from his country and from his family. Intrinsic to this identity then is a sense of change, both cultural and emotional, and in his case, religious as well, since with his exile in Australia came a different approach to his religion. The author also illustrates a psychological cleavage within Shimen as he walks the streets of Warsaw: “I, one time child of Warsaw, resistance-fighter and, now, visiting returnee home—Shimen Obiatz in his own right simply isn’t” (Liberman 29). Here the author illustrates the extreme displacement of his narrator as he talks of himself in the third person, and acknowledges the non-existence of his own identity in his place of birth. He has had to relinquish then, his original identity from his country of origin. This notion of changing identity is discussed by Stuart Hall when he says:

“Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (225).
Shimen’s experience shows the interplay between his psychological state and history. At the point of journeying back into history the change in identity which has occurred reveals itself, and the capacity for this transformation of identity becomes apparent.

While the author explores the theme of exile and dislocation within Shimen, as he visits his own past, there is another layer of narrative in the story, the biblical past, where the narrator’s father reads the Haggadah at the table, recounting the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. This provides three layers of time to the tale because Shimen lives in the present but has to confront both the immediate past and the biblical past, in which he questions the presence of God. The character of Shimen personifies some aspects of the experience of diaspora as he searches for home and identity by visiting the past, and views his own life through a multi-faceted lens. For him the past is an actual place, which, like a mirror, reflects the image of his parents and family, as well as of himself, and he seems to be exiled from both. In this narrative, as in Café Scheherazade time becomes interchangeable, past and present merge to the point where characters move seamlessly from one to the other, so geographic distance becomes irrelevant since memory negotiates the journey.

_The Reasons I Won’t Be Coming. Exile and Dislocation in the Narratives of Elliot Perlman_
In Elliot Perlman’s collection of stories the condition of exile and dislocation are depicted in the story “A Tale in Two Cities” which tells the story of Russian-Jewish refugees and the trauma of relocating from Russia to Melbourne. The story illustrates the ambivalent nature of diasporic experience since each member of the family copes with the experience in varying ways. For some members of the family it is emotionally crippling. Despite their determination to flee Russia, the underlying narrative of the story shows the inability of the father, an educated economist, to cope with life in Australia. His emotional attachment to his home in Russia is all-powerful. Unable to gain employment, unable to cope with the English language, the story shows his decline, defined by his singing of Russian songs at any inappropriate time:

My father sang Russian songs, initially when he was alone in the shower, but then in the lounge room, when we were trying to watch television, or in the middle of the night, if he couldn’t sleep… and he sang too, just any time, alone, in winter with the doors and windows closed so that he might be anywhere…

(Perlman 251-252)

Singing, in this narrative, brings the past into the present, and defies the distance between Russia and Australia. The pathos of the father’s situation is mirrored in the experience of his son. Pavel’s Australian peers marginalize him; his sister Rose comments on her brother’s situation by saying:

The exile who succeeds through hard work and talent gains everybody’s acceptance and even acclaim. But no one gets
any acclaim for just getting out of bed day after day, for having a
talent only for attracting derision, with his clothes, his looks, with
the spittle noise that he tries to pass off as English… he was either
invisible or else ridiculous. (Perlman 301)

The use of fiction allows the author to illustrate exile at a personal
level—where the individual is continually diminished in the face of an
unsympathetic culture, but it is obvious that Perlman is exploring the
issue in a universal sense as well, since there is overt commentary on
the situation of Jews in society: “He did not even know how far back in
time he would have to go to explain this almighty European river of
hatred for a group he found himself born into, a group whose existence
was for so long marginal, as marginal as his existence within it”
(Perlman 301). The author depicts Pavel’s isolation as a Jew as well as
a Russian, exiled from his old country and exiled within his new country.
The male characters in this story experience loss and displacement to
an extreme degree. Perlman illustrates the negative experience of the
refugee. In his case the diaspora does not offer a supportive
community. Edward Said’s description is applicable, that exile: “… is
the unhealable rift between the self and its true home” (Reflections
173). The female characters in this story survive and flourish in the
environment which the father and son find so hostile and alienating.
Both the mother and daughter in this narrative align themselves with
other Russian Jewish refugees and find support in the relationship.
This narrative shows a family straddling the space between their Russian and Australian identities, enunciating both the pain of exile and the effort of survival. While their home is originally Russia, their memories of that place are not memories of security and stability: “We had moved half way around the world to escape the misery of Russia and yet we were more miserable than ever” (Perlman 249). The Russia that we see in “A Tale in Two Cities” is one of discomfort and exclusion, so that tension between exile and home is not a representation of opposites, the past does not denote security, but it is ever present in the lives of people. For this Russian-Jewish-Australian community, the concepts of home and of exile differ according to individual values and emotions. If Australia is exile for some members of that community it is not for others who have willingly embraced Australian culture thus Australia becomes home to Rose, and to a certain extent to her mother, but it is clear that it will never be home to her father. The father and Pavel, the son, are examples of immigrants who experience the worst aspects of the diasporic existence, whose identities hover between their original home and their new country and who cannot belong to either. The tension in this story is not only between Russia and Australia, the presence of Israel is constantly in the background since two characters, Mitya and Adam, live there and both are seen to be constantly in danger. Israel lies only in the background of this narrative, but its significance as a spiritual home is present throughout the story.

In her article “A Place Called Home?” Doreen Massey links the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘place’ by saying: “The most common
formulations of the concepts of geographical place in current debate associate it with stasis and nostalgia, and with an enclosed security” (12). In the case of refugees in many of the stories I am examining, that notion of place as secure, is often subverted. Memories of home create feelings of nostalgia but also of insecurity and fear. Australia as the new home is also insecure, because of feelings of dislocation and isolation, caused by refugee status.

The Psyche as ‘Home’

In the fifth chapter of Café Scheherazade, this concept of ‘home’ is referred to directly when the character Zalman tells his tale. He discusses how he has no sense of home, although he has lived in Melbourne for fifty years: “I have no sense of belonging. I am acutely aware that everything is temporary in life, a mere bridge. One does not build a house on a bridge. Instead I find my true home inside” (101). For Zalman, the ultimate home is in his psyche, deprived of so much by the trauma of his early life, he finds freedom in his own sense of exile. Said comments on this in his work Reflections on Exile when he says: “While it perhaps seems peculiar to speak of the pleasures of exile, there are some positive things to be said for a few of its conditions. Seeing “the entire world as a foreign land” makes possible originality of vision” (186). Zalman’s condition whereby “through losing everything I became free” (Zable 101), is an example of this freedom brought into existence by extreme loss, so there is an eternal tension between this and the trauma of his past life. In the stories we are discussing here home is not only a new
country, or memories of an old country, it is a marginal space apart from mainstream Australian society. The immigrant who is exiled and marginalized within a foreign environment, does not have the freedom of perspective but must cope with psychological and emotional dislocation.

The notion of ‘home’ is explored in Serge Liberman’s story “Pebbles for a Father.” This narrative is a soul-searching account of the narrator’s relationship with his father, seen against the background of his traditional Jewish childhood. He talks of himself in the third person, trying to create an objective view. The portrait of the father is one of a lonely hard-working man who tries to keep a hold on his Polish cultural practices: “The father, to be sure, was connected, and connected early on, to the underfoot contours, variety and pliability of the Australian terrain. But connected did not mean secure or truly grounded, and certainly he was far from ever feeling at home” (234). The dislocation of the father is personalized in the story; Liberman presents an image of a man in exile, not only in his new country, but also within his family. He sees that his father thinks of himself as “eternal newcomer, alien, Jew” (237), mirroring the state that Said refers to as “the perilous territory of not-belonging” (Said, Reflections 177). It is Liberman’s character takes a retrospective stance which makes him realize the difficulties that the father faced. Whereas Liberman’s narrator speaks from the point of view of a Jewish-Australian secure in his identity, the father is marginalized by his: “un-Aussie as he was” (236).
The isolation caused by not being able to speak the language and not being considered Australian is illustrated by the poignant picture of the father trying to learn English from an English primer, night after night. Since he is unsuccessful, he chooses silence over communication. Liberman’s story is the story of two generations, but it is a contemporary story which reflects images and struggles of multicultural Australia, where the duality of cultural identity struggles to overcome the experience of dislocation.

**Memory as ‘Home’**

The significance of the past in these stories, is inextricably intertwined with memory, whether that memory recollects trauma or security. The concept of memory works in various ways in these stories. It serves firstly as a means of recording history, which I will discuss later, secondly it acts as a bridge between generations, and thirdly it can be seen as a home to the past. Inga Clendinnen remarks that:

> Human rememberings, whether individual or collective, are not inert archives. They are factories of dreams, and hopes, and illusions. They are also our surest individual homeland; essential evidence of our essential being, and our impulse is to defend them against all comers. (206)

This comment also suggests the instability of memory. If “dreams and hopes and illusions” invade memory, then it becomes unreliable, and fictionalizes those recollections. Clendinnen advocates: “disciplined, critical remembering” (206).
This would appear to be an almost impossible task, given the emotion and trauma involved in the Holocaust experience. While Jewish literature serves to perpetuate memory of the past, that memory for many is ironically what they wish to forget.

In Liberman’s story “Till All Has Been Said and all has Been Done” Freydi Glezer longs for those memories to disappear: “I would pay to any man a fortune, let him be doctor, bricklayer, electrician or locksmith, if only he could tear out memory and let me sleep one, just one dreamless night through” (Liberman117). This comment refers to the specificity of individual memory, where it is too powerful a presence in this character’s life. For Heydi memory is a form of entrapment, a negative, unavoidable state which engages with a horrifying past. In *Café Scheherazade* the ambivalence of memory is exhibited by, on the one hand, the desire to relate the past and on the other hand the rejection of the experiences, so there is constantly a tension between forgetting and remembering. The desire of the Jewish community to keep alive the memories of the Holocaust ensures that personal rememberings contribute to a wider, collective bank of memories. The narrator in *Café Scheherazade* comments on the span of memory which is covered by the characters in the café: “They cast their eyes back to events long past. Their collective gaze extends from the first year of the twentieth century to the last” (Zable 57). As part of contemporary culture, the short fiction in this study becomes part of that process of remembering, by engaging with history, on a fictional level and by illustrating the significance of memory in contemporary life, as Shimen in “The Promise” says: “For as long as memory remains,
no one fully dies, memory being as much the Jews surest salvation as his special genius” (Liberman 29). Paula Hamilton argues for an “integral relationship, an essential interdependence between memory and history…” (12). Fiction engages with both these concepts, and by its nature destabilizes both, because it refuses to be confined by either. The fiction writer may be constrained by the time and events of history, but is free to interpret those events and to provide a version of them and present it to the public. Sara Horowitz writes that: “Holocaust fiction puts into words what customarily remains outside the flow of historical narrative: the sufferings resistances, aspirations of the individuals ravaged by genocide” (39). Memory thus has a function as a conduit to the past, which is used as a strategy in the formation of imaginative interpretations of it.

The diasporic nature of the Jewish race is constantly represented in Jewish fiction and contributes an exotic flavour to the stories that I am studying. The notions of home and of exile intrude into this literature because it is such an integral part of their experience. Their Jewish identity masks many cultural differences, as Ranen Omar-Sherman writes: “Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with each other” (1). By experiencing several cultures the Australian Jewish community gains a perspective from which the past life can be observed. Geographic distance and cultural difference provides this perspective and contributes to their divided cultural loyalties. The notions of ‘exile’ and ‘home’ are explored in these stories because they define the identity of
many people within the Jewish community in Australia. As Edward Said wrote, in a discussion of an exile’s detachment:

There is considerable merit in the practice of noting the discrepancies between various concepts and ideas and what they actually produce. We take home and language for granted; they become nature, and their underlying assumptions recede into dogma and orthodoxy. (*Reflections* 184)

By reading these stories the reader is constantly aware of characters having an objective view of their lives, making references to wider issues and questioning and discussing their situation in life. In *Café Scheherazade* these attitudes are articulated by the outspoken patrons of the café. One example of this is in the second chapter when the character Yossell tells his tale. He interrupts the narrative of the past by addressing the journalist:

Violence could erupt at any time, even as we played in the basement café behind the broad shoulders of our Mendel. My foolish child, what do you know about danger? About fear? Here we live in a paradise!

‘Stanislaw the pimp would descend into the café…’ (26)

This character takes on the function of commentator, voicing opinions on issues which appear to be outside the text, so the narrative appears to be multilayered. He steps outside the narrative for a moment, interrupts the flow of the fictional tale...
and comes back to the present tense to engage with the reader. In Liberman’s story “The Promise” it is the character Shiman who refers to a wider perspective and In “A Tale in Two Cities” the reflective voice is Rose, the daughter who questions her own identity: “I didn’t really know what being Jewish meant…” (265). It is these voices within the narratives and emerging from the narrative that provide insight into contemporary Jewish issues.

A discussion of these stories can appear to show the diasporic experience in a negative light, but Docker and Fischer explain that “co-existence” is also part of this experience, where there has to be an interaction between cultures in day to day life (15). By articulating the Jewish experience, both in Australia and in Europe, the subject matter of these stories, which reflect Jewish culture and the migrant experience, suggests that they exist within certain cultural and literary boundaries, but this notion of co-existence is significant because it illustrates a merging of cultural identity, a constant breaking of these boundaries, since the stories articulate both the Jewish culture and the Australian experience. As Yossel Bartnowski, in the second story in Café Scheherazade says: “In Australia we have no fear. Here we live in a gan eiden, a golden land. We make a living. We educate our children… Here we make a good life” (Zable 26–27). This dual experience of the culture of Australia and Europe, past and present, Jewish and Australian is intrinsic to the diasporic existence and denotes its ambivalent nature. Docker’s article points out that “diasporas can actively support multiculturalism in a host society while just as actively supporting nationalism and ethnic absolutism in a claimed society of origin.” (15) Yet one of
Arnold Zable’s characters, Zalman, in Café Scheherazade represents an alternative to this position when he says: “I no longer care for anthems, and I no longer care even for nations. They too are transient” (101). Zalman’s identity is nevertheless defined by his Jewishness, and by the geographic and emotional ties with his early life in Europe.

While many of these stories exemplify the diasporic condition, they also illustrate that this condition is not static. Notions of ‘home’ for example differ between generations, so for the journalist in Cafe Scheherazade home is in Australia, whereas the patrons of the café may consider home to be their country of birth. The writers of the stories in Enough Already have their home in Australia but their parents still identify with their original homes in Europe. The second generation experiences the diasporic condition in quite a different way from the first generation of European immigrant Jews. Kathy Grinblat articulates just some of these differences:

… our generation is uniquely placed—we represent the endeavour to re-establish a normal life. Our children have grandparents; we did not. We are the bridge between black despair and a renewal of life. We are the means by which the memories and legacies of individuals, families and entire villages and cities—the memories and legacies of our parents—have their only chance of being transmitted.” (5)

These stories form part of that bridge by articulating the past for the previous generation; In Serge Liberman’s story “Till All Has
When Freydi Glezer comments on her daughter’s attitude: “Their generation is not ours… she told me long ago that she lives in Australia and lives in the present. Warsaw for her, is not a place on earth but altogether on another planet, and of my past, of our past, she wants nothing. Not Hitler, not the camps…” (Liberman120)

These narratives then, attempt to span the difference in experience between the generations as they indicate the changing sense of identity between the post war immigrants and their children. They show the sense of exile and cultural dislocation which the diasporic experience can bring, both geographic and psychological, but they also depict a sense of community that can arise from these conditions. By revisiting the sites of these experiences, this writing contributes to a reinscription of history from a contemporary perspective and contributes to its shifting nature.

**Representations of the Holocaust**

The theme of the Holocaust invades and hovers over this literature. In the diasporic consciousness the illustration of the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘exile’ are intrinsically intertwined with its representation and the past becomes integral to the present condition. Two layers of time interweave constantly and exist together in the psyche of the Jewish characters in this short fiction. In contemporary times the word Holocaust hardly needs the adjective ‘Jewish’ since it seems to have been appropriated
from a more general usage to specifically denoting the Jewish experience, despite the fact that holocausts have occurred against other racial and religious groups throughout history. In her book *Reading the Holocaust* Inga Clendinnen, discusses the exclusive use of the term:

> My own conviction is that our sense of Holocaust uniqueness (and we do have that sense) resides in the fact that these ferocious, largely secret killings were perpetrated within twentieth century Western society… they were conceived, executed and endured by people very like ourselves (22).

Clendinnen acknowledges however, that the memory of the half million of gypsies who were killed, had been erased from debate about the Holocaust, until the book written by Isabel Fonseca in 1995 (*Bury me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey.*) This book points out that the gypsies contributed to this erasure but the fact that their profile is low in Holocaust debate nevertheless points to an exclusive use of the term.

Norman G. Finkelstein, in his controversial book *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, published in the year 2000, argues that the Holocaust has been used as a political and ideological tool within the American Jewish community, particularly since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. These debates indicate the significance of the Holocaust in contemporary life. Lily Brett, in her story in *Enough Already* comments on the use of the term by saying: “Lola hated the
word Holocaust. It was too neatly wrapped in a parcel. There were no loose ends and no frayed edges. It was nice, compact abstraction” (Brett 205). Yet the influence of the Holocaust in contemporary society refutes this attitude, its presence still pervades social and academic debate. In the Introduction to their book, Andrew Leak and George Paizis remark that: “…the events of the Holocaust seem perversely to become ever more present, as though refusing to become history” (1). This comment suggests that history is in the past, yet these narratives suggest that history can be parallel to the present.

**Silence and Memory**

Two issues are central to a discussion of the Holocaust and are illustrated in the Jewish short fiction which I am studying here. The first issue is the so-called ‘silence’ of the first generation of survivors. The second issue is the use of memory in recording the experience of the Holocaust. Since Australia is home to a large number of Holocaust survivors the Jewish writing which has emerged since the Second World War, resonates with its influence. For example, the anthology *Enough Already* consists of stories by writers who have all been born since World War Two but the Holocaust theme is still dominant. Children of Holocaust survivors have acknowledged the existence of this silence and for this reason in the year 2000 a workshop was set up involving both survivors and their children to explore this issue (Halasz 61).
In these contemporary stories the experiences of the Holocaust are recorded by the second generation of Holocaust survivors. This in itself reveals some of the problems that have arisen between these generations. George Halasz, in an essay entitled “Beyond The Wall of Silence” remarked that: “I had thought how often, we, their children, couldn’t hope to compete with our survivor parent’s toughness. Yes, we were no match for our survivor parents. We were bound to lose… They were the eternal victors” (64). Psychological attitudes such as this present a barrier between the generations, yet the commitment by that generation to debate and to narrate the experiences of their parents, is becoming apparent by the fiction and non-fiction being currently published. I shall consider four stories from the anthology *Enough Already* to illustrate how the concept of silence is illustrated in this literature when depicting the Holocaust experience.

Rosa Safransky’s story in *Enough Already*, entitled “History In the Kitchen” explores the Holocaust experience and tells of a young girl’s relationship with her father who constantly carries on a dialogue with his past, shouting aggressively about his experiences during the war while he irons the garments which he has tailored. The father’s conversations transport him to and fro between Auschwitz and Australia, at times re-enacting the past, at other times commenting on the present. When he shouts the question: “What do Australians know about the Holocaust?” (139) he articulates his own sense of isolation. Safransky’s story presents the father as the dominant household figure. The two women in the narrative live in fear of his outbursts, so the
stereotype of the strong Jewish mother is subverted in the face of such a dominant male figure. While the father in the story rages about the past, Uncle Leon refuses to talk of it at all: “My Uncle Leon NEVER talks about the past.” (146) The narrator wonders how he came to be in Australia since there is a void of information about his past, and when his brother screams about his experiences Uncle Leon whispers: “Don’t listen” (147). In the character of Uncle Leon, Safransky illustrates the silence that ironically defines the horror of the Holocaust, just as much as the outbursts from the narrator’s father. The narrator’s father and Uncle Leon appear to be an overt representation of two reactions to the trauma of the Holocaust. Sara Horowitz, pursues this point by saying: “The trope of muteness, predominant in Holocaust narratives of all sorts, functions in fiction deliberately and explicitly to raise and explore connections and disjunctures among fictional constructs, textual missions, and historical events.” (1-2) Safransky uses the father in her story to articulate what her Uncle cannot, so they are reverse images of each other.

Elisabeth Wynhausen’s story in Enough Already entitled “But is he Jewish?” is an extract from a memoir which tells of her experience of this silence. She writes of the inaccessibility of her parents’ past, since the nature of her grandparent’s death was not available to her. Wynhausen links this to the wider question of her Jewish heritage:

… we never asked questions about it, as if frightened of straying into a territory that had been sealed off for good.
Nevertheless, those unexplained deaths assumed an odd, almost sacred character, as if in talking about them we would dissipate the sense of significance that was the mainspring of our identity as Jews. (54)

This observation raises the issue of the power of silence. If there is such power in the unspoken, then the very idea of language as communication is challenged. Yet for this silence to exert power some knowledge of what that muteness is about is pre-supposed. It is bounded by knowledge, yet exists in a vacuum. In the preface to her book Ruth Wajnryb says: “...because silence transmits its own messages, it is impossible not to communicate” (xii). In Elisabeth Wynhausen's story the reticence of the parents to speak of their trauma is passed on to the children “... it was as if we didn’t want to know too much” (57). So the power of that silence extends beyond those that refuse to speak.

In a psychological study of the second generation of Holocaust survivors, Aaron Hass notes that: “Nearly half the people I interviewed knew nothing or very little about their parents’ Holocaust experiences” (78). The Hass study indicated a reluctance to pass on the experiences of the Holocaust because of the burden it imposed on the second generation and in many cases the experiences were too painful to articulate. The issue of secretiveness also arose out of this study since in some cases the families suppressed the knowledge of a previous family from the second generation. (73)
In *Enough Already* the notion of ‘silence’ is also explored in Judy Horacek’s tale “Flying in Silence.” The story relates how a woman tried to communicate with her grandmother in order to relate the story of her life during the war. Impeded by language difficulties and deafness the narrator describes the need to “frame questions about silences” (157). She is unsuccessful, but succeeds in piecing together parts of the grandmother’s early life from a patchwork of images gleaned from her mother, who in turn has heard it from her husband. By this process she confronts the power of silence. There are two levels of narrative—the story of the grandmother on one level and the story of difficulties of communication within the family. There is an overt use of the theme of silence in this narrative; the name of the story is the first indication of the subject, and throughout the story there are repeated references to silence, even the absence of silence when she is with her father in a theatre: “this static interference when we are supposed to hear silence” (157). Horacek presents silence as an active concept. The grandmother is a mute figure, so someone else must tell her story. Sara Horowitz explores this theme when she says: “The idea of muteness in fiction is exemplified concretely by the frequency of mute characters, structurally by the predominance of gaps and textual ellipses, and thematically by an overriding concern with language, silence, speech, muteness, writing and blankness” (38). Horacek makes the reader aware of the gaps in the story, jumping from the present to the past, filling in the gaps in her knowledge with family hearsay and anecdotes. The opening sentence to the story indicates its narrative construction: “The past is made up of pictures like stills from movies or scenes from
period dramas” (151). To accentuate this the narrative structure moves from one small anecdote to the next, interwoven with commentary from the present. Early in the story the reader is told that there is little communication between the narrator and her grandmother, partly because of language difficulties and partly because the grandmother is deaf. The narrator admits that: “Where things are not talked about much family stories are a game of Chinese whispers. I do not know if the stories of what I have in my head are really what happened or a distillation of word vapours that fall one day like this, another like that” (Horacek 153). This comment not only indicates the silences within the family, but also the unreliability of interpreting family history. Throughout the story the narrator repeats the phrase “I do not know” (156) nevertheless the story is told, and the final image of a picture of a patchwork hang-glider on the wall of the grandmother’s bedroom, adds to the image of a narrative stitched together from disparate pieces.

The concept of silence is represented in other ways in the short stories in Enough Already. The families of Holocaust victims are shadowed by the silence of the dead. In the story by Tobsha Learner, “My Grandfather’s Graves” the narrator’s grandfather, Josef, has his tombstone constructed while he is still alive, and is pictured proudly standing beside it. Inscribed on the stone is his own name and the names of all those in his family who were killed during the Holocaust: “These are the names of those who had no grave: his father’s name, an eight year old brother, nearly all of his cousins, aunts, uncles, over a hundred people who had perished with the six million.” (Learner 195). For him this is a
way of claiming his family and his own identity within that family. He is part of them, as they are of him and the past becomes part of the present. Josef confronts the silence of the dead, to make it become integral to his life. Lily Brett confirms this attitude when she refers to her dead Jewish relatives in her essay entitled “Death” when she says: “I grew up with death. The dead were all around me. They were palpable. They felt more alive to me than the living” (In Full View 230). There is therefore an intrinsic refusal to allow death, the ultimate silence, to prevail. It intersects constantly with the living and the present.

The power of silence is indicated by its ability to be a comment on history. It articulates itself in these stories through the subject matter where the theme of muteness is explored. Its psychological connotations can be seen at the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre in Melbourne, where sculptures now on display are a visual reminder of the conditions of the Holocaust. The sculptor was unable to articulate her experiences for thirty-two years after the war but finally expressed herself in the art which is on display there. The notion of silence in these stories reflect personal situations and the trauma of the war years, but also indicates a wider phenomenon which affects not only the Jewish community but the way the Holocaust has been viewed by the rest of the world. Ruth Wajnryb remarks that whereas the Holocaust is now studied and discussed, for the first thirty years after the war, it was not part of public consciousness; there was a universal silence:
In the post-war reshuffle of alliances, and the scramble for reconstruction, it suited many to let matters like war crimes and the pursuit of justice slip by the wayside. The silence of the Papacy, the alleged neutrality of the Swiss, and the rhetoric of whitewash… such phenomena were conveniently overtaken in the complicated politics of forgetting. This was a world uncomfortable in the presence of survivors. (90)

This comment affirms the political connotations of the concept of silence, the convenience of forgetting. Contemporary Jewish literature addresses this silence by depicting it in narrative and thereby counteracting the silence of the previous generation. In this way the narratives I am studying create a voice which reaches between generations as well as reaching out to a community of readers.

The Holocaust and the Function of Memory

In Café Scheherazade the concept of silence is not an overt theme as it is in some of the above stories. However Zable’s writing acts as a voice of the Holocaust, since he weaves tales around actual events of the war. He is articulating, in fiction, the stories that many survivors refuse to tell. His characters continually reiterate the necessity to tell stories of the Holocaust. The stories are told as individual tales, through the personas of Avram, Masha, Zalman, Yossel and Laizer, survivors who talk to a journalist in the café who leads us back to Europe and to the horror of those years. Zable’s tales are colourful and
descriptive and highly detailed, the journey is very visual, and the beauty of nature is the background to horror. There is an overt use of images of opposites. The café is used as the hub of the story, but the narrative engages the past and makes it part of the present. The narrator refers several times to “the parallel universes” (83) that his characters inhabit. The trauma of the past lives in them still existing at one with the present.

