Polities and poetics: a ‘place’ for reconciliation

by

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Acknowledgements

At the centre of this study is a story; a point where I became centred. The idea to write about reconciliation for a doctoral thesis came while visiting a remote Indigenous community in Central Australia called Santa Teresa. What was intended to be a professional meeting became a very personal connection with a place, people and culture that were not completely foreign but euphorically embracing. I am sincerely grateful for the time spent with Cecile and her family under her verandah, engaging in life’s yarns of love and politics and showing me that reconciliation is a dialogue with strangers.

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Prolegomenon

What is this becoming?

To begin: what is my own location within the area of race studies in literary research? While I eschew essentialism, my experiences as a White woman have oriented me towards a particular viewpoint on racism and the plight of Indigenous people.\(^1\) Stephen Meucke urges doctoral students to consider from the outset why they want to study the ‘Other’, quoting Deleuze and Guattari: “it’s alright to study Eskimos if you are Eskimo-becoming, and if the Eskimos are European-becoming.”\(^2\) What I have experienced and thought and felt towards the ‘Other’ – the Indigenous peoples of Australia – provides a primary lens through which I see and interpret the world. And while one’s personal reflections may not be of first interest in academia, they are nonetheless relevant. Jane Tompkins warns of the “unfriendly reader” who sees no place in academic writing for personal feelings or expressions which can make the student appear “soft-minded, self-indulgent, and unprofessional.”\(^3\) However, the topic of Black and White relations is controversial and unavoidably complex, discussions often hinging on the question of who has authority to speak about race. I will argue that race relations are – or need to be – built dialogically, and that academic writing in the area of literary studies is often an exegesis or critique of creative writing that lends itself to the reader’s introspection about the Other as a method of research – the results of which can sometimes be shared. As Tompkins argues:

I love [essay] writers who write about their own experience. I feel I’m being nourished by them, that I’m being allowed to enter into a personal relationship with them. That I can match my own experience up with theirs, feel cousin to them, and say, yes, that’s how it is.\(^4\)

I cannot claim that my own experience is extraordinary; on the contrary, it has been conditioned by, and bears witness to, racism that is a result of systemic colonialism. Thus how we think and feel about, and behave towards, Others must be questioned so that colonial norms can be identified and altered, as part of the processes of reconciliation. I would like to share what I have witnessed in order to develop a context for my work; showing where my interests stem from and how they ultimately led me to commit to this PhD. I want to be open about the position I write from, and my motivations.

\(^1\) Meucke, Stephen. ‘Dialogue with a postgraduate wanting to study Aboriginal culture’ in Textual spaces, API Network, Perth, 2005, p. 174
\(^2\) ibid. p. 177
\(^4\) ibid. p. 2131
I was moved by the plight of Indigenous peoples from a young age and influenced by my aunt, who is a Murri woman. Her children (my cousins) are very close in age to me and I would often play at their house as a young girl. One afternoon a classmate saw me playing in their front yard and made a great effort to confront me at school the following day about how I was ‘hanging around’ with ‘boongs’. Soon, other children were interrogating my link with a people they did not know or understand. It was at this pivotal moment of racial guilt by association that I decided which group I would align myself with.⁵ I never wanted to be actually (or apparently) racist or be seen as racist, so that since childhood I have continually reflected on my habits of thought in very personal ways. This process was not the same as Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” but more ‘I see (and feel) therefore I am not’. I have been fortunate to meet Indigenous people from different regions of Australia, and have taught literacy in remote areas of the Northern Territory. Coming to know, understand and love many Indigenous people is enough, I think, to warrant an interest in their representations of whiteness – their Other – while forming views about cultural exchange and the reconciliation debates. Thus as a researcher and educator, and an avid reader of Australian Indigenous literature, it is the function of language, and particularly in fostering ‘Indigenous and non-Indigenous becoming’ that is a key interest for me – to find ways of articulating and giving language to emerging discourses on reconciliation that are ‘becoming’ of Australians and represented in fiction writing over the past twenty years.

Many non-Indigenous people feel the need to critique mainstream culture to expose, discuss and undo cultural norms that are oppressive of Indigenous people; and thus to develop their awareness that such oppression exists and can be reversed. And the way that ‘White’ people perceive their identity in relation to the Other is critical to the process of reconciliation and should be examined. However, what is needed in this vexed area of study is not an emphasis on skin-colour but, rather, recognition of the fact that increasing numbers of non-Indigenous readers enjoy, connect with and learn from Indigenous writing. Skin-colour is only an external sign of a person’s identity. The way one thinks, imagines, behaves and exists in everyday life is far more complex than dictating that person must be Black to say this, and that person must be White to say that. A meaningful and dialogical relationship may be

⁵ In 1993 a study of racism in schools was conducted with the results published in a journal article the following year. Journalist Carolyn Jones reported that the study found “five-and six-year olds are more racially prejudiced than any other group among Australian primary school students and have the strongest negative attitudes towards Aboriginal and Asian students.” This reflects my own experience and shows racism is a common and early occurrence in Australia, particularly in school environments. Jones, Carolyn. ‘Prejudice hits its prime in first-grade playground’ in Racism and reconciliation. Vol. 28 1993, p. 6
founded in a shared ‘desire’ to dream of new possibilities, to stretch the limits of subjective identity and to find modes of being that are not dictated by race – or prescriptive of what people should read, write, discuss, research, learn, envision or believe. From such sympathy, new symbols, semiotics and languages become active and transforming.

Numerous perspectives on our past have been presented but fewer on the hope for some type of reconciliation or racial harmony in the future. Either of these perspectives are found in the work of authors, historians and academics to be discussed in the body of this thesis. At times however, ideas from everyday people may be awe-inspiring and profound although they remain unpublished. We must remember those who are illiterate or cannot access English in order to negotiate their identity with their oppressors. Where are such people heard and represented? Their imaginations are ghost-like – they are not shared publicly but they may be as powerful and thought-provoking as those expressed in published texts. One’s personal reflections may not be of great interest in academia but they are relevant to a process of cultural exchange based on story-telling, open discussion and freedom to express ideas in creative and autonomous ways.
Introduction

Polities and poetics: auxiliaries in the construction of new worlds

There are two fundamental Australian truths. One: Black people have proven they will not go away despite the exaggerated reports of their demise. Two: White people won’t go away either despite what some Aboriginal people wish to believe. We’re stuck with each other and we’re stuck with our land. What a magnificent prospect.6

Bruce Pascoe (2007)

In an era of apology and of heightened awareness of race issues, are there real prospects for constructing a new world order that places diverse peoples in a meaningful relationship with each other and their country? Research suggests there are creative ways of inaugurating a postcolonial reality that frees Indigenous subjects from oppression – and reconciles cultural, ideological and conceptual divisions over history, land-ownership, identity and belonging.

At the centre of this research project is the pivotal role of fiction writing in transforming race relations through sustained contributions to discursive areas such as history, ‘place’, migration, and culture narratives, and notions of the sacred. These are the literary tropes identified in Australian writing over the last two decades that have informed the field of inquiry known as the ‘reconciliation’ debates. Various texts published since 1990 that have provided space for negotiations and articulations about race have an established purpose, meaning and ownership – whereby readers have been drawn together to reflect on deeper issues of nationalism, political resistance and reconciliation. Engagements with characters and narratives have been used to question colonial assumptions about history, belonging and white hegemony and to present the possibilities for social transformation. Thus when realising literature’s full potential, writing can deliver fresh hope for the future of reconciliation by constructing its tangible form or material design for readers to analyse, dream about, discuss and act on.

This thesis, Polities and polemics: a ‘place’ for reconciliation explores how Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors have shaped the reconciliation debates since 1990, by changing readers’ consciousness and cultural understanding of Others as they are portrayed textually. It

has been divided into five chapters, each representing a main trope or motif of reconciliation as represented in the literature. Chapter 1 discusses Australia’s history of colonisation and the ways in which modern authors have used their creative work to challenge, debunk and remember early settlement as a means of transforming relations. Chapter 2 addresses notions of ‘place’ and how Australia’s landscape is re-imagined and rewritten in order to renew how home and the Other are conceptualised. Chapter 3 explores belonging to ‘place’, and being implicated in the reconciliation debates through shared historical understandings of colonisation and oppression. Migrant Australians are affected by literary encounters with reconciliation too and, because they have experienced displacement from their homelands, are also in search of new cultural identities. Migrants are not excluded from ‘the dreaming’ of a postcolonial reality that can give them a sense of belonging to the land – the spiritual becoming of a new identity – and empower them to love and be loved by the strangers around and among them. This chapter explores how depictions of migrant Others reflect a politics of inclusion and exclusion that is essentially harmful to prospects for reconciliation in Australia.

Chapter 4 argues that the bodies of Black or Indigenous characters are not always represented as a symbol synonymous with oppression, hatred or anger but can be benefactors of healing – the for-givers of hope, transformation and love in Australian literature. Lastly, Chapter 5 asks where the non-Indigenous subject may be located – if at all – in the complex system of human relationships, and in relation to understandings of the sacred. It also examines the implications of secret knowledge of the Other for reconciliation that anticipates knowing, understanding and loving the Other in a new or transformed world order, when aspects of the Other are often secret. There are arguably secret discourses that flow in and out of discussions with Indigenous people which non-Indigenous readers do not properly understand but need to acknowledge and respect – even if the secrets are never revealed and the workings of the sacred can never be owned or identified.

In summary, this thesis has a tripartite enquiry: firstly, it seeks to examine the ways in which ‘reconciliation’ is depicted in contemporary writing. Secondly, it seeks to illustrate that literature can do more than simply mirror reconciliation but that it can also engage in reconciliatory processes – ‘do’ reconciliation – in particular ways. And thirdly, it explores what ‘doing’ reconciliation may mean, determining whether this emerging social movement can have a positive and transformative effect or whether it will fail philosophically and be superseded by another social movement or paradigm. Underlying this enquiry is the question: is the failure of reconciliation – ideological, cultural and emotional apartheid – here to stay?
Methodology

This thesis is not dependent on reader-response theory, as it does not engage a sample of individual readers in order to gauge effects of, or responses to, particular texts. Neither is it a discussion in the area of cultural studies nor concerned with making direct parallels between political events and the proliferation of Indigenous writing. For this reason, its title stands as: 

Polities and polemics: a ‘place’ for reconciliation (rather than, ‘Politics and polemics’ as originally considered). The term ‘polities’ signifies the engagement of the collective human spirit with the body politic; here it is the subject of interest because it implicates the personal, emotional and social consciousness of readers/writers, rather than the political activities of the governing members of powerful elites. ‘Polities’ suggests an interest in authors (members of a civil polity) who write in ways that are political but do not necessarily participate in political activity, which is part of governmental or institutional practice. Kristeva argues that authors have no “author-ity”, being able to shape culture by the way their work is received by readers rather than their artistic intentions.7 Writers participate in cultural production by using the power of language to transform polities, rather than directly changing or upholding particular party politics. This does not mean that writers do not take part in politics but they may use language to transform polities in preference to the machinery of the state. Polities and poetics are closely aligned, auxiliaries in the production of new world orders; as this thesis will argue, polemical and literary forms of writing are just as significant to reconciliation as political activities such as public protest and law-making. Hence ‘place’ appears in quotation marks in this thesis title to imply that the conceptual development of reconciliation depends on literature being a ‘place’ Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects can use to construct (and reconstruct) notions of the Other and their relationships with each other.

Drawing connections between the construction of polities, producing culture and writing is not a new phenomenon. Early discourses about the power of writing can be traced back to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, but it was Socrates who said that poetry was “a power divine, impelling you like the power in the stone Euripides called the magnet”.8 Literature in our civilisation, as a result, has always had the potential to be much more than a source of enjoyment for readers – it can also be political, invigorating, dissident, empowering; calling

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to be eternally discussed. When it fails to evince these qualities, it fails to be valuable, as Henry James inter alia argues:

Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints; and there is presumption that those times when no one has anything particular to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice or preference, though they may be times of honour, are not times of development – are times, possibly even, a little of dullness.9

In 1866 Australia’s first literary history was recorded by George Burnett Barton in his publication *Literature in New South Wales*.10 The first Indigenous author, David Unaipon, was recognised in our literary canon in 1929, even though the earliest writings by an Indigenous person in English were Bennelong’s letters, the first of which date from 1796.11 Arguably, even these early letters show how Indigenous writing has been polemical from the outset – using the English language to communicate with settlers, make requests, write petitions, form political alliances, express anger, build resistance and (at times) articulate forgiveness. Even though Bennelong’s writings are structured in the form of letters, they are a form of written text that gives insight into the early Indigenous perspectives of colonisation. As Frederic Jameson convincingly argued, all Third World and Fourth World texts are “national allegories”, telling of their peoples’ colonisation.12

The lacunas of Indigenous literary representation began formally to be dispersed during the 1960s with publications by Kath Walker’s *We are going* (1964) and Mudrooroo’s *Wild cat falling* (1965). Since these significant publications, there has been a notable rise in publishing houses publishing work by Indigenous authors, such as Aboriginal Studies Press, University of Queensland Press, Magabala Books, IAD, Black Inc, Keeaira Press, and Fremantle Centre Press. By 1988 seven novels, twelve plays and eighteen collections of poetry had been published by Australian Indigenous writers. These texts have continued to be the subject of vigorous debate in academic institutions concerning how political, dissident and empowering they can be.13

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13 Shoemaker, Adam. *Black words, white page: Aboriginal literature 1929 – 1988*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.4. In his work Shoemaker also examines history and dispossession, the emphasis on sex and violence in Aboriginal literature, the transformation of literature into propaganda for equal rights and land rights, and the use of humour as a literary tool to represent oppression.
Surveying the historical emergence and proliferation of Australian Indigenous writing is a method of investigating the relationship that exists between polities and polemics. Rather than being dependent on reader-response theory or the opinions of individual readers, this thesis employs historical and theoretical analysis and interpretation to construct a point of view informed by the work of specific theorists. By exploring the ways literary tropes have changed to reflect and inform race relations, readers see how corresponding cultural and social transformation is apparent over time. Thus the emphasis is on both the communal effects of reading and writing, as well as on how an individual is affected by a particular text.

While affect may begin initially as the visceral stirring in an individual who then ‘owns’ an emotion, the individual response ultimately becomes part of how a community recognise the symbols and experience of the emotions they evoke, and draws on familiar codes belonging to the community. For the most part, the individual’s connection with a text is also likely to be made by others. Lauren Berlant believes that affective criticism has the scholastic obligation to locate the history of significant moments of shared affect. 

Thus, explicating reconciliation depends on recognising the collective agreement as to its symbolic constructions over time. However, while the common use of symbols and codes allows communal messages to be conveyed, it is what individual writers, readers and critics do with them that can create new meaning within, or paradigmatic contributions to, the reconciliation debates. Thus the ‘affect’ of writing should not be considered to be merely imaginary, for similar ideas, emotions and political symbols can be linked to a number of texts and their criticisms. Reconciliation may be thought of as a personal experience with another but, as this thesis will show, its material existence can be traced to the discussions, reviews and interpretations of specific texts. In other words, reading does more than stimulate emotion; on many levels it asks readers to ‘do’ something with the messages, symbols and language offered up in creative writing.

In 2011 Miles Franklin literary judge Morag Fraser supported this view when pronouncing that Kim Scott’s award-winning novel That deadman dance was a text that “shifts our understanding of what a historical novel can do”, the question she addresses being: what

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14 Favret, Mary. The study of affect and romanticism. Indiana University, USA, 2009, p. 1162
can a novel do? Scott himself writes of the power of language in *That deadman dance*, showing how stories can transform their readers both physically and psychologically:

> When Bobby Wabalanginy told the story, perhaps more than his own lifetime later, nearly all his listeners knew of books and of the language in them. But not, as we do, that you can dive deep into a book and not know just how deep until you return gasping to the surface, and are surprised at yourself, your new and so very sensitive skin. As if you’re someone else altogether, some new self trying on the words.¹⁶

This thesis explores what it means to ‘try on the words’ of ten Australian authors, mostly Indigenous, but including the work of non-Indigenous and Migrant Australian authors as well. A cross-section of Australian authors from various cultural backgrounds is necessary to gain a wider and deeper sample of the textual representation of reconciliation in race relations. Each text exemplifies the signifying process of reconciliation *par excellence* and examines how characters and narratives break up empirical patterns of everyday thought, offering readers new ways of living together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens. The authors to be discussed in this thesis include: Larissa Behrendt, Dianne Johnson, Kim Mahood, Meme McDonald, Marie Munkara, Bruce Pascoe, Kim Scott, Daryl Tonkin, Alexis Wright and Arnold Zable. These writers’ works are considered *sin qua non* in underscoring dominant Western ideologies of colonial superiority, as they reveal how whiteness subtly pervades society and – if left unanalysed – continues to impede race relations. The focus of this analysis is on texts that offer literary diversity and richness, embracing new ontological dynamism in order to escape a world already dominated by colonial ideology. While there are six Indigenous writers included in this selection, they are no ‘Uncle Toms’. On the contrary, their literature allows them to speak among white-dominated discourses, offering non-Indigenous readers possible models of redemption if they listen to and search for new ways of thinking about the Other.¹⁷

The texts selected for this study have all been published since 1990, when an identifiable concept of reconciliation appears in the language, imagery and themes of particular works. These texts span the period from the early 1990s until now and differ fundamentally from the writing of Indigenous authors in the 1960s, – 70s and 80s, which created a sense of urgency about Indigenous citizens raising their voices and fighting for their rights. Writing about race

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¹⁷ Another reason Indigenous literature is used here is to give a higher number of Indigenous people representation in the debates – something they did not have during the ten-year lifespan of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) in the years 1990 – 2000. This government organisation was set up to oversee specific goals – one being the circulation of reading material to educate the general public on what they believed reconciliation stood for and what they wanted to achieve.
has significantly changed since the groundwork laid by Mudrooroo, Oodgeroo and Judith Wright, among others, to bring about social and ideological change. Arguably, it is no coincidence that Indigenous writing proliferated during the 1960s in a political climate that produced the 1967 Referendum and the 1966 Wave Hill strikes led by Vincent Lingiari. Such protests punctured the consciousness of Australians and were reflected in “resistance literature”. Following this era, Indigenous writing continued to augment socio-political dynamism directly – thus the urgency of this thesis’ analysis of texts written since the civil rights movements and published during and after marches over Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Mabo decision, Paul Keating’s Redfern speech and Kevin Rudd’s national apology to the Stolen Generations. The methodology of this research is dependent on isolating themes, imagery, symbols and narratives of particular authors; anatomising the implicit messages of texts that are relevant to discussions about reconciliation; and exploring what writing – and reading – about reconciliation ‘does’.

Theoretical and discursive frameworks

In *Breasts, bodies, canvas: Central Desert art as experience* Jennifer Loureide Biddle discusses ‘painting’ as a verb rather than a noun – what art ‘does’ rather than what it ‘means’ – arguing art is a material force in culture, sentiment and politics with the power to create aspirations towards radical political possibilities.\(^{18}\) Loureide Biddle neatly sums up her argument by stating art is “a way of being in the world, not just a way of ‘seeing’ it”.\(^{19}\) Her work is analogous to the work of this thesis, as a template transferable to the discipline of literary studies. Her arguments regarding visual art are profound not only in the area of art history and theory but also in the much wider area of the creative arts. The astute arguments Biddle Loureide makes within her own discipline raise many questions about what artistic expression does, whether via painting, performing or, in this case, writing. Her enquiries are a basis for the primary research question that underlies this thesis: can creative writing ‘do’ reconciliation?

While Loureide Biddle’s work offers a discursive basis that extends to textual analysis, that of postcolonial theorist Bill Ashcroft is also fundamental to the theoretical structure of this thesis. In *Caliban’s voice: the transformation of English in post-colonial literatures* he argues

\(^{19}\) loc. cit.
that Black writers can use English (the language of their oppressors) to write their way out of an oppressed subjectivity. Ashcroft builds his ideas from the analysis of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, arguing that Caliban is a symbol of colonial resistance, as when he says to the powerful Prospero: “You taught me language, and my profit is I know how to curse”. Ashcroft explains how the dialogue and narratives of characters create the world in which they live. Although Caliban speaks in a language that is forced on him by colonial rule, it is his awareness of how English can be used to disempower, undermine or “curse” Prospero that is particularly noteworthy, Shakespeare seeming to anticipate the development of modern racial consciousness. Ashcroft’s “theory of transformation” advocates that the world in which we live can be reconstructed and transformed through the creative articulations of postcolonial writers:

Language has power. It provides the terms by which reality may be constituted, it provides the names by which the world may be known... This power is crucial to ideas of identity, whether personal, national or cultural, because identity is neither “revealed nor “reclaimed” but constructed as part of the social experience of language itself.

The world is analysed and remembered through language, and it is therefore a primary means Australians have to dream of where we envisage the future. Since the 1990s, reconciliation has been a national vision that expresses itself in a new kind of art. Ashcroft’s “theory of transformation” is used in this study to make sense of particular texts that are part of this literary movement; to examine the possible reasons for their innovations in language and form; and to explore the implications of these works for race relations, especially reconciliation.

While governments are often credited with achieving social and political transformation, Ashcroft supports the notion that polities are created through the less visible workings of a nation’s polemical masters. He writes: “While the soldiers and politicians have gained most attention, it is the ordinary people — and the artists and writers, through whom a transformative vision of the world has been conceived — who have often done most to ‘resist’ the cultural pressures upon them.”

Ashcroft considers language in its poetic forms to be paramount in the postcolonial transformations of the everyday world because it depicts the

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21 ibid. p.131
22 ibid. pp.1 & 13
everyday “imaginations of these societies”. He advocates that “language therefore can be made to change, to be used in different ways of talking about the world and in a metaphorical sense, to lead to changing the world itself”.

Similarly, French theorist Julia Kristeva comments on aspects of nation building in France. She argues that “poetic language” is important to the production of a society’s culture, particularly when writers of a minority group do away with conventional linguistic uses and require words to “bear a more basic significance that has to do with our individual and collective being-in-the-world”. Reading and writing are: “an exploration and discovery of the possibilities of language … an activity that liberates the subject from a number of linguistic, psychic, and social networks … and a dynamism that breaks up the inertia of language habits and grants linguists the unique possibility of studying the becoming of the significance of signs.”

Kristeva’s theory promotes the view that reconciliation, like any ideological concept, is built on consensus about the meaning of signs and semiotics, as language is produced in social and historical fields and allows for communication to take place. Yet according to Kristeva, language embedded in colonial constructs such as ethnocentric images, depictions and lexicons is a great challenge to the discourse of reconciliation, which transmits revolutionary ideas. Clearly, social transformation is derived from new and emerging forms of language and semiotics. Thus it is only when authors use “poetic language” to challenge what Kristeva terms “historical forces or currents” that ideas readers take for granted about the Other can be reformed in the textual sense. Kristeva’s theoretical formula is useful and complex. She argues that words have form (as units of language) and essence (as referents to elements of reality). Hence there is a significant link between the way reconciliation is articulated and its possibilities for success, the way “poetic language” is constituted in the chosen texts of this study being fundamental to their interpretation.

The theory of Ashis Nandy is also informative for this thesis. Nandy’s work details the struggle of Indian subjects for independence from British colonialists in the twentieth

24 loc. cit.  
25 *Calibans’s voice: the transformation of English in post-colonial literatures*, op. cit. p.4  
26 *Revolution in poetic language*, op. cit. p. 7  
27 ibid. pp. 2 – 3  
28 ibid. p.8  
29 ibid. pp. 15 – 16
century. According to Nandy, society is constructed by political/economic institutions and the development of scholastic ideology to create what he calls “public consciousness”. The success of any ideology is, according to Nandy, underpinned by the effect ideas have on “public consciousness”. In *At the edge of psychology: essays in politics and culture*, he explains how Gandhi was able to introduce new Indian concepts because he could “bring to the centre of political activity the hardy, non-ideological, albeit ‘dull’ and low-key, masses for whom reformers and revolutionaries had long fought, but rarely ‘represented’”.

These people were not engaged in political life in India nor were they people of power and influence who could directly change laws or economically support a particular movement. However, Gandhi showed that political decisions could be based on “visions of a desirable society with which the majority was not concerned” and that these could be underwritten by “a concept of humane politics which may mean little to the social scientists but which does make a difference to the quality of life in a polity”.

Nandy’s theory, although specific to Indian society, is relevant to colonial literature because he points to the political implications writing has for a majority (or non-majority) readership because it works to alter “public consciousness” or the psychology of a nation. Indeed, his ideas can be complemented by Kristeva’s theory of “poetic language”, and Ashcroft’s ideas about transformation, to show how Australian society may be continually transformed, or reconciled, textually. However, if “public consciousness” is critical to achieving a postcolonial society, is textual reconciliation plausible in Australia for those who are “non-ideological” (Nandy’s term), illiterate or choose not to read? And how do writers represent these subjects in their literary worlds?

While Nandy does not make specific mention of literature or creative writing in detail, in *Barbaric others: a manifesto on Western racism* he identifies the need for “creative [and] liberating means to address the pressing issues of today”. His vision is inspiring: “The possibilities that were overlooked and unseen 500 years ago must re-emerge as humanity’s project over the next 500 years”. Is literature a way of engaging with and effectively ‘doing’

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30 Nandy, Ashis. *At the edge of psychology: essays in politics and culture*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, p.61
31 ibid. p.62
humanity’s project? Creative writing is potentially the place for experimenting with the building of a postcolonial polity increasingly committed to race relations.

The theorists mentioned above deeply inform the starting points of this research. There are many more theorists and academics referred to in this thesis, but it is the work of these four that has been most instrumental to the theoretical and discursive frameworks of this extended discussion. At times spaces open up for further investigation and critique than was available at the time when their work was published, providing opportunities for respectful acknowledgement of the chasms in these academic discussions that have not yet been crossed. Notwithstanding, this research is undertaken in the spirit of progress and the desire to be part of a larger body of reconciliatory knowledge that continues to grow.