One of Zable’s characters, Zalman, walks daily to keep his hold on reality: “It is a daily ritual this walk, a means of regaining the feet, of restoring the present” (91). The patrons of the café exist in the past with their stories, while the journalist represents the new generation. Another character, Yossell, speaks a recurring refrain: “My foolish child what do you know of the past?” (141) and in doing so echoes the father in Rosa Safransky’s story “History in the Kitchen,” when he says: “What does Australia know about the Holocaust?” (Safransky139). The gap between generations is apparent, just as the second generation writes for the first, so too does Zable’s journalist act as a voice for the survivor generation.

In these short stories memory becomes a significant issue because of the engagement of these narratives with the past. I have already discussed memory as a home to the past but it is also used as a bridge, a site of connection with that past, a means of travel. In Café Scheherazade Zable’s characters journey into the past through memory. As he tells his story, one of his characters, Laizer, says that: “I cannot see continuity in my journey… only broken lines” (71). The narrative mimics the
trail of memory, choosing at random the recollections as they come to his mind. The journalist in the story assembles the pieces to make the narrative flow. The narrator describes Laizer as his mind engages with memory:

“... the aggressive banter gives way to a haunting intensity. It can be seen in the eyes. They turn inwards, away from me. Laizer loses all sense of his surroundings; and, without warning, he has glided into another world” (58). Here the author employs a description of physical movement to denote a mental state, which also serves to move the narrative from the present into the past. The importance of memory in this literature lies in the fact that the contemporary writers which I am studying are the second generation of Immigrants or Holocaust survivors. Since this literary engagement with the past is mediated through memory, it becomes a central factor in influencing a contemporary perspective of the past.

**The Holocaust and Voices in the Corner**

In some of the stories in his collection *Voices From the Corner* Serge Liberman questions and explores significant issues of Jewish history which are relevant to contemporary culture and addresses the question of the Holocaust from quite a different perspective. The story “Messiah in Acland St.” for example, takes a wide view of the diasporic nature of Jewish culture and debates the role of God in contemporary society. Like *Café Scheherazade* the narrative is centred in a café in St. Kilda. This story questions the role of God in the Holocaust by presenting a theological debate between the Messiah and the narrator. The intervention
by the proprietor of the café who, while pointing to the tattoo on his arm asks: “Mr. Messiah, Mr. Messiah. Where were you when you were really needed?” (Liberman73) is central to the story because the question is unanswerable and acts as a rejection of God. It is enough to drive the Messiah out of the café. In this narrative Liberman revisits Jewish history, viewing it through a visual clock which shows a panorama of the past: “a travelogue of horror re-capping a history of tide and woe.” (65) This view draws history into the present as the Messiah travels: “from the lip of a collective grave outside Kiev, on through Paris, Genoa and Columbo, then onto Melbourne… along the South Melbourne shore to St. Kilda.” (66) The narrator rejects the notion that he should draw people to God through his writing. The significance of language and the role of the writer is expressed several times in the story: “The gift of language! The gift of words to reach into people’s hearts, and their minds and their souls.” (58)

The narrator not only looks at the wider perspective of Jewish history in this story, but also articulates the social setting in which many Australians Jews find themselves: “We, as Jews are comfortable here. The asphalt beneath our feet, the brick veneers in which we live, the ceilings over our heads, these give us the security we want…The point is, you see, we have become people very much of the here and now” (Liberman 62). In this quotation the author illustrates the changing nature of the diasporic Jewish culture. The settled nature of the community he is describing is in stark contrast to the history which is depicted in this story, a history of violence and change and catastrophe.
Yet the ending would suggest that this situation is transient: “I have lost everything but have myself survived” (Liberman 77).

Liberman’s narrative employs the past to comment on the present. He draws together wider issues of Jewish historical experience and confines them to a contemporary debate in a cafe in St. Kilda. Although Liberman’s fiction in this case covers a wide sweep of history the narrative tapers from a world-wide perspective, as seen on the face of the watch, down to the fate of one man, the narrator, who is the survivor of yet another Holocaust. The author uses debate to illustrate a more universal issue, the absence of God in the face of human catastrophe. The reader is always conscious that his stories pose questions which are central to Holocaust debate. For example in Liberman’s story “Beinish Gotteskind” the central character is a poet, Beinish, who survived the Holocaust and who reads his work in the streets of St. Kilda: His poetry poses the question: “So why are we born, and why do we suffer? Why the pain and why the sorrow” (163). Beinish takes his answers to the grave, “the ultimate “Why?” of things” (165). But there is a suggestion in his surviving scrappy notes of hope in the future. Beinish’s refrain echoes the cry of Avram in Café Scheherazade: “he wanted to scream out the eternal why” (Zable 211).

In “The Scar” Liberman writes of the destruction of innocence by a young boy’s experience of anti-Semitism during the war: “Must you too learn so young, so young, what it is to be despised?” asks his mother’s friend Shula (112). In another tale “The Luck of the Draw”, Liberman narrates a simple tale of a couple who have
won a lottery, but the reader is taken on a chilling journey with them to a gas chamber. The story questions the element of misfortune and mysterious logic by which there is a random selection of those who die.

Liberman’s characters are often symbolic; names such as “Gotteskind” “Godling” “Gotteswill” in three different stories indicate that his narrative is often depicting a dialogue with God or about God. Liberman raises questions about man and God’s behaviour in the past, and to this extent re-visits and re-appraises that past. The dialogue which his narrators engage in is often disbelieving and confrontational. Veronica Brady, at a symposium on theology and literature remarks that for Liberman the Holocaust is the source of both “faith and despair.” (Brady 3). His despair is easily observed in these stories, but his faith is less easy to identify. His writing constantly questions the concept of redemption and the role or existence of a Messiah: “he has never been other than an ordinary human” (71). There is a distinction between the traditional Jewish observances of the older generation and those of the younger Australians. In “The Promise” the father says that his son has settled in a “wilderness void of God” (Liberman 23), while in “Pebbles for a Father” the writer and narrator questions the connection between man’s death and the sanctity of God, which traditional Jewish prayers espouse.

An Australian Image of the Holocaust
The Australian-South African writer Rose Zwi illustrates quite a different approach to the Holocaust in a story in her collection *Speak the Truth Laughing*. In “Laugh Kookaburra” she uses the analogy of the dingo as the “scapegoat of the ages” (71), writing a narrative which exists on two levels: one set in a town on the outskirts of the Australian bush, the other in an underground trench in a hut in the European countryside, where a girl and her mother hide during the war. The image of the dingo is paralleled by that of the European dogs who belonged to hunters or the militia, but in the Australian context the dingo is the victim. The main character in Zwi’s story, a nameless woman, associates her isolation and dislocation as a migrant, with the half-tame animal, who is condemned to die. Again, in this story contemporary Australia meets the European past and provides a commentary on both. This tale is significant because of the specifically Australian images which are used to create a parallel with European history, the associations between these images are unexpected, but nevertheless successful in connecting Geographic, cultural and political distance. The title of the story invokes the refrain of “Kookaburra sits on the old Gum Tree” which is familiar to Australians. The narrator sees no need to articulate the last line of this refrain as she presupposes that her readers know the ending.

In *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable*, George Paizis and Andrew Leak point out that: “It is impossible not to adopt a point of view when recounting an event… And to adopt a point of view… is to give shape to, and therefore interpret the event” (2). All these narratives are interpretations.
of the past, informed by personal perspective. Bromley points out that writers who “situate themselves in the past” articulate: “not an act of nostalgia, but of anamnesis, a process of fabulation in which a particular time of place is not so much revered, or even discovered, but brought into being, invented, made and unmade.” (123) This notion is central to the study of this literature since it indicates the significant role that this engagement with the past plays, in contributing to a voice speaking from the perspective of this minority culture.

All the stories that I have considered so far illustrate this engagement with the past. The reinvention and reinscription of that past is integral to the contemporary nature of the stories, and reflects a desire on the part of these writers to keep the issue of the Holocaust and the experiences of the postwar Jewish generation at the forefront of current debate. The representation of the past that occurs in this literature contributes to a new perspective on the past, and serves to shape the memory of it. An essay by Kate Darien-Smith further articulates this notion:

Our memories are constantly negotiated in an interactive cycle of recovery and burial, in a process of exchange between the individual and society. The culmination of narratives of wartime, articulated in public forms of commemoration… leave a residue of mental and visual images that fertilize the collective rememberings of the past, and feed both into and off the memories of lived experience (156).
These texts are shaped and informed by history, personal experience and memory and for this reason are open to flux and change. This engagement is a two-way process, so in turn literature contributes to a change in our perception of the past. In *Café Scheherazade* the past is re-staged through fictional characters. In the stories in *Enough Already* the interpretation of memory illustrates the past from another perspective. All the writers considered so far write from the viewpoint of the present—a changing perspective, informed by sixty years of debate between victims, onlookers and even perpetrators.

**The Role of Fiction in Australian-Jewish Writing**

Saul Bellow comments on the role of fiction in Jewish writing when he says:

> In this century, so agonizing to the Jews, some people think it wrong to object to (such) lack of realism, to insist on maintaining the distinction between public relations and art. It may appear that the survivors of Hitler’s terror in Europe and Israel will benefit more from good publicity than from realistic representation, or that posters are needed more urgently than masterpieces. (17)

In the literature I am studying here the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are often indistinct. Arnold Zable uses accurate dates and historical events in these narratives, and two characters, Avram and Masha were the owners of the café, which
still exists in Acland St. But the author sees his book as “a homage to the power of story telling” (Zable, Café 222) The stories that I have so far discussed in Enough Already appear to be family memoir but as I have shown rely on interpretations of memory to overcome the silence of Holocaust survivors. Thus there is an interchange in this literature between history and fiction.

Inga Clendinnen, who argues for the value of historical narrative over fiction in Holocaust narrative, states that:

“Normally we expect the magic of art to intensify, transfigure and elevate actuality. Touch the Holocaust and the flow is reversed. That matter is so potent in itself that when art seeks to command it, it is art which is rendered vacuous and drained of authority.”

(185)

Yet the use of fiction gives these writers freedom to narrate emotions and events over a wide geographic and cultural space. It can explore issues and instigate debate through dialogue, and as is the case with this literature, move effortlessly between past and present. Thomas Kenneally protested the fact that his book Schindler’s List was categorized as fiction, and therefore on the New York Times fiction list while the Times described it as a “non-fiction novel” (qtd. in Horowitz 227). Mark Baker’s The Fiftieth Gate is similarly difficult to categorize, since it is carefully researched and meticulously documented and yet takes the form of fiction. Fiction allows Zable to interpret the horror of the Jewish experience from different perspectives. It gives him the
freedom to narrate the tales of Masha, Yossel, Zalman, Laizar and Avram, tracing their nomadic war-time existence, roaming between countries such as Poland, Russia, Shanghai, Paris, on their journey to escape the Holocaust. The presence of Martin Davis, the journalist in the café, draws the narrative from the past in Europe to the present in Australia. The characters then comment on their own stories, their own past. Avram’s recollection of parents having to choose between their children is one such instance. “Many parents were driven to insanity that night, Avram whispers.” (162). Up to this point the story has been narrated by the journalist, the character of Avram then interjects and comments on his own story. His interjection draws the narrative from past to present, providing an interchange of ideas between the two.

**Language**

Two issues are central to the discussion of language in these narratives. Firstly, there is a debate about the ability of language to reflect the extremes of horror which occurred in the Holocaust. Secondly, some of these narratives that I am studying display certain characteristics which reflect the sound of a Jewish cadence in this literature. I will discuss both these questions in relation to these short stories and examine how language has been adjusted to reflect these issues. Roland Barthes explores the notion of language representing the real, when he says:

> Literature’s second force is its force as representation. From ancient times to the efforts of our avant-garde, literature has been concerned to represent something. What? I will put
it crudely: the real. The real is not representable, and it is because men ceaselessly try to represent it by words that there is a history of literature. That the real is not representable, but only demonstrable, can be said in several ways…” (Sontag 465)

The difficulties of representation become apparent in stories about the Holocaust yet a huge body of literature confronts history, revealing the Holocaust from many perspectives, providing a body of knowledge and a window into the past. Some of this writing attempts to represent the real but most of the stories in Enough Already represent the Holocaust mediated through the behavior of the writer’s or narrator’s parents or family. There is usually a hesitation about direct description of atrocities, thus many stories depict two levels of meaning. An example of this is in Rosa Safransky’s story “History in the Kitchen” when the father shouts: “I was in a cattle truck… When they opened it corpses fell out…” (147) The narrative goes on to describe plates and food flying all over the kitchen, as he bangs his fist on the table. The story then is about the daughters experience in the face of his anger and frustration and violence as well as about the Holocaust itself. It is about the past being re-played and renewed in the domestic environment of the family kitchen of their home.

One of the stories in Enough Already confronts the subject of the Holocaust more directly than this. Mark Baker’s narrative, “The Fiftieth Gate: A Journey Through Memory” is an extract from his novel of the same name. The story transports the reader onto a
train taking a mother and her two children on the journey to death. Baker’s language grapples with the task of articulating thirst, suffocation, and fear:

   The air is mixed with the pungent odour of fresh vomit and faeces. It is an effort to breathe but I strain my neck to the edge of the woolen torso and inhale. We stand like a forest of trees. My fingers form a web against the wooden beams of the ceiling. My head spins with the terror of losing my daughters. (Baker 175)

Unlike “History in the Kitchen” Baker’s narrative centers itself in the past and is not mediated through other characters or other experiences which exist in the present. It confronts the challenge to speak of occurrences beyond the scope of most human experience. Serge Liberman criticizes this narrative by remarking that “it strains for effect, with stock images, emotions and writing that make the end result prosaically commonplace” (Liberman, “Defining Jewish”). However the author employs vivid description as well as the use of silence to articulate horror and the unknown. For example the last sentence of the narrative is unfinished: “tell him tell Him that i” (Baker 185). The silence that occurs at the end leaves the reader’s imagination to fill the void. So where language becomes inadequate, silence communicates, indicating the demand that the topic of the Holocaust places on language.

The discussion as to the representability of the Holocaust will continue, and the fiction which I am studying here is just one
example of that interface between the real and its demonstration. What is seemingly beyond description is being articulated, but perhaps the success or otherwise of this can only be judged by those who have undergone the extremes of the Holocaust experience. Certainly visual representation, such as the graphic photographs in the Holocaust Museum in Melbourne, is far more confronting than a literary depiction, but the photographs are stark and specific, without the wide emotional background which fiction is at liberty to depict.

The capacity of language to represent history is further explored in Café Scheherazade, when the narrator (Martin Davis) comments on the inability of Avram to cope with the subject of the Holocaust in English. Describing the narration of Avram’s story he states that: “English is a language still in the forming, still straining for meaning, a language that eventually fails him as he falls back into the mother tongue to weave the tale of his revolutionary past”(6) In Café Scheherazade a discussion of language recurs intermittently throughout the tales that are told. The narrator points out that the café is a “Babel of languages” (128). Polish, Russian, German Hungarian, Romanian and Yiddish reflect the diversity of the Jewish experience and the mixture of cultural identities which come together under the label ‘Jewish.’ The narrator refers to Yiddish as “the main course” (128) and a mixture of many languages. Benjamin Harshav, in his essay “The Semiotics of Yiddish Communication” comments on Yiddish forms of speech, saying: “Its folklore is fond of short units, rhymed proverbs, idioms, anecdotes, jokes ‘stories’ and tales of great people—embedded in a longer discourse”(152). Harshav explains
that Yiddish contains a “second level of language” containing suggested patterns of conversational behaviour which are intrinsic to its meaning.(145) The cadence of the Jewish accent resonates in Zable’s writing, and his language reflects the Yiddish tone. This is achieved in several ways: firstly the dialogue is often short and exclamatory and secondly, there is frequent use of Yiddish words. Thirdly, there is the constant use of unanswered questions, giving a lilt to the end of sentences. An example of this is in the following exchange:

‘Sholem Aleichem!’
‘Aleichem Sholem!’
‘Well, how is it going?’
‘As you can see I am still alive.’
‘And how are the children?’
‘They are so busy I have to make an appointment to see them.’
‘And the business?’
‘The business? It’s deep in the ground.’
‘So? That is where we will all be soon enough.’ (Zable 20-21)

Finally, the subject of the sentence is often inverted and placed at the end which contributes to the sound of a foreign inflection: "‘From the Bolsheviks I do not hide,’ Erlich replied.”(40) Intermingled with these strategies is an underlying black humour. In this way a European Jewish identity is suggested through language and its implied sound. The significance of this lies in the fact that the English language must change to adjust to the
diasporic phenomenon. The dialogue shows a hybrid syntax, the intermingling of English and Yiddish inflections and meanings. In the essay “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin states that:

… at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so-forth, all given a bodily form. These ‘languages’ of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying ‘languages’… (34)

In the short fiction from minority cultures the mingling of different cultural influences which Bakhtin refers to empowers the literature of the minority which it is articulating. It intrudes into the dominant language structure and confronts existing patterns of expression. In Café Scheherazade the narrator describes this process:

‘I was reared on Bund legends,’ says Avram in his lilting Yiddish. Each word is carefully wrought. Each sentence has its melody, each paragraph its song. And when he glides into English there is a continuity in syntax for this was the last of Avram’s six languages. (Zable 5-6)

The Role of the Writer
In Jewish-Australian short fiction the themes that have been discussed indicate the engagement that writers have with contemporary society. The message becomes more explicit when we consider that the role of the writer is in itself a theme in many of these stories. In *Café Scheherazade*, in Liberman’s “Messiah of Acland St.” in Perlman’s “I was only in a Childish Way,” and in “Laugh Kookaburra” the central character is a writer. In *Café Scheherazade* the Journalist Martin Davis is a constant presence in the narrative. Since all the tales are mediated through him, his role is not only to tell the tales but to let the reader know how the narrative evolves. The journalist gives structure to the tales and makes the reader aware that he is performing a task which is regarded as essential to present day Jewish culture. His duty as a journalist is “Driven by the knowledge that the old men are moving on, nearing the end of their tumultuous lives: driven by the sense that it would be a tragic betrayal if their stories disappeared without trace” (Zable 59). The duty to record the experience of the Holocaust is echoed by other characters: “Avram is an avid guardian of the past. He tells it as a sacred duty” (157). Zable’s fiction illustrates a link between language and story. Both the journalist and the narrators are telling the tales, but by foregrounding the journalist’s role in the narrative Zable is accentuating the role of the story teller and the significance of the writer’s role:

> Martin, I warned you,’ says Masha. ‘This is a story without end.’ But by now I am entranced. I may have been drawn here as a journalist in search of an intriguing tale, but this is far
greater than a column, a life story at a glance. There are moments when I no longer know where I am. Time extends beyond time… (10)

This excerpt indicates the position of the narrator, who stands outside the individual stories but within the narrative as a whole. There are continual interruptions to the tales and references to the journalist and his role: “My foolish child… What do you know of such things…” (23) The journalist therefore becomes another character in the life of the café, as well as being instrumental in the telling of the tales.

Serge Liberman’s character Beinish Gotteskind also wants literature to act as witness to history. “I… I write what I have seen in the war… and what I learn from others … and to pass it on and what to make of it all…”(150). The stories in Enough Already which deal with the Holocaust illustrate the desire of the children of Holocaust to perform this duty on behalf of their parents. In Rose Zwi’s story the central character is asked: “‘What kind of books do you write?’ ‘Depressing ones,’ she said. ‘You wouldn’t want to read them. But they have to be written’” (Zwi 67). This statement reiterates the sense of duty which these Jewish writers brings to the Australian literary scene, the determination not to let the stories of the Holocaust disappear into history. In her essay on “The Writing Life” Lily Brett also expresses this need: “Part of my need to write comes out of a need to document my parent’s past” (329).
All writers considered so far promote the importance of the theme of the Holocaust in contemporary fiction. As Ron Castan said in 1999 “The Shoa foundation has been recording the testimony of every Jewish survivor of the Holocaust in Australia as well as in other countries—so that the Nazis can never triumph through the cult of disremembering, so that we do not forget” (17-18). Contemporary stories about the Holocaust confront history, bringing the past into focus, contributing to this testimony. Kathy Grinblat, asserts the significance of the task of recording stories: “We of our generation, through the stories and silences of our parents, are custodians to a moment in the history of mankind which was truly so dreadful that it defies understanding” (4). By acknowledging the silences this comment affirms the fictional nature of the task of recording the past, since memory must engage with history to fill in the gaps left by the silence of the previous generation.

One of the central messages which emerges from all these stories about the Holocaust is the survival of the Jewish race within Australian culture. Despite the bleakness of the subject matter, there is a sense of the continuity of the Jewish community—in the cafés of Liberman and Zable, in the households of the stories in *Enough Already*, in the Carlton of Perlman’s “A Tale of Two Cities,” and in the memories of the past which this generation of writers is determined to revive. As the narrator’s mother in “Samovar” says: “You must not forget you are Jewish. You must go on to have some children, so we will live in them. Go now” (Koval 31). Cultural survival in turn reflects the positive aspects of Diaspora, the ability of a culture to flourish
within a host culture, celebrating continued links with original identity, yet absorbing cultural influences from the host country.

Moving To Mainstream? Narratives which do not Depict Jewish Issues

The topic of the Holocaust dominates Jewish short fiction because its impact resonates still in contemporary Australian life, but not all stories explore this theme. Some do not deal with Jewish issues at all and others only loosely refer to Jewish culture. An examination of Elliot Perlman’s collection *The Reasons I Won’t be Coming* shows a change from the literature which demonstrates a self-conscious Jewish identity since the Perlman collection is an example of short fiction which is not confined to dealing with Jewish issues. “Spitalnic’s Last Year” and “A Tale of Two Cities” are both stories about Jewish families, and his story “I Was Only in a Childish Way Connected to the Established Order” uses a Jewish literary allusion but the other six stories cannot be categorized in this way, since no issues of Judaism are raised.

“I Was Only in a Childish Way Connected to the Established Order” is an account of the psychological and emotional instability of a poet who particularly associates himself with the Russian Jewish poet Osip Mandelstam whose work was repressed in Russia during the Stalinist regime. The story is centred in the Australian countryside and its theme questions the way that
sanity and insanity are perceived in our society and the way that the poet is misunderstood and undervalued. This literary allusion and powerful scenes of pathos propel the story. The character’s emotional instability is denoted by continuous nervous repetition: “When I cry I suck on my front teeth and purse my lips as though in anticipation of an onslaught of kisses” (Perlman, 166). In the end he is silenced and disempowered by his family, but empowered by his own actions.

Perlman creates a second level of narrative, by his reference to Osip Mendelstam but the main focus of the story is rural Australia. It is interesting to note that there are only two stories in this study which take place in a rural setting, denoting the urban focus of the writers who reflect this diasporic culture. This story is an example of a narrative which reflects a shift away from specific Jewish issues to illuminate a subject which is at once personal and universal as well as being set in an Australian context. Many of Perlman’s stories are written in the first person, but the author’s style changes radically, he uses many voices. “The Hong Kong Fir Doctrine” for example discusses the emotional effect of the break up of a relationship and reduces it in lawyer-like formal language, to a legal doctrine. In this story a woman’s lover addresses her in a monologue which takes the form of a love letter. The language is formal and pedantic: “By an agreement dated years ago, I, the plaintiff, agree to love you unconditionally in return for an offer of the rest of your life. The terms of the contract were partly oral, partly implied and partly imagined” (Perlman 136). The formality of the language is in contrast to the emotion of the message, giving the narrative an
unusual structure. The situation is presented as an argument, so the narrator sets out the argument as if he is speaking in court: “Look at the effect of the breach. You have an agreement with two men” (135). In contrast to this style Perlman’s story “In the Time of a Dinosaur” is narrated by the voice of a child. The story exists on two levels, which are revealed by the naïve voice of the narrator: “The Economous live directly above us and we hear them. Mum says we don’t need to watch TV on one of their good nights. They don’t sound like TV. I don’t know why she says that.” (43) The parallel narrative is maintained throughout the story, Perlman manages to achieve a tone of childish innocence, while revealing adult subject matter.

Another of Perlman’s narratives which does not have Jewish subject matter is “The Reasons I Won’t be Coming.” It is a story of the self-delusion of a husband whose wife is going to leave him and who has lost any sense of respect for him: “‘Those pyjamas are so... you,’ she said. ‘What do you mean?’ ‘They are just you,’ she said and went back to her face, ‘but they are too stripey, I can’t look at them’ ” (60). The tone of the narrative imitates his pedantic, petty ways, and yet conveys pathos. The narrator’s dialogue thus subtly exposes the relationship between the husband and the wife.

Perlman reveals the narrator’s true state of mind, which is confused and emotional and gives a hint of what is going on to the reader. The husband says to himself: “‘Where are my golf clubs? She said she just needs some space. That’s all she really needs at the moment. I can run things alone for a while. We’re
out of that multi-purpose spray stuff" (62-63). Perlman’s dialogue then, is revealing and his subject matter covers a wide range of topics. The narratives are highly detailed, while the self-examination of his characters is intense.

There is a shift of emphasis in these six stories since they do not refer to a European past or European culture, or depend on this for reference. The language does not carry the Jewish cadence, which so many other stories which I have discussed, celebrate. The introspection of these stories does not preclude their reference to social and moral questions but the issues do not relate to Jewish identity, but rather to a more universal subject. The fiction of these stories is not bounded by the historic past or present, and does not draw upon a core of Jewish tradition. The centre has therefore moved from a Jewish orientation to a more general literary direction. This change seems to indicate a desire by the writers to have their work considered in a wider context, reflecting their engagement with issues pertaining to contemporary society, which for them is no longer dominated by the events of World War Two. Despite the fact that the Holocaust is a major theme in Jewish literature and that European Jewish culture has a strong influence on this literature, a literary distance is emerging and the events of the past are relinquishing their hold. This writing indicates the changing nature of diasporic culture which I have already mentioned, its subject matter is less focused on the immigrant experience, these writers in this study have spent all or most of their lives in Australia and the contemporary Australian experience is beginning to emerge in Australian-Jewish literature.
Serge Liberman's collection *Voices From the Corner* also contains stories which do not explore Jewish issues. His opening story “St. Kilda Madonna” takes as its subject a portrait painter and his model, a poverty-stricken young girl who lives off the streets with her young child. The image of the Madonna and child becomes superimposed upon the reality of her life, but reality changes that image from a classic Madonna image to that of a battered woman, and as he offers to look after her, the image transforms to create a trinity: “a huddled threesome bonded into a hallowed would-be family” (Liberman 16). The narrator explores the connection between art and reality: “Art may transcend reality, it may open windows to the soul and make the earth holy and the holy eternal. But you and Joshua are in the here and now. You are of this earth and of this time” (16). For the narrator, reality takes over from art as he realizes that his power as a human transcends the power of art. As with his other stories, the names used are significant to the narrative. The artists model, the Madonna, is named Marita, and the son, Joshua, which is derived from the Hebrew, meaning “Lord of Salvation.” Other stories in this collection pursue various themes, some which are centred in contemporary Australian life, such as “O, Sylvie, Sylvie,” a narrative about the past relationships of a group of men. Another takes on a biblical style, “Hegera’s Curse” explores the role of God in the patriarchal line of a family. Some stories delve into the realm of fantasy, such as “Keinfreind’s Golem” or reveal the mythical land of Cerulea in “Ariela.”
The diverse range of topics in the stories which do not deal with Jewish issues indicate the freedom which the use of fiction allows when it does not deal with the Holocaust. These narratives are not bound by time or place and the characters do not need to represent a particular view of a culture or ideology. Robert Alter has said: “It is by no means clear what sense is to be made of the Jewishness of a writer who neither uses a Jewish language, nor describes a distinctly Jewish milieu, nor draws upon literary traditions that are recognizably Jewish” (54). However, I suggest that these stories can be seen as a conscious move towards mainstream Australian literature, breaking down the cultural and literary borders, which loosely encapsulate Jewish short fiction. In his foreword to the anthology *Enough Already*, editor Alan Jacobs writes: “The Australian–Jewish experience is today rich and varied, and is also maturing now that Jews feel more confident and secure about their place in Australia”(viii). This comment suggests the changing concept of place, and its attendant psychological connotations of security and safety.