**Original contributions to research**

The first academic in Australia to cogently report and analyse the history of Aboriginal literature in great detail was Adam Shoemaker. In *Black words, white page: Aboriginal literature 1929 – 1988*, Shoemaker traced the burgeoning of Indigenous writing over this period and the way it corresponded to the growing national importance of Indigenous issues. It was during “the twenty-five years up to 1988 that the other side of black/white cultural communication in Australia finally found expression”. Given the evident connection between increased numbers of Indigenous publications and intensified political activity, his project explored the politicisation of Aboriginal literature – especially its contribution to cultural nationalism and growing Aboriginal pride during these years. As Shoemaker writes:

> Black activists grew both in numbers and in audibility through the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and the 1980s, as did the politicisation of many Aborigines. The activists made themselves heard through petitions, protests, demonstrations, interviews, and publicity campaigns and, importantly many of them also began to write.  

Shoemaker’s research established that particular texts were characteristic of what he termed “resistance literature”, arguing that these authors significantly rejected – and even sought retaliation against – the colonial status quo by the way they used language to speak about colonisation and pursue equal rights. He focused mainly on the connection between Indigenous writing and resistance, arguing that writing had the potential to be symbolically political:

33 *Revolution in poetic language*. op. cit. p.10
34 *Black words, white page*. op cit. pp.13 – 14
Aboriginal literature also belongs largely to the realm of symbolic politics. However, it is far more complex than a flag or a tent on the lawns of Parliament House. While their symbolism is overt and striking, that of Black Australian writing is usually more subtle and covert. Aboriginal authors can persuade and educate the reader without the potentially alienating intensity of a march or a demonstration, even though the aims of both may be identical. In that sense, Aboriginal literature may, in the long run, have an even more important role to play in advancing the Black Australian cause than public exhibitions of grievances, which can be misconstrued by the average White Australian as intimations of so-called “Black Power”. 35

Exploring the writing from these earlier decades shows the confidence Indigenous authors have progressively built on in critiquing the nation in which they lived, empowering younger Indigenous authors to go further and envisage our social transformation. Present-day writers aspire to more than the achievement of equal rights, urging a complete overhaul of the nation’s social order. Thus they challenge the ways Australian history is remembered, the land is represented, belonging in culture is conveyed, Black bodies are interpreted, the Indigenous sacred is acknowledged, and how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples might be reconciliatory in dialogue.

Notably, Shoemaker’s literary timeline ends in 1988, the year of the Bicentenary – a celebration that many Indigenous people opposed, yet that marked a time when their voices could arguably be heard with effect and non-Indigenous people could also engage in a new politics of representation. At that time, modern Indigenous texts were no longer ghettoised as Fourth World literature but seen as belonging to an intelligible body of First World, Indigenous authors. There is an urgent need, therefore, for literary critics to examine these texts, as they were written during the aftermath of the civil rights movements and published in an era of emerging discourses on reconciliation – now a significant meme in a number of disciplines. 36 Just as the 1960s demanded Indigenous equality through the polemics of poet and activist Oodgeroo/Kath Walker, the years post – 1988 call for exceptional imaginations – like those of Kim Mahood and Alexis Wright – to articulate the dawning of “reconciliatory literature”.

This thesis does not render obsolete Shoemaker’s critical work but aims to contribute to his arguments and offer a new way of speaking about race relations to date. Shoemaker

35 ibid. p.275
36 The intelligentsia has come to genuinely appreciate Aboriginal culture in the twenty-first century. Quinn suggests that: “The ‘canon’ consists of a number of books written by authors from various disciplines, from the social sciences to law to the humanities, and all of them are concerned with issues and processes related to this kind of postconflict social reconstruction.” Quinn, J. R., ed. Reconciliation(s) transitional justice in postconflict societies, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009, p.3
welcomed further expansion of his inquiry when he concluded: “These are some of the most striking elements of the Aboriginal self-definition in literature; others will be isolated in the future.”\(^{37}\) However, to draw a line between a literary era of ‘resistance’ and that which represents transformation through love will certainly attract criticism from those who care to draw it elsewhere. Resistance is the antithesis of peace, yet both philosophies have due place in literature aiming to change ‘the natural order of things’. Perhaps future Indigenous writing will oscillate between the poles of resistance and forgiveness as new tropes in innovative texts emerge. Future ideas may develop in literary criticism that create a new channel for communication between colonisers and colonised to listen, think, feel, speak. For now, forgiveness writing advocates a change in race relations that requires both readers and writers to ‘do’ something. It proposes that reconciliation is very much achieved by an equilibrium between equality, transformation, resistance, peace and preservation, so that subjects know what to keep and what to throw away in a new world order.

**Defining reconciliation**

Although the term ‘reconciliation’ stems from Christian religious discourses and may have thaumaturgical associations, it denotes a concept devoid of a ‘magic bullet’. Each discipline shows ideological bias in its definitions, the discernment of which is precisely what is called for in the humanities. However, Brandon Hamber and Grainne Kelly are unsettled by the lack of a consistent and universal meaning at the present time and suggest “that the lack of definitional and conceptual clarity surrounding the term ‘reconciliation’ is, in fact, partly to blame for unsatisfactory results achieved in the area of reconciliation around the world”.\(^{38}\) Indeed, the term ‘reconciliation’ may be a misnomer in the Australian context, as it implies there was an existing relationship to begin with. Self-evidently, before colonisation there was no relationship between the settlers and Indigenous people, nor was there an understanding or acknowledgement of the existence and ways of life between Australia’s first peoples and European colonisers.

A postcolonial reality in “principle restores the sovereignty of an Indigenous people while at the same time it provides an interrogative framework for textual, theoretical or practical operations”.\(^{39}\) Thus a postcolonial model of reconciliation would be favoured over a neo-

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\(^{37}\) *Black words, white page*, op. cit. p.277  
\(^{38}\) *Reconciliations(s) transitional justice in Postconflict Societies* op. cit. p.11  
\(^{39}\) *Dialogue with a postgraduate wanting to study Aboriginal culture* op. cit. p.175
colonialist framework that, as Franz Fanon explains in *Black skin, white masks*, “involves the transfer of power to the ‘others’ in the colonial encounter, without changing the structure of domination”.40 A paradigm of reconciliation that did not replace old understandings and power structures would be contrary to the objectives of many Indigenous writers who use the text as a space to free themselves from colonial oppression. Indeed, the text is a license to use a new symbolic currency that represents Indigenous subjects as breaking free from the confines imposed on them. The ideals of knowing and understanding the Other are modern values whose symbolic forms in Australian literary representations substitute for the common use of a loaded term such as ‘reconciliation’ in the debate.

The term ‘reconciliation’ was not commonly used in Australia until July 1988, when Prime Minister Bob Hawke was discussing his position on a national treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. He said he was “not hung up on the word *treaty*, it’s not the word that’s important … if there is a sense of reconciliation”.41 However, Les Murray made earlier mention of the word in 1980 when replying to an invitation from fellow poet Judith Wright to support a treaty campaign, stating that: “Your passion may be Justice, or perhaps Restitution; mine is Reconciliation.”42 The use of the term became common all over the world during the 1990s to describe the process of former enemies working together to create a better future.43

For some, reconciliation is essentially a national movement expressed in national institutions at a political level and guaranteed on paper as federal government policy. However, ‘reconciliation’ is an eclectic term given meaning in socio-political contexts, such as law, but implicitly shaped by other means of cultural production (such as fiction writing) and operating as a nexus for *representing* and *informing* the debates that are contributing to, as well as ‘doing’, reconciliation in both private and public forums. This rapprochement cannot be effective without the equilibrium struck between political movements, social processes and personal and imaginative spaces – for reflection about the Other and ourselves – that reading and writing provide. It is the collaborative work of cultural producers such as writers

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40 loc. cit.
42 ibid. p.27
43 Quinn op. cit. p.287
and poets, who use their inordinate faith in the written word, to recreate the nation in which we live and the way we share it with Others.

From a structuralist perspective, reconciliation is an epistemology of knowing and understanding the Other. But does this value-system guarantee reconciliation between peoples? Can one know about the other without loving that person? That Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together and ‘know’ each other’s cultural backgrounds does not necessarily imply a relationship of trust or friendship (perhaps due to our ingrained colonial attitude of judgement and mistrust). Accordingly, Raimond Gaita speaks of the place of love among the moral responsibilities of the reconciliation process, arguing that if one felt deep patriotism, one could also feel the unconditional shame associated with one’s national history:

shame for what one’s country has done depends on a relation to it that is different from, and in many respects deeper than, citizenship … That identity-forming relationship takes time to develop and, beyond the respect, loyalty, obligation and gratitude a newly naturalised immigrant might feel, requires something like love … the work of those institutions will count for nothing, of course, unless there is also friendship and sometimes love between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, considered merely as individual human beings.44

Reconciliation must therefore be concerned with knowing, understanding and wanting an engagement with Others – in an imaginary/literary or real way – that incorporates seeing, hearing, remembering and dreaming with the Other – feelingly, reflectively.

Chapter 1
Reconciliation has a history

Poetry, no less than painting and town-planning, seemed to be implicated in this process of colonisation by mimesis.\(^{45}\)

Paul Carter (1996)

Nations are built with pens and brushes not just hammers and nails. They exhibit their character in what they say about themselves as much as what is said about them.\(^{46}\)

Bruce Pascoe (2007)

Colonial languages have been not only instruments of oppression but also instruments of radical resistance and transformation.\(^{47}\)

Bill Ashcroft (2009)

In contrast to the pseudo-rhetoric of dilettantism, politics and poetics are closely aligned: auxiliaries in the construction of social reality. Each of the citations above suggests that poetry, along with other art-forms, is a powerful tool in constructing national and cultural identity; also that a society is built by – rather than conferred on – its members. Carter suggests that the practice of poetry helped conjure a different society from that which existed at the time of white settlement. He gives a historical perspective of Australian society, from which he argues the possibility of writing differently to inaugurate a postcolonial polity.\(^{48}\)

Similarly, Indigenous author and historian Bruce Pascoe believes authors have the power to represent themselves and the nation “constructively” – informing the world as they write about it.

These arguments, which have been influential, are complemented and expanded by the criticism and postcolonial discourse of Bill Ashcroft who, in *Caliban’s voice: the transformation of English in post-colonial literatures* (2009), posits that Black writers can use English (the language of subjugation) to write their way “out” of an oppressed subjectivity. In *Caliban’s voice* Ashcroft builds his thesis from an analysis of Shakespeare’s play, *The tempest*, arguing that Caliban’s character symbolises colonial resistance when he says to the powerful Prospero: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t is I know how to


\(^{48}\) ibid. p.19
Although Caliban speaks in a language that is forced on him by his oppressors, it is his awareness of how English can be used against Prospero that is important in the play. Hence Ashcroft argues that how one writes can shape culture and reverse societal assumptions – moving them away from colonialist mimetic structures towards embracing new representations of the Other as postcolonial. In the Australian context, Ashcroft believes Indigenous people can indeed construct a postcolonial reality with the purposeful use of language, creativity and imagination. Accordingly, the writings of Others can be used to construct an alternate identity for themselves and the nation:

Language has power. It provides the terms by which reality may be constituted, it provides the names by which the world may be known … This power is crucial to ideas of identity, whether personal, national or cultural, because identity is neither “revealed” nor “reclaimed” but constructed as part of the social experience of language itself.\(^{50}\)

If what Carter, Pascoe and Ashcroft argue is true – that writing is responsible for both the architecture of Australia’s colonisation and the possibilities of decolonisation – then authors, particularly Indigenous ones, must play a key role in cultural production. But what might this egalitarian future look like? How is history addressed in the narratives of modern writers? And is reconciliation a thread binding the patchwork of a dreamed identity for the nation?

This chapter is concerned with modern writers who have played a role on Australia’s historical and literary stage – by telling their stories in English, albeit in a style that is very much idiosyncratic. It will examine the interpretation of many historical events in a literary context, analysing whether it has the power to transform the subjectivity of Indigenous people in a way that is significant for reconciliation. Potentially the changing ways one identifies place and in connection with history can shift the way one sees Others as well. How relations will change because of this evolution of language and listening has not yet been thoroughly articulated. Yet in Australia’s relatively short history of colonisation – and even shorter history of Indigenous publications – there is evidence of a relationship between rewriting the national record and an emerging language of reconciliation. In this chapter, Bruce Pascoe’s contribution will be discussed in relation to his short story *Tired sailor* (from *Shark*) and historical work *Convincing ground*. This will be followed by a critique of Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon’s *Jackson’s track: memoir of a dreamtime place*. Each text will be analysed regarding its representation of a transnational past that is respondent to reconciliation.

\(^{49}\) ibid. p.17  
\(^{50}\) ibid. pp.1 & 13
History versus literature in the peripatetics of reconciliation

At this point it is appropriate to justify the relevance of historical narratives in the work of a literary studies thesis. The linkage is ancient as the discourses of history and literature have long been bedfellows. Indeed, for centuries history was simply a ‘branch’ of literature. Historical and literary narratives that reflected on the past had one commonality: space and time were not objective realities but were consistent with other authors and historians. Both kinds of texts sought to capture and hold their readers’ attention in a variety of ways they considered effective, so as to “unite writer and reader in a common universe of meanings”. It was during the eighteenth century, however, that History became a distinct field of narrative practice and its epistemological basis was more clearly defined. According to Lionel Grossman, poets became more closely affiliated with poetics and were seen as the makers of meaning, while historians were affiliated with rhetoric and seen as the recorders of truth. He traces this relationship back to its earliest inception in two famous passages from Aristotle’s Poetics: “the difference lies in the fact that the historian speaks of what has happened, the poet of the kind of thing that can happen”. The past and future are differentiated here by means of the distinct roles of historian and poet. However, it is arguable that both discourses have been necessary to the construction of visions of the past and future, as historian and author alike render their ideas of truth and make meaning for those who share their world.

Unlike Aristotle, therefore, Carter and Ashcroft argue that social transformation occurs when reflecting on the past and dreaming of the future simultaneously, forming the blueprint of an approaching reality. In The road to Botany Bay for example, Carter suggests that the Australian identity “began in someone else’s fantasy: it is not so much the travellers and settlers [who] belong to our past, but we belong to their future”. Imagining the future is just as important as understanding the past – a responsibility resting with each generation – Carter

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51 ibid. p.227
52 Gossman, Lionel. Between history and literature. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p.249. This generalisation that all historians agree on space and time is challenged in Jackson's track revisited: history remembrance and reconciliation in which Carolyn Landon writes of the notion of being “sucked into the archival version of events” – of subconsciously writing the past to fit a historical context. Chapter 7 “Aunty Gina's story”, Monash University, ePress, Melbourne, p. 79. Historical discourse that does not dispute archival evidence becomes problematic because evidence is omitted – for example, when the voices of the oppressed are absent from official records. Landon was disappointed by the limited representation of Indigenous voices in government archives and describes it as a deafening silence that speaks volumes about the flawed nature of historical enquiry.
53 ibid. p.256
54 ibid. p.231
55 Carter, Paul. The road to Botany Bay: an essay in spatial history. London, Faber and Faber, 1987 p.294
goes on to explain:

Just as the travelling writers did not invent the language they used, so they did not make the world in their own image. They entered historical space as they entered life, finding a use for themselves where they lived. It was their intention to make a place for themselves which links us to them as much as any marks they succeeded in making. And it is by reflecting on their intentions, by understanding what lies behind the finished map, the elegant journal, the picturesque view, that we recover the possibility of another history, our future.\footnote{ibid. pp.294 – 95}

We cannot be separated from the history Australians have inherited. However, Ashcroft argues that writers are not limited to habitual ways of expressing themselves. Writing oneself towards freedom from colonisation means daring to explore the contours of the English language and break away from its boundaries: “it will be the achievement of generations of post-colonial writers to show that language will belong to those who use it”.\footnote{Caliban’s voice, op. cit. p.9} Similarly, Carter argues that Australia’s history will continue to be rewritten because “the lacuna left by imperial history” calls to be explored through language.\footnote{The road to Botany Bay, op. cit. p.xxii} “Language, like travelling”, he writes, “gives space its meaning. It does not report the world: it names it.”\footnote{ibid. p.175} Writers therefore have the ability, like Cook or Leichhardt, to name the world as they see it – examine life from a different point of view or take another track – albeit to the extent that history, like any narrative, is governed by principles, ideals and a hierarchical ordering of what the storyteller imagines should be included. It is an exercise in naming, rather than simply ‘knowing’. Thus, renaming the past could ultimately invent a future that differs from the imperial, hierarchical one commonly predicted by explorers and first settlers in their early writings.

If it is indeed possible that hegemonic interpretations can be ‘challenged’ or altered, then there is another arm to Ashcroft’s theory of “transformation” via language to be considered: if language has the power to change the structures of a society, can it change historical perspectives as well? Carter argues that fiction and history have been used as weapons to keep Indigenous people in a lower place in the colony. Yet they can also be tools for decolonisation – a means of renegotiating power structures by bearing witness to the point of view of an(other).

A postcolonial subjectivity is dependent on Indigenous voices being heard and the subaltern being allowed to speak – especially about sensitive topics pertaining to national history such
as European invasion, colonial wars, the Stolen Generations and life on the missions. However, in the collection of essays edited by Marilyn Lake, *Memory, monuments and museums*, she notes that there are few contributions to historical debates by Indigenous academics – Jim Everett being the sole Indigenous researcher among her essayists. Everett writes in an academic style that is appropriate to himself, while admitting that his discussion of “dispossession” is not “an academic one” because he must write about his “own experience” as a Tasmanian Aboriginal man. Compensating for the limited presence of Indigenous voices in this collection, Everett’s work is marked by his ability to use the English language to tell his story with conviction. Needless to say, more Indigenous viewpoints should be acknowledged in the national record for a more balanced representation when naming the past and envisioning the future. One may argue that there are relatively few Indigenous historians because they belong to a traditionally oral culture that has long been without the means to write down its earlier history. However, historians W.E.H. Stanner and Henry Reynolds argue that Indigenous viewpoints have been excluded from academia for additional reasons that are a “structural matter” of “a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape” – and over many years turned “into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale”. As this thesis will demonstrate, the ability to listen to Indigenous voices is the nexus of conciliation and transformation of race relations, in which lies the beginning of a shared understanding, knowledge and love for one (an)other.

Historical writing that only included the perspective of non-Indigenous authors essentially stalled our identification with reconciliation until the early 1990s. History as it was recorded by the first explorers was supposed to link settlers to place, to people and to nation – enabling later Australians to inhabit a unique country and providing social cohesion. The presentation of Australia’s history has been controversial, however. Conflicting interpretations of the national record have deeply affected race relations because there is no single or autonomous

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61 Reynolds, Henry. *Why weren’t we told? A personal search for the truth about our history*. Viking, Melbourne p. 92. Generally low-level literacy and numeracy in remote Indigenous communities plays a part in the ‘structural’ oppression of Indigenous knowledges. Margaret Kemarre’s *Iwenhe Tyerrtye – what it means to be an Aboriginal person* is quoted in parts of this thesis. Her messages about communication are both charming and erudite, and on meeting her it was a surprise that she could not easily sign my copy of her book. Barry McDonald Perrurle was her amanuensis and Veronica Perrurle Dobson her translator; the work represents a collective effort to overcome the ‘structures’ that Stanner and Reynolds argue exist for Indigenous people wanting to record their knowledge and ideas with minimal English literacy.
account of how Australia came to be ‘settled’ or ‘colonised’.

On the other hand, improved relations may be sought through the processes of rewriting the past and open debate, aiming at understanding history from the viewpoint of Others. For instance, Carter’s study of the autobiographies and journals of Cook, Mitchell, Leichhardt and Bunce shows how each explorer recorded the roads he took and the places he named. Their personal experiences and writing have become historical, even though they are only an adumbration of their singular journeys. Their writing captures a moment in time but has helped to create a paradigm for the national chronicle. Thus Carter suggests that Australian history is a circular movement: “It points to a kind of history where travelling is a process of continually beginning, continually ending, where discovery and settlement belong to the same exploratory process.”

History is not a static narrative, as stories can be retold from a different path or another viewpoint. Accordingly, Carter questions the premise that the past has been definitively set down and points to the possibility that the future is invented.

The history war debates illustrate how revisiting Australia’s past may open up questions by causing further discussion between those who consider it was ‘settled’ and those who believe it was ‘invaded’. However, Joanna Quinn values the recognition of all versions of the past as quintessential to the process of reconciliation and argues that Australians should engage in “a dialectic of acknowledgement”. This chapter addresses the textual representations of what Quinn terms “aversive acknowledgement” – of what may be seen as “unwelcome” aspects of

62 The road to Botany Bay op. cit. p.xxiv
63 ibid. p.294
64 In summary, the History War Debates are relevant to the study of Indigenous texts because they illustrate two critical schools of thought that continually interplay in a politics of reconciliation: scholars who believe people living today are not responsible for the violence and hatred towards Australia’s Indigenous people of the past, and those who believe the violence and hatred of the past has created us and the society in which we live. Tessa Morris Suzuki, for example, argues that the past forms “the material world and the ideas with which we live, and will continue to do so unless we take active steps to unmake their consequences” (Hokari, Minoru. ‘Globalising Aboriginal reconciliation: Indigenous Australians and Asian (Japanese) Migrants’, Cultural Studies Review, Vol.9, No.2, 2003, p.84). Similarly, Reynolds feels that the history of Australia’s violent settlement should be properly researched and publicly disclosed. In Why weren’t we told? he laments: “Australia, we felt, had been badly let down by its historians. They provided no material, no analysis, no stories which would enable the community to understand the nature of contemporary relations between white and black Australians.” (Reynolds, Henry. Why weren’t we told? A personal search for the truth about our history. Viking, Melbourne, 1999, p. 95). Keith Windschuttle is the best-known contributor to the debates and sparked a war within Australian history when he published The fabrication of Aboriginal history (2002). In this densely written and extensively footnoted work, Windschuttle overtly accused historians such as Lyndall Ryan of making fundamental mistakes in scholarship and “fabricating” historical claims. Windschuttle’s convictions also rested on the popular theory of “historicism” which argues that: when studying historical texts and sources, the era being studied should be interpreted in terms of the values, perspectives and cultural context of the time, rather than our own.
the nation’s past; sometimes referred to as the ‘black armband’ version of history (see Geoffrey Blainey’s use of the term). Thus the task ahead is to explore how a meaningful paradigm of reconciliation may be found in literary worlds that revisit the past from varying perspectives. Of course views about the nation’s past and future will provoke incessant debate among scholars, artists, writers and historians, but scholarly and artistic expression gives subjects a choice of how their culture should be constructed. And while this thesis only studies a cross-section of stories by Australian authors, it is important to realise that emerging representations of the nation’s past underpin a politics of reconciliation.

A literary analysis of Pascoe’s *Convincing ground*

Bruce Pascoe’s work on Australian literature seeks to undo the “cult of forgetfulness” that Reynolds argues has manifested itself in the nation’s historical discourses. Pascoe agrees with Reynolds, arguing that “Our problem stems from our national myopia. We’ve been quarantined by that history, separated from our soul and soil.”65 Thus he writes – to “restore” the nation’s memories of Indigenous Australians, searching for nationhood based on a radically alternate view of Australia’s history since colonisation. Whether we call it remembering or imagining the past, writing the factual or the projective, literature opens up a dialogue for those not formerly recognised as able to speak. In ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that postcolonial subjects cannot speak within the dominant regime of colonial discourse.66

Pascoe is an Indigenous man of Bunurong and Cornish descent whose background informs his work. He grew up in the Kulin nation in Victoria and his writing offers a historical perspective from a culture rich in oral history. His text *Convincing ground* cannot be neatly compartmentalised as either fiction or non-fiction, as it branches into history and politics in a discursive style and forthright tone common in autobiographical writing. As his title page states: “This is not a history, it’s an incitement.” In conventional historical discourse, Pascoe may be criticised for giving a report of the past that is openly biased; yet to believe that all historical texts are not incitements by their very nature is overly simplistic. Pascoe believes that colonial historians had their versions of history told and accepted because they were written “in a style which is formal and less sentient” (p.14). Thus *Convincing ground* sets

65 *Convincing ground: learning to fall in love with your country*. op. cit. p.255
itself apart from typical colonial interpretations of how Australia was ‘settled’, adopting
unconventional historical rhetoric to argue that Australia was invaded – and a style which is
experimental, emotional and dialogical. Pascoe’s tone is conversational rather than
pedagogical, deliberately transforming the way Australia’s history can be conveyed in a
postcolonial reality. Like Mikhail Bakhtin, Pascoe uses the concept of dialogue to emphasise
that postcolonialism results in an interaction between coloniser and colonised that occurs
textually.\textsuperscript{67}

Pascoe’s first words, “This is not a history, it’s an incitement”, act as a conscious bone of
contention and engage with the history war debates. Rather than ‘taking sides’ however,
Pascoe taunts historians and academics from either side: “Intelligent debate might cause
oxygen deprivation for ideologues of either persuasion, but might also allow for mature ideas
to breathe” (p.208). He wonders if “we all learn more, will our views become less polarised?”
(p.81). This form of questioning is familiar to Homi K. Bhabha, who argues in ‘The
commitment to theory’ that Western ways of thinking about history and culture are limited to
theories of binary opposites. Bhabha asks, “Must we always polarize in order to
polemicize?”\textsuperscript{68} Pascoe speaks specifically about the History War Debates, challenging the
arguments from the left and right; refusing to take sides; and advocating further research,
discussion and debate about Australia’s history in order to draw new conclusions:

\begin{quote}
As a nation we hold widely divergent views of our history and yet we hold these convictions on the
basis of such little evidence ... Sometimes when describing the colonial frontier it is like talking about
the Tasmanian Tiger; no-one has seen it for eighty years but everyone seems to have an entrenched
opinion about whether it exists, and both sides argue from little personal knowledge. (p.81)
\end{quote}