Since the anthology *Enough Already* is devoted to Australian–Jewish writing most stories explore Jewish issues, but Sandra Goldbloom’s story “Chronicle One: The Massage” is an example of a story which does not take a Jewish theme as its subject. It is an intense, intimate tale of a daughter’s relationship with her father, told while she massages his feet in hospital. Mathew Karpin’s story “The Monitor” presents a dialogue on Australian racism without referring to Jewish issues, these stories are nevertheless informed by contemporary Australian culture.
The merging of Australian and Jewish identity is explored in the opening essay in *Enough Already* by Andrea Goldsmith which has been referred to at the beginning of this chapter. In discussing her journey of self-discovery she remarks: “Who was I with my fifth-generation Australian heritage and not one relative killed in the Holocaust?” (7). This comment indicates the extent to which the Holocaust invades the identity of Australians, since she feels apart from the “stereotypical Jew” (7). The combination of Australian and Jew instigates debate on the boundaries between cultures. Several of the stories I have been discussing mention the feeling of separateness which being Jewish entails. Elisabeth Wynhausen in “But is he Jewish” remarks that as a child: “even a birthday was fraught with danger, because a Jewish kid could blacken the name of the whole race, by accidentally taking the biggest piece of cake on the plate” (58).

Since most of the stories studied in this chapter celebrate Jewish culture and identity they accentuate cultural and literary boundaries. However the influence of contemporary Australian culture ensures that these boundaries are porous, and are likely to become more so as the influence of Jewish European culture recedes, and the “parallel universes” (Zable 83) cease to exist. Nevertheless, as Elleke Boehmer states: “… cultures are not always mutually intelligible. Obscurities and silences will exist no matter how much research is devoted to the task of making lucid what is dim, or of giving voice to what was stilled” (248). The personal and detailed nature of these stories give an insight into many cultural nuances which reveal aspects of the Jewish lives which these narratives depict. Andrea Goldsmith accedes that
Jewish culture was more dominant in her life until recent years: “… my Jewish side took precedence almost to the exclusion of the Australian” (Goldsmith 3) As I have noted Goldsmith is a fifth generation Australian Jew, so her experience denotes the resilience of Jewish culture while bounded by the influence of Australian society. At the same time she articulates the porosity of those boundaries when she says: “An Australian-born Jew who attended a Methodist girls school, who made the annual pilgrimage to the Myer window display, who would have followed Australian rules football if it had been more to her taste, and as homeless as if she had just landed on these shores” (Goldsmith 5). This comment indicates that a sense of displacement is not confined to first generation immigrants.

The increased flexibility of cultural boundaries was illustrated in a recent article by Peter Kohn in the *Australian Jewish News* reporting that mixed marriages had increased by 20 per cent since 1996. The president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry was quoted as saying that in light of these figures “obviously there are challenges for the Jewish Community” (Kohn), suggesting a desire to retain those boundaries within the Australian community.

Literary boundaries are illustrated and accentuated by the publishing of such anthologies as *Enough Already*. The writers included in such an anthology choose to be categorized as Jewish writers, thereby setting themselves apart from mainstream Australian writing. Such an anthology contributes to a collective voice being heard from the Jewish community, even though the
authors speak as individuals. It is this voice which communicates and forges links with non-Jewish Australian readers, indicating the paradoxical nature of boundaries, on the one hand encapsulating the stories, on the other hand providing a channel of communication reaching out between culturally different communities.

The boundaries of Jewish short stories are not only imposed from within the Jewish literary community, but are emphasized by studies such as this, which choose to separate this literature from other Australian short fiction. Yet this literature provides a commentary not only on aspects of Jewish identity but on Australian multicultural society in the twentieth and twenty-first century, indicating the fluid nature of the genre as it interacts with both history and contemporary society and expresses the experiences of both European and Australian society. Vince Marotta points out that “Boundaries are ambivalent, because they are both constructive and destructive.” (178) The social experiences which these narratives reflect indicate this ambivalence since the characters in these stories celebrate their Jewish identity within Australian society and as Marotta points out: “The multicultural experience may expose how cultures are porous, but for some cultural or social groups, cultural boundaries are still important for the construction of their self-identity.” (185) These narratives show life in the new community is often difficult and isolating. This literature continually crosses boundaries because it is the product of writers who are at once Jewish and Australian and it is from this interacting space that its literary voice emerges. So while these narratives can be seen as
celebrations of Jewish identity and an indication of the survival of Jewish culture, the influence of the Anglo-Celtic Australian culture is integral to it.

I have already noted that the contemporary Jewish fiction that I have studied here makes no direct reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict, although Israel is present in the background to some of these tales. The writers considered here refrain from making direct political comment with regard to this situation. Neither do the stories refer to the wider plight of refugees in Australian society, apart from the experiences of Jewish refugees. The editorial in the *Australian Jewish News* on Australia Day 2003, however, does claim that the Jewish community presents a virtual “wall-to-wall” opposition to the Federal governments asylum seeker policy:

> As a community largely comprised of refugees and their descendants, it is therefore understandable that we are empathetic to the plight of bona fide asylum-seekers, especially children, who land on our shores only to be locked behind razor-wire fences in the middle of the desert. (“Being”)

This article also re-asserts Jewish support for the dispossessed Aboriginal people, in both cases then, creating a political and ideological link with contemporary Australian issues.

Much of the literature examined in this chapter shares common themes. It particularly displays a continuing engagement with
the events of the past and shows that integral to the role of these Jewish writers is a sense of responsibility to perpetuate those memories. To a certain extent this gives these writers a predetermined role and tempts the reader to interpret this literature as a collective voice. These short stories, however are also personal tales, exhibiting various degrees of literary merit and a wide span of cultural experiences, but they come together to illustrate varied Jewish experiences in contemporary Australia, the continuing trauma of the Holocaust, the silences imposed by that experience, the cultural dislocation caused by immigration and exile and the endless debate as to why it happened. The stories reveal contemporary experiences of Jewish families, generational conflict and the desire to explore these issues within the space of Australian society. Whether the stories deal with Jewish issues or not we see pictures of a vibrant social and literary culture which constantly negotiates with Australian society, articulating a changing perspective on history as well as on contemporary issues. As Homi Bhabha states:

The border line work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent it renews the past, re-figuring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. (Location 7)
The constant renewal of the past in Jewish-Australian short fiction results in new articulations of the diasporic consciousness and affirms its relevance to contemporary Jewish life. Although this literature articulates only a limited view of a diasporic culture it serves as a bridge between generations and serves to refute the idea that the migrant condition is static and contained within its own cultural boundaries. It indicates the diasporic experience as being both negative and positive and indicates the capacity for identities to change and transform within that diasporic space. By re-articulating the past, re-examining notions of place and displacement, by accentuating difference and change in language these narratives contribute to a celebration of difference which encodes the shifting nature of both historic and imaginative narrative.

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Chapter Three
Chinese-Australian Short Fiction and Poetry

Introduction

In this chapter I will look at contemporary Chinese-Australian writing which reflects experiences of the Chinese diaspora in Australia. I have chosen writers whose short fiction engages with their Australian experience and, as I have mentioned in the introduction have also included a study of some poetry. Integral to this study is an examination of the role of language and the way which it reveals and confronts cultural difference and acts to interpolate the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. The notion of place is central to this writing since it engages with language and becomes part of the discourse which investigates the role of China in Chinese-Australian identity. This writing also depicts psychological displacement which informs many of the narratives which focus on various points in the Chinese diaspora. These stories and poems investigate themes of isolation, racism and a search for identity and in the process of this contribute to shifting perspectives on Chinese-Australian identity and cross-cultural relationships. Some of these narratives reassess and reinscribe history and reflect the perspectives of individuals who share a background of Chinese culture and who observe the Anglo-Celtic Australian culture from the vantage point of a minority group. They contribute to an understanding of the relationship between cultures and the experience of immigrants in contemporary society and investigate the capacity of
Australians to deal with difference and with change, which is integral to the fabric of a multicultural society.

Homi Bhabha articulates the necessity for the recognition of difference in such societies where contiguous cultural groups exist in ever-changing relationships with each other: “The whole nature of the public sphere is changing so that we really do need the notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple and potentially antagonistic, political identities” (“Third Space” 208). In distinguishing between cultural diversity and cultural difference Bhabha points to the inadequacy of political systems which accommodate diversity but mask cultural difference: “… it is actually very difficult, even impossible and counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily co-exist” (“Third Space” 209). Both the Aboriginal literature and the Chinese-Australian literature which I am studying insist on the right to assert and recognize cultural difference and in doing so act to intercept the dominant literary culture. In both cases the expression of difference is empowering to the minority group from which it emanates.

I shall show in this chapter that this literature celebrates difference and in many cases illustrates the antagonistic nature of the relationship between the narrators and the majority culture. Homi Bhabha comments that: “The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the bound of knowledges, or to engage in the ‘war of position’ marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of
identification” (Location 162). An examination of these stories will show that the interaction and confrontation which takes place in the production of this Chinese-Australian writing has contributed to expressions of cultural hybridity, articulating changing perspectives on Australian society. Although the body of work available for study is limited, this writing comments upon and reflects contemporary multicultural society in Australia and in some cases refutes the assumption that Australia’s multicultural society is a tolerant one. I will show how this writing is a manifestation of the changing nature of Chinese identities, since its subject matter confronts essentialist notions of Chineseness and illustrates the diverse nature of the Chinese diaspora. The incommensurability between cultures does not inhibit the individual expressions of difference which define this literature, but is made apparent by the limited body of work which has been published in this field. Before entering into a close discussion of the texts, I would like to consider the diasporic, multicultural background which helps to define this writing and to acknowledge the fractured and unfixed nature of Chinese identity as well as the significance of the role of language in the examination of these texts.

There is evidence that Chinese labourers were imported into Australia before 1820. From this time the numbers swelled to 37,300 in 1891, at which point they began to decline due to the influence of the White Australia Policy. (Ip 5) Their presence, therefore, like that of the Jewish community, is very much part of the history of White occupation, but their relationship with the majority culture was one of racism, bigotry and exclusion. In
political terms this began to change under the Whitlam government with
the abolition of the White Australia Policy in 1973 and with the passing
culture have been limited to the margins of Australian society. Wenche
Ommundsen notes that Chinese-Australian creative writing in English
has a short history, dating back only to 1975 with the writing of Ee Tiang
Hong and Brian Castro’s *Birds of Passage* in 1983. (*Bastard* 3) The
literature which has emerged since then speaks from many positions in
the Australian Chinese diaspora and offers perspectives on Australia
which deserve to be heard. However considering the long history of the
Chinese presence in Australia, the recent emergence of this writing
indicates the existence of many years of literary silence, and to this
extent can be compared to the cultural silence imposed on the
Indigenous population, which is discussed in the opening chapter of this
thesis.

The origins of the writers themselves reflect the diverse backgrounds
which contribute to the nature of this diaspora. Ouyang Yu is from
Hangzhou in China; Brian Castro was born at sea between Macau and
Hong Kong; Ding Xiaoqi is from Shenyang, China; and Beth Yahp was
born in Malaysia. Liu Guande and Huangfu Jun are both from
Shanghai. In collecting the stories for this study, the absence of an
anthology of Chinese-Australian writing in English became apparent.
Many stories became available only through academic literary journals
and university libraries. The publications that did reach general
bookshops often had a brief life and were sourced by specialists in
out-of-print
books, such as bookfound.com. Some stories came to me from overseas university libraries. Difficulties in accessing some of this literature may reflect the limited popularity of the short story in Australia but it also indicates how marginalised this literature is.

To categorize this writing as ‘Chinese-Australian’ suggests that it is a reflection of one cultural perspective, but these voices are individual and celebrate the diverse perspectives of the writers. Ien Ang points out that reference to a ‘Chinese Community’ as part of a multicultural discourse encourages the attitude to regard Chinese groups as homogenous, which is erroneous. (Ang, “Transforming” 254). Two linked factors emerge in this literature, however: all speak from a marginalised position and act to interpolate the Anglo-Celtic culture, and all writers considered here depict essentialist attitudes which are seen to define social and cultural relationships between Australians and Chinese. The strategies by which these processes take place will be noted in a closer examination of the texts. The diasporic nature of Chinese identities in Australia refutes any notion of an homogenous identity and contributes to the hybrid nature of Chinese-Australian cultures. Ang notes that:

Central to the diasporic paradigm is the theoretical axiom that Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content—be it racial, cultural or geographical—but operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora. (On Not Speaking 38)
The literature which I am studying here is one way that this renegotiation and rearticulation of identity can be seen. Texts from the diaspora display the different aspects of Chinese identity and allows for new forms of cultural expression which reflect this. The narratives which I shall discuss in this chapter can be seen as a dialogue which explores the ever-changing relationship between cultures in Australia as well as between diasporic communities and their homeland. This writing celebrates not only differences between diasporic identities in Australia, but the hybrid nature of intermingling cultural influences and the flux of identity which occurs within the diaspora. Brian Castro’s writing for example focuses mainly on the engagement between his narrators and Australian culture; Beth Yahp’s writing looks back to her early life in Malaysia. So some writing looks inward towards Australia and other writing looks back to another homeland, which is not necessarily China, indicating the changing notion of the concepts of home and place which is significant to much of the literature in this thesis.

Although this literature emanates from only a small section of the multicultural community it raises questions concerning policies of multiculturalism. In an essay entitled “Re-siting Australian Identity” Tseen Khoo refers to the “often patronising model of tolerance” which the Australian government promotes. (97) James Jupp in an address to the National Conference on Racism in March 2002, pointed out:

There is very little plausible measurement of racial or ethnic hostility and public figures regularly proclaim that Australia
is not only the ‘most multicultural country on earth’ but also ‘the most tolerant.’ These are flattering to the electorate and cannot be taken at face value. Most discussion of ethnic relations in the past has concentrated on the absence of race riots and violence as found in other societies, especially in the U. K. and the U.S.A. By that measure Australia is tolerant—but it also lacks both a fascist tradition (common in Europe) and a history of race rioting. (Jupp)

The Chinese-Australian writing and the Indigenous literature in this study indicate the existence of such racial and ethnic ‘hostility’ and this concept of tolerance is therefore questioned. The situation is commented on by Prime Minister John Howard in an interview on the subject of multiculturalism in the *Australian* newspaper in May 2002 when he said: “I just find that everybody is quite comfortable, and and [sic] they’d be fairly happy with the fact that we have quite a diverse background” (Megalogenis). Yet his abolition of the office of Multicultural Affairs and his reduction of the migrant intake points to the fact that he is not in sympathy with multiculturalism. (Ang and Stratton 24) His remarks on the subject are often ambiguous. He said in the same speech: “I have never subscribed to the view that Australians are really racist. I’m not saying that we don’t have racism and we are not incapable of being insular or intolerant…" (Megalogenis). This approach was possibly an attempt to mitigate criticism which had been voiced as a result of statements made in 1988 which were interpreted as being antagonistic to multiculturalism. The literature that I am looking at here contests Howard’s position by depicting a society which displays strong racist and essentialist
views of Chinese people. It acts to interrogate any such complacency which is displayed in the Anglo-Celtic community in Australia. Ien Ang points out that implicit in the policy of multiculturalism is a tendency to insist on a stereotypical cultural identity and therefore “what is being imposed here is a kind of cultural prohibition on de-sinocization.” (Ang, “Transforming” 254). In this way the ideology reinforces boundaries between cultures and confines Chinese people to a category of race, which she suggests is illusory. This literature reveals the ambivalent nature of multiculturalism in Australia and questions the nature of such divisions.

Language

This illusory sense of a universal Chinese identity is illustrated by the fact that the Chinese diaspora is not necessarily linked by language. The widespread nature of its diaspora promotes a distance from the language of the original homeland, introduces other languages as well as hybrid identities and cultural practices and thereby causes a shift in the definition of Chineseness and the relationship of culture to language. Whether or not a person speaks Chinese is not necessarily a prerequisite in defining Chineseness. The employment of other languages accentuates the cultural difference within the diaspora and promotes alternative ways of ethnic identification. Ang notes the significance of this when she says:

It is by recognizing the irreducible productivity of the syncretic practices of diaspora cultures that ‘not speaking
Chinese’ will stop being a problem for overseas Chinese people. ‘China’, the mythic homeland will then stop being the absolute norm for ‘Chineseness’ against which all other Chinese cultures of the diaspora are measured.” (Ang, On Not Speaking 35)

The existence of various languages within the diaspora thus contests the notion that ‘China’ lies at its centre. China’s presence becomes more symbolic and the notion of the homeland becomes an unsettled one. Beth Yahp, whose work will be discussed in this chapter, does not speak Chinese and addresses this situation in some of her writing. Bill Ashcroft observes that:

“The place of a diasporic person’s ‘belonging’ may have little to do with spatial location, but be situated in family, community and in those symbolic features which constitute a shared culture, a shared ethnicity or system of belief, including nostalgia for a distant homeland” (Ashcroft, Post-Colonial 125).

The complicated threads between language and identity and the concept of the homeland are evident in all this literature and will be discussed as I consider the work of the various writers.

The significance of language in these narratives lies in the role which it plays in postcolonial discourse, as a site where resistance to cultural domination takes place. The use of English allows the entry of Chinese-Australian writers into the literary and cultural
domain, but as I shall show, there is a further manipulation of language, both Chinese and English, which acts to expose the frictions and nuances of difference. Literary strategies differ between these writers, but all act to affect and change the discourse which it intercepts. In doing so the capacity of language to absorb and reflect the hybrid nature of diasporic culture is displayed as it adapts to cross-cultural influences which define contemporary Chinese-Australian literature. This writing reflects what Homi Bhabha refers to as the “… shifting margins of cultural displacement …” (Bhabha, Location 21) and acts to contest the dominance of the majority culture.

The Manipulation of Language in the Writing of Ouyang Yu

The significance and the specific role of language is particularly apparent in the writing of Ouyang Yu. His stories and poems explore notions of personal identity as well as providing a perspective on current social attitudes in Australia and in China. By examining his short stories and some of his poetry, I will show how he overtly foregrounds the role of language in his work, which pinpoints the site of cultural difference. While isolation and difference is revealed through the subject matter of his poems and stories, language is shown to be the means by which such notions are constructed. In Ouyang Yu’s work his narrators depict the struggle with and over meaning, and in doing so illustrate the point where the difference between cultures is exposed. Ouyang Yu uses various literary strategies to expose cultural difference. In the first place the use of English allows him to enter the
dominant discourse and enter a site of cross-cultural literary negotiation. Secondly, Ouyang Yu uses Chinese words and names in many texts to set up comparisons of meaning. In this way Chinese language intersects English discourse and the two cultures confront each other at the moment of intersection. This incorporation of foreign words into narratives has been noted in the Aboriginal short stories and in the Jewish literature which I have studied in previous chapters. The practice is discussed in *The Empire Writes Back*: “The technique of such writing demonstrates how the dynamics of language change are conspicuously incorporated into the text … the employment of specific techniques formalizes the cross-cultural character of the linguistic medium” (53). By employing this practice contiguous ideas influence and challenge accepted notions of meaning. At the same time this practice indicates what Ashcroft calls a “metonymic gap” (75) denoting a cultural difference of meaning which installs a distance between the two cultures. Thirdly, I shall show how Ouyang Yu uses confronting, abusive language and redirects it towards his reader, thereby redirecting the Orientalist attitudes to which some Chinese are subjected. The detailed analysis and re-configuration of English words and their meaning in some stories is another strategy which he uses to instigate intense discussion of cultural difference. In one story confronting sexual imagery is also used for this purpose. While some stories reveal attitudes of Australians towards Chinese people, others consider the self-perception of the narrator in relation to other Chinese-Australians.
I will first consider the role of language in Ouyang Yu’s story entitled “The White Cockatoo Flowers.” This story opens on the day of the New Year, where the future and the past separate, significant because it represents the emergence of new cultural practices and perspectives for the narrator. It explores the relationships between a Chinese family and its neighbours within a multicultural Australian community. The story focuses on a comparison between cultures, and on the conflicting perspectives of its members towards social relationships and towards each other. The story is an exploration of identity, of conflicting loyalties and social isolation where the influences of two cultures collide within one family.

In order to convey the intense condition of loneliness, Ouyang Yu introduces Chinese words into the text: “Words like tui xin zhi fu (meaning ‘giving out one’s heart and belly’), zhi ji (meaning ‘know self’), zhi yin (meaning ‘know sound’), and zhi xin (meaning ‘know heart’) do not have equivalents in English” (“The White” 174). Inserting Chinese words into the narrative offers an alternative way of articulating these notions and exposes the precise point of difference between cultures. It allows the narrator to delve into his own sense of isolation and rejects the use of English as the dominant mode of communicating this concept, thereby questioning its authority. The incorporation of these words into the text suggests the dynamic possibilities of language to interact between cultures, and in doing so to depict a distance between those cultures.
The point of intersection between languages in Ouyang Yu's text, indicates the site of cultural difference and as Ashcroft points out, is the moment when the “transformation of the dominant discourse” occurs. (81) The use of this tactic does not entirely isolate the reader, since a translation is included however, it alerts the reader to an alternative means of expression and questions the power of the English language to articulate these concepts adequately. It creates an obstacle between the reader and the text and at the same time allows Chinese culture to interact and intercept Australian culture. This intervention contests the ability of the reader to interpret that text and therefore displaces the relationship between writer and reader, subtly accentuating the power of the writer. The use of Chinese words also suggests that the term ‘friendship’ has deeper meaning in Chinese culture than in Australian culture and therefore adds to the degree of cultural difference which exists between the two perceptions of this concept.

“The White Cockatoo Flowers” consists of comparisons between Australian and Chinese culture and attempts to analyse difference and come to terms with the unfamiliar aspects of Australian culture. The family exhibits divided loyalties to both. Where the father resents the son’s friendship with an Australian boy, the mother shows admiration for this boy’s attributes of “straight forwardness” (172). His wife questions her husband’s self-image: “All you can do is speak a bit more broken English than the others. And now you feel as if you are not Chinese and have gone beyond being Chinese. In fact, you are more Chinese than all of them put together” (173). The clash of attitudes
within this family, the occasional rejection of Chinese modes of behaviour indicates the fractured nature of identity where two cultures come together. The points of difference between cultures are foregrounded in this story, and the racism which marginalizes the family from Australian culture is continually depicted: “…they rather look down on us Chinese. Even Vietnamese look down on us” (174). The narrator positions the family on the margins of Australian society, as ‘other’ to the “genuine Australian” (175) as well as to the Vietnamese culture. The Chinese father is as racist to the Vietnamese woman at the market as Australians are towards him: “‘But I don’t want to look at her either!’ he spat! ‘After all she is not a genuine Australian herself, but a refugee from Indochina’” (175). This comment indicates the value that is placed on being a “genuine Australian” as well as the racist attitudes which exist towards the Vietnamese in this situation.

The family dialogue in “The White Cockatoo Flowers” indicates that new cultural perspectives form out of these cross-cultural relationships. This short story displays hope in the future. The son who was taunted with the words “Ching Chong Chinamen” (178) by the children in the street becomes empowered by his experiences and emerges with a new confidence. The narrator puts emphasis on the word ‘white’ which for him, is significant for two reasons. Firstly it represents the annoying cockatoos that swoop at him and make jarring noises, and secondly it represents a beautiful unnamed flower. The word ‘white’ then, invokes both a negative and a positive response. The naming of the flower is a defining moment in his quest for identity and symbolises a new
life and an intersection between cultures. It is significant that neither the father nor the mother is named in this story, suggesting a universal rather than an individual experience.

Competing influences and images of Australia and China combine in this narrative. Ouyang Yu illustrates the ambivalent nature of identity when two cultures merge and at times conflict and undergo a process of negotiation. The interplay of relationships within the community and the fluctuating attitudes towards the new country, expose difficulties inherent in the migrant experience. As Ien Ang simply states: “The condition of diaspora… produces subjects for whom notions of identity and belonging are radically unsettled” (44). This condition is echoed in one of the poems in Ouyang Yu’s collection *Moon Over Melbourne*. In “The Last Chinese Poet” the narrator says: “Three years on /I no longer know what nationality I am/ I am a bit of everything” (45). There is a suggestion in “The White Cockatoo Flowers” that identity is not a fixed concept but an entity in a state of constant flux. Intrinsic to Ouyang Yu’s narrative are images of the double world of the migrant experience. Australia and China, new and old, the past and the present all jostle together to contribute to the formation of new identity.

**Dismantling English**

In Ouyang Yu’s story “God and Man in One” the narrator uses language as a vehicle to explore specific cultural differences. He dissects language and re-interprets meanings and in doing so confronts issues in Australian culture which refer to the
experience of a Chinese immigrant. The story is set against the backdrop of a hot Australian summer, as in the previous story China and Australia are discussed in parallel with each other. The narrative constantly moves from a reference to specific words and images to making comment on wider cultural issues while the complicated thought process of the narrator becomes apparent as the story unfolds.

The focus of this story is on language and grammar which are examined in close detail. The narrator notes for example the use of the subjunctive tense in English and how the words ‘would’ and ‘should’ can be used in a misleading way, to persuade people that they ‘could’ win prizes in the Reader’s Digest if they take out a subscription: “In Chinese that would not be called the subjunctive mood, that would simply be called hoodwinking” (“God and Man” 65). As the narrative progresses the analysis of words becomes more specific and more pedantic. This analysis is referred to as a “dismantling game” (67). The narrator divides words so that another meaning can be drawn from them; for example he questions why “Mother” and “smother” would occur within one word, or “skilled” and “killed”. In each case he draws parallels with similar concepts in the Chinese language. This dismantling process subverts the accepted meaning of English words and produces a meaning which is redolent with racist or negative overtones. For example the word game which the narrator plays investigates words of colour, instigating a discussion on racism:
‘Black’ was a word that had ‘lack’ in it. Likewise ‘yellow’ had ‘low’ whereas ‘white’ would sound like ‘height’ when ‘w’ was removed. No wonder there was such rampant racism throughout the English-speaking world. It was built into their language. The English God must be a racist, who did not create the language in a fair manner. (67)

By manipulating the spelling of English words the narrator takes away its accepted meaning and reconfigures the word to his own purpose. The new word is a legitimate word but one which serves his own argument and from which he then forms conclusions about Australian culture. He points out that in Chinese words such as “sex” and “tolerance” have moral implications inbuilt into the Chinese characters: “the former with a knife on top and the latter with the blade of a knife point downwards at one’s heart” (67). The narrator in this story sees his game as a way of discovering the “meaning of life” (67), and it is a game which shows a critical bias against Anglo-Celtic culture. He is gleeful to discover that the word “live” in English is “evil” spelt backwards, but it is the word “hypocritical” (68) which, split down the middle, gives him the ammunition to criticize academics and PhD candidates, who while critical of social injustices, lecture on Asian and Aboriginal cultures but do not use Asian people or Aboriginal people to contribute to the educational process, and direct their lectures towards white audiences.

The word “hypocritical” also causes the narrator to ponder on the irony of the fact that the British brought Western ideas to China and destroyed “symbols of old China” (70). Since China
then favoured western ideas over its traditional past, he finds it ironic and hypocritical that the English have kept their own royal traditions. This in turn gave him a feeling of inferiority, of belonging to a country without history and he concludes that: “As a result, people like himself were cast out of history in this uncontrollable vortex after the June 4th, unwanted by either country and reduced to this dump” (70). This observation all stems from the narrator’s analysis of the word “hypocrisy”, which for him acts as a springboard to these more general cultural observations, so there is a constant movement in the text from the specific to the general.

The narrator’s strategy in “God and Man in One” is not only to appropriate English, but to change the construction of words and use them as a critical instrument against the culture from which he is marginalised. So the process goes beyond mere appropriation of the English language to an insistence on total re-configuration. The dissection of words which takes place in the narrative does not lead to a logical interpretation of the word’s meaning, but rather instigates discussion on associations which the components of these words invoke. The continual movement in the narrative from particular experiences to general observations on cultural difference, ensures that the narrative covers a broad array of topics which illustrate one man’s experience of two cultures.

The narrator illustrates a new approach to language, taking away the power of the reader to interpret, and insisting that that power lies in the hands of the writer. The difference that this
strategy reveals is not merely a difference in the meaning of words but it conveys a different approach to the way words are read and therefore their function in the text changes totally.

The Outsider

In “God and Man in One” the narrator sees himself as an outsider to Chinese society as well as Australian society. This enables a perspective on both cultures. There is an overt use of the image of an outsider in the story. The narrative opens with a discussion of the oppressiveness of the Melbourne summer, particularly at night, which is contrasted with sleeping by the river on a bamboo mat in China. The narrator then chooses to sleep outside under the sky in Melbourne. The image of the sky in the story suggests an all-encompassing concept which negates the necessity for individual identity: For him the sky “had no nationality and identity because it did not need that” (75). There is a suggestion that under such a sky he was neither Chinese nor Australian: “… he could no longer tell where this was, whether Australia of China or anywhere in the world” (75). The narrator is challenging the whole notion of identity which acts to separate and isolate. Under the sky he creates a space which rejects notions of categorization and division and therefore consists of an idealized space where there are no outsiders.

The comparison between the two experiences is used to observe that in Australia there is a distinction between outside and inside which indicates a different way of life. The conclusion that the narrator draws is that: “It was a people that had somehow lost
touch. With what though he did not quite know." (64) The continual analysis of difference that takes place in this narrative brings with it a system of knowledge from two cultures and contributes to the conclusions which the narrator draws, which are frequently critical of Australian culture. The perspective of an outsider informs this view. In his essay “The Stranger” Georg Simmel explores this situation:

Because he is not bound by roots to the particular constituents and partisan dispositions of the group, he confronts all of these with a distinctly “objective” attitude, an attitude that does not signify mere detachment and non-participation, but is a distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement. (145)

The narrator in “God and Man in One” is positioned as an outsider, and the objectivity which results from this position leads to his obsessive deconstruction of language, thus giving him control and power over the means of communication. His objectivity is also illustrated when a trip to the Preston Market provokes an exploration of the various cultures which are represented there. The narrator sees people there who are bounded by their own cultures: “who never went across the invisible boundary that separated them by language and culture except when they traded with each other in cash and in English” (71). Language is therefore seen to be pivotal in dividing cultures. The market provides a panorama of cultural difference. Just as he has analysed words throughout the narrative, he tries
to guess at the nationalities that thronged there. The range reflects a view of multicultural Australia: Indians, Sri Lankans, Vietnamese, Malays, Chinese, Thais, Africans, Greeks, Italians and some from the Soviet Union: “it all seemed so detached as if he was watching them in a TV. program” (71). His observation of the women there leads into a discussion of the sexual attractiveness of Chinese women and the way they dress in comparison to Australian women. This reinforces his Chinese identity and differences between women since he only finds Chinese women sexually attractive. It also serves to emphasise his isolation from the Australian community, which is reinforced when he says: “… that sometimes his life was like a book written in Chinese characters and imported from China, that remained unread because few knew the language and bothered about learning about it” (74). This indicates how enmeshed language is with identity. In this narrative language is on the one hand presented as a barrier to cultural communication but on the other hand it is the point at which cultures meet, there is therefore a tension between the functions of language.

The narrator in “God and Man in One” uses Chinese words to denote difference. He re-names his surroundings in Chinese in order to remind himself of home: “His bungalow he called Ye Shi Ju or Wild Historical Residence … His garden he called Wu Wei Yun or Five Tastes Garden…” (72). As Ashcroft points out, “language variance is a synecdochic index of cultural difference. This process affirms the distance of cultures at the very moment in which it proposes to bring them together” (Ashcroft, Post-Colonial 76). This tension is integral to this site of
difference and is the point at which difference can be observed in the text. Edward Said comments on the significance of such strategies of resistance by saying that: “… resistance, far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history. It is particularly important to see how much this alternative reconception is based on breaking down the barriers between cultures” (Said, Culture 260). In breaking down these barriers such narratives force recognition of the marginalised culture and insist on recognition of difference. Said refers to this as “the voyage in” (Said, Culture 261), since it is the point where the minority culture intercepts the dominant culture. In “God and Man in One” the re-naming of the narrator’s garden implies an interchange between place in Australia and place in China, and illustrates the necessity for control, through language, over this place. The notion of place in this instance, engages with language to depict difference, dislocation and power.

The narrative “God and Man in One” indicates the ambivalent nature of the diasporic experience. In an article entitled “Lost in the Translation” Ouyang Yu reflects on his own experience:

In my first few years in Australia I used to have a feeling that I had never experienced in China. Whenever I woke up in the morning or was trying to go to sleep at night. I felt as if I were dead, as if life were just standing outside me and I were somehow a dead person who could still observe the happenings in the outside world, a world that was totally irrelevant to me. (10)
The intensity of feeling expressed in Ouyang Yu's work not only reflects cultural isolation but can be considered in relationship with the policy of multiculturalism in Australia. Ien Ang points out that:

… the ethos of multiculturalism has transformed the expectations of the dominant culture towards minority subjects. Where in the era of assimilationism the dominant insisted on homogeneity and sameness, multiculturalism insists on the opposite: minorities are supposed to remain true to their “cultural identity” assumed to be pre-given and primordial. (“Transforming” 254)

This creates a tension within the identity of the immigrant person, placing them in a cultural space somewhere in between two cultures. Ouyang Yu has said: “My effort to English myself has met with strong resistance from all sorts of people ever since I came here. Even if I wanted to be English they wouldn’t let me be… I began to feel uneasy with my disloyalty” (Ouyang Yu, “Lost in Translation” 10).

Isolation

In the third story which I shall discuss by Ouyang Yu, entitled “The Wolves From the North” this notion of ‘disloyalty’ is explored again through a discussion of Chinese and Australian identity. Apart from the name of the main character which is Luo Wenfu, or Lone Wolf, the role of language is not foregrounded as
in the previous stories, but the intense isolation of a Chinese immigrant is portrayed. The narrative takes place in Melbourne on Christmas Eve, when Luo Wenfu travels into the centre of the city to escape his lonely existence in the suburbs. The realization that there are many Asians in the city centre dispels his feeling of isolation: “he did not have the slightest feeling of being a stranger in this alien land” (31). However this feeling is followed by one of disappointment: “The discovery disappointed him for the simple reason that he had come to Australia in order to leave China, not to return there. Too many Chinese made him uneasy and caused him to think many unhappy thoughts” (31). Despite the fact that he is in a crowd of Asian people, many of them Chinese, Luo Wenfu sees himself in isolation, not part of a wider community. As he observes the Chinese masseurs working in the street he says: “Even the cunning and smug smile on their faces when they caught a customer and the exchange of knowing expressions in their eyes were so Chinese. He found it hard not to dislike such things” (33).

This attitude towards Chinese identity supports the observation of Ien Ang, quoted earlier in this chapter, where stereotypical categorization of race encourages “a kind of cultural prohibition on de-sinocization” (“Transforming” 254). The apparent disloyalty towards Luo Wenfu’s own race challenges the tendency to see Chinese people in this stereotypical way, and foregrounds the disparate nature of identity in the Chinese diaspora. The narrator suggests that Chinese people see themselves as inferior: “For he noticed that when those Chinese or Asians were walking past him they carefully avoided direct eye
contact, the expression on their faces seeming to say, I hate Chinese! or, Who do you think you are? You are only Chinese!” (31). This indicates that the narrator is searching for his own identity in relation to the Chinese community in Australia as well as within the Australian community and is marginalised from both. As he walks through the city of Melbourne he becomes more and more introspective and voices the central question of the narrative: “Why was he becoming so weary of familiar faces and things? Why did he want to become a person whom he did not even want to know himself” (34). The narrator asserts the need to be apart from other Chinese people in order to feel free, so there is a desire for a renewal or rebirth of identity: “Whenever he felt lonely he would escape to crowds of strangers, the best if there was not one from his own race. Then, only then would he feel free …” (34). This points to the inhibiting nature of racial categorization, and to the desire for a more liberating form of identity. The position in which this narrator finds himself, bounded and constrained by his own Chinese identity is described in Orientalism: “A field is often an enclosed space. The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate” (Said, Orientalism 63).

The narrator in “The Wolves from the North” seems to feel the burden that such attitudes of Orientalism have imposed on him. This is further emphasised in the conclusion of the story when he realises that “Go home” is an abusive term which means that he should return to China and which is symbolised by the fact that
he is spat upon in the narrative. The title of this story, “The Wolves from
the North” suggests Australian attitudes which see Chinese people as a
potential political threat. It points to the opinions on their identity which
are informed by notions of Orientalism which still define Chinese-
Australian relationships. The title also links to the narrator’s name, Luo
Wenfu which translates as Lone Wolf or “a solitary person living in
isolation”(34). The narrative looks at difference from a negative
perspective and considers Chinese identity from the self-perception of
the individual.

Sexual Imagery and Cultural Difference in “Until The Wall Broke”

Homi Bhabha has noted that:

The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the
ground of knowledges, or to ‘engage in the war of position’, marks
the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of
identification. Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms
of identity, which because of their continual implication in other
symbolic symptoms, are always ‘incomplete’ or open to cultural
translation. (Location 162)

In the extract entitled “Until the Wall Broke” which is linked to his recent
novel The Eastern Slope Chronicle, Ouyang Yu’s “ability to shift the
ground of knowledges” can be seen by the manipulation of language
which takes place in the text. The narrator considers
issues of difference between Australia and China, drawing comparisons between the short history of Australia —“a blank page compared with Chinese history” (143) and the long history of China. The use of explicit sexual language is associated with history and indicates the point at which the writer has appropriated the English language and reassigned its meaning to illuminate cultural difference. Historic imagery and events are directly linked with sexuality and racial difference. For example the June 4 massacre of Tiananmen Square is described as a “mass political orgasm” (143). Here the word “orgasm” is used to denote upheaval and violence in China, drawing that Chinese experience into the focus of the Australian reader and at the same time assigning new meaning to the word “orgasm”. The entry of the soldiers to Tiananmen Square, which is equated with the title of the story, is used as the culmination of the story, likened to a rape with a bullet. Specific occasions in the history of China are therefore drawn into Australian literature, so that experiences of the two cultures merge in this writing. Ouyang Yu draws parallels between these cultures by articulating the Chinese experience through the use of English sexual words, and in this way he transforms language and suits it to his own purpose. The use of explicit sexual imagery is also used to denote the absence of the Chinese in the history of Australia: “He found to his horror, A History of Australia was partly covered in his semen, white Chinese semen. My God!” (141) Here he asks himself: “Would he be accused of soiling the history?” (141) His sexual act denotes the rewriting of the Chinese presence into the history of Australia, thereby addressing the absence of the Chinese in past versions of history. Language such as “white
Chinese semen” puts a different and new focus on these English sexual words and their associations, since the word ‘white’ is not usually associated with Chinese, and so the narrator’s use of these words questions assumptions about racial difference and asserts Chinese male sexuality.

The significance of Chinese history is foregrounded in “Until The Wall Broke” and brought into focus for the Australian reader. The narrator shows its difference to Australian history since: “What they termed history in a mere two hundred years is a miscellany of cramped indiscriminate and uninspired facts that in Chinese terms could mostly be pared away” (137). In showing this difference however he ignores the presence of Aboriginal history, only considering the Anglo-Celtic presence in Australia. This story represents an engagement between language, history and place; between China and Australia. The narrative re-interprets and re-inscribes history through a powerful use of language. “Until The Wall Broke” engages with a range of issues relevant to contemporary Australian society and illustrates at the same time the continuing double view of an immigrant who draws parallels between two cultures. This exposition of the conflicts of double identity and the pull of two cultures is central to Ouyang Yu’s work. His poem “Seeing Double” in his collection of poetry *Moon Over Melbourne* continues this theme:

wherever you go
china follows you

like a shadow
its ancientness

recast in Australia
you gaze at your own image

on the computer
its chineseness

becoming strange
like an imported antique

newly painted with foreign colour
a being of two beings

you can’t help but
translate everything back and forth so many times

that it becomes unrecognisably
fascinating as a doubled, tripled, multiple double (36)

This poem articulates a process of translation, not only of language but also of experience, which eventuates into some form of new identity. Words such as: “shadow” “recast” “two beings” and “doubled” denote replication. These words are employed to evoke the experience of two cultures and two identities. The new identity evolves in front of the narrator’s eyes, and it is significant that the Chinese image remains, but is “recast” or “newly painted with foreign colour” (36). There is therefore a redescription of the old or of the past. The tension
between two experiences of identity see-saw backwards and forwards in the process of translation, so in effect the poet is describing the process by which hybridity takes place. As Ien Ang points out: “Hybridity is not only about fusion and tension but also about ambivalence and incommensurability” (On Not 200). The ambivalent nature of the experience is illustrated by its foreignness, resulting in the narrator’s sense of an unrecognisable image of himself, a tension between images where the conflict of the old and new merges into a fascinating but confusing result.

The speaker in this poem is observing himself, and by articulating this translation between identities is an active participant in the process of change. In his observation of this, there is a suggestion that he is exiled from himself, he describes “its chineseness becoming strange.” Yet this poem also emphasises the power of the Chinese heritage: “wherever you go China follows you”; thus the cultural centre of the diaspora remains part of the psyche of the narrator. Ien Ang’s observation that: “What connects the diaspora with the ‘homeland’ is ultimately an emotional, almost visceral attachment” (“On Not” 32), can be applied to the meaning of this poem. The terms “image” and “shadow”, words which imply a replication of something that cannot be cast off, suggests the process of change which occurs to the original Chinese identity, and which becomes unfamiliar to the narrator. It is therefore a new identity, which is inextricably entwined with the concept of place and displacement.
While “Seeing Double” observes the flux of identity, the poem “Alien” articulates the marginalised position of its narrator. This is indicated at first by his relationship to the country: “I stand on this land / that does not belong to me / that does not belong to them either ” (Moon 28). The poem contains many words with negative implications which illustrate the racist attitudes of the dominant society: “unwelcoming”, “unsmiling”, “murderous”, “resentful.” The language used emphasises these attitudes, contributing to the alien nature of the narrator’s experience. By employing the use of stock conversational phrases Ouyang Yu transforms meaning to illustrate its negative connotations and to expose hostility behind the phrase: “… questions like / when are you going home? / how do you like it here?”(28) This poem confronts attitudes of the Australian community which serve to alienate and ‘other’ the migrant and which imply that the migrant does not belong: “unwelcoming eyes / unsmiling noses” (28). But it is the last line of the poem which denotes the pathos of the migrant experience: “The bloody inscrutable Chinese has no friends” (28). The word “inscrutable” is often used in relation to Chinese character. The poet challenges the interpretation of this word, which denotes a stereotypical description of Chinese identity, and destabilizes its meaning, pointing to the fact that it can indicate cultural isolation. This same condition is explored in the poem “Untitled” (Moon 91) where the narrator describes the schizophrenic nature of his own identity: “We’re strangers / Between Us / A life-sized mirror” (91) Here the observer can see both sides of his own identity and yet cannot reconcile the two images. This suggests that two cultures cannot merge, but appear in opposition to each other and separate from each other.
Ouyang Yu's poetry shows language as an important contributing factor in articulating cultural and personal isolation which defines the experience of the Chinese narrators. A specific discussion of language takes place in his poem “Song For an Exile in Australia” (Moon 14) when the poet reveals the difficulty of moving between two languages:

I sow my language into the alien soil
where it sends forth strange flowers that no one recognises
and all of a sudden I find my tongue held
between two languages like a vice (15)

The narrator shows its function as a contributor to cultural isolation and this writing again suggests the constant process of translation which is also a translation between the ideas of West and East. The link between place and language is in constant tension, since the language does not fit “the alien soil” and contributes to the dislocation of the experience, place and language therefore become interdependent. By representing this process in literature, the significance of place and language in postcolonial discourse is foregrounded. Ouyang Yu’s poem “Translating Myself” explores this:

I mean how can I turn myself into another language
Without surrendering myself
Without betraying myself
Without forgiving myself
Without even losing myself in a different con/text (82)
This sense of loss indicates the extreme sense of dislocation which is integral to the process of articulating in another language. The words “surrendering” “betraying” “losing” suggest two aspects of self, and reinforce the image of the double which runs through all of Ouyang Yu’s writing. But in another collection *Songs of the Last Chinese Poet*, the narrator moves on from this position and comes to a realization that:

it suddenly dawns on you that whatever you write will be a mirror image of the other depending on which language you choose which perspectives you employ (*Moon*16)

Ouyang Yu’s poems investigate the interface between language, identity and place and between language and culture, and illustrate their interdependence, the power of language which: “remains itself while being turned into another.” (82) The poet shows a reluctance to allow the new language to diminish his own cultural identity. In this way he is commenting on his status as a person poised between the borders of both societies.

In a poem entitled “Interview with Yu” the persona of the poem addresses the question of writing in English:

you said you come from china
i did
but why do you write in English
well its just a matter of preference I guess (*Moon* 42)
This poem explores the expectation of Australians in relation to Chinese-Australian identity and indicates that the hybridity which is open to the immigrant is not necessarily embraced by the dominant Australian culture which is unwilling to forego essentialist ideas of Chinese identity:

sorry can I ask you why you do not write in chinese
your own language
i do not own a language
i mean your own language (42)

Ouyang Yu does write poetry in Chinese and sees this as an indication of his marginal place in the Australian community:

To write Chinese poetry as Australian is to resist the temptation to be known as an Australian poet. It is to place oneself outside the mainstream English speaking and writing world, which has so far been asking the same question: “Do they write in English?” It is to borrow a fashionable saying, to exile oneself in obscurity.” (Ouyang Yu 2)

This comment indicates the paradoxical nature of identity where this author protects his position as a marginal writer, but where much of the subject matter of his literature addresses the isolated nature of such a position.
Language as Abuse

The language used in Ouyang Yu’s writing is often confronting, not only because of the use of abusive words but also because of its explicit sexual imagery. One of the techniques which Ouyang Yu employs is to use strong abusive language which mimics racist attitudes and re-directs it towards Australia as a country. This extract from his poem “Fuck You Australia” is an example:

You thought I was every bit unlike you
funny, inscrutable wily, cunning, miserly, full of dark designs
you thought in your heart of hearts that we were bad
not fit to share your continent

fuck you Australia… (79)

The poem is powerful because it has adopted an abusive Australian expression: “fuck you” and turned it back towards Australians, thereby re-directing the very weapon that has been used against him. The dialogue is presented as if it is a personal attack, yet the object of the attack is the collective Anglo-Celtic Australian community. The narrator articulates the accusations which he believes are directed against Chinese people, that they come here to live on the dole, to look for sex and to: “… learn your English that /called me names / that fucked, whenever it could, anybody, especially us” (79)

His poem “A Racist Chinese Father” also takes on the role of the abusive Australian. When the narrator’s son asks: “Dad what does you fucking dickhead mean and why did they sing << Ching
chong Chinamen to me>>" the son is taught to abuse in return: “simply answer back you fucking dickhead, you fucking aussie bastard…”(72)

The use of Australian vernacular challenges the Anglo-Celtic reader, and empowers both the author and the narrator. At the same time it accentuates the marginalised position of the writer, by appearing to be out of character with his cultural background. Through such familiar language Ouyang Yu is showing the reader an alternative view of Australia, a view of bigotry and racism and in doing so illustrates the dynamic nature of language which adjusts to his purpose. As part of this confrontation the speakers in Ouyang Yu’s poetry often display anger, which again mimics the anger of racial abuse and is inverted and re-directed towards “the homogenous race.”

anger buried deep inside
anger against the homogenous race
bent on self-destruction
anger against the alien race intent on othering …
(Songs of… 26)

His poem “A Lesson on Eyes” articulates the essentialist stereotypical perspective which defines Australian ideas of Chinese appearance and which is used as a form of abuse: “Slit-eyed almond-eyed slant-eyed and slopes / That unchanging view of the Western image of the East / Stunted by its own bloated sense of superiority” (Moon 78). By articulating these attitudes the narrator is both resisting and confronting the racist
perspectives which he considers inform Australian views of Chinese people. The poem echoes aspects of Said’s theory of Orientalism which: “depends for its strategy on this flexible, positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (*Orientalism* 7). This sense of superiority of the west is the central issue which Ouyang Yu’s writing attempts to destabilize, using the English language as his weapon.

Ouyang Yu’s writing engages with Australian culture by direct confrontation, and by mimicry of verbal and racial abuse. It inverts the relationship between the abuser and the abused. His strategy of dismantling language changes the way language is perceived and in doing so foregrounds cultural difference. The accusations which are implicit to his writing attempt to change opinion, and speak out against the hegemony of the dominant culture and to break through the constraints which are imposed by that culture. His writing often depicts two cultures in conflict. The confronting nature of this writing illustrates a dialogue between cultures, an attempt to force recognition of the isolation of the immigrant and his/her relation to the dominant culture. It also articulates the personal struggle involved in writing in another language. Brian Castro comments on the positive experience of this: “Language marks the spot where the self loses its prison bars—where the border crossing takes place, traversing the spaces of others … The polyglot is a freer person, a person capable of living in words and worlds other than the narrow and the confined one of unimagined reality” (“Writing
Asia” 9). Ouyang Yu traverses Australian space by his manipulation and reconfiguration of language which gives him power to both confront and engage the dominant culture.

Such writers as Ouyang Yu can create a powerful voice from a minority culture, however in an essay entitled “Multicultural Poetry as Unwritten in China” Ouyang Yu describes how “exclusive, authoritarian and tyrannical the Australian literary climate can be, under which ‘multiculturals’ like me will have a hard time”. His collection of poetry entitled: “Songs of the Last Chinese Poet” was however short-listed for the N.S.W. Premier’s Literary Awards in 1999, indicating both recognition and acceptance. Ouyang Yu’s writing is confronting because it challenges the notion that contemporary Australian multicultural society is “harmonious and tolerant” (Ang, 98). Ouyang Yu’s Australia is isolating, racist, lonely, one that perceives Chinese in an essentialist stereotypical way. This dialogue serves to de-personalise immigrant experience and acts to muffle the voices that speak a different message, voices such as Ouyang Yu’s, whose writing presents an array of perspectives on Chinese and Australian experiences. The confrontational nature of his writing is valuable in its ability to shock and unsettle comfortable attitudes which exist within Australian society. These narratives and poems refute John Howard’s perception, quoted earlier in this chapter that: “I just find that everybody is quite comfortable, and and [sic] they’d be fairly happy with the fact that we have quite a diverse background” (Megalogenis). Hopefully the publication of Ouyang Yu’s recent book The
*Eastern Slope Chronicle* will make his work more accessible to Australian readers.

**The Representation of Women in the Writing of Ding Xiaoqi**

The articulation of cultural difference is also significant to the writing of Ding Xiaoqi, who arrived in Australia after the Tiananmen Square massacre. The role of women and the marginalised position of the homosexual is central to these narratives. The two stories by Ding Xiaoqi which I will discuss bring some experiences of Chinese-Australian women into the Australian literary scene. The narratives pivot around attitudes towards gender, and the comments of Ien Ang in relation to multiculturalism and women are particularly relevant to these stories. In her book *On Not Speaking Chinese* Ien Ang discusses the need for multiculturalism to recognize the role of difference in relation to feminism, but in doing so to allow for “ambivalence and ambiguity” (178). As she says: “Isn’t it more than understandable then, that feminism too wishes to embrace the multicultural ideal? Isn’t it necessary for women from other races and ethnicities into its fold, if only in their own interests as women?” (178) The following two stories, consider the position of women and of homosexual people in a contemporary Chinese-Australian context.

The first story, “The Glass Man”, depicts the marginalised position of a homosexual man in a Chinese-Australian family. The narrator indicates the inability of his Chinese-Australian family to accommodate difference, both sexual and racial. The father
rejects both his son and his Australian lover, who is known only as “Blue Eyes” (86) indicating that East and West unite in a relationship which is rejected by all those around them. Although this narrative is told in the first person by the young Chinese male, the story also foregrounds female presence within a Chinese family and shows its enduring influence in the diasporic situation. By investigating this female space, the psychological isolation of the male character becomes more apparent. Images of Australia seldom occur in this story, although the narrator moves countries when he is seven years old. There is no engagement with physical aspects of Australia as a country or with Australian people, with the exception of “Blue Eyes.” However China looms in the background. The image of the grandmother hovers over the family in Australia, even though she had died years beforehand in China. She is the dominant female, perhaps representing the homeland since a shrine is built to her in the house in Australia, where the father speaks to her and burns joss sticks. The narrator is conscious of the chorus of relatives in China: “… all my family including crowds of my relatives, far away in China hoped that I would have a bright future and bring honour to my ancestors.” (85). There is therefore a sense of the power of the diasporic centre, which is essential to everyone’s identity with in the family. As Shen Yuanfang writes: “For Chinese immigrants there existed in their imagination a place where they could anchor their physically or psychologically dislocated selves” (Dragon Seed 148). In “The Glass Man” China, as the centre of their diaspora, exists in Australia. Geographic distance from their birthplace becomes
irrelevant because of the power of its presence and its ability to acts as “anchor” to this family.