The History War debates could be seen as non-conducive to reconciliation because it is
predicated on negotiation and therefore must be a dialogue aimed at reaching agreement. On
the other hand, interracial harmony cannot be achieved by simply convincing Others they are
wrong – as was characteristic of past assimilationist policies. Hence, the title of Pascoe’s
work, \textit{Convincing ground}, is said to represent the time when the Gundidjmarra people were
“convinced of white rights to the land” (p.10). Do the History War debates indicate the
continued effort to persuade Others of the legitimacy of White people’s claim to \textit{Terra
Australis}? Can a nation in a state of continual debate be reconciled at the same time? In his
essay, Bhabha talks about the “third space” that is opened up when polarised views on history
and culture meet to produce a hybrid identity in nationalist politics. The “third space”

\textsuperscript{67} loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{68} ibid. p. 2379
becomes possible when subjects begin to negotiate their differences rather than negating the Other as an inferior political or racial group. Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is a historical and cultural necessity for any postcolonial society to produce revolutionary cultural change. He insists, “We need a little less pietistic articulation of political principle (around class and nation); a little more of the principle of political negotiation”. Through continual debate the ‘third space’ – or as readers may call it in this context, a ‘reconciled space’ – can be realised in the works of postcolonial writers so that mature ideas may, as Pascoe suggests, be allowed to breathe. He argues that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are compelled to question historical research if we want to effectively and homogeneously inform constructs of nation:

But all of us, black and white, must investigate our past and on examination of that record come to some basic agreement of how the past unfolded. Some, like academics Keith Windschuttle and Ron Brunton, and politicians John Howard and Mal Brough, may deny it, but the rest of us must arrive at an understanding (p.68).

This recommendation leads to the question of how polarised groups arrive at a common understanding of the Other. Like Bhabha, Pascoe suggests the answer is adopting a hybrid approach to historical interpretation, accepting both welcome and unwelcome aspects of Australia’s colonial past: “We have to accept all the deeds of that character … warts and all, that’s how knowledge of country is achieved” (p.81). Similarly, Andrew Gunstone notes in his work Reconciliation, nationalism and the history wars that reconciliation is sometimes viewed as “adhering to a nationalist discourse” but if a national identity could be fused from both settler and Aboriginal histories, it would greatly benefit the movement. Arguably, a fused national identity must first be articulated before a politics of transformation becomes obvious in practical terms. With Convincing ground in mind, literature is the space for such possibilities.

Pascoe’s vision may seem somewhat idealistic and almost implausible considering the plethora of opinions surrounding the history war debates. Yet isn’t it the nature of fiction writing to project a world where anything is possible, limited only by the imagination of its authors? Pascoe wills history to be represented in Bhabha’s ‘third space’, resulting in a discourse that is neither colonial nor oriental – nor left nor right – but ‘hybrid’. Can there be

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69 ibid. p. 2388
such an intersection of history, politics and culture? Interestingly, Gillian Cowlishaw conducted research in Rembarrnga that suggested it is possible for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to create collaborative meanings and symbols in the place they live. She uses the metaphor of the palimpsest – the writing of one text over another – to remind us that history can be written and rewritten in creative ways to conflate two separate cultures; this process makes representations of culture and people more porous and hybridised. She explained how the people of Rembarrnga country in the Northern Territory write of their home as a place of ever changing images, texts and meanings for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who live there.\textsuperscript{71} In her field research, Cowlishaw observed how the people of Rembarrnga “shaped” the meaning of their individual worlds anew:

\begin{quote}
Those being overwritten find that their images and texts, their relationships with their place, begin to merge with the imported ones and can no longer be expressed unchanged. The new surfaces are moulded to what was already there and one form of meaning can graft itself onto another, using the contours of an earlier text to establish its own shape. If shaken together, they might combine, only to separate again when left alone. In some places the new surface will never “take”.
\end{quote}

_Convincing ground_ is a profound text because it shares Colinshaw’s idea that separate cultural identities can fuse together to create new symbols and existential meaning without former symbols and identities becoming completely lost. Her argument suggests that creative writing, language and history can be fused and moulded to reshape colonial society to an appropriate ‘fit’. Indigenous subjectivity is dreamed of differently by Pascoe, who extrapolates from the past so as to change the course of his people’s fate with the ideas he incites: “I have ideas, and like many in the world I’m trying to recruit people to the idea of embarking on a voyage of self discovery, not to achieve dominion but to set our world feet on a path toward a civilised future” (p.79).

Using rich prose and emotive language, Pascoe conjures the journey to transformation as being both individual and collective:

\begin{quote}
The journey to nationhood will be a torturous journey and each of us will have to endure rebuffs, slights and profound disappointments. But we must set our feet upon it with good faith, energy and patience and not resort to the petulant dummy spit as soon as it becomes intellectually and emotionally difficult. Fatigue is no excuse, because at the end of the road is the belonging to place, the acceptance of the Australian earth when we die and rest for our souls thereafter (p.238).
\end{quote}

This journey critically depends on readers widely accepting his version of the past and wanting to shift perspectives of nationhood. Mikhail Bakhtin has already established that

\textsuperscript{71} Cowlishaw, Gillian. _Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas: a study of racial power and intimacy in Australia_. St Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin 1999. p.14

\textsuperscript{72} loc. cit.
spectators watching a performance are active participants in processes which lead to the creation of a community. Pascoe’s challenge is to ‘convince’ his readers to adopt specific virtues: “If we choose racism and self-interest over tolerance and self-knowledge then we must blame ourselves if the name of Australia and Australians is held in less regard than we like to believe” (p.111). However, while writers are catalysts for such re-imagining, readers may or may not show the desired response. And while Indigenous authors can now partake in the continual process of nation building because of their abilities as writers, Pascoe fears that readers may not be ready for the representation of significant changes to a culture already well ‘settled’ in:

Gallipoli is yet to come, but rather than the Australian character trembling in anticipation of creation, for the molten metal to spill into the heroic mould, that metal has already cooled as a rod in Henry Lawson’s soul, cooled so quickly that he can write “the last of his tribe”, “Stay blackfellow” and never wonder at the chain of events which brought that circumstance about (pp. 208 – 09).

He comments further: “Both ‘Stone Country’ and ‘Secret River’ are entertaining reading, but I wish more Australians would read novels by Indigenous authors: Benang by Kim Scott, and The Kadaitcha Sung by Sam Watson’ (p.213). The mention of these texts points to his informed awareness that writing, particularly by Indigenous authors, is a powerful tool in the construction of nation. Convincing ground shows how political debates have been superseded by imaginative prose in the challenge to resist and change colonial discourses.

A literary analysis of Pascoe’s Tired sailor

Taking his readers back to the first European arrival on Australian shores, Pascoe explores early colonisation in this text from an Indigenous point of view. Despite not having been there, Pascoe assumes his fiction writing can tell a different story of Indigenous peoples’ experiences than can those settlers who may have first noted them with empiricists’ eyes. He explores feelings rather than geographical contours, wondering how Indigenous people might have felt about the arrival of foreigners to their land in 1788. And how the abduction of Indigenous men, Bennelong and Colbey, may have been received by their family tribe. According to Bradley’s journal, when they saw Bennelong and Colbey being captured, the people “were much terrified” and he could hear “the noise of the men crying” and the

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73 The Norton anthology of theory and criticism op. cit. p. 2390
74 While Pascoe focuses on early twentieth century texts here, this thesis limits itself to the analysis of literature published since the 1990s.
“screaming of the women and children”.\textsuperscript{75} Unfortunately there are no records of these events in the native language in which they would have been movingly expressed by Bennelong and Colbey’s clan. Pascoe’s writing is also limited to English – the language of his ancestors’ oppressors. Yet he shows that the English language is pliant, as it can be used to reinvent representations of Indigenous people that were recorded by early settlers. His prose liberates them from a description forced on them of being “a strange race”\textsuperscript{76} (as Bradley describes them in his journal) and instead depicts them as belonging to a “well-established community” he considers “industrious”.\textsuperscript{77}

Pascoe contributes to historical memory in this published work and proves that it has not been categorically set down by chroniclers such as Captain John Hunter, commander of H.M.S. \textit{Sirius}, the escort vessel with the First Fleet; Captain Watkin Tench of the marines; William Bradley, First Lieutenant of H.M.S. \textit{Sirius}; and John White, the colony’s Surgeon General – all of whom mainstream historical interpretation has depended on.\textsuperscript{78} Paul Carter also argues in \textit{The road to Botany Bay}: “The fact is that, as an account of foundation and settlement, not to mention the related processes of discovery and exploration, empirical history, with its emphasis on the factual and static, is wholly inadequate”.\textsuperscript{79} Pascoe’s writing contests the settlers’ myopic interpretation, proving that there are other imaginations, experiences and ways of remembering colonial ‘invasion’. If writers such as Pascoe can present themselves differently, they have the power to incite others to see their people differently also. And if constructs of the Other are changed from indigenes being passive bystanders in the ‘inevitable’ takeover of Australia to vanquished fighters in a significant war, then there is reason and obligation for the opponents to make peace and consider a treaty as a result. Thus retelling history from an Indigenous perspective is commensurate with discussions about reconciliation because they seek social and structural change as their primary objective. Pascoe’s creative engagement with history allows for the possibility of social and structural changes for Indigenous people, offering a paradigm for mutual understanding that concerns constructions of the past as much as it does the future.

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\textsuperscript{75} Bennelong: first notable Aboriginal. A report from original sources arranged by Jon Kenny, Councillor, Royal Australian Historical Society. Published by the Royal Australian Historical Society in association with the Bank of NSW, Sydney, 1973, p.9
\textsuperscript{76} ibid. p.7
\textsuperscript{78} Bennelong: first notable Aboriginal. op. cit. p.7
\textsuperscript{79} The road to Botany Bay. op. cit. p.xx
\end{flushleft}
‘Tired sailor’ appears in *Skins* – a compilation of Indigenous writing from Canada, the United States, Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand). It tells the history of Weeaproinah in Victoria through the perspective of a traditional Aboriginal elder who witnessed the area’s colonisation and later its renaming as Tired Sailor. In *The road to Botany Bay* Carter argues that the naming of places became integral to the colonisation of Australia and its written history. Place names did not always connote geographical knowledge, sometimes reflecting the explorer’s feelings towards a certain place or Cook’s mood at the time he sailed by. Examples of emotive place names he includes are ‘Repulse Bay’ and ‘Cape Flattery’, showing that Cook’s writing of history was intended to be specific to his own self-referential world rather than representing a holistic account of the country or its character.  

Accordingly, Pascoe begins his story by describing the location and people of Weeaproinah as contrasting with its renaming: ‘Tired Sailor’. The first people, as he describes them, are the antithesis of “tired” or apathetic; they are “quiet, peaceful, happy and industrious”, never thinking of themselves as “tedious” (p.111). The colonists, however, have named this town in order to impose their own construction of place. “Laziness”, for example was forced on the Indigenous people, according to Pascoe. He states: “They were interrupted by noise, conflict, death and laziness in sufficient regularity for the people to seek out ways of inhibiting the latter events and promoting the more enjoyable former” (p.111). The Europeans wanted to construct a place that was “peaceful” and “happy” for fishermen to retire, the great paradox being that these very qualities already existed in Weeaproinah before the place was “interrupted”. This vivid metaphor for colonisation provokes the question: what if the foundations for peaceful communal life already existed in Indigenous societies before they were interrupted and rebuilt under policies of assimilation? Can fiction return readers to the past, if not physically then ideologically, in order to understand the potential for reconciliation as it may have originally existed?  

Even though the Indigenous people of Weeaproinah are described as “quiet” and “peaceful”, the narrator tells us that these qualities did not make them submissive to British colonisation:

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80 *The road to Botany Bay*. op. cit. p. 4  
81 See Kim Scott’s most recent novel *That deadman dance* (Picador Pan Macmillan, Sydney 2010). This story is set in the 1800s in a Western Australian community and as the blurb reads: “It is a story which shows that first contact did not have to lead to war”. Convict William Skelly is described by Scott as a character with a “willingness to let bygones be bygones” and that “he had created the friendship of white and black here” p.94.
“They were not sure if their efforts at resistance were successful” but still “they persisted”. Pascoe uses his style of blunt prose to emphasise that resisting invasion was altogether hopeless: “Of course they were black and of course they were killed.” There is no point of negotiation in Pascoe’s story – no time for compromise, let alone reconciliation between the Europeans and the first Australians. The Others were seen as ‘Black’ and their skin-colour used to mark their fate as subjects of the Empire. He also explains that how Europeans constructed the Other also affected the construction of their white destiny within the dominant culture. Thus rewriting the Other differently may be a way of transforming cultural identity. Can writing go further to reconstitute the Other’s fate and subjectivity? Reconciliation is dependent on the resurrection of an Indigenous identity that is not associated solely with death, disease, the macabre and all symbols unaffiliated with life-giving qualities that translate to a foreseeable future. For instance, Tench and Hunter write descriptions of Bennelong and Colbey that emphasise their illnesses: “They had both evidently had the small-pox: indeed Colbey’s face was very thickly imprinted with the marks of it.” However, although the Indigenous people of Weeaproinah all die, there is hope when “a benediction of love” sees the deceased return in a different form in Tired Sailor: “This man would not be Jesus but nor would it be the Rawleigh salesman or a squid fisherman” (p.114). Such transformation not yet fully articulated by Pascoe, suggesting perhaps that the changing identity of the Other is never fixed or completed – changing as power relations also change.