In connection with this, “The Glass Man” is resonant with sexual references. In both countries the narrator is surrounded by doting females. In China they all come to the grandmother’s funeral and like the spirit of the grandmother they remain in the background of the boy’s life. As a child his relationship to all these female relatives in China is sexual: “Those who were reserved would smile at me while those who were shrewish would simply take my ‘thing’ in their hand and stroke it…” (84) In Australia he is still surrounded by this adoring throng of sisters. The boy is worshipped by the females in his family, his five sisters and many aunts, a situation which constructs the subordinate nature of the male-female relationships in the family. In turn the father’s rejection of his son is indicative of his power in this story. There is a constant interchange between sexes in the narrative. The author shows the isolation of the male character, firstly by showing him surrounded by females and then by being marginalised because of his homosexuality. These images of China and images of gender intertwine to define the narrator’s identity, which ultimately cannot survive without both.

The voice of the narrator in “The Glass Man” has an innocent tone and the image of the Glass Man is a literary allusion to a character in Dream of Red Mansions who was “spoiled by bad women” (84). There is a suggestion that the narrator is emotionally and psychologically fragile: “as if I was really a glass man who would break at any moment with the slightest
movement.” (87) Ding Xiaoqi’s narrative explores the psychological state of the main character where the narrator questions his rejection by his family and his own sense of identity: “I stood before the mirror, watching my own face. Wasn’t I the selfsame I?” (86) He articulates his father’s rejection of his partner, but attributes it to his partner’s bad manners: “it was because he was as useless as me.” (85) The narrator is oblivious to the effect that his homosexuality has on his father and manifests an inability to survive on his own without being surrounded by people: “If there was nobody beside me I couldn’t think, couldn’t do anything, not knowing who I was.” (86) Ding Xiaoqi foregrounds both difference and marginalisation within a Chinese-Australian family by using a homosexual young man as narrator, and in doing so questions the discrimination and repression which is central to this story. Themes of the Chinese homeland, sexuality and identity give this story a depth which is at odds with the detached and rather formal style in which it is written. An example of this is when the narrator is trying to commit suicide: “I told her in all honesty that I had been awaiting death because I had attempted suicide” (87). This detachment is unsettling for the reader. Since the subject matter is intensely emotional, there is a distance between the reader and the subject, and between the writer and her narrator. The minor role that Australian images plays in the story increases the significance of Chinese identity in the narrative.
The Angry Kettle

The collection of Ding Xiaoqi’s stories entitled Maidenhome consists of stories written while still living in China, with one exception, the story “The Angry Kettle,” which was written after her move to Australia. It is this story which I shall consider here, since she is writing as a member of the Chinese diaspora in Australia and engages with her experience in this country. This narrative employs the use of psychological realism to examine a relationship between an Australian male named Michael and a female Chinese student who shares his house. The kettle, which is his proud possession, ultimately defines their relationship, as it is the medium through which his attitudes are revealed. The dialogue in this story represents male and female perspectives as well as those of West and East. Her flatmate, Michael, is pompous and dominating: “he always interrupted me the minute I opened my mouth” (195). Michael uses his knowledge of the English language to show cultural dominance: “Five interruptions for every ten words.” (194) Their relationship progresses according to the state of the kettle which he treats with obsessive attention, and it finally climaxes when he finds the kettle is not clean. The dirty kettle exposes Michael’s racism as he accuses her of spattering it with cooking oil:

‘You could eat a sandwich.’
‘But I’m Chinese’
‘Do Chinese people have to eat fried food?’
‘Maybe, but I can’t stop eating just because of that kettle.’
Ding Xiaoqi’s writing shows a sense of the ridiculous, but in doing so raises significant cultural issues. Stereotypical notions of food take on a deeper meaning when they become accusations and mirror essentialist views of Chinese people. There is an association between the dirty kettle and her being Chinese. The narrator presents Michael and his attitudes as petty, annoying and ridiculous, and so there is an interchange of views on culture. In the shiny surface of the kettle the narrator sees her face as “a rock melon” (194). By not recognising her reflection in the kettle she acknowledges the cultural change which is central to her move to Australia. This distortion reflects the changing nature of her identity in the new country, she becomes unrecognisable to herself, a condition which is reminiscent of Ouyang Yu’s poem quoted above: “we’re strangers / between us / a life-sized mirror”. (Moon 91) The text, then, comments on the relationship between the narrator and Michael as well as on her own image of herself. “The Angry Kettle” represents the narrator as ‘other’ within the Australian community. Not only as a woman but also as a Chinese woman. It is significant that the encounter with Michael and his kettle is empowering. She rejects his narrow views and leaves his flat, asserting personal and cultural independence, therefore challenging his domination as a Western male. This narrative moves then, from the specific to a broader view of a Chinese woman in Western society. Ien Ang notes that:
The so-called politics of difference recognizes the need to go beyond the notion of an encompassing sisterhood, and acknowledges that feminism needs to take account of the fact that not all women are white, Western and middle-class and take into consideration the experiences of ‘other’ women as well (On Not Speaking179).

By writing about women and gender and the experience of a Chinese-Australian, Ding Xiaoqi engages in a dialogue with multiculturalism, feminism and racism, bringing the experience of the ‘other’ into the view of contemporary readers.

The woman’s decision to move out of the flat implies a refusal to accept the position of victim and to be a target for gender and racial repression. She walks away from her marginalised position and in doing so refuses to be considered as ‘other’ in the relationship with the Australian male.

**Marginalised Identity and the Short Fiction of Brian Castro**

Both these stories by Ding Xiaoqi have been translated from the Chinese language, their style and subject matter are quite different from the short fiction of Brian Castro, who has spent many years in Australia. Both authors investigate the site of cultural difference between China and Australia and foreground the marginalised position of Chinese-Australian migrants. Castro’s short narrative “The Pillow Book” is a reflective piece which depicts cultural and personal isolation, expressing the trauma and confusion of a nameless person, referred to only as “he”, who
has no sense of identity because he is of mixed race. The story challenges the notion that racial boundaries should define identity. The narrator questions the idea that East and West should be concepts which denote two poles of identity: “As if the East and West were such immoveable pillars …” (Castro, “Pillow” 81) The person who is the subject of the narrative “had fallen in-between, made invisible by complication, assimilation; ground like yellow corn without distinction: less than human. Fodder” (81). The subject shows confusion at the way he is classified. This is indicated in the narrative where nine of the paragraphs start with the phrase: “He does not understand.” (81-83) This phrase reflects the irrationality of racism and bewilderment at the need to classify people according to their race.

At first the narrative refers to an Eastern diasporic identity: “He does not understand why the words immigration and migrant and Asiatic causes such a darkness in his mind” (82) and then moves to an exploration of Aboriginal identity and the difficulty of writers being published. So the subject of this narrative is not personalised or specific but rather encompasses the experience of the marginalised and the isolated, allowing various voices to speak. As the narrative weaves between subjects it articulates the suffering of the outsider: “he does not understand why the words immigration and migrant and Asiatic cause such a darkness in his mind and sorrow in his heart.” (82) This story hovers between poetry and prose as it describes racism and exclusion. The narrator links these themes to language: “He does not understand why most of us are afraid to tread a singular path: we/ us/ our: the most disingenuous of pronouns.” (83) It is
these first person pronouns which denote exclusion from society, which he likens to an illness: “A contagion which limits his activities and an infection which sequesters him.” (82) Specific words thus become part of the exclusion process.

“The Pillow Book” articulates the condition of a person of mixed race whose identity represents an aspect of the Australian multicultural experience. The reflection of this experience questions notions of racial purity and exclusivism. In an essay entitled “Writing Asia” Castro comments on this by saying: “But hybridity, or its shadow, miscegenation, has always been viewed here with a kind of embarrassment or puzzlement. And yet, when one thinks about it, it is in the interests of the puritanical perpetrators of hierarchy and exclusiveness to encourage such bewilderment” (“Writing Asia” 7). By depicting these negative attitudes the writer celebrates such an identity and affirms its place within the Australian community thus notions of Anglo-Celtic cultural dominance and superiority are challenged.

**Revisiting History**

The theme of difference and isolation is also explored in Brian Castro’s story “Nightsafe Area.” The narrative centres on the life of a disabled Vietnamese refugee who sits on a bench at a railway station in Sydney. There are many interlinked themes to this story as the narrator slips between past and present and alludes continually to the future. His monologue roams between Australia, Amsterdam and Vietnam, but he only moves from his bench to get a cup of hot water or to speak to the station-
master. The narrator, Billy Van, is marginalised in three ways: as an Asian, as a physically disabled person and as one who is mentally unstable. The author uses theatrical allusions and a reference to Edward Said’s theory to describe his marginalised identity: “On account of the western worlds persistence in Orientalism there have been few parts available to us East-enders; us little yellow men, even though it's fashionable now to put some colour into acting, you really have to admit” (Castro, “Nightsafe” 34). His reference to “little yellow men” reflects the racist, western attitudes which form an integral part of racial abuse, he is therefore referring to himself as he is perceived by western society.

The narrator is of mixed race, since his father was an Australian in Vietnam during the war, but there is always a sense in this story that his past and his identity are as crippled as his body, that his identity is unstable and fractured:

… I’m a cripple. Got no feet see. Take this calliper off.
Nothing there.
Vietnam…
Then again, maybe not.
I think I was born this way. I’ve changed my mind. (27)

The narrator changes his mind several times about the cause of his deformity. It changes from being caused by the chemicals of Agent Orange impregnated in fruit that his mother ate, to stepping on a mine, to being shot. Whichever version he chooses, he is a product of the war: “Because of defoliation I occurred. Fell
from creation. A parachuting paranormal. Secret-agent orange.” (37)

The unstable notion of the origins of his physical disabilities illustrate the horror of the legacy left to Vietnamese people by Americans and Australians and illustrates the political nature of this story. The author employs irony to present the two perspectives on the Vietnam War in a conversation between the narrator and someone on his bench at the railway station:


The ironic conversational tone uses a form of mimicry—a reasonable, rational tone of voice, to emphasise the critical political stance of the narrator’s message. As Homi Bhabha states mimicry is: “… the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (Location 86). This strategy empowers the speaker, and uses language as a form of resistance to question dominant political beliefs and to suggest another version of the events of the past. The presence of the French in Vietnam also comes under scrutiny in the narrator’s monologue: “They left the country. Bled it dry. Broke its back” (Castro, “Nightsafe” 28). There is a constant sense in this story of the author’s political perspective, as he says: “One
culture’s strength is always another’s devastation” (33). Images of the war and deformity intrude continually into the narrative, disturbing images from the past which obviously reverberate still in the present. The narrator refers to the several times he tried to commit suicide: “Death is my constant companion” (32). The author employs black humour to illustrate the image of death: the ashes of the narrator’s uncle, a Buddhist monk who incinerated himself during the war, sit beside him on the bench in a tea caddy, which he addresses from time to time: “Yours was a most creative cremation”, he says (23).

Although the narrator in “Nightsafe Area” is articulate and expresses himself with a certain elegance and humour, the images are bleak and the message is bitter. He describes the botched surgery on his “reptilian stumps” in return for which he is granted citizenship: “A guarantee of love on my part… I woke the next morning waving a little Australian flag out my window. Nobody took any notice and the feeling went quickly away.” (34) There is a very cynical tone to the narrator’s monologue which puts the plight of the refugee, the Asian, the outsider, into perspective. It observes the Vietnam war from the vantage point of the Vietnamese people and speaks disparagingly of the Australian government’s treatment of refugees: “… an Australian patrol boat appears on the horizon to spray us with Mortein” (37). The narrative draws on the past and provides commentary on the ability of Australians to be blind to its messages: “… we pluck out our eyes as we flee hysterically into the future.” (36) This vivid but bleak vision gives a negative view of Australia both in the present as well as the future since the blindness to which
he refers is self-inflicted by Australians and the word “hysterically” indicates a future that is out of control as a result.

This story is an example of the capacity of non Anglo-Celtic Australian literature to provide a different perspective on Australian history, to view it from outside the boundaries of Australian ideologies. In doing so this story both challenges and confronts accepted ideas that exist within Australian culture. By questioning these beliefs, Castro’s writing interpolates the narrative of Australian history and resists cultural dominance by articulating an alternative interpretation.

The past is also significant to Castro’s story “Shanghai Dancing.” In this narrative however it is approached from a different perspective. “Shanghai Dancing” is a short story but is also an excerpt from the novel of the same name which was published in 2003. In this excerpt the narrator, an Australian-Chinese man, journeys into the life of his father and into the past by visiting Shanghai, armed only with an old set of photographs which had belonged to his father. I shall show how the story is dense with interwoven themes and recurring images. The most dominant theme of this story is the significance of the past and its relevance to present identity. The photographs, which are interspersed in the narrative, form part of that journey, acting as visual signposts to a life that was lived sixty years beforehand. These photographs are central to this story and are linked to the use of double images of people and events, where the past runs parallel to the present. As a counterpoint to the story, the image of Australia lies in the background, but the story celebrates
cultural difference and points to its significance in relation to the identity of Australian migrants.

The journey into the past echoes those in Café Scheherazade, but whereas the patrons of the café journeyed through memory, this narrator sees memory as empty and travels to Shanghai: “to pursue the emptiness of memory: of things disappearing all around” (12) The trip is seen as a pilgrimage. The narrative moves easily from past to present; in the space of a paragraph it transports the reader from Shanghai to Australia or from sixty years ago to the present, as the narrator inhabits and replicates his father’s life, discovering the hotels and streets of the city, rebuilding and reconstructing the past: “So he looks out across the Whangpoo and the Soochow and it is already midday, 1932” (13). The existence of his father’s photographs is central to the theme of memory and its evocation of the past is introduced in the opening to the story: “Sometimes I suffocate when I think of the past: of a life that never was, flashing by in a daguerreotype. Creamy yellow. Let’s not get too technical about photography. Protogallic acid; protosulphate of iron potassium cyanide. Let’s not get into all that. Makes for too much exposure” (11).

There are repeated references to replication in the story. The doubling of events and images is central to the narrative and indicates the significance of the past in the identity of the narrator. In an interview where Castro was questioned about this recurring theme in his writing, he said: “Yes. I see it as a positive, in the sense that it is a refinement of human desires and imagination to be someone else… Doubleness and doubling back are also a kind of mode d’emploi in the writing of my novels and
also in the key to their reading” (Oyang Yu, “An Interview” 75). The narrator’s girlfriend, Carmen, talks of his photographs: “I’m trying a new technique, she said. Re-photographing. It’s possible that photography has its own time, outside of any technical manipulation of it” (Castro, “Shanghai” 23). Carmen is a parallel image of his father’s wife, Claudine, who had died in child-birth many years before. The narrator mimics his father’s life in other ways as well, wearing similar suits and going to the same hotels: “I get into the bath as he had done, in this room, in this hotel almost sixty years ago” (22).

By reliving his father’s life the narrator engages with history and reconstructs and re-interprets it. The depiction of the past is very detailed in the story. The colourful life and atmosphere of Shanghai in the 1930s, told from the point of view of his father as a wealthy ship-owner, is one of hotels, clubs, cabarets and dancing: “By nine it’s drinks on board his launch, jokes rippling across the water while they snack on crisp Peking duck folded into crepes, Meme tosses the Moet over the transom…” (14) Through social detail such as this the reader is drawn into the past. Even the music of those years before the Second World War is mentioned. As the past unravels in the narrative it becomes clear that at its core it is a life of cocaine and opium and alcohol and that he is in fact a “dapper murderer” (15) who uses the phrase “Shanghai Dancing” as a term to denote the syphilis from which he suffers.

Through this detail the author illustrates the interrelationship between social history and memory. While memory explores the
past it also leads into the future: “I go out for a walk, my heart heaving with memory; no home now. But somewhere forward. I thought I could breathe, swim the relentless stream of possibility and magnificent obsession.” (15) His journey into the past empowers this move forward. In travelling back to Shanghai he discovers not only his father’s past but his own heritage. As a migrant he is incomplete without the knowledge of that past: “… I needed some marker of truth, something that I could hang on to” (18). Castro articulates change within the narrator’s identity; as the past becomes reconstructed so does his awareness of himself. There is a sense of transformation, as the narrative shifts between his father’s past and his own past and the present and future, and so does his identity evolve.

The multicultural literature which this thesis examines, foregrounds the significance of the past and its contribution to cultural identity. The cross-cultural exchange in all this literature brings with it an acknowledgement of the past but also an awareness of the flux of identity which occurs with cultural change. Transformation of identity is an inevitable occurrence when influences of past and present intermingle and it is this transformation which many of the stories in this thesis explore.

There are only intermittent references to Australia in “Shanghai Dancing”, but since the narrator informs us that he has lived in Australia for thirty years and his father died here, it exists as a point of comparison to the colourful depiction of Shanghai which I have mentioned above. In the twelve photographs which are interspersed throughout the story one is of a garden ornament in
the shape of a kangaroo. Australia therefore, is part of the story which the narrator reconstructs. “Shanghai Dancing” celebrates difference between cultures, and articulates an alternative past to that which is seen from an Anglo-Celtic perspective. Ien Ang points to this when she says:

Claiming one’s difference (from the mainstream or dominant national culture) and turning it into symbolic capital has become a powerful and attractive strategy among those who have never quite belonged, or have been made to feel that they do not quite belong in the West. (“Transforming” 12)

Ang’s comment suggests that claiming difference counteracts some of the negative aspects of cultural exclusion, but Castro takes this a step further when he says: “As a migrant, as a citizen of this country, I do feel a responsibility for promoting difference” (Ouyang Yu, “An Interview” 80). This literature becomes part of this “symbolic capital” which is influential in destabilising social attitudes which denigrate cultural difference.

“Shanghai Dancing” illustrates the significance of the psychological pull of the centre of the Chinese diaspora, and the influence of that centre on the life of an Australian immigrant: “I survived thirty years in Australia… Then I got the urge to go back.” (Castro, “Shanghai” 12) In this story the journey back is an exploration of self-discovery. As Ien Ang states: “There is of course an excitement in the self-affirmation and self-assertion that is inextricably linked to the rise of identity politics since the
1960s: there is a pleasure in the sheer realization of a distinctive shared identity and the empowered sense of belonging it imparts." (11) For the narrator in this story this sense of identity is not specifically or solely Chinese. He points out that some people in Shanghai greeted him with the words: “Hello English!” (16) “ … Some spoke gibberish which I worked out later to be Russian or Mongolian. I passed for both.” (16) Castro’s narrator is therefore foregrounding a mixed racial identity, which includes his Chinese past. This story delves deep into that past and catches a glimpse of a life straddled between cultures.

Identity and the Past in the Short Fiction of Beth Yahp

The significance of the past and the changing nature of identity and culture is also central to the short fiction of Beth Yahp, who came to Australia in 1984 from Malaysia. The links between language and culture and place are foregrounded in her writing, and are seen to be significant to the inter-family relationships which her narratives depict. As in Castro’s story discussed above, a photograph is part of the narrative structure. Yahp writes from the point of view of a Chinese-Malaysian woman who does not speak Chinese, thus her writing speaks from yet another area of the Chinese diaspora. By recreating Chinese-Malaysian life in vivid detail, Yahp’s story explores the nature of the racial identities which have evolved in the family, looks at the significance of language and communication and reveals the subordinate situation of her grandmother and her grandmother’s daughters in an androcentric culture. Through the exploration of these themes a picture of three generations emerges representing cultural
difference, cultural change and a reinterpretation of history. The narratives at first appear to be autobiographical, but on closer reading involve a re-creation and reappraisal of the past. Fiction and biography merge as she states simply in the opening sentence of “The Photo 1955”: “Some of this is fact. Some of it stories” (Yahp, 143) Most of the stories considered here look outward from Australia and re-assert her Chinese-Malaysian identity. Apart from Yahp’s short fiction I will also consider an essay which reflects upon some aspects of her life in contemporary Australia.

Yahp’s story “The Photo, 1955” investigates the history of a Chinese-Malaysian family through the careful examination of a photograph taken in 1955. The photograph consists of two parents, two daughters and three sons. Yahp’s narrator spins a narrative web between the family members in the photograph so that a history evolves, cobbled together from observations, memories and from the interpretation of gaps and silences which are revealed in the scaffolding of family memories. There is a constant shifting in the narrative, moving between generations and between countries, providing a perspective from the contemporary viewpoint of the narrator. The narrator and observer is their granddaughter in Sydney, looking through the family album, re-inventing the past re-creating it from the perspective of another country. The narrator then, speaks from the position of an Australian Chinese-Malaysian person without Chinese language. Malaysia is referred to as: “That other place. Not here”, (Yahp, “Photo”143) a strategy which centres the story in Australia, but does not allow Australian images to intrude
into the narrative. Descriptions of Chinese food conjure up the Chinese home, invoking a strong sense of place: “The marble-topped table laden with coconut candy, sugared carrots and lotus nuts” (143). The voice of an aunt intrudes into the narrative and is written in Italics so that the layers of the generations involved in the photograph become apparent to the reader. A series of sub-headings provide structure and indicate the themes which unfold.

“Fact one: Names” is the first of these sub-headings which reveals the hybrid identities of the faces in the photograph. The narrator connects the original name of the older son Chung Kean (the narrator’s father) to his Chinese identity: “He still thinks in pure Chinese then, that immigrant language of his parents and grandparents.” His name at a later point in his life becomes Richard Andrew with the influence of the British presence in the country, while his parents give him three different names until one is found to suit his luck. Language and names are significant in the narrative since they not only reflect position in the family but reflect the cultural and political changes that took place in Malaysia, which in turn affects the mutability of their identity. Whereas the son pictured in the photograph in 1955, thinks in Chinese, his father sees the Chinese past as irrelevant: “Born and bred in Malaya for him the tumult in China is a story which unfolds only second-hand” (149).

The mosaic of identities that is revealed in the two generations represented in the photograph indicates the intricate nature of identity in the Chinese diaspora. Renegotiation of these identities
can be seen since various members of the family identify with different cultures. For instance Chung Kean lived a different life to his siblings: “filled with the war and the Japanese occupation” (Yahp, “Photo” 145). His father however, sees the future in the hands of the British in Malaya: “He throws away all his Chinese clothes, he will never again wear them. He embraces all things British” (149). Thus there are various cultural influences at work: British, Chinese, Japanese and Malaysian. This reinforces Ien Ang’s statement referred to earlier in this chapter that: “Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content—be it racial cultural or geographical…” (On Not Speaking 38). The intercepting influences within this family and the changes which inevitably result are an indication of the unfixed nature of Chinese identity.

In “The Photo: 1955” the spectrum between identities in the family and its relationship to language can best be seen through the relationship between grandmother and granddaughter. The narrator of the story, who is not in the photograph communicates with her grandmother in Chinese Malay, which is a language that neither speak. The cultural difference between them signifies not only a generational gap but also a cultural gap, which increases when the granddaughter moves to Australia. Whereas language and communication are central factors in the links between the family, the granddaughter and her grandmother communicate without the fluency of any particular language: “… it is not talk so much as a dance, of eyebrows and words and hands and shoulders, with the essence of what we’re saying having to be sifted out from amongst our wealth of
ungainly words” (154). This separates the narrator from the world which
the Chinese grandmother inhabits, but does not exclude her, since their
relationship is maintained by this expressive behaviour as well as
words.

Ashcroft points out: “Worlds exist by means of languages, their horizons
existing as far as the processes of neologism, innovation, tropes, and
imaginative usage generally will allow the horizons of language itself to
be extended” (The Empire 44). The absence of a common language
between the granddaughter and grandmother and the consequent use
of other forms of communication indicates an extension of the horizons
of language to which Ashcroft refers, articulating the significance of
physical actions in relation to language and meaning and creating a
hybrid form of communication which is particular to the two of them and
is adaptable to their personal needs. The fact that the narrator does not
speak Chinese also points to the distance which can emerge from the
diasporic centre when the language of the homeland is not handed
down to other generations and when different cultural influences
intrude. By interpreting the past through the English language that past
is filtered through western perceptions, ideas and expressions, and the
interpretation of it is therefore affected by culturally hybrid perspectives.

The complicated entanglement of hybrid identities within “The Photo:
1955” not only reflects the intertwined relationships of the Chinese
diaspora but reveal the position of women in the three generations of
the family. The narrator reconstructs the
story of the family through the gaps and absences in the photographs as well as through those present in the grandfather's family album. The narrative reveals that one aunt dies as a young girl, and one daughter was taken away. Information is supplied by a surviving aunt, a female presence therefore dominates the narrative. The grandmother in the family is “dowered” to the family of her husband. (152) Her life is lived out serving the domestic needs of her family and eventually her life revolves around her son even in his forties: “Cooked breakfasts and dinners and ‘Son when will you be home?’” (163). The position of women in society is indicated by the fact that a female child was removed from the grandmother, since it was financially difficult to keep her. In the next generation the narrator’s mother receives condolences when she gives birth only to daughters and the grandparents try to adopt a son for them.

The inferior position of women in this narrative is entrenched in female attitudes as well as male. One of the aunts refers to the narrator as: “This girl, she's just another useless girl” (156), so that self-perception promotes the subordinate space which they inhabit. When the narrator returns to her grandmother’s house from Australia and looks at the photographs adorning the walls of the house, she remarks that: “Our faces are up there even though we are only daughters… our faces allowed amongst that gallery of faces” (148). The sense of inferiority and servility which pervades the attitudes of women in this narrative indicates the entrenched dominance of the male figures in the family and the patriarchal system which structured the family in the past. The grandmother, although repressed and subordinate to the
grandfather, exists in a space defined by her Chinese background, however she is in fact central to this story because she is so significant to the life of her granddaughter, who views her position from the perspective of life in Australia.

**Diasporic Identities**

The depiction of place is integral to Yahp’s narrative since “The Photo: 1955” is redolent with the colours, smells and voices of China. China’s presence hovers in the background despite its geographic distance, but the diasporic nature of the family which is depicted absorbs culture from Malaysia and Britain and Australia. The photo which anchors the narrative is a fixed entity, but it comes to life in the voice of the narrator, as she weaves her tale around each of the characters. The hybrid cultural perspective of the narrative is positioned from Australia and therefore is informed and defined by contemporary culture. Ien Ang points out that:

…”the cultural context of ‘where you at’ always informs and articulates the meaning of ‘where you from.’ This is, to speak with Rushdie, what the diasporic subject gains. In this sense, hybridity marks the emancipation of the diaspora from China as the transparent master-signified of ‘Chineseness’ (*On Not Speaking* 35).

“The Photo: 1955” depicts a continual translation between Australia and Malaysia and the Chinese heritage of the narrator’s family, and reflects the relationship between the diasporic
subject and China, to which Ang refers. Yahp’s writing is therefore defined by the experience of diaspora and its implication of changing notions of place and home. Parallel with this is the translation between past and present. The hybrid nature of the narrator’s cultural heritage weakens the links with China and re-configures her relationship with that country. The narrator’s story shows the porosity of the boundaries of language and culture and in this way indicates her “emancipation” from China as the cultural centre of her past. The diasporic community, then acts to challenge and question the notion of China as the centre, as the spiritual and geographic homeland. As the narrator says of her grandfather: “Not for him the dreams of someday returning to China that still haunt the men around him, as well as his own father. China is the past …” (149) This comment indicates the dense and complex relationship between, place, history and identity.

Yahp’s short stories are characterized by an intense evocation of the past. Their reference to Australia is fleeting but they indicate the significance of the past in the life of an immigrant, seeking and re-inventing their identity. Her story “Houses, Sisters, Cities” moves between three generations and reconstructs the relationship of the narrator with her sister, interwoven with the relationship between their mother and her sisters and mother, in Kuala Lumpur, in London and Sydney. The narrative is reconstructed by the “geology of memory” (70) which pieces together the relationships between the women. “Houses, Sisters, Cities” is highly detailed: “my mother in those days was a mother of sleeveless blouses and talcum powder, of full cream milk and
boiled eggs in the mornings, a proper breakfast and rosewater left over from the days she was a young missy of the house”(43). But behind the sweet-smelling portrait her life is one of repression and depression and dark moods, in a society that regards the women in the family as “useless girls” (53). The mother’s life reflects a repressive society, yet she shows the strength to resist: “If as you say all I am good for is cooking and cleaning and looking after children, I’d rather do it in my own house” (65). The oppression which she is subjected to is initially as much from women in her family as from men. But in her married life she speaks a “whispered litany over dusting scrubbing and sweeping… ‘I am no-one, I have nobody, I wish I was dead’” (69). Her problems are not specifically articulated, but her role within this culturally hybrid family is unenviable.

The female figures which are portrayed in these narratives reveal a deep sense of inferiority and enact a subordinate role within the family. Audre Lorde defines sexism as: “… the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance.” (Lorde 631) The right to dominate is depicted in Yahp’s stories in the degree to which the women believe in their own subordinate position. It is this self-perception, this belief in the ‘inherent superiority’ of the male, imposed by the patriarchal society, which governs their lives and renders them incapable of regarding themselves with any sense of self-esteem. The fact that Beth Yahp’s writing situates itself in Australia and writes from that perspective indicates the cultural change which has taken place since the previous generation. It contributes to a new view of the past, by
exposing the inequality which defined family relationships. By foregrounding the role of females in her writing, Yahp resists and contests the subordinate position to which they have been relegated and questions the power structures which imposed that dominance. The depiction of sexism, mixed with essentialist notions of Chinese men are articulated in the story by the older members of the mother’s family when she decides to marry someone who is Chinese:

Someday the Chinaman will marry a younger wife … and perhaps he will beat her, those people are known for that, and gambling, drinking, strings of children from God knows where, as well as opium pipes. He will find a young mistress, someone who speaks his language and knows his customs, who will turn his head completely and drive her out of his house. Children will end up on the street. (64)

These attitudes indicate the marginal position of the mother within her own Malaysian family as well as anti-Chinese sentiment, which includes a stereotypical image of Chinese men.

**Memory Shapes the Past.**

As with much of the literature which I am studying in this thesis, memory sifts and shapes the recollections of the past. The significance of memory is foregrounded in “Houses, Sisters, Cities” and there is continual reference to its role. The narrator refers to: “my memory house”(58), “the shape of my memory”(61) and “The geology of memory”(70). She admits to
its unreliability and to manipulating these memories, since there are two other sisters who are virtually unmentioned in the story: “It sometimes suits the shape of my memory if those two other sisters will do me the favour of sitting quiet.” (61) Memory reconstructs the past that it wants to reconstruct, and in this case its absences become part of the family picture.

The past that memory conjures up is a colourful, detailed past. Sydney and London exist as “opposite ends of the earth” (73), but the homeland of Malaysia and the personality of the mother are situated in the middle, drawing each daughter to the centre. Descriptions of the markets, the back streets, the food and the heat contribute to this sense of place, of life in the tropics: “Nowadays her voice on the phone is a thread to the crush and swell of those markets; it seems fishcakes and diesel fumes make the satellite leap with her stories into my room. My sister smells them from the other side of the world” (47). Their story exists as a picture of the past, Sydney and London exist only as a passing reference, as marginal to their Chinese-Malaysian identity.

Beth Yahp’s short fiction does not always directly reflect her Australian experience, but its vivid portrayal of family relationships and of the changing roles of the women over three generations draws her Chinese-Malaysian world into the realms of Australian literature. As Kirpal Singh notes: “For her the writing is a moment of diasporic empowerment” (152). Her literature is informed by the Western perspective from which she speaks, from this vantage point she views a cross-cultural community
which is itself a diasporic one. Her writing foregrounds the role of women in Chinese-Malaysian society and in this way addresses the silence that has defined their position in society.

As I have mentioned the two stories written by Yahp which have already been considered do not reflect the Australian experience to any great degree, although the narratives are positioned in Sydney. The narrative “In 1969” makes no mention at all of Australia but is significant to her body of work because she admits in a note which refers to the story, that it was “a kind of watershed” (Disher 229). Inspired by reading an article in a library in Sydney, Yahp’s story revisits the race riots in Malaysia in 1969. She writes of: “… the effort involved in trying to disentangle myself from the learned habits of self-censorship and apathy. The ‘say nothing, do nothing’ mentality ruled by the most effective bogeyman of all: those policing what’s inside our heads” (Disher 229). This comment indicates the importance of her role as a writer of the diaspora, since she sees a responsibility to re-visit a significant event in the history of Malaysia, which existed only as a silent space in the memories of her childhood.

“In 1969” tells of a woman, the narrator’s Chinese mother, who lives in a womb-like cellar “like a spider ” (218) in the base of an old hotel. Ethnic groups clash with the Malaysian army in violent riots and in the midst of it, in a gutter, during a storm, her mother gives birth, and is found later, stripped and beaten with her breasts cut off. The birth, depicting struggling, emergent democracy, which is central to the story, is paralleled by the
violence of the racial clashes taking place around it. The narrative moves away at times to show different images of the mother, as a young girl, living under British rule, as one of several wives, as a beautiful young shopkeeper. But it is the twin images of violence and birth and an intimation of evil that reflect the politics of the moment: “The whites of her eyes shone from the ditch like twin stars and she squeezed and pushed and coaxed with her whispered curses. Her eyes unable to close. All those bodies sweeping past. Soon the city would be full. It would be full to bursting, and then it would burst” (221). Yahp inverts the image of a mother as good. The child is fed reluctantly, and “in the lamplight she looked cruel.” (223) The final image at the point of birth, depicts a snake strangling and biting her as she emits a final scream. The story is intensely violent and overtly political. Yahp admits that the imagery denotes: “A voice struggling to be born” (228), a reference to the struggle for a democratic government. The brutality that the story depicts emphasises the intensity of the political struggle. On the one hand the author articulates a voice for the woman who she had read a newspaper report about. On another level the narrative addresses the silence which in her experience surrounded the riots of 1969. This story illustrates the empowering nature of the diasporic position which allows this author the freedom to speak through her literature.

Beth Yahp’s stories cross cultural boundaries by commenting on Malaysian politics and history, and therefore look outwards from Australia to wider issues of the diasporic community. Her literature brings an awareness of Malaysian-Chinese identity to
Australian writing. By its depiction of other cultures, and because it is published in Australia this literature engages in a cross-cultural relationship which enriches multicultural literature in this country, and which contributes to the global profile of local writing.

**Chinese and English Writing: *Footprints on Paper***

In the publication *Footprints on Paper* which was published in 1996 to showcase Chinese writing to Australians and Australian writing to Chinese readers, the role of language becomes significant in quite a different way from other writing considered in this chapter. The prose or poetry submitted for the publication was confined to twenty-five lines, thus the entries are extremely short. The layout of the publication is significant since Chinese and English is printed on opposite pages, there is one version in English and two versions in Chinese which can be compared with each other. This layout creates an awareness of the visual difference between Chinese and English. Only three short narratives are relevant to this study, since they depict the experience of Chinese immigrants in Australia. One of them is a poem by Ouyang Yu which I will not consider because his work has already been discussed.

This anthology raises issues concerning translation. As the editors state: “It is almost impossible to capture the music, rhythm, rhyme, puns or alliteration” (10), nevertheless the two translated works, “Walking Around the Small Towns” and the short story “Busking” provide revealing perspectives on Australia.
The fact that they have been translated indicate that their influence flows in two directions. Readers, both Chinese and Australian will each view from the vantage point of their own cultures.

Lawrence Wong’s work “Walking Around the Small Towns” is a poetic journey through rural Victoria, Cranbourne, Tooradin and Koo Wee Rup. The format blurs the boundaries between prose and poetry. Each paragraph or verse is preceded by the name of the town. Images of the first town are peaceful and friendly but as the journey continues to Tooradin images of “desolation and loneliness” intrude and the extract concludes with an accusation: “Don’t look at me with such strange cold eyes / We are all the same…” (118). A reference in the poem to “Aboriginal compatriots” (118) suggests that they share with Indigenous Australians the experience of being outsiders. Although the poem takes the form of a journey we are told that the couple are “no passers by, we came to Australia / with the intention of throwing ourselves into the embrace of this great land.”(118) Lawrence Wong’s poem confronts Australian attitudes which see Asian immigrants as visitors, and their presence as temporary, so there is an implicit rejection of the notion that they cannot be part of an Australian community.

The very short story “Busking” by Li Ming Yan also tells of the experience of an immigrant, in this case one who has just arrived in Sydney. The narrative uses images of flying to denote the “liberty” (94) which awaited the narrator. These images of freedom also link to the sails of the Sydney Opera House, thus
very iconic Australian images are used. The ambivalence of the experience becomes apparent when the narrator hears a Chinese busker singing a song which draws the emotions of the narrator back to the homeland of China. The “joy” and “gloom” (94) reveal the tension and the duality of loyalties integral to the immigrant experience. The busker exists: “within his own melancholy musical world”(94). China, as the centre of the diaspora exists therefore within an Australian space, through the intense sense of nostalgia which the music evokes. The evocation of images of China and Australia denote cultural difference which exists between the two countries. In “Footprints on Paper” the pages of Chinese script foreground the site of language difference and the gap between languages, while the Chinese translations expose Chinese text to the Australian reader and integrate the experience of Chinese literature into the Australian literary community. The translated page also reveals the ability of English to bridge the language gulf between cultures. A two way process therefore opens up since on the one hand Chinese language enters into Australian literary experience and on the other hand Australian writing intersects Chinese culture. By accentuating language difference this anthology also promotes cultural understanding and in this sense it provides a unique experience for both Australian and Chinese readers.

This small anthology interacts between cultures and opens up a site of recognition between Chinese and Australian writers and readers. Each work is followed by a profile of the writer and includes notes on the text and the translation. Editors and
translators thereby intersect the relationship between writer and reader. The celebration of difference and the depiction of themes of isolation and racism which are apparent in the writing of Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, Ding Xiaoqi continue to be apparent in the two short works which I have looked at here.

**Literature by Overseas Students**

To conclude this chapter I will look at some literature which positions itself from quite another perspective. Two Chinese stories, published together in a volume entitled *Bitter Peaches and Plums*, were published in Australia in 1995. They describe the experience of two students who spent time in Australia in the late 1980s. Now classified as a genre of writing, this “Overseas Students’ Literature” (Jacobs i) is significant because it was written for a Chinese readership and was first published in Shanghai in 1991. In the introduction, the translators point out that the two stories “My Fortune in Australia” and “Australia—Beautiful Lies” are a combination of “reportage” (*baogao wenxue*) and “faction” (*jishi wenxue*). (ii) Both are translated from Chinese and provide Australian readers with an insight into the small world of the Chinese student community, where isolation and a sense of dislocation become part of daily life. The narratives refer back to China constantly and the view of Australia is very confined, nevertheless this writing opens a small avenue of knowledge between Australia and China.

In “My Fortune in Australia” Liu Guande tells of the experience of a thirty-nine year old man, the narrator Robert Niu, who arrives in
Sydney and after a desperate search for work, becomes a chef in a Japanese take-away restaurant. The story depicts the atmosphere of the kitchen, the long working hours, the exhaustion, and the actions of the conniving boss, a Korean woman who dominates his existence. The narrator’s capacity for work directs the subject matter of the narrative, so the reader experiences the confined atmosphere of the kitchen which parallels his narrow experience of Australia. “I worked seven days a week, twelve hours a day… if required I would have liked to work even longer hours” (Guande 37). Within the confines of the kitchen the narrator struggles with his own sense of identity, experiencing alienation and dislocation: “I had become a person elusive to myself.”(46) His sense of identity changes until he sees himself as representative of Chinese identity within the Australian culture:

I was always shouldering a heavy cross—I felt as if the Chinese national flag and emblem were imprinted on my chest and I was a national team member. Eating, pissing and drinking—no matter what I did I represented China and Chinese people. In fact this is exactly where we Chinese make a stupid mistake. No one ever thinks of you as a member of the national team. (73)

The narrator’s comments reflect the connection which he has to his homeland as well as his perceived importance as member of a diasporic community. The admission contained in the last sentence of this quotation however, illustrates the changing
perception of his own place in society, and an awareness of how others see him.

The intense detail of the struggle of day-to-day living which is depicted in this narrative is paralleled by the insertion of intermittent articles and opinions which comment on the place of the Chinese in Australia's history, and chart the development of various policies relating to Asian immigration. These articles are taken from Australian and Chinese-Australian newspapers and journals and serve to inform the Chinese reader about the history of the Chinese in Australia and the various debates governing Asian immigration. They depict attitudes, both racist and otherwise, which inform Australian perspectives and form an integral part of the narrative and act as a point of comparison between the struggle of the narrator and the wider political picture. One such article reads:

*Reason and justice finally started to display their existence and strength. The Australian-Chinese Daily reported from Sydney that, in the midst of Australia's anti-Asian wave, religious groups have come out boldly with one church leader after another calling for an end to the debate…* (112)

These reports counteract the limited view of Australia supplied by the narrator in the story, who admits at the end of his stay that: “Sydney was still as obscure and strange as if I had only arrived a few days ago” (175).
“My Fortune in Australia” provides Chinese readers with a somewhat limited view of Australia, but one which is for the most part positive. The narrator finds it difficult to engage with the Australian experience: “… Facing this splendid scenery I would forever have a feeling that all this was so remote from me that I could only enjoy it from a distance and gasp in admiration and that I could never blend it into my spirit or embrace it in my heart” (176). In her book *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes* Shen Yang Fang suggests that in “My Fortune in Australia” both China and Australia are represented as the ‘other’. China is seen to be economically and politically backward and the money that Robert Niu sends home appears to his wife to be a fortune, despite the fact that he earns five dollars fifty per hour. Australia’s respect for human rights is foregrounded in the story, in comparison to the situation in China. On the other hand Australia “… was paradise, a playground, hell, a prison of freedom…” (Guande 60). The narrator stands somewhere between the two trying to balance his experience of two cultures and the tension between the concepts of freedom and imprisonment.

“My Fortune in Australia” depicts the failure of government policy in selling English language education programmes, which caused an avalanche of visa applications in the late 1980s. The English classes which the narrator enrolled in form a minor part of his Australian experience. The opportunity to earn money and send it back to family in China was a far more important aim, and the flood of students which occurred as a result of the policy resulted in many illegal immigrants as well as the closing of many ELICOS Colleges. This situation damaged the reputation of
Australian educational institutions in the eyes of the Chinese and prevented more serious students from gaining entry to Universities and colleges. (Jacobs v)

“My Fortune in Australia” makes a significant contribution to Chinese-Australian literature since at the background to the narrative is an implicit criticism of China and an investigation of the political debate on Asian immigration. This ensures that the tension between cultural, political and social practices in both countries, provide Chinese and Australian readers with an insight into the student experience, which documents a significant episode in Chinese-Australian relations. The narrative allows Australian readers to view both Australia and China from a Chinese perspective and draws the reader into the intensely personal experience of an overseas student and portrays a view of Australia to readers in China.

The second story in this publication, “Australia—Beautiful Lies” by Huangfu Jun, is the story of Ho Xiaobo, again a student with a six month working visa who hopes to learn English and qualify for an Australian University. Like Robert Niu he experiences emotional dislocation in Australia and is bitter at the lack of employment opportunity in the early 1990s: “this lucky country was a safe and happy home only for Australians.” This story points out that the students who communicated with family and friends in China mis-represented their situation in Australia in order to save face, despite the fact that they were “… rejected from Australian society and without qualifications to participate in Australian life…” (Jun 226).
Ho Xiaobo is marginalised in relation to Australian society and the story of his experience shows that he is rejected on two counts. Firstly, by government policy which made employment difficult, and study almost impossible, due to high education fees. Secondly, he is alienated by racism: “The white Australia policy has become history, but under specific circumstances and at specific times, its sediment can rise to the surface; the shadows of racial superiority have not completely vanished” (Jun 234). The rejection that he and others faced in Australia was to be compounded on their return to China since their old jobs would no longer be available. The narrator articulates the psychological effect of the marginalised position of these students and sees this student body as a community:

The Chinese society in Australia was only a tiny world, but due to its existence among foreigners, the innate character of its people manifested itself more strongly, more densely and more completely than it would otherwise have. Within this small world Chinese could see their own images more clearly and could more penetratingly understand their own souls. (250)

This introspection is apparent in both stories but in particular in “My Fortune in Australia” where Robert Niu engages in continual self-analysis. Huangfu Jun’s descriptions of Australia and Australians are sometimes critical but often fair-minded and generous. But as the narrator leaves to return to China he points out that: “It can be said that Chinese students who went to
Australia have varying degrees of hatred towards this kangaroo kingdom” (256).

Chinese-Australian short fiction exposes sites of cultural difference, not only between Australia and China but within various sections of the Chinese diaspora. These stories provide a view of the intricate web of relationships which intertwine with Australian culture and contribute to its changing face. The policy of multiculturalism in Australia does not necessarily accommodate the cultural difference which this literature depicts. Accusations of racism and bigotry, expressions of isolation and intimidation are constant themes in the literature studied in this chapter. Homi Bhabha points out:

> The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework. Different cultures, the difference between cultural practices, the difference in the construction of cultures within different groups, very often set up among and between themselves an incommensurability. (“Third Space” 209)

This ‘incommensurability’ is depicted in many of the narratives that I have included in this thesis. In an essay entitled “Multiculturalism in Crisis” Ien Ang and Jon Stratton assert that the policy of multiculturalism is ineffectual because it: “glosses over experiences of disharmony and conflict” (37). This literature points to the necessity for allowing for cultural difference beyond the superficial celebrations which are often seen to depict
Australia’s multicultural community. At the same time it must be recognized that the writing considered here is itself a product of the contiguous relationship between cultures, which contributes to a cross-fertilisation of attitudes and ideas.

These voices from the Chinese diaspora in Australia which I have discussed represent a small group of writers and a limited genre of writing; nevertheless they enrich Australian literature with their perspectives on Australian culture and a view of their Chinese heritage. These narratives promote a dialogue between cultures and challenge readers to reassess the cultural differences which form an integral part of the Australian community.

In the writing which I have considered in this chapter I have shown how the use of English enables Chinese-Australian writers to interpolate the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture and that language exposes the site of difference between cultures. It engages with place and history to bring Chinese culture into the realm of Chinese-Australian literature. I have observed various literary strategies which appropriate aspects of the English language to denote experience, and have noted the shifting nature of language as it accommodates Chinese perspectives and specific Chinese words. Related themes have emerged in these narratives: racism, isolation, anger, all of which question the assumption that Australia is a tolerant society. The need to recognize the constantly changing nature of identity and to accommodate difference is a central issue in this writing, and is
significant in the writing to be considered in the next chapter on Middle-Eastern Australian short fiction.

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Chapter Four
Middle-Eastern Australian Short Fiction

Introduction

The Chinese-Australian writing which I have discussed in the previous chapter provides views from a marginal position in Australian literary culture, and reveals in some cases antagonistic social relationships which exist between some Chinese and non-Chinese people in Australia. In this chapter I will look at some contemporary short fiction which has been written by authors of Middle-Eastern origin. This literature also speaks from a marginalized position in Australian society, a position which has been made increasingly difficult as a result of recent political occurrences and which is therefore relevant to Australian Middle-Eastern relationships. These narratives form part of a dialogue which emanates from the boundaries of the dominant Australian culture.

In this chapter I will show the literary strategies which are engaged by writers from Middle-Eastern backgrounds who use the short story genre to articulate a response to the dominant discourse and through this literature affirm their own cultural identities within the Australian community. As well as forming part of this resistance the stories are linked by the articulation of themes which, as I have shown are common to the short fiction of minority cultural groups. The importance of language, the role of place and the homeland, the significance of history, and the
changing position of the second generation are again, all significant to this writing, which is influenced by the nature of the diaspora from which it emanates. In this study however other themes emerge. Most notably the narratives engage directly with themes of war and violence and current conflicts in the Middle East. Secondly, they explore the position of Muslim and Arab communities within the larger Australian community, and thirdly, some of these texts address the role of women in Arab societies. Finally, I will show that the use of fantasy in some of these stories adds a further dimension to this writing. Ultimately the texts which I am studying throw light on relationships between diverse communities, both local and global.

Although this study reveals interconnected themes, each culture and each author displays individual attitudes towards, and different perspectives on, the dominant Australian culture. Homi Bhabha has pointed out that: “Increasingly, the issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises, and the questions of identity that it raises are agonistic; identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre: in both senses, ex-centric (Location 177). Social crises engendered by the Gulf War of 1991, Arab-Israeli confrontations, events of September 11, the bombing in Bali and by the war in Iraq have all served to marginalise people from Middle-Eastern backgrounds in Australia, despite their diverse religious and cultural affiliations, encompassing both Christian and Muslim communities. Trevor Batrouney comments that: “Conflict disallows the blurring of boundaries and also acts to keep the issue of identity in the foreground of the individual’s
consciousness. It categorizes people, and ensures that they think of themselves and others in terms of those categories” (Batrouney 60). This categorization is often imposed on people of Middle-Eastern heritage and together with misinformation and ignorance on the subject of Islam and Muslims, contributes to a situation where many Australians perceive these groups as a potential threat (Saeed iv), tainted by the shadow of terrorism. Incidents of racial violence point to the need for Australians to become more knowledgeable about Middle-Eastern communities who live in their midst, so literary expressions of cultural difference, such as the narratives I discuss become an important contribution to cross-cultural understanding. With reference to Muslim groups in Australia, Abdullah Saeed in his book *Islam in Australia* notes that:

> Although Muslim communities in Australia have been growing and forming their own unique Australian identity since the beginnings of settlement, the perception that Islam and Muslims are somehow incapable of adapting to Australian values and life remains widespread. It is largely based on the idea that Islam is a religion that is against modernity and Western values… (198)

Such attitudes do not take into account the diverse nature of Muslim communities in Australia, which originate from seventy different countries. (Saeed 1) Thirty six percent of Muslims now living in Australia were born in this country and as Saeed points out Islam has: “many theological orientations, legal schools and religio-political divisions” (v), so that religious, cultural and
linguistic diversity must be kept in mind when considering any perspectives which emerge from this writing.

As I have mentioned in the introductory chapter the short fiction available for this study is limited, and for this reason some poetry has been included if it provides a further perspective on issues under discussion. In this chapter I will look at a collection of stories by Eva Sallis entitled *Mahjar*, published in 2003, as well as short fiction and some poetry selected from an anthology entitled *Waiting in Space: An Anthology of Australian Writing* published in 1999. I will look at how these narratives engage with both Australian and Middle-Eastern cultures and the strategies by which the manifestation of difference takes place. This discussion will examine the literary intersections of culture and the emergence of new cultural expression which takes place at the site of this interaction. The collection of stories by Eva Sallis, entitled *Mahjar* focuses on communities in Australia which emanate from the Middle East, including Iraq and Palestine. Although the title page of the book refers to it as a novel, each chapter stands alone and was published initially as a short story.

**Arabic Language and the Australian Vernacular in the Stories of Eva Sallis**

These stories are informed by the Middle-Eastern background of the author but since Eva Sallis was born in Australia, it was not a question of appropriating the English language to write these stories; rather she speaks with the perspective of an Australian-born writer who has made an intensive study of Middle-Eastern
language and culture. She therefore writes from a position outside Australian culture and outside Middle-Eastern culture. Nevertheless she manipulates language in these narratives to illustrate a range of experiences about the culture of which she is speaking. By examining the strategies used to convey meaning in these stories the significance of language in postcolonial writing becomes apparent, as it draws together two cultures and negotiates new forms of meaning and experience.

In all the writing in this study language is shown to be integral to the exposition of cultural difference and the means by which a culture penetrates a dominant discourse. The transformative nature of language is foregrounded in the stories in *Mahjar* since the strategies of interpolation are an overt part of the text. The first and most obvious way that this can be seen is in the name of the book. Because *Mahjar* is an Arabic word which would be unfamiliar to many readers, its meaning is explained in the foreword. It refers to: “all the lands of Arab, most often Lebanese, migration”. The use of Arabic names also brings Middle-Eastern culture and language to the foreground of these narratives. For example in the opening story “The Kangaroo”, the characters are named Amin and Zein, Walid and Haifa, two married couples on a car journey together. Since these names are unfamiliar in the English language, it leaves the reader uncertain as to which sexes they refer to. This immediately draws attention to cultural difference. Their presence in this story becomes symbolic as they have a violent encounter with a kangaroo that confronts them on their journey. Another strategy which is used to foreground cultural difference in language is by the frequent
presence of Arabic words which are used intermittently in these stories. These words are usually used in exclamatory sentences where their meaning is revealed by the nature of the sentence. For example in the story entitled “Munira’s Bad Day Out” One of the characters exclaims: “An accident! Ya Rabb! Oh Lord! Habibti, are you all right? (14) These exclamations and others such as “Ya Latif!” (Sallis 20) and “Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim” (17) are repeated several times in this story and used in other stories as well. The repetition encourages familiarity with these expressions, although a precise translation of them is often not provided. Ashcroft remarks on the significance of such linguistic strategies:

If we look closely at these intercultural linguistic devices and the commentary which surrounds them, we can see that the role they propose for themselves is often that of ‘power words’, power syntax and power rhythms which reproduce the culture by some process of metaphoric embodiment. (Post-Colonial 78)

In Mahjar the exclamatory nature of these “power words” colour the text because they are usually used in dialogue and the exclamation infers the way the sentence should be spoken. The exclamation mark therefore helps to contribute to the meaning of the sentence, and to “reproduce the culture” without direct translation. The use of these unglossed words and phrases in Mahjar does serve to transform language but it also alienates and disempowers the reader, since the communication of meaning is broken. The reader’s engagement with the text is interrupted in
this process of transformation and it is at this point that an acknowledgement and recognition of difference must take place. The inscription of difference takes place therefore at the moment where the reader is distanced from the text. This process of transformation illustrates the infinite capacity of language to change. By absorbing and displaying meaning it both reflects and instigates cultural change.