On the other hand, he describes how early Indigenous people also constructed European identity within their own cultural understanding: “The first white people they saw appeared like ghosts under moving clouds.” Did they think these ghosts would drift in and out like passing clouds without imagining their potential to stay? Even though ‘Tired sailor’ is a fictional story, it is a common historical view that Indigenous people first thought of White people as the ghosts of their ancestors. Gillian Cowlishaw believes that the publishing of this view about ‘white ghosts’ was so extensive in mainstream history sources because it confirmed the belief that Indigenous people were primitive in their beliefs and overly superstitious. She also believes that the Indigenous impression that Europeans were in fact ghosts was a “comforting thought”, denoting that colonisers were not considered to be their enemy “but could be accepted as kin”. Reconciliation is a modern socio-political concept

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82 Bennelong: first notable Aboriginal. op. cit. p.10
83 Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas: a study of racial power and intimacy in Australia. op. cit. p.9
84 ibid. p.9
but its genesis lay in a long-held romantic notion that Europeans were of a higher spiritual order, their culture inherently good, and reconciliation with them would simply be a given process that would occur through social evolution. Captain Arthur Phillip believed, for example, that if Indigenous people would assimilate, they could enjoy the benefits of nationhood in the same way as Europeans. He recorded in his diary: “It was absolutely necessary that we should attain their language and teach them ours so that the means of redress might be pointed out to them if they are injured and to reconcile them by showing the many advantages they would enjoy by mixing with us.”Phillip was under strict instructions to open relations with the Aborigines so that “our intercourse with these people may be turned to the advantage of this colony”. Relationships with Indigenous Australians stemmed from the notion that Western culture was superior, so that colonisation would benefit a ‘lesser’ people. Europeans looked for ways in which reconciliation would be advantageous to the colony, which included the employment of Indigenous trackers to help police navigate harsh terrain in order to find escaped convicts. In what way is a politics of reconciliation today etched with the same arrogant notions? Do our relations also become stage-managed in order to protect our international reputation (just as the Empire sought to protect its own self-image)? What evidence is there to suggest that reconciliation can ever be genuine and sincere?

Perhaps the indigenes’ construct of Europeans being White ghosts was a way of naming a people with whom they could have no meaningful connection. Reconciling with such ‘ghosts’ would be an impossible prospect from the outset. The people of Weeaproinah in Pascoe’s story do not welcome them and they soon incorporate measures in their ceremonies to deter “white ghosts with black teeth” from arriving on their beaches. But their protests prove hopeless and “more smelly ghosts brought cows, boats, guns, shovels and influenza and the old days beside the lakes were gone”. The people become displaced: “The last of them died sixty years after seeing her first white ghost” (ibid). If there was potential for reconciliation in Pascoe’s fictional world, it could not be achieved in the short space of sixty years.

Was there ever the potential for Europeans to have settled in Australia and made meaningful relationships with the first Australians? In Tired Sailor Pascoe implies that the way in which Europeans arrived showed little respect for the first people, meaning conflict and deep-seated

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85 Bennelong: first notable Aboriginal. op. cit. p.6
86 loc. cit.
animosity was inevitable: “And although the whites gave them a fat seal and only rooted a few women in return, the [Indigenous] people were anxious”. Similarly, his argument is cemented in his historical work Convincing ground in which he states that:

It didn’t seem to matter who landed on the shores: sealers, governors convicts or gentlemen, almost all visitors fire on Aborigines within their first 24 hours on the continent. They never admitted to an understanding that the people were resisting the invasion of their lands, nor did it occur to them that killing people was no way to negotiate or conciliate. Despite what they thought of the Indigenes’ level of humanity, it seems an incredibly stupid tactic to enrage the occupants on day one. (p.37)

It is unclear whether relations between Indigenous people and Europeans were hostile from “day one”, as Pascoe purports; but we know that Philip failed to “open an intercourse” with the first Australians within the first year of colonisation and in 1790 ordered “one [of the natives] to be taken”. Perhaps this was an “incredibly stupid tactic” on Philip’s behalf that would prove to be a fundamental error, hindering future attempts at trust-building between groups. It was obvious to some Europeans, however, that the Aborigines were becoming resentful towards the new arrivals and deeply despondent about reconciling with them. William Bradley of the Sirius, for example, observed in January 1788: “The Natives were well pleas’d with our people until they began clearing the ground, at which they were displeased and wanted them to be gone.” The first Australians’ strong connection with land was evident from the first year Europeans arrived, yet it continued to be cleared because farming and construction represented progress that would one day give Whites a sense of historical belonging and ownership of country. This ruinous clash of worldviews would hinder race relations well into the twenty-first century. It has taken almost two hundred years for non-Indigenous Australians to begin reconciling with the first people, because clearing the land left no meaningful ‘place’ for relationships to be built. Carter makes this point in The lie of the land when he writes: “It was as if the colonists set out to erase the common ground where communication with the ‘Natives’ might have occurred.” Chapter 2 will discuss in greater detail how the land has been repaired, at least ideologically, in the depictions of modern Australian writing since the 1990s, to cultivate a (literary) place where reconciliation might take place.

In Pascoe’s short story, Tired Sailor has replaced Weeaproinah. The land has been cleared and native plants exchanged for foreign flora. Houses stand incongruously in the bush:

A row of small slab houses led down to the wharf and cow pastures velveted the rising ground behind

87 loc. cit.
88 The lie of the land. op. cit. p. 6
89 loc. cit.
them. Women brought in fruit trees, daffodils, lavender, honeysuckle and roses and the warm air of the estuary began to savour the new fragrances and mingle them with the old perfumes or pittosporum, bloodwood, bursaria and blueberry ash (p.112).

The smells of English garden beds are reminiscent of the homes left behind in Britain. Pascoe’s description is historically credible, analogous with the aesthetic descriptions of “Some old homes and gardens near Adelaide” recalled in 1936 at the centenary of South Australia:

Little plots planted with sweet-briar, old world herbs, and rosemary for remembrance; large gardens with great stone gateposts, long avenues, vineyards, orchards, archery grounds, croquet grounds, and a very gardener's delirium of trees and plants from all over the world; small cottages in bungalow style, substantial houses with thick walls, and cedar fittings, built for an easy hospitality, and furnished with treasures from old homes over the sea.90

The land was cleared and places were constructed to institute both manorial and cottage ways of British life. As Susan K. Martin argues, “In contemporary critical terms gardening might then be read as one aspect of the performance of a colonial subjectivity”.91 Does a postcolonial subjectivity therefore depend on the clearing of English gardens and the restoration of Indigenous plants? Martin argues that finished gardens can symbolise a “static colonial identity” and appropriate Indigenous wilderness for the New World.92 Pascoe’s narrative reminds us of the great cost associated with the early clearing of Australian landscape. Juxtaposed with the glorious garden built by the sailors is a harrowing interpretation of Victoria’s violent settlement. His words are intended to shock readers and represent a history that is itself shocking: “Of course, it was these same old men [who built these homes and gardens] who had shot and poisoned the black people, fucked their wives and drowned their children” (p.112). However, in Tired Sailor the English garden displeases later generations of Australian subjects. Gardens once developed by Europeans are left unmaintained and Em Frazer – the great-granddaughter of settler Craypot Frazer – becomes a metaphor for the reshaping of Australia's social landscape.

Em is burdened by her great-grandfather’s history and has inherited, not only his possessions, but his violent past as well. We read how Craypot once tied an Aboriginal child to the bottom of a craypot for bait while the child was still kicking and screaming in the net as he was

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90 Appears in Holmes, Katie. ‘Planting hopes with potatoes: Gardens, memory and place making’ in Memory, monuments and museums: The past in the present. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2006, p.166
91 Appears in Martin, Susan K. ‘Remembering the self in the colonial garden: gardens and subjectivity’ in Memory, monuments and museums: the past in the present. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2006, p.184
92 ibid. p.186
lowered into the water. This image from the past is then juxtaposed with a future image of making love with a man who returns from the sea: Em is “waiting in certainty for him who would come with the hands shaped to the geography of her own undiscovered land” (p.114). Em’s place within Australia is not inherited from her ancestors but learned from those around her and informed by hope for a different future. She refuses to maintain the place her great-grandfather left behind and instead allows social relations to constitute its geography. In ‘Tired Sailor’ we see how each generation is connected to the past but in a way that does not limit the construction of its future. Similarly, Carter advocates that Australia’s history move along a continuum in which our national identity “is settled” and “resettled” – so that with the passing of time our relations will inevitably be renamed as something other than reconciliation. Thus race relations are continually constructed – rather than passively brought into being – by those who choose to build their polemical framework.

Politics and polemics are closely aligned in the construction of reality. Bruce Pascoe’s short story ‘Tired Sailor’ demonstrates how writing about the nation is done ‘constructively’. He (re)presents early colonisation from an Indigenous viewpoint and thus contributes to the construction of Indigenes’ subjectivity, giving them power to own their identity from “day one”. ‘Tired sailor’ illustrates how reconciliation between the first Australians and early Europeans was impossible due to the serious implications of clearing the land, spreading diseases, and the limited understanding of Indigenous culture; and how the ways in which Indigenous people were first imagined and written about has underpinned the construction of nation – writing (in English) being the quintessential tool in the production of a colonial society and the handing down of empirical frameworks. Indigenous authors have, however, taken up English as a tool for their own use and as a primary example, Pascoe’s work informs the world that colonisation was invasion – i.e. not a process of diffusion, but a violent exercise met with resistance and long-standing opposition. Without understanding how the Other interprets past events in Australian history, there cannot be reconciliation. Better race relations first require Indigenous people to rewrite the past differently – including how Europeans were first seen and imagined. A history that focuses on Europeans’ experiences and how they named the country is sure to be a history that repeats itself. Pascoe undoes the “cult of forgetfulness” Reynolds condemned, making ‘Tired Sailor’ a tour de force in the emerging discourses of reconciliation in Australian literature.
A literary analysis of Tonkin's *Jackson’s Track: memoir of a Dreamtime place* and Landon’s *Jackson’s Track revisited: history, remembrance and reconciliation*

*Jackson’s track: memoir of a Dreamtime place* (1999) is an apologia that identifies ‘doing’ reconciliation. Authors Daryl Tonkin and Carolyn Landon rewrite the history of Jackson’s Track in Victoria, adding flesh and bone to official archived documents through affective story telling about the area. In particular, Tonkin practises a type of historical vigilance in the way he ‘bears witness’ to past atrocities against Indigenous people of the Track, making knowledge of the Stolen Generations public. The reality of place is presented in a way that is so tangible it calls for more than historical acknowledgement, emphasising the need for mainstream and Indigenous cultures to hybridise in order to know, love and understand the Other.

*Jackson’s track* is co-authored by Daryl Tonkin, the “teller of this story (and the one who lived it)” and scribe, Carolyn Landon (a former teacher of Daryl’s daughter, Pauline). Tonkin a “white” man married to Euphemia Hood Mullett, an Aboriginal woman of the Brabralung Clan of the Kurnai Tribe. Together Tonkin and his wife raised their family of twelve children, with Euphemia’s extended family living close by. He employed many Indigenous people on his property and was often referred as “a white blackfella” (p.183). Does this make Tonkin a hybrid author in an experiential sense? Bhabha’s ideas about hybridity focus on theoretical understandings in culture and politics, prompting further exploration of what it looks like textually. Does Tonkin represent the qualities of a hybrid author? If so, does his hybrid world capture the essence of a ‘reconciled’ space, the ultimate postcolonial setting? According to Robert J.C. Young in *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction*, a postcolonial reality is constituted by:

> the creation of equal access to material, natural, social and technological resources, the contestation of forms of domination, whether economic, cultural, religious, ethnic or gendered, and the articulation and assertion of collective forms of political and cultural identity.

If Tonkin’s textual world exhibits some but not all of these qualities, is it enough to challenge social positions of Indigenous subjects and act as a model for transformed Indigenous subjectivity in a wider context?