While Arabic words intercept and transform language in these narratives, Australian vernacular is also used to assert difference. Sallis’ story “Zein’s Way” shows how Australian versions of English can be like a foreign language: “‘Gonna beya scorcha!’ the butcher had said. She had no idea what he meant but was flattered that he assumed she would understand.” (12) The narrator is showing the power of words to communicate even though the meaning is not comprehensible. The incident illustrates to the reader the distance between the speaker and the recipient. By presenting English as a foreign language it disturbs the assumption that all English can be understood by English speaking people and accentuates a form of Australian culture which is removed from its English origins. An Australian vernacular is therefore foregrounded which accentuates the association between place and language and introduces an identifiable difference between the English language and Australian English.
Language, as I have shown, displays the point of difference between cultures but it is also redolent with associations of place and displacement. Since the word *Mahjar* refers to the lands of Arab migration, the concept of place is obviously significant to the subject matter of these stories and to the sense of identity which defines the characters portrayed in them. While the trope of place is common to all the writing studied in this thesis, the way in which it is revealed in this writing differs between authors and between diasporic communities. Aboriginal space has been considered separately, since it plays a different role in Aboriginal life and is inextricably entwined with spiritual identity.

Ashcroft points out that:

> Place is never simply location, nor is it static, a cultural memory which colonization buries. For like culture itself, place is in a continual and dynamic state of formation, a process intimately bound up with the culture and the identity of its inhabitants. Above all place is a result of habitation, a consequence of the way in which people inhabit space, particularly that conception of space as universal and uncontestable that is constructed for them by imperial discourse. (Post-Colonial 156)

These stories in *Mahjar* articulate the role which place plays in the lives of members of a Middle-Eastern community. Its “continual and dynamic state” contributes to a redefinition of their identity and their relationship towards both their homeland.
and their new home in Australia. By exploring this notion of place these narratives go beyond the local to explore wider issues of the Arab diaspora and its place in the international community. The stories are positioned from the marginal space which is inhabited by Middle-Eastern communities in Australia and this position defines the attitudes which are depicted in this writing.

Since the stories in Mahjar are narrated from the dual perspectives of Australia and the Middle-East, a sense of place is continually reaffirmed in these stories. It is foregrounded in the texts in several ways. Firstly, by continual comparison which informs these narratives, cultural and geographic, and secondly, by the use of myth and fantasy to question and reveal the perspectives of these stories and to offer an alternative sense of place as a background to the narrative.

The physical landscape becomes a participant in the narrative “The Kangaroo”, the opening story in Mahjar, since visual difference is such an important part of the perspective which informs the attitudes of the characters. This narrative contains creative representations of place which become sites where, as Carter states: “… culture declares its presence.” (xxii) In “The Kangaroo” the characters, Amin and Zein, Walid and Haifa are placed against a very Australian rural backdrop, (a car journey through the Mallee to Berri) which positions them and affirms their place as figures in the Australian landscape. The physical comparison starts immediately: “Who would have thought you could just go there, on these lovely, civilised new roads… not even snipers to worry about and no road blocks” (6) Physical
space, then, denotes freedom. With this comparison comes the continual affirmation of difference which informs the attitudes of the characters: “... the landscape became too much to look at and comment on” (6). Implicit in this comment is reference to the vast spaces of rural Australia, as well as their inability to as yet make it their home, to grasp the ideas of this new space. This comment indicates the power of place to affect the psychology of the characters. To counteract this the travellers in the car continually return to their card game of tarneeb, blocking out the changing view of the countryside by returning to a ritual of their own culture. The one road which is shown on the map is their journey through a changing geographic and cultural landscape, while the ensuing violent altercation with a Kangaroo sets the scene for the cross-cultural narratives which follow in the collection.

In contrast to this representation of rural Australia, the story “The Hafli” demonstrates a sense of place through city architecture. As Abd al-Rahman, an Iraqi refugee drives through a city suburb, he remarks: “What a pointy city! Such an agitated architecture, eager and uncertain. So Western! Big windows, but shuttered or filmed over” (Sallis 53). This comparison between the architectural profiles of eastern and western buildings embodies more than a mere visual observation. The word “pointy” suggests the Gothic profiles of Christian churches, while “agitated” “eager” and “uncertain” suggests the mixture of old and new buildings, which define Australian cities. The physical aspect of the suburban background affects his judgement of the people: “What strange gardens, all out the front... we are not
afraid these gardens said, but don't enter. They made him uneasy…” (Sallis 54). As Carter notes: “By way of floor window, doorway and ceiling, by way of fence and garden, the suburban dwelling successfully incorporates and represents the world in such as way that it speaks” (290). However the character’s uneasiness suggests his position as an outsider to the community which he is observing. In both cases these scenes are viewed with the perspective of the newcomer, the immigrant viewer whose view of place is informed by comparison with the homeland and with the tension between what Carter refers to as: “visible nature and invisible culture” (244). Geographic landscape and architectural design evoke personal attitudes and the visual aspects of place interact with and inform cultural assessment.

In the story “The Hafli” the house where a party takes place is referred to as “a little Lebanon” (Sallis 54). There is an overt depiction of place, since the house is presented as microcosm of the Arab community in Australia. The host, Zein, even invites her guests to “step ashore” (Sallis 54). The community which meets there consists of people from both East and West Beirut, Christian and Muslim, refuting the assumption of an homogenous, bounded culture. Against a background of Lebanese music and poetry, and the smells of “fresh mint, burnt thyme and the spiced chickpeas and eggplant” (Sallis 56), the refugees, exiles and immigrants gather. This image of Lebanon within the Australian community emphasises the significance of the homeland in minority communities and the way in which place and culture merge to defy distance. It is within this relocated space that Arab culture is celebrated and the geographic and
cultural distance between Lebanon and Australia is overcome. The replication of culture which takes place at the Hafli is an assertion of cultural difference, which finds everyone “vaunting their origin to everyone else” (Sallis 55). In this story, place is at once local and global, and provides a site where Arab identity is empowering. The narrative emphasises the notion of community as a site of belonging. The house is also depicted as place of tolerance, where cultural and religious divisions within the Arab community are ignored or accepted.

It is through the character of Abd Al Rahman in this story “The Hafli” that the author explores the condition of exile which is so inextricably intertwined with place. Abd Al Rahman’s experience of exile is shown as an overwhelming physical and psychological episode and mirrors Said’s description which describes the condition as “disorienting loss” (Reflections 181). This narrative is an overt depiction of an exilic condition. As the only Iraqi refugee at the party consisting of Lebanese “exiles, emigrants and refugees” his position is outside their community as well as the Australian community. The extreme disorientation that takes place contributes to his “upwelling of misery” (Sallis 57). In the background to the party a CD plays a song entitled We Will Return. By depicting this condition the author brings the contemporary experience of exile into the Australian literary experience. In a later story in this collection (“The Sea”) the reader discovers that Abd Al Rahman survived a shipwreck in international waters near Indonesia, so the story echoes the incident of October 19 2001, when 353 asylum seekers were drowned when their boat sank. The narrative depicts
unsympathetic attitudes towards refugees since Abd Al Rahman is told that: “Many people here are very Australian about the new refugees” (Sallis 56). This comment also shows divided opinions within this Lebanese community. The ambivalent nature of exile is made clear in this narrative. The story depicts exile as a place of psychological and geographic isolation, but while it is a place of exile, it is also ultimately, at the end of the story, a haven. While the story is personal it reflects the wider issues of Australian refugees and the political situation in Iraq, so it spans issues that are both local and global.

**Fantasy as Place**

A point of difference with other narratives examined in this thesis is the use of fantasy in some of these stories. Fantasy allows the concept of place to be unbounded by geography, politics and culture. Place becomes universal, where anything can happen and any ideas can be explored. The stories are free to invent a new reality, which is not bounded by time or the past or the present. Rules of human behaviour do not apply and the animal and the human form can become interchangeable. In these stories the use of fairy tale extends the meaning of the narrative by suggesting an alternative way of reading it. Marina Warner, in her book *From The Beast to the Blonde* points out that: “This very boundlessness serves the moral purpose of the tales, which is precisely to teach where boundaries lie” (xx) thus despite the narrative freedom which the employment of fantasy allows, the stories can be laden with meaning.
The connection between place and identity which is foregrounded in all stories considered so far is subverted by the use of fantasy. Political, geographic and cultural boundaries can become irrelevant. In the narratives which engage fantasy and fairy tale, the connection between them becomes open to interpretation; the narrative setting becomes a place of the imagination. Fantasy is used in two ways in Eva Sallis’ writing: on the one hand myth and fairy tale merge and are employed to contribute to the double vision of her stories. Secondly she at times enters into a childhood world and allows a child’s imagination to inform the narrative. As Marina Warner notes: “… the stories’ fallaciousness… makes them potential conduits of another way of seeing the world, of telling an alternative story” (415). These tales therefore become multifaceted and open to interpretation.

In the narrative entitled “The Gazelle” in *Mahjar* the development of the figure of Rima is paralleled by a fantasy. Her story is centred in Australia but the tale which parallels it is set somewhere in the Arabian past. The gazelle, “an image of freedom and the untrammelled spirit” (Sallis 43) is a flightless bird and informs Rima’s development as she grows up. It also represents women: “female, vulnerable fragile” (Sallis 43) The arrogant and predatory lion who harasses the gazelle and regards her as food is an assertion of masculinity who claims his innocence in an apparently reasoned and rational way, before the Parliament of Beasts and Birds. In the fairy tale the lion wins his case and the gazelle is told to accept her position in life: “gazelle must resign herself to God’s provision and God’s wisdom, and accept the gifts that are her nature until the pre-ordained day of
her death.” (45) The link between the fairy story and the life of Rima emerges when she is taken from Australia to Palestine by her parents to find a husband, whom she rejects because he refers to her as a gazelle. Instead she becomes attracted to a Muslim boy: “She liked his world, his Australian friends and his leb-thrash band” (Sallis 47). In choosing the Muslim boyfriend Rima denies the moral of the fairy tale, subverting its moral message by using it as an example of how not to conform; thus in denying the message of the fairy tale Rima refutes the notion of predetermined notions of gender. Her choice of partner is dependant on his interpretation of the fairy tale, so fantasy intersects her life and informs her decision. In the version of the tale offered by the Muslim boyfriend, however, the lion is killed by the gazelle, and therefore the image of the female ultimately triumphs. The use of fairy tale in this story empowers the voice of the female, and allows her to assert herself in the face of cultural tradition which is followed by the Lebanese parents. In rebelling against the message of the fairy tale, Rima rebels against the traditions of her own culture. The fairy tale world that this narrative enters is adapted to a contemporary world; the lion for example hides behind parking meters in order to trap his prey, but the fairy tale also merges with Arabian history since Marina Warner notes that the hoopoe bird is often used as a messenger in folk tales of the Middle-East (111) and that birds in general appear frequently in classical myth. In this story the hoopoe is the messenger who delivers the verdict in court. Warner notes that birds were “credited with many aspects of human culture, as well as hidden, lucid foreknowledge, both ominous and wonderful.” (111) The land of fantasy where the
lion and the gazelle roam plays a significant role in directing this narrative. It acts as an alternative, magical place where actions of the animals illuminate stereotypical perceptions of gender held in contemporary society and in particular in this Lebanese community. The narrative shows the adaptability of fantasy, since an alternative ending is offered which empowers the female and therefore adapts to the changing nature of the female role in contemporary society.

In the story entitled “The Jackal” birds are also used to enact a fantasy situation to illuminate family and cultural behaviour and to observe gender relationships. The narrator of the fantasy is a Lebanese Australian, Farhan, who hates Australia and Australians and regards the country as “God’s biggest prison” (Sallis 108). This theme of confinement and entrapment is repeated throughout the narrative which moves between the past in Lebanon and the present in Australia. Farhan lies in a field, relaxing in a place away from the many dominating females in his family. The jackals who start picking at his body, thinking he is dead, finally drag him away to the forest to bury him, to be eaten at a later date. In this narrative the clan of jackals become a metaphor for human behaviour: “How similar they were to my own family” (Sallis 113). Their squabbling and fighting as they compete to get a bit of him and drag him into the forest are equated with competing sections of the Arab community. “They didn’t want this plenty to be whittled away with other families or the Christians or the Druze knowing about it.” (Sallis 114) There is continuing interaction, an easy slippage, between contemporary Lebanese politics and the unfolding fantasy.
Gender behaviour is foregrounded in the story. Although Farhan observes the leadership of the female Jackals, and eventually takes a beautiful one captive, he ultimately kills her, curtailing her newfound freedom and asserting his masculine power over her.

By taking on the form of myth, legend and fantasy these stories situate themselves in the past. They maintain a link with history, by intersecting with ancient fairy tales. In “The Tiger” the reader is drawn back to the past, to the time of the narrator’s grandmother. “Of course there were tigers in Palestine back then. Still are one or two.”(Sallis 26) The engagement with the past reinforces the importance of history which is represented through the use of fantasy. The suggested antiquity of the tale has indeterminate origins, due to the universal nature of fairy tale, but its magical nature sets it in back in time. In “The Tiger” the narrator’s grandmother bonds with an injured tiger which results in the jealousy of her husband, who kills the beast. As in the other stories in this collection which employ fantasy, there is fluidity between representations of humans and animals. The jealousy of the husband suggests the existence of sexual attraction between his wife and the tiger. It echoes the story of The Beauty and the Beast about which Marina Warner suggests that: “At a fundamental level, ‘Beauty and the Beast’ in numerous variations forms a group of tales which work out this basic plot, moving from the terrifying encounter with Otherness, to its acceptance, or in some versions of the story, its annihilation” (276). In this case the male figure cannot deal with the otherness represented by the tiger, nor by the independence
shown by his wife. The sexual connotations of their relationship are depicted in the encounter between her and the tiger:

> My grandmother was shaking all over. The tiger howled and howled, and fell forward, half on top of her and half bowing at her feet. Then it opened its mouth right in her face. She glimpsed the long yellow teeth and the red tongue and felt its hot breath as she closed her eyes tightly. Very gently, it licked the pus off her face.” (Sallis 28)

Warner notes that a Freudian interpretation of shuddering suggests that it represents an orgasmic experience. (276) The story of the tiger depicts relationships to otherness and relationships between genders. The grandmother takes a journey of self-awareness in her friendship with the beast. When he is killed she articulates her grief and anger towards her husband so she is empowered by her relationship with the tiger. While the narrative depicts a distance between the past and the present, reality and fantasy intersect when the granddaughter, who is the narrator of the tale, tells the reader that she too has stripes, emphasising the ongoing significance of otherness which permeates the tale. The fantasy element of this story intersects with this notion, and depicts its dangers and its implications.

**The Place of War**

The stories of Eva Sallis bring the experience of the Middle-East into the Australian literary arena. The depiction of war and violence provide a background to Middle-Eastern identity and
provide a perspective on a minority culture which is at times misunderstood in the Australian community. Two of the stories enter into the world of children to illustrate this situation and by presenting a childish view of their world, illustrate wider issues and perspectives.

In “The Flight” two boys and a girl play in a wrecked American bomber in Iraq. Israel and Palestine at first become the focus of the narrative since the imagination of the children soars with the plane, as they enact bombing missions over Israel. The fantasy flight provides perspective in the narrative:

Jewish settlements stood out from the air. They were orderly. The roofs were all the same colour. And they had green gardens with fountains wasting the water, while all around the Palestinian dwellings were higgledy piggledy, many colours and shapes, and the gardens were dead and parched. (Sallis125)

The contrasting impressions of Jewish and Palestinian settlements reflect perceptions of cultural difference in the minds of these children. The orderly shapes and greenness of Israeli dwellings seem to imply affluence and comfort in contrast to those of the Palestinians. Gaston Bachelard notes that: “… imagination augments the values of reality”(4). This can be seen in the narrative where the enactment of the children’s fantasy depicts their aggressive, war-like attitudes in a theatrical way: “They bombed the crap out of the settlements and then flew back home…” (Sallis125). Their imagination shows the nature of
life in Iraq, as a war zone, and empowers the children to play out roles which they see as heroic. Their sense of place involves political ownership and geographic boundaries and is central to the direction of the narrative. This is emphasised when on their last imaginary flight their destination is Australia: “We don’t need bombs this time” (Sallis 129). This comment accentuates the intersection between politics and place and between desire and the imagination, since in this instance place exists in it, and is informed by it. By constructing their imagination to direct the narrative the author depicts Australia as the ultimate peaceful destination. The use of fantasy in these stories enables the concept of place to be unbounded by the narrative. It is controlled only by the imagination, so it can not only reflect and depict a sense of place, it can create place through language. The concept therefore becomes fluid and place becomes constantly reinscribed and open to redefinition.

The depiction of war illustrates a site of violence and articulates the unstable and fractured nature of the homeland which informs the identity of some Middle-Eastern Australians. In “The Cows” alternating voices of a child and an adult depict images of violence and torture in war. Adults kill their own babies to keep them quiet, and kill their daughters to save them from predatory soldiers. “Sometimes if little children wandered too far alone at the border, we would find then alive, but with their anus cut open, sometimes with a knife, sometimes with a sharp stone.” (Sallis 150) The violence depicted in this story goes two ways, so that the view provided in the story becomes more balanced: “… Then we killed as many of them as we could find… I think we
killed more than two hundred, men, women, and children.” (Sallis 148)

A litany of shocking images directs this narrative, showing experiences of war which draw Middle-Eastern violence into the Australian literary scene. The concept of place in these stories therefore becomes a site of violence and provides a view of aspects of Arab–Australian identity.

As well as the world of fantasy, these stories move between Lebanon, Iraq and Australia, between East and West and between places of peace and war. By its intersection with cultural identity representations of place can reflect the beliefs ideologies and cultural practices of the characters and depict difference. The significance of the concept of place in these narratives is that it becomes part of the narrative itself.

“The theory of place does not propose a simple separation between the ‘place’ named and described in language, and some ‘real’ place inaccessible to it, but rather indicates that in some sense place is language, something in constant flux, a discourse in progress” (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial* 155). Place is language because it directs and informs these narratives through its associations with identity, with cultural and political beliefs. Conversely, in the stories which engage with fantasy, place becomes significant because it subverts all of those associations, and can override the significance of political, geographic and cultural boundaries. Since the role of place is so essential to minority groups such as Arab-Australians and the other literature studied here, its function is central to the writing which reflects their experience. It contributes to the sense of difference which is so integral to their experience and which this writing celebrates.
Perspectives From the Second Generation: Mothers and Sons, Mothers and Daughters

The second section of Eva Sallis’ collection investigates the interrelationships of family in this Australian–Lebanese community and the cross-cultural interaction which results from intercultural marriages. The narrative takes the reader into the realm of family life and in doing so illustrates the different perspectives and attitudes which inform their culture. In the depiction of these experiences the multicultural nature of Australian society becomes part of Australian experience and other cultures can be viewed then as an unthreatening presence. Ghassan Hage refers to the “multicultural claustrophobia” (13) which affects many Australians who fear the existence of the “double allegiance” of multicultural communities (13). These stories contribute to broadening the perception of those who are wary of the influence of such groups. Hage suggests that the focus of Australian multiculturalism should include the country of origin of its migrants and encompass the dual loyalties which are part of the migrant experience. (12) This double allegiance is particularly evident in the second generation of migrant families and several of Eva Sallis’ stories depict these conflicting loyalties. The story “Muwashshah” describes the rebellion of older children against the strictures of their Lebanese families:

And as their parents pulled into the drive, the sons stashed their illegals, washed off their aftershave and their girlfriends’ perfumes, washed out their mouths with
Listerine, leapt into bed, pulled the covers over their heads and breathed, deep and even. It was a regular Friday night phenomenon. (Sallis 86)

The conflict between generations that these narratives depict shows the changing identities among the youth who are subject to conflicting cultural values. Parental attitudes in this story represent Australians as the cultural other, thereby inverting the perception of migrant cultures as other. Australian culture therefore becomes marginalised. For example Hussein, Rayyas’ son in the story “Muwashshah” overhears his mother on the phone talking to his Australian girlfriend: “Australian, whore prostitute slut! Where did you get my son’s name? NEVER call this house again!” (92) This attitude redirects racist attitudes and rejects the notion that Australian culture is dominant and superior. Its sexual liberty, the availability of drugs and the possibility of intermarriage is seen as a threat to Lebanese culture and a threat to the power of the mother over her children. The role of the dominant mother is foregrounded in several stories and directs the narrative. In “Muwashshah” it results in rebellion from her marihuana-smoking son who writes a poem, half in Arabic and half in English: “Burn momma burn momma, burn bitch …” (100). The violence of this line is then counterbalanced by the son fantasizing about looking after his parents for the rest of their lives, the narrative therefore encodes a desire to destroy the mother-son relationship and to invert the role of parent and son which leaves him so powerless.
In the stories in *Mahjar* gender relationships depict anti-Australian sentiment. Attitudes of mothers towards their Lebanese-Australian sons show a strong antipathy towards Australian wives and girlfriends. The narrators depict the ideal wife as Lebanese and virginal. In the second section of the book four of the stories foreground powerful women who carry with them very strong attachments to Lebanese traditions. The story “Music” depicts a wedding between a Lebanese-Australian son and his Australian girlfriend: “Half the community boycotted, and the other half sat grim-faced, even crying, at the white tables filled with uneaten food.” (Sallis 103) Racial insults from both sides present a picture of mutual racism in this story, indicating that both communities are insistent on defending their own space. The two cultures are positioned in opposition to each other, but it also shows a new perception emerging in the mother, Zein, who finally insists on celebrating the relationship. It also shows her shock at the thought of anyone disliking her son: “they were clearly unhappy too, something that Zein was utterly shocked by” (104). This oppositional positioning in the narrative therefore changes to a more tolerant relationship. The cross-cultural wedding interrupts the traditional connection with the past which is seen to be essential to the Lebanese community in this story. Michael Humphrey notes that:

Where people have migrated through networks of groups (family reunion and chain migration), as many migrants from the Mediterranean have done in Australia, the connection with the past remains an important social conduit through which to enter into the new society… the sense of loss or
the threat of loss is most acutely felt in the domestic sphere, because it is the primary site for the cultural reproduction of tradition—language, gender relations, belief as well as for its contestation and erosion. (Humphrey 209)

The stories in *Mahjar* which examine domestic relationships demonstrate the intense desire to hold on to the traditions of the past and also show the “contestation and erosion” of it through the behaviour of the younger generation. In “Muwashsha” the father asks the son if he has done wrong: “Hussein thought for a moment. *Your wrong or mine*” (Sallis 91). These conflicting values reflect ever-changing identities between young and old, and illustrate a complex site where cultural traditions clash. In a discussion of hybridity Greg Noble and Paul Tabar state that: “In emphasising the hybrid nature of diasporic identities, there is a tendency to ignore the always already syncretic nature of culture, which implies, however unintentionally, that the ethnicities from which the hybrid derives are fixed and immutable.” (132) In some of these narratives there is a sense of a fixed Lebanese culture behind the characters because of the presence of older members of the community which hover in the background to some of these stories, acting as a type of Lebanese chorus, attempting to influence behaviour and attitudes within these families. By considering all these narratives together, however, the diverse and shifting nature of Lebanese diaspora becomes apparent as the reader moves from Australia, to Palestine, to Baghdad, and hears mention of Argentina and New York. This geographic and
cultural diversity contests any idea of a “fixed and immutable” culture (Noble 132).

In the story “Ibtisam Had Four Sons” the dominant role of the mother is foregrounded, particularly in relation to her sons. Her gradual loss of influence over them reflects the changing nature of this second generation. The title is significant because it neglects to mention the existence of her daughter who has rebelled and left the family. Her accusations towards her mother identify the points of conflict within the family:

Nadine said that they locked her up when she was a girl and threw away the key.
Nadine said they sucked out her brains and forced her to wear dresses.
Nadine said they drove Sa’eed to homosexuality
Nadine said they treated Deborah, Daniel and Kathy like rubbish.”
(Sallis 74)

The short sentences affirm the accusatory and angry tone of the exchange between mother and daughter while the content of the accusations establish Nadine’s immaturity. The story shows Ibtisam’s personal journey, from a rejection of her sons’ Australian wives: “strife torn mixed marriages were a given”, (66) and her daughter’s Australian boyfriend, to an acceptance of the changing culture within her family. In doing so she must reject the values of “the community” which tries to direct her attitudes: “To hell with the community,” (83) is a defining statement in this
journey. This story articulates the process of change between the first and second generation, the effect of hybrid cultural influences which drive the identities of both generations. The story indicates a personal journey but reflects the life and flux of identity implicit in the experience of the diaspora, and the diminishing effect of homeland traditions in the face of new cultural associations.

In *Mahjar* gender relationships play a significant role in defining cultural difference. As I have shown, several of the stories foreground the role of women in Arab-Australian families and define their relationship with their children. The majority of stories in Sallis’ collection have women as the main character in the narrative. The opening story, which I have already referred to, sets the scene by depicting a woman fighting and killing an aggressive kangaroo with her stiletto heels, thereby saving the life of her husband. The stiletto heels depict the female nature of the confrontation, whereas the kangaroo is an iconic representation of Australia. This narrative establishes the significant role that women are to play in the stories that follow and suggests a combative relationship between them and Australian culture.

In the collection *Mahjar* gender relationships are the subject of the story “The Sea” which examines the relationship between a husband and his wife. The story investigates the subtle balance of power between an Iraqi Muslim woman, Zahra, and her husband:
He had the power to keep her in the house, to insist that she wore even gloves on the street, to recall her from university. He could demand her service. He could demand her body. In the moment these things gave him a heightened pleasure, but it was fleeting and he was, when she complied, ashamed. He wanted a fight.

(Sallis 132)

This desire for a confrontation inverts accepted notions of the traditional relationship between men and women in Muslim communities. This extract establishes the rights of the male in the marital relationship, but at the same time dismisses the relevance of those rights. In this story Zahra is shown to be capable of wielding power in her own way. Abd Al Rahman first meets her when she is snorkelling wearing the hijab and balto. In this way her independence is established early in the narrative, showing that her traditional dress does not inhibit her behaviour. As he says of their relationship: “she never fought but she always won” (132). The volatile marriage which is depicted in the story shows a powerful and articulate woman who constantly stands up to her husband. It is her eventual drowning in a refugee boat that contributes to a retrospective redefinition of his relationship with her, and a questioning of male and female roles. The story highlights the delicate and ambivalent nature of gender roles and questions perceived attitudes which attempt to define these relationships within the Muslim community and present women as repressed by their husbands and men within their communities. In his book *Islam in Australia*, Abdullah Saeed points out that discrimination against women differs between countries and between Muslim groups, although in recent years women’s
groups have been established to improve the position of women, both within the Muslim community, and in the Australian community in general. Saeed states that most Australian-Muslim women "subscribe to the neo-Modernist or Liberal view." (159), both of which reject traditional and conservative interpretations of gender relationships. Saeed points out that the traditionalist view is held by “a small but vocal group of women who argue that the role of women should be as it is envisaged in classical Islamic law” (160). Sallis’ writing contributes to the ongoing debate about the role of women in Muslim society in Australia. By voicing Muslim experience these narratives work to articulate the culture from their perspective, rendering it normative and natural. Arab women are not presented as the exotic other, but as outspoken and articulate individuals who are adapting to their changing roles in the Australian community.