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93 Tonkin, Daryl & Carolyn Landon. *Jackson’s Track: memoir of a Dreamtime place*. Ken Fin Books, Collingwood, Victoria, 2000, p.xii

Tonkin’s desire to construct a hybrid culture on the Track fits socialist philosophy that political actions should renew culture to ‘make it better’ for its socially disadvantaged subjects. His world, however, becomes problematic when values from Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures cannot be evenly shared, which makes the pursuit of reconciliation sometimes ‘unfair’. As will be further discussed, the hybrid place that Tonkin carefully creates on Jackson’s Track fails because it cannot survive in competition with laws and regulations designed to support the dominance of White mainstream culture. Yet what we can gauge from this project is that Tonkin and Landon’s model for social transformation sees subjectivity constituted by a relationship of history, language, consciousness and political action. The direct link between consciousness and political transformation was articulated in Ashis Nandy’s work, *The intimate enemy: loss and recovery of self under colonialism* (1983). His work stands apart from Sartre and Fanon’s because he argues that colonialism affects the minds of individual subjects so that before culture can be changed, changing the minds of colonisers and colonised alike is necessary.  

Tonkin conjures a hybrid community in the imaginations of his readers and points to the possibilities of reconciliation if there is a psychological shift in cultural mindset. Only then will there be a shift in colonial structures – material, military and cultural. As his story illustrates, one person alone cannot destroy institutionalised power structures but efforts can be made to change the consciousness of those who institute power over Others. The ‘track’ is used in this text as a motif for “travelling towards” or “finding a road to” reconciliation that has not yet been arrived at. Moreover, this text can be appreciated for revealing where the reconciliation movement has been since 1990 and our destination post – 2010.

The history of Tonkin’s positive relationships with Indigenous people reveals that while reconciliation burgeoned in the 1990s, it began in the homes of many individuals some time before that. Arguably, the publication of this text was a building block in the public reconciliation process. His work ‘does’ reconciliation:

> The book forced local people to think about the make-up of their community and to confront their assumptions about the Aboriginal people who, unbeknown to many, lived amongst them. It created an atmosphere of acceptance and a new curiosity. It also seemed to give the Kurnai people the confidence to emerge from the shadows in which they had been living for more than forty years and begin, tentatively, to take their place in the community.  

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95 ibid. p.340  
This apologia transforms the way Jackson’s Track is remembered and articulated, changing the social fabric for Indigenous people in surrounding areas such as Drouin, Victoria. The book narrates how Tonkin welcomed Indigenous people, their culture and their relationships into his life, literally creating a hybrid ‘place’ for them to govern their lives: “it was a thriving community, full of busy people who were proud of their independence, people from the ‘Welfare’ never came to Jackson’s Track. The people at The Track had a kind of freedom and they knew it and cherished it” (pp.213-4). The vigilance he exercised was not simply a physical necessity: its function was to make a place with a history and the ability to speak it. A space is cleared in this text for the dreaming of a new world order that bears witness to the Other’s life and stories.

In her sequel, *Jackson’s Track revisited: history, remembrance and reconciliation*, Landon shows how history is a dialogue calling for many perspectives and requiring the complex negotiation of ideas and interpretations. Her admission on p.1.8 does not undermine Tonkin’s account, but positions it as belonging to a group of stories that make up the history of Jackson’s Track: “Over the eighteen months that Daryl and I worked together, Pauline and I had become increasingly aware that his memoir was only one version of events.” However, Landon credits the way Tonkin contributed to the historical narratives that stemmed from the 1950s so that his work represented a “new kind of engagement with history ... [that] challenged many of the assumptions of conventional scholarship”. Clearly it was difficult for Tonkin to share the intimate details of his life and family, not knowing how his story would be received. His own family never recognised his marriage to an Indigenous woman, alienating him from their lives and parts of the family property. Social mores have fortunately changed since Tonkin lived at Jackson’s Track, perhaps making him more confident in his opinions and prompting him to publish his work in 1999. The timing of this publication was opportune for informing a literary movement that began to reflect reconciliation as a social meme. It has continued to proliferate, as Landon remarks, “I believe Daryl would be able to speak with much more candour and less shame now in 2006 than he did in the mid – 1990s: telling his story helped him realise the changes that had been taking place over the years that he was silent about his life at Jackson’s Track” (p.8.4).

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97 Landon’s page numbering system.
The willingness of writers such as Tonkin to tell their story, even when they are uncertain of how it will be received, creates possibilities for discussions that were inconceivable to earlier generations. Jackson’s Track: memoir of a Dreamtime place proves that writing about the Other continues to challenge conventional narratives and perspectives, adopting more hybrid language. Narratives like these are not just a form of ‘resistance writing’ but are moving society closer towards racial harmony as a social and ideological goal that negates the language of apartheid and celebrates hybridity. Landon quotes Bain Attwood’s observation in The making of the Aborigines to summarise this cultural evolution: “Over the years, a Eurocentric view has given way to an Aboriginal view, which, in turn, has become a view of acculturation and accommodation between Aborigines and settler people” (p.8.3). In Landon’s text, however, hybridity is not represented as ‘mixed’ ideas from one and the other, but as different cultural and political views being accommodated for the betterment of race relations. Constructing a new or ‘hybrid’ culture would mean the unfortunate loss of former cultures, leaving reconciliation to be salvaged from a melting-pot reality that was ‘new’ rather than ‘reconciled’. This resonates with Cowlishaw’s earlier point about reconciliation being palimpsestic – cultures having the ability to fuse and merge together but also to separate again when required. Understanding, knowing and loving the Other is not anticipating how ‘they’ and ‘we’ are changing, but how we are growing in awareness of each Other – accommodating differences while evolving as a more complex society. With the luxury of literary hindsight (that comes from writing a sequel) Landon elaborates Tonkin’s ideas about reconciliation and hybridity. Moreover, she demonstrates how ‘White’ authors can, and must, write reconciliation – questioning history, analysing human relationships and sharing in the dream of a better future.

Tonkin’s first text advocates cultural and relational progress by examining national history in a way that opens dialogue, discussion and the opportunity for ideological negotiation. While Daryl does not claim to be a historian as such, he renders himself as a historical “witness” (pp.260 & 281). Feeling that his story is important enough to be published as part of the larger and more significant Australian story, he writes: “We believe that life on Jackson’s Track was a very important part of this history” (p.293). Tonkin’s narrative informs about the part White Australians played in the atrocities suffered under the Aboriginal Protection Act, such as the Stolen Generations and the removal of Aboriginal communities from their traditional homelands. He writes: “I saw a woman a few days after her daughter had been taken a high-pitched, keening cry coming from her wide-open mouth letting all of us in the
camp knew her heart was broken” (p.217). Tonkin makes his presence known to authorities and watches the Aboriginal camp being bulldozed from a distance but does not physically intervene. His method of resistance rests on simply bearing witness: “I sat and watched, letting them know they had a witness. I hoped it was clear to these whitefellas that this witness was sickened by them” (p.260). In the article “‘No last word’: postcolonial witnessing in Jackson’s Track and Jackson’s Track revisited’, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey argues that Tonkin’s eyewitness account is fundamental because it “necessitates vigilance”. 98 Being vigilant is the act of acknowledging one’s “response-ability” and “address-ability” towards the other without creating hostility; it allows for the articulation of difference simply by bearing witness. 99 Tonkin’s efforts could not thwart the power and authority the government exercised at that time but by ‘bearing witness’ – and later writing about it publicly – structural changes may one day come into effect through his re(membering) the history of this area and its people.

Tonkin names the Indigenous people who lived on Jackson’s Track between 1936 and 1975 in order to make them visible in the consciences of non-Indigenous Australians, making their participation in history significant. Landon notes in her sequel how Tonkin’s version of events is incredibly important because, as she discovered from her own research, Indigenous voices were absent from the government archives pertaining to the area during the 1950s and 60s. She states: “I too am amazed and appalled at the amount of material there is available in the Archive about the people who had lived at the Track there is no true indication of their characters, their opinions, their values, their needs, their culture. It is impossible to hear their voices” (p.6.1). Historical sources, such as archived government documents, minutes from council meetings, newspaper articles, policy documents, letters etc, are consulted in Landon’s sequel but are not consistent with Tonkin’s history of the area. The official accounts of Indigenous people living on the Track contradict Tonkin’s historical interpretation. For example, the main episode in Tonkin’s memoir details the forced removal of Indigenous people from his property by the bulldozing of their homes and belongings; however, this is not documented in government records at all, according to Landon. Thus she acknowledges that retelling this story in an apologia also qualifies as historical writing because it also functions as reportage. What Tonkin ‘witnessed’ becomes a historical record – one of the

98 Probyn-Rapsey, Fiona. “‘No last word’: postcolonial witnessing in Jackson’s Track and Jackson’s Track revisited’. Antipodes. Vol. 22, No.2, December 2008, p.127
99 loc. cit.
many narratives that tell of this place and its people:

Daryl’s story is the same as the Record. The Record tells the official view, the view of the perpetrators; Daryl’s memoir tells the view of the victim. It tells the side of the story that usually remains untold and off the record. I must remember that and measure both views against the other (p.4.8).

Retelling Australia’s history of colonisation can be seen as a philosophical pursuit that leads towards reconciliation. *Jackson’s Track: memoir of a Dreamtime place* goes further, however, emphasising the need for practical changes in Australian culture and politics as they are presented in Tonkin’s memoir. If postcolonialism is, according to Young’s definition, the “contestation of religious domination”, then Tonkin’s pursuit of social transformation was a personal one, leading him to resist many Christian groups in town and criticise their efforts at converting Indigenous people to their church. Landon perceives Tonkin’s tone towards Christians who visited the Track as being prejudiced and investigates his attitude further in her sequel. She recalls, for example, how Tonkin accused Mrs Buchanan from a local church of coming out with other “bible-bashers” and going “from camp to camp talking about Jesus and Christian values. Always on the backs of the blackfellas trying to get them to improve their ways” (p.252). However, a different opinion of the Buchanan family is presented in an article in *The Warragul Gazette* that reports they were “hard workers for the betterment of living conditions of Aborigines in the West Gippsland area” (p.4.6). Tonkin was uncomfortable about the Buchanans bringing clothes out to the Aboriginal people on the Track and saw it as a stratagem to assimilate them into ‘mainstream’ culture. Landon explains how these contradictory views should be seen as “suspicious”, as she believes that what the church members were doing was nothing more than “unconscious racism of well-meaning people – church people who have aligned themselves with the League”.

In the past there have certainly been those who disguised their contempt for Aboriginal people as generosity. Landon and Tonkin are examples of how white people’s suspicion of Others continues to linger even in the progressive politics of reconciliation, making a relationship of exchange self-referential rather than disinterested and generous. While the authors seem to be advocates for reconciliation, they prove there are many challenges regarding broader social structures, inequalities, dependencies and histories that engender a culture of ‘suspicion” rather than one of trust in order to foster forgiveness from Indigenous people. For example, Landon admits she put pressure on Tonkin to name and shame the people who had acted against the Aborigines and removed them from Jackson’s Track:

He thought it was the Shire, but he didn’t really care. I see now that I am the one who cared about
officialdom oppressing the people at the Track and so perhaps it was my emphasis, my attempt to find a villain in the story, that made him name the Shire and let them take the blame for all the Leagues and Boards and Councils that might have done damage to Aboriginal people during the era of assimilation in every small town in southern-eastern Australia (p.8.2).

The dialectics of reconciliation can often be marred with blame and resentment of past wrongs, pressing people to be held accountable. Of course not all settlers were racist, just as not all Indigenous people are pro-reconciliation. As Pascoe tells us in Convincing ground: “Too many people committed to a reappraisal of contact history attempt to paint Aboriginal people as an uncomfortable pastiche of Pollyanna and Gandhi. Aboriginal people are people, incontrovertibly identical to Europeans except for skin colour” (p.81). Gandhi was of course a genius who developed and lived out his own cultural, spiritual and political values, deploying them strategically as a part of the anti-colonial struggle.100 Tonkin’s and Landon’s texts prove, however, that for most people combining conscious thought and action is nearly impossible in a reality dominated by colonial power structures. What empowers people to act in a certain way that is nonconformist and revelatory is of greatest challenge in the study of literature. Particular texts produced in Australian literature since 1990 have represented the struggle between an apathetic and ‘reconciled’ society, informing and reflecting the changing times in which we live – and showing how a language of reconciliation assists in bridging the divide between consciousness and action.