By challenging stereotypical perspectives of Arab-Australian people these narratives indirectly confront racist attitudes. A report into racist violence in Australia stated:

Anti-Arab and Muslim feeling is largely based on stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims: a generalized identification of Arabs and Muslims with violence (such as terrorism and the taking of hostages), stereotyped identification of Arabs and Muslims with ‘un-Australian values’ (for example religious fundamentalism, conservative views about women and moral issues, dietary restrictions, conservative and conspicuous clothing…). (qtd. in Jureidini 175)
Sallis’ writing allows the personal experience of Arab-Australians to be represented in literature and breaks through the barriers which confine perspectives on these issues, contesting existent notions which inform attitudes towards Muslim culture. Saeed states that: “There is no inherent contradiction between Christian and Australian, or being Jewish and Australian. Likewise there is no contradiction between being Muslim and Australian (207). The narratives question the idea that the cultural differences between the communities are a threat to Australians. It also encourages a positive identification with Arab-Australian people and contributes to inter-cultural understanding and a more enlightened approach to Muslim culture, acting as a form of resistance to the marginalised position which it occupies in the Australian community. Because of such writing, through what Bhabha refers to as “the migrant metaphor”, it is possible to re-think “the very language of cultural community” (“Third Space” 219). It is this constant re-thinking which indicates the capacity of postcolonial society to absorb and celebrate difference.

**Short Stories / Diverse Cultures. Waiting in Space: An Anthology of Australian Writing**

The second group of texts which I will discuss is an anthology entitled *Waiting in Space: An Anthology of Australian Writing*. Published in 1999, this anthology was put together specifically to depict writing from a range of cultures by emerging Australian writers. Because Australian authors who have a Middle-Eastern background write from a wide span of countries and perspectives, so the anthology *Waiting in Space* brings together
many voices and experiences. In the preface, the editors claim that “While the erasure of diversity remains a feature of the Australian literary canon, looking for the expressive voices of the other is an act of resistance against the monolingual nation” (Abood viii). Narratives echo from Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Italy, the Philippines, Fiji, India, Turkey and Aboriginal Australia thus this publication promotes diverse literary voices. In this section of the thesis I will look at selected short fiction from this anthology by authors of Middle-Eastern origin, including Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey and investigate how these narratives engage with or reflect Australian culture. Many of these stories are very short, and the discussion moves not only between stories but also between countries. The narratives articulate strong views both on the homeland of the writers and on Australian experience.

The authors use various strategies to intersect with contemporary Australian experience. Language plays a significant role in these stories since unglossed words are often installed in the text to denote difference and while some narratives use the exploration of language as subject matter, others speak from the distance and perspective of their geographic homeland. In many of these stories the theme of war directs the narrative, the subject matter is often therefore overtly political and the depiction of violence and torture, confronting.

A Manipulation of Language
In *Waiting in Space* the subject matter of a narrative by Lena Nahlous, entitled “Talking in Silence”, illustrates the position of
the migrant through its exploration and manipulation of language. It addresses the role of speech and silence and the process of communication in relation to migrant experience. The narrative depicts both the possibilities and the limitations of language and its title, “Talking in Silence” indicates its paradoxical nature. The text blurs the boundaries of genre; its structure suggests short story, perhaps poetry, monologue, and has been performed for radio. It addresses many issues involved in communication when English is not the first language of the speaker. The pace of the text is controlled by the insertion of instructions such as “pause”, “quickly” and “silence” (Nahlous 9). The conversation is one way, so the hearer is implied, but does not speak; nevertheless the text manages to depict a range of issues. For example: “I proud to be told I speak well for migrant woman. Thank you. Thak ewe. Tank u. I gratefruit. So gratefruit” (Nahlous 10). These sentences not only convey the difficulty of communication, the various accents of more than one speaker, but also convey the patronising attitude of the person being spoken to. The speaker therefore articulates the silence of the person she is addressing.

Through short paragraphs the narrator not only depicts accents, but articulates attitudes which exist in the Australian community:

I learn to speak about myself so they can understand the ABC of me and mine. I become walking ethnic dictionary of every Other culture. Because we all same. “You Lebanese? I had a Turkish friend. Her brother oppress her—you
oppressed too? I white feminist, so important I should investigate. (Nahlous 12)

These lines indicate the presence of several voices in the one paragraph. They challenge the stereotypical perceptions which can define relationships with migrants and the attitudes of feminist scholars towards gender relationships in the Arab–Australian community. Paula Abood notes that: “the writing up of Arab and Muslim women by Western women has firm roots in the female orientalism of previous centuries” (Abood 168). These orientalist attitudes perceive women of these communities to have no voice and therefore consider that they should be spoken for. They become, then, the other to the Australian community. At one point the narrator refers to herself as “I, Ethnic Sideshow” (Nahlous 12) to denote this position.

By writing in accented English, the narrator appears to mock herself and her voice becomes the stereotypical other for which she is speaking. By mimicking accented English the narrator both appropriates and transforms the dominant language and exposes the site of difference between cultures and in doing so draws both cultures together. Throughout this narrative the narrator asks for a voice for migrant women and contests the need for silence: “I need to talk. All the time, everywhere. To fill the gaps and spaces where silences hide” (9)

The position of migrant women in the community is addressed when the narrator remarks: “I ask, why do you always suggest that we invite migrants to cook the food and dance at women’s events? Have you considered a migrant woman speaking?” (Nahlous 14) In this
way the narrative reflects the marginalised position of migrant women, and at the same time acts as a literary voice for them. It sees their silence as imposed by the community which others them and refers to the larger issues affecting Australian migrant communities: “… words will never deny my existence, justify my colonisation and assimilation. Yes, Sir, I’ll be quiet” (Nahlous 10). There is a constant tension in the dialogue between the concept of silence and conversation, and a move from specific to universal issues, providing a dense investigation of inter-cultural communication and the role of language in depicting cultural difference.

A different strategy to expose language difference and its link with identity can be seen in the poem “A.F.L. Arabic as a Foreign Language”, written by Alissar Chidiac. The title, with its association with Australian Football League, immediately sets connection between Australian culture and Arabic language. The narrator engages language to foreground identity. Untranslated Arabic phrases are constantly inserted in the text while the narrator explains her Australian-Lebanese background: “I was in Australia all my life kul hayati” (45) The story which emerges emphasises her identity as a person of mixed race: “Our family is in australia from long ago, min zamaan / There are arabs in australia from long ago” (44) The use of both Arabic and English language celebrates this identity, and opens up a new site where Arabic and English co-exist: As Ashcroft points out: “Ultimately the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word and thus the ‘receptor’
culture the higher status.” The narrator is situated in Lebanon and since she appropriates both languages to her own purpose contests the monolingual culture which she experienced in Australia. There text indicates that there is a difference in the way that identity is assigned in Lebanon, in comparison to Australia:

As soon as I open my mouth
they know there’s a lebanese accent in there
I don’t know if I’ve ever been so “lebanese”
as opposed to n.e.s.b. or arab australian
or of lebanese background or of arabic speaking background
or of migrant background or Mediterranean
or just wog (Chidiac 44)

This extract not only illustrates the many ways which Australians categorise people but shows that in Lebanon the accent causes the narrator to be included, whereas in Australia the categorization denotes exclusion. However within Lebanon, points of difference must be also be articulated: “ok, ok, my family is Christian” she says (46), so boundaries of identity are imposed from within the Lebanese community.

Trevor Batrouney discusses the connection between language and identity when he says:

The Arabic language is a highly influential factor in fixing identity for Arab-Australians. As such it is both a marker and a transmitter of cultural identity that helps bind
communities together. Speaking Arabic at home, praying in Arabic and attending Arabic classes are means of preserving the language and elements of their former identity. (60)

This situation is illustrated in many of these stories by the presence of Arab words, but the connection between language and identity is specifically addressed in the story “Not A House But A Home”, written by Rihana Sultan. The narrative centres on a huge whiteboard which dominates the house of a Jordanian man for the purpose of teaching his children the Arabic language. The board depicts the absence of his culture, since it is not used: “Of course deep down we all knew what our father wanted us to do: write Arabic” (Sultan 123). The story infers the dislocation which the father feels without the language of his homeland and declares the need for him to pass on his language to his children. The whiteboard is the centre of his living room and represents the central role of language in relation to his culture, as well as the changing nature of identity, since the Arab language has not been passed on to his children. Cultural identity in this case therefore, cannot be transmitted since language is the conduit for that process.

**Sites Of War**

Despite the various nationalities of the writers, the depiction of life in Middle Eastern countries in *Waiting In Space* often engages the language and imagery of war, reflecting not only the unstable nature of politics in the area but also the diverse background of migrants and refugees in Australia. Imagery of war makes these
stories and poems overtly political and depicts space as both vulnerable and changeable. As El-Zein notes: “The land can be and is conquered by other races, and appropriated by other stories” (234). Although they are informed by the diverse origins of the writers and their homelands, in a literary sense the theme of war crosses all boundaries and the language of war becomes universal to this writing. The sense of place which informs much of this fiction contributes to cultural understanding even if the text does not specifically and directly engage with Australian culture.

The stories in *Waiting In Space* bring a global significance to Australian writing by the evocation of political and physical brutality which lies behind the plight of many refugees in Australia. In Nasrin Mahoutchi’s narrative “The Big Iron Door Banging” the reader is drawn into two scenes in Iran. The first is the sensual childhood memory of a bath house, a place of steamy women’s bodies and the smell of soap. The parallel scene, linked by the ominous banging of a big iron door, is a prison bath house, again with naked women’s bodies, one of them violated by a brutal whipping. A tortured and bleeding body in the shower is the focus of the narrative and symbolizes the violence which is part of the country: “This is Iran. She has her back to me … what was in front of my eyes was absolute brutality… (62). The narrative speaks from outside Australian culture but merges with it by informing the writing with an intense sense of cultural difference and political violence.
The comparison between childhood and peace and security, and between adulthood and war also structures the narrative in “A Promise”. Written by Kendy Estphan, the story depicts idyllic scenes in rural North Lebanon during early childhood which contrasts with the violence and destruction of the civil war. The narrative moves from: “The smell of ancient cedar oil which drifted from a shy lonely forest not far away, carrying with it myths of biblical proportions” to “the suffocating smell of explosives and poisonous gas” (112). By depicting the grandfather as a storyteller the narrator illustrates the ongoing power of the written story which not only summons up the past but ensures that it lives on: “No elixir of life was needed, no miracle drug: only a paper, a pen, and the passion of that nine-year old still dwelling within… My grandfather shall never die.” (114)

The politics of the homeland in the Middle-East constantly informs these narratives. It is the subject matter for Palestinian writer Sari Kassis who employs an unusual literary strategy in his story “The Numbers of a Palestinians life in Jail” by using numbers to depict the unjust jailing of Palestinians. Numbers in this story denote months of incarceration, and in his view also denote: “the whims of the Israelis.” In the opening to the story the narrator uses numbers like language:

Sentence: 6666
Sentence: 646633.
Sentence: 6336
Sentence: 63
The numbers reveal the sentencing pattern which governs the life of prisoners: "It is the way Ali Jaradat's life is composed: the original detention order of 6 months, followed by 5 consecutive extension orders, each 6 months in duration." (77) Numbers accentuate the dehumanising nature of each sentencing, and denote a seemingly endless succession of jail time and therefore turn into the "diabolical manifestations of mind games" (77). Numbers take on the function of language: "pre-Oslo, post-Oslo: pre redeployment, post-redeployment: 1948, 1967, 1974, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1995, 1997; pre-the-pull-out from H1 in Hebron, post we're talking again"(79). They denote the passing of time and significant political events and together with the use of short, staccato sentences reinforce the impersonal nature of the handling of detainees, depicting the power which governs and orders peoples lives: "Another 6 months. Another 3, 2, 4… His life is mine!" he says.” (81). The use of numbers exploits the prisoner’s expectation of freedom, and the hope that their sentence will end. The numbers challenge the meaning of the word “detention”, which suggests that the detainees are being held for a short period of time, whereas the repetition of the numbers in fact denotes a very long sentence.

Kassis uses the genre of the short story and an innovative format as an overt anti-Israeli political statement to address the question of Palestinian administrative detainees: “What’s being
done in the world? Who cares? How much do we hear about this?” (Kassis 78) This narrative draws an international situation into literary discourse in Australia and indicates the fluid nature of the short story genre and its capability of reflecting international situations without engaging with local Australian experience. The versatility of English is reflected in its ability to absorb the use of numbers as a form of creative literary communication.

War in Palestine is also the subject of the poem and narrative entitled “Episode” by Hala Husseini. As an Australian-born Palestinian she chooses to write about the past, the events of 1967. Her introductory poem states: “I am yesterday, today and tomorrow, / I am their grief, pain and sorrow…” (118) Her writing depicts a powerful scene of love, rape and violence, during a massacre in 1967. The past therefore informs her writing and in doing so draws the Palestinian situation into the realms of Australian experience. The narrative structure of Husseini’s writing involves a poem, followed by a short story, followed by another poem, all on the same topic, so her writing expands the boundaries of genre. It foregrounds the relevance of this history to multiculturalism in Australia and ensures that Australian literary discourse absorbs the Palestinian experience, just as other cultures discussed in this study become part of the same site of negotiation. The narrative engages with Australia through the background of the author, rather than directly through the subject matter and acts to voice a Palestinian perspective on the events of the past.
The depiction of war that is seen in this writing includes horrific scenes of torture. Farik Suleyman’s poem “Extinguishing Eyes” uses images of torture to denote war in Iraqi Kurdistan. The poem is directed by these confronting images:

One day they came,  
the executioners of war  
to extinguish their cigarettes  
in my eyes instead of their ashtrays.  
Theyuffed my hands tightly  
Then pulled my eyes out  
Of their sockets (99)

This writing illustrates a literary strategy which engages shock to interpolate Australian literary culture. The tension between war in Kurdistan and peace in Australia is implied but not articulated. The power of this poem lies in its images of war and violence as well as the unexpected use of the power of laughter as a counterpoint to torture: “I spat so fiercely into their eyes / And I laughed and I laughed and I laughed /Again and again and again (Suleyman 99). These lines subvert the meaning of laughter and render it both ominous and empowering. Australia acts as a silent participant in the background of these narratives about war, its presence is integral to the writing. But the political nature of this fiction is informed by the sense of place which each story depicts thus the information about the various authors and their place of birth, which appears at the end of this publication, becomes part of the reading experience.
Gender and Exile

Due to the exilic nature of many migrant experiences, both geographic and cultural, images of Australia in these stories are often negative. As Edward Said notes: “Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong.” (182) Loubna Haikal’s story “My Mother the Carmelite”, depicts a woman who gradually withdraws from life because of such a sense of exile. Australia itself becomes part of the discourse. Its existence directs the narrative, defines attitudes and ultimately is the cause of death of the two main characters. As a participant in the narrative Australia becomes other to Lebanon, inverting the position of the two cultures. The story depicts the imprisoning nature of Australian life in comparison to the warm community of life in Lebanon. The mother’s life reflects the condition which Said refers to as: “… the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community” (Reflections 183). Her life as a machinist who works from home is likened to an existence in the community of a Carmelite convent where the inhabitants speak infrequently. Her increasing silence denotes her refusal to belong. Cloistered and isolated by her loving husband, on whom she is totally dependant, she works her way towards death. While both home and Australia are depicted as a form of prison, this narrative illustrates the tension between the imprisoning nature of male-female relationships and the comparative warmth and pleasure of the female family community back in Lebanon. The narrative shows the two
cultures in parallel: “This is such a vast country, the houses are so far apart, it is like living in space” (71). This links concepts of house and universe where physical space implies both cultural difference and cultural isolation, but despite the unbounded idea of living in space, it also acts as prison, so the sense of space has an ambivalent connotation. In an essay entitled “Being Elsewhere” El-Zein points out that:

If faces and buildings and streets are unfamiliar, it is only because we cannot recognize them, do not understand their stories and cannot readily incorporate them in our consciousness. It is also because we cannot get them to recognizes us and cannot tell them our stories. The migrant loses the precise language of familiarity, and shared memory, the ability to evoke worlds of associations with a few hints and words.” (230)

Architecture therefore plays a psychological role by giving not only security and familiarity, but by creating a link with history and the past. El-Zein describes this interaction as a form of language. In “My Mother the Carmelite” this interaction does not take place. The central character refuses to engage with Australian society, withdraws and loses her power to speak so her silences must be interpreted by her daughter. El-Zein suggests that a refusal to engage with place indicates that: “Belonging… becomes a form of betrayal.” (230) The narrative then, depicts the extreme psychological exile which can exist in the experience of the migrant and the intense loyalty towards the homeland. This story presents images of Australia which are
all negative. The capacity for Australia to imprison denotes the destructive nature of exile and the ultimate descent into silence by its female character reflects the possible powerlessness and voicelessness of migrant experience. By emphasizing the supportive nature of the female community in Lebanon the narrative foregrounds a condition of gender isolation: “The silence she longed for among the chatter of women in Beirut became too heavy with memory and longing in Australia” (71). The absence for her, of this feminine space in Australia points to the significant role of gender in contributing to cultural isolation. The woman in his narrative cannot survive without her familiar female community, thus her exile is governed by gender as much as by geographic distance from Lebanon.

A site of female space is also the subject of a poem in this anthology entitled “Behind the Veil,” written by Nushet Yilmaz Comert. As a result of recent political events this topic is particularly relevant to current attitudes in the Australian community. “Behind the Veil” writes from the perspective of a Turkish woman wearing a veil which is a metaphor for cultural invisibility, but more significantly frames a vision of the community which the narrator observes: “You cannot see me I can see you, hidden behind the veils of your culture, / Revealed are you” (84). The blindness of the observer is emphasised throughout the poem. Constant inversion of images ensures an intense interrogation of attitudes towards Muslim culture. Teasing images of hiding and revelation, of touching and not touching, accentuate the secretive nature of the vision which is exposed: “Touch me / you can / I cannot touch you (87). The
observer, outside the veil, becomes other to the person inside it:
“Revealed is the camera of your culture that has veiled me so that you
cannot see me but I can see you” (85).

“Behind The Veil” addresses the division between cultures which the
veil signifies: “ … you speak in English I look at you in Turkish” (84)
There is constant movement between the veiled and the observer so
the paradoxical nature of the veil which both conceals and reveals is
foregrounded. Despite the fact that the veil conceals, the woman feels
that: “the eye of the camera dissects me into little pieces…” (87),
indicating the position of veiled women who have often been the subject
of racial abuse and discrimination. (Saeed 182) The veiled woman
speaks from a physical and cultural marginalised position, but the fact
that she does speak indicates that her voice is not repressed. The
poem ultimately makes a positive proposal: “Take your veil and I’ll take
mine so that I can see you and you can see / me unveiled…” (Comert
89)

“Behind The Veil” makes a contribution to cross-cultural understanding
by articulating the attitude of a Muslim woman to those outside her own
community, and in doing so, depicts a view of herself. The poem
therefore interpolates both cultures. The two images of the dominant
and the marginalised are drawn together in the text: “I am the dark side
that belongs to you…” (88) and although the image of the veil is used
metaphorically, implicit in the message of the poem is the right to wear
it, and the right to express cultural difference. There is a constant
assertion of strength as well as difference: “Untamed /
Dangerous I might be” (87) is repeated several times in the poem, inverting the view of the repressed Muslim woman. In Edward Said’s book *Covering Islam* he calls for the need to encourage: “… the capacity to produce and articulate a conscious and forceful self-image. But this means a serious assessment of the positive (not merely the reactive and defensive) values for which Muslims, in many different ways stand” (67). This writing addresses this need, by the articulation of a voice from a site which is unfamiliar to many in the Australian community.

Overt references to cultural and political issues in this writing indicate that the reader is a participant in the dialogue which takes place. This interaction is an essential contribution to the changing attitudes and perceptions which are intrinsic to cross-cultural relationships and which this writing cultivates. Ashcroft suggests that: “Once we see the term ‘post-colonial’ as representing a *form of talk* rather than a *form of experience* we will be better equipped to see that such talk encompasses a wide and interwoven text of experiences” (*Post-Colonial* 13). These narratives come together, with their readers, and create a “form of talk” between these Middle-Eastern cultures and Australia and in doing so intercept the literary scene and inhabit in new and different ways.

Both *Mahjar* and *Waiting in Space* make a small but important contribution to Australian writing. The celebration of these diverse cultures and the investigation of Australian culture which this writing explores, bring new perspectives to Australian
literature. The innovative use of language which acts to install difference in the texts brings together Arabic and English, and in some cases Australian vernacular, to create new sites of meaning. These narratives show the intersection between concepts of space in the Middle-East and Australia and the way in which this informs identity and behaviour. They examine the sites of war which instigate the experience of emigration and which have contributed to the dynamic nature and diversity of their identity in the new country. The stories encourage what Homi Bhabha refers to as a rethinking of: “the very language of cultural community” (Third Space 219), and help to expand the view of both global and local culture.

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Conclusion

The selection of writing which I have studied in this thesis indicates the diverse nature of short story writing (and to a lesser extent poetry writing) in Australia. The marginalised and minority position of the cultures I have discussed has contributed to the many perspectives which emerge from this literature. This thesis shows the manner in which this writing acts to interpolate the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture, and indicates that in the course of this process these stories encode the shifting nature of language, indicate reassessments of history and reveal changing notions of place and at times, shifting generational perspectives. Since this process involves the insertion of foreign words and phrases this study also shows that the language used in these narratives challenges the dominance of Standard English. I have shown that the ways which these strategies of interpolation are applied in this literature are individual, many and varied, and indicate the imaginative, inventive dimensions of this writing. They contribute to the changing directions in Australian literature and act to distinguish it from the traditions of English literature which have informed it in the past.

The Aboriginal short fiction studied in this thesis confronts and challenges the marginalised position of Indigenous people and causes a reassessment of Australian history from the point of view of Indigenous cultures. I have shown that the depictions of Aboriginality in these texts, particularly through language and the depiction of the sacred, contribute to the political, resistant nature of Indigenous writing by asserting cultural difference. Poverty, racism and cultural appropriation are all integral to the subject
matter of these narratives, their message therefore is often bleak, and yet the ongoing resilience of Aboriginal cultures and pride in their historic cultural heritage is also apparent.

The Chinese-Australian and the Middle-Eastern short fiction and poetry which I have studied in this thesis, as well as Jewish writing, engages with the policy of multiculturalism, a policy which has played a part in informing these narratives, creating an environment which has caused the development of critical debate. These debates have been fuelled by Hansonism in the 1990s, and by terrorist activities in the early twenty-first century, which have reacted against people from Middle-Eastern communities living in Australia. Government attitudes appear to be at odds with celebrations of multiculturalism. This thesis shows that accusations of racism and stereotyping which emerge in these narratives, particularly Chinese-Australian and Middle-Eastern Australian stories and poetry, contradict perceptions of a tolerant community. The Middle-Eastern fiction in this study particularly illustrates the contentious political position of Arab communities in Australia. Yet the writing emerging from these communities shows a richness of style and narrative scope and reflects the many diasporic influences which have contributed to the identities of these writers.

All of this literature shows that an interaction exists between fiction, history and politics. The Australian-Jewish short fiction studied here particularly illustrates the continuing effects of World War Two and the Holocaust on Australian lives. This study shows that past history runs parallel to the present in many of these narratives which recreate the past, or reinterpret its significance in
the second generation of immigrant families. While these stories reflect many aspects of Jewish cultures and the diverse nature of the Jewish community in Australia, they also reveal the capacity of these cultures to co-exist productively within the contemporary multicultural community.

This thesis reveals that this literature contributes to the global relevance of Australian writing by turning its gaze to other countries. The short fiction which has emerged from immigrant communities often enters into a dialogue with history and politics outside the geographic and cultural boundaries of Australia, looking back to the country of origin of the authors, to their diasporic centre. The short story genre has moved from the bush realism of Lawson and Baynton to include writing which reflects these many cultural identities, many races and countries. The presence of a multitude of literary voices which now speak from minority communities in Australia indicates a distance between the short fiction written in the nineteenth century and the contemporary fiction and poetry studied in this thesis. While no literary text is innocent of politics, this distance is also affirmed by the overt political nature of the statements which emerge from many of these stories. It can be seen from this study that this writing is often used as an avenue of cross-cultural confrontation since this literature is at times aggressive and angry. The structure and form of some of these narratives refers back to the realist prose of earlier Australian stories, but other writing is innovative and adventurous. I have shown that the boundaries between short fiction and poetry are blurred, indicating the capacity of the genre
to absorb differences in style and form which also affirms a distance from early Australian fiction.

To generalise too much about this writing is to deny its vibrant diversity. However this study shows that for the most part the fiction I have discussed foregrounds and celebrates cultural difference and in this sense can be seen as a linked discourse. The assertion of difference contests notions of an homogenous community, and affirms the ability of non Anglo-Celtic cultures to survive and at times flourish within the Australian community while reflecting wider global influences and individual cultural practices. This writing explores the tensions of personal identity and reflects the continually changing, complex nature of hybrid cultural interaction in contemporary Australia, and suggests the need for this to be accommodated in Australian politics.

This literature is significant because it creates a dialogue between cultures, a dialogue which serves as a vehicle for critical and sometimes confrontational cultural communication, enabling these writers to challenge issues which are central to the relationships between cultures, issues such as racism, cultural repression, and historical misrepresentation. I have shown that the cross-cultural engagement which takes place in this writing can act as a challenge and a site of resistance, and serve to liberate writers from their marginal and minority positions; in this respect this writing is political. This literature invites a reassessment of cultural relationships, promotes an awareness of issues concerning Indigenous people and sees immigrant cultures as part of a diverse Australian community. It is significant that the narratives I have
discussed address problems inherent in diverse cultural communities living together and show a capacity to not only reflect, but to instigate cultural change. For this reason they make a small but important contribution to contemporary Australian writing and towards creating a space for the disparate voices of minority cultures to be heard.

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Primary Texts


Bell, Jeanie. “Australia’s Indigenous Languages” Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians. Ed.


Delaruelle, Jacques, Alexandra Karakostas-Seda, and Anna Ward, eds.


Hagemann, Helen. “Anti-Heroes in Patrick White’s and Peter Cowan’s short stories.” http://www.geocities.com/helen_hagemann/PeterCowan.html