Tonkin is a privileged writer in the sense that he knows about Indigenous culture and can reflect on and articulate White culture at the same time. He can be considered a ‘hybrid author’ because of his allegiance to the people and places he loves, which challenges the notion of loyalty to one race. He rejects Western culture, however, with deep cynicism: “I did understand one thing straight away: compared to the blackfella, the white man has no Law. Maybe that’s why we can act so cruelly sometimes without even being aware of it” (p.62). He implies here that Indigenous cultural values could allow for reconciliation if dominant culture embraced Indigenous ideologies or laws about relationships. Yet, despite his efforts, Tonkin is not a ‘reconciled’ individual comfortable belonging in two worlds. Reconciliation seems impossible when Tonkin criticises White culture in ways that are at times offensive for White readers: “I knew that aside from the three R’s, what students really learn at white man’s school is to be a silly fool because they are taught to be greedy, to try to be better than others and to be dishonest by cheating” (p.201). However, his alternate world cannot be made to

100 Postcolonialism: an historical introduction. op. cit, p.338
represent a perfect balance of hybrid characteristics. It is impossible to reach a perfect cultural equilibrium. Thus while social transformation is an act of consciousness, it happens slowly in a type of coalescence. Natural scientist Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500 – 428 BCE) who said that “appearances are a glimpse of the obscure”, offers a metaphor of how social transformation is both conscious and unconscious, by describing the gradual change of colours – “if we take two colours, black and white, and then pour from one to the other drop by drop, our sight will not be able to discriminate the gradual changes even though they exist in nature”.

Tonkin’s isolated living conditions make it relatively easy for him to reject dominant society, yet for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with an interest in reconciliation, living in isolation is not a realistic option. However, recognising flaws within various paradigms of reconciliation may allow us to one day construct a change of consciousness that will, in turn, lead to structural changes in power and politics. The track or road is a recurring motif in this memoir and is emblematic of the changing nature of race relations through the transformation of written historical interpretation – engaging with the consciences of readers. Tonkin’s road leads us to a divergent history of the Jackson Track area that is contrary to government records (or the lack thereof). We learn that if we are open to discussing the many stories of our nation, we can avoid cultural recidivism that is suspicious, non-collaborative, exclusive and unforgiving.

**In conclusion**

The colonisation of Australia was planned, imagined, orchestrated and recorded through the interplay of politics and polemics: law and governance were assisted by artistic design and literary craft to construct Australia as a British colony. The establishment of colonialism in this ancient foreign land was not the result of natural progression – it was hard work. To replicate ‘home’, or another England, was a violent struggle for occupation, followed by the rapid clearing of trees, the construction of European gardens, buildings and roads and the reverberant production of an imperial culture through the arts. A history of Australia’s settlement was recorded and played out as ‘the’ national story for almost two centuries. Despite such ‘hard work’, the expansion of Britain on the opposite side of the world proved

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102 It is necessary to note that Indigenous peoples’ suspicion is different to white people’s suspicion of Others, and that these differences stem from different experiences and perspectives of colonization/invasion.
to be a dangerous romantic notion memorialised in a culture that would see future generations lacking a sense of community and place. As argued in this chapter, it was the efforts of particular writers, during the period from the 1990s to the present day, that challenged the dominant culture in a candid but also conciliatory way through their work. Bruce Pascoe is one author and historian who exposed settlers’ writing as myopic and self-indulgent in his burlesque masterpiece, *Convincing ground*:

Such is the power and momentum of self interest, and the admiration with which most men view greed, that our national story reads like a nursery rhyme for spoilt children. The great deeds of land clearance, “exploration”, the construction of cities progressing at a miraculous pace, meant there was no time or inclination to reflect on the war or the law. The writers and painters whom you might have expected to ponder the source of all these riches, instead were swept along by the riotous energy of the native-born currency lads, painting portraits of the newly rich and their horses, dashing off rhyming stanzas to celebrate those horses and their fearless Australian-born riders. Too busy with the brighter more optimistic palette to see black. Too embedded with the invader to see through their own eyes (p.203).

For historian and academic Paul Carter, Australia was not ‘settled’ once and for all. He believes that, as a nation, we are yet to reach our “special destiny”. His work suggests that our national identity will eventually be realised via “mimesis” and the continual production of art and expressions of place through time. History and literature are intrinsically linked for Carter, who claims that the exploration of Australia’s “spatial” history means this land can be travelled again and again – settled and resettled by individuals who wish to take old roads or make new tracks and express them creatively in a spirit of historical enquiry. Many articulations of the nation’s identity reveal a lacuna of language never properly fulfilled by early explorers or historians. It is this gap that shows the impossible task early settlers undertook of writing an Australian history and culture that was autonomous, final and complete. Thus, these spaces have become opportunities for Indigenous voices and cultural contributions to be appreciated in Australian writing.

Bill Ashcroft writes dynamically of the possibilities for Indigenous authors to write themselves free from colonisation and reconstruct themselves as powerful contributors to cultural production through ownership of the English language – achieved and celebrated through experimentation. This chapter has elaborated on Ashcroft’s theory of “transformation”, arguing that Indigenous (and a few non-Indigenous or hybrid) writers use the power of language to contribute to and transform historical interpretation and debate. The four texts explored here show that historical interpretation is not solely dependent on primary and secondary historical sources – as these may not exist or have been erased during early colonisation. What is arguably needed from history writers today is the ability to connect with
a reader on an emotional and imaginative level; to communicate with empathy for those who suffered as a result of colonisation; to acknowledge the ‘uncomfortable’ aspects of a past littered with ambivalent memories and shift public consciousness in a way that is irreversible.

Nevertheless, debating whether Australia was originally ‘invaded’ or ‘settled’ is a healthy part of the reconciliation process, which is not just about love and peace. The process can be fraught with blame, resentment and antagonistic responses to European history and cultural values. Constant and ongoing aggression is representative of conflict, rather than interracial harmony – but like any ‘loving’ relationship, there must be a chance to speak, to listen, to be sorry, to forgive and to change. Australia is becoming the ‘place’ for a hybrid postcolonial society, still inchoately articulated but demonstrably finding its idiom in the literary realm that informs polities through its poetics.
Chapter 2
A ‘place’ for reconciliation in Indigenous writing

A loved being or thing or idea is held by us, held in our arms, in our imagination; our love casts a glow around it. But a loved place holds us, even if it exists only in memory; it causes everything within it, including ourselves, to glow. A loved place is not encompassed by our love; we are encompassed, loved, breathed into life, by it.103

Freya Matthews

Our ability to make peace depends on there being people and places with whom we can make peace.104

Deborah Bird Rose

While the erasing of Indigenous languages has caused damage to the Australian sense of place, can it be remedied by exploring the ‘language of the country’ – once a language without words but now translatable through the creative work of postcolonial writers?105 How might a postcolonial imagination transform our relationship with place? Would we reach new levels of interconnectedness through a shared understanding of the land we live in? There are fundamental implications for Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations if land becomes a place for healing rather than the ‘bloodshed’ and ‘conquest’ formerly chronicled. For example, in Maybe tomorrow Meme McDonald reflects on collaborative texts she created as a White woman with Indigenous author Boori Monty Pryor and realises how:

Each book trawled a little deeper, in the way that only non-fiction can, for truths that lie beyond the necessities of non-fiction. Although each book stands alone, complete in itself, they all progress the same pathway we travelled in reaching for words to create a sense of beauty and possibility from the challenge of being black and white in Australia. There are traces of Dreamtime stories in some of the books, but their main focus is the place we share now and into the future (p.5 – 6).

Pryor and McDonald’s collaborative work demonstrates an interconnectedness that exists in two very different Australian writers’ imaginations, while admitting the task of reimagining Australian landscape, history and narratives is fraught with many challenges from either side wanting to navigate a hybrid yet new and autonomous space.

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105 The phrase “language of the country” appears in Mahood, Kim. Craft for a dry lake. Random House, New Zealand, 2000, p.62. I have argued that postcolonial writers are not exclusively Indigenous, since Mahood can be identified as coming from a family that was both Indigenous and non-indigenous.
In *Uncanny Australia: sacredness and identity in a postcolonial nation* Gelder and Jacobs argue that White Australians of today experience an “uncanny” sense of belonging to a land that is both familiar and alien. Non-Indigenous people have come to feel they belong in Australia, although not in the way Indigenous people have maintained their long historical and linguistic identification with place. This kinship may be like that of English urban Aborigines identifying with land and belonging to place through storytelling; however, it does not reduce the need for reconciliation. Nevertheless, Gelder and Jacobs suggest that place should be rewritten in ways that are hospitable to all Australians, past, present and future. Interestingly, Gelder and Jacobs state that: “Aboriginal fiction can participate in this dilemma [of Australian places being uncanny], but it cannot resolve it.” However, their point has not been developed through discussion of how literature can or cannot resolve this “uncanny” relationship with place. What has been a moot point becomes a path of investigation for this chapter, as it explores how representations of place and the Australian landscape in fictional texts have potential to do reconciliation.

The ideas of Matthews and Bird Rose quoted above suggest that the land is ‘alive’ and has a psychic influence that, if we are open to it, can intervene in our lives and organise our relationships with each other. The land has shaped Indigenous people since the beginning of the ‘Dreamtime’ or, to avoid using a non-Indigenous term, the genesis of their people and culture. It has been fundamental in the sophisticated development of their people, giving them totems, kinship and laws by which to identify themselves and live as communities. Perhaps the land can continue to organise all its inhabitants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, if they are open to exploring these possibilities creatively. Analytical exploration of ‘place’, for example can be informed by Paul Carter’s theory of creative research. His theory asserts the interconnectedness of academia, creativity and the material worlds that people build and inhabit. Creative research seeks to reveal original ideas that emerge during the processes of any creative work or production, such as writing. His concept explains how physical spaces can be designed through shared narratives that inform the “master plan” of any architectural design. In relation to this thesis, Carter’s arguments are relevant to how creative writing about ‘reconciliation’ may inform broader public policies or “master plans”. A nation’s polity is designed, rather than passively constructed, and results from the stories shared across the

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nation. The nation is thus being built as an effect of “material thinking”, with the constant interplay of politics and polemics informing how we share Australia with Others.

Increasingly, Australian writers – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – are using landscape and a sense of place to communicate textual ideas and offer social commentary about the transformation of a colonial society. Of primary interest in this chapter is the work of Kim Mahood (*Craft for a dry lake*), along with interpolations from the polemical writing of Fabienne Bayet-Charlton (*Finding Ullagundahi Island* and *Watershed*), Bruce Pascoe (*Earth*) and Kim Scott (*True country*). These texts give the land a central presence, their protagonists being quite literally moved and directed by the psyche of place. The power written into the land is very much in line with Bird Rose’s theory that ‘Nature’ is an actor in social organisation. It has a “living and active presence, it reaches out to people”; it organises itself and “seeks to organise those within its ambit as well”. Since 1990 these authors have painted a brighter picture of belonging to the land, as a change from the traditional focus on enduring its hardships. How ‘place’ is envisaged has a potent effect on the relationships of people who share it, as they reach a common understanding of, and love for, their land – rather than seeing it as largely belonging to Others. While reconciliation is an idea that can be measured in a number of ways, this discussion has suggested the importance of gauging it from our imagination of place – conceptions of the Australian landscape that become a source of healing, rather than division. As Matthews purports, writing about the land in new and creative ways can transform our national stories from representing “history, conquest, and damage” so that instead they “may become for us resilience reconciliation, and love”. Thus literature is a space for such transformation to materialize within and be built on.

**Transforming the “master design” and mapping consciousness in Kim Mahood’s *Craft for a dry lake***

Postcolonial writing can invigorate Australian places and vice versa, consequently breaking up colonial patterns of thought that dictate that the land should be seen as worthless, functional or dangerous and needing to be controlled. It reflects a two-way relationship between land and people, unlike a section from a populist book published in 1971 titled *Australia: this land – these people*, which writes of:

107 *Reports from a wild country: ethics for decolonisation* op. cit. p.207
108 ibid. p.212
A harsh and unforgiving land, baked by summer sun, flooded by swollen rivers, ravaged by fire and worn by the ageless wind. For many it offers a life of hardship, loneliness and trial. It is a familiar cycle; droughts turn crops and pastures brown, animals starve, forests fall prey to the merciless god of fire; then wet years follow, farms are flooded, and the earth replenishes its natural vegetation, ready once more for the vengeance of drought and flame.109

Mahood uses language in *Craft for a dry lake* to re-imagine the land in an array of vivid colours that contrast with earlier myths and representations of a dry, dreary and lifeless (out)back Australia like the one described above. Instead she conjures up with word craft images of:

Red earth and soft wheat-coloured grasses, spinifex and the elegant small desert gums with their white trunks and deep green furry leaves. The giant anthills are the most striking feature of this part of the country. They hulk across the landscape, almost animate, each with an individual weirdness of shape that hints at sentience, as some sort of purposefulness of their design (p.49)

In this description, the land is welcoming and full of character as she observes its “purposefulness” and “design” – how its features show a “sentience” about the web of life. The presence and survival of “desert gums” signifies an underground river or water source that allows them to thrive with minimal rainfall, which is emblematic of life-affirming qualities in a seemingly “inhospitable” place. She paints the Australian landscape in the quintessential colours of the outback and the desert symbols, while reflecting its “weirdness”, also evoking its beauty and grandeur to narrow the conceptual and existential gaps between geography and home. Her “artwork” embodies Matthews’ thesis that a “flourishing community is likely to evolve a bright, self-affirming cosmology”, whereas “a languishing community is likely to see the world in darker shades”.110 Thus writing reconciliation is possible through word-pictures that transform the nation’s myths and cosmologies.

Ghassan Hage argues that above all else, hope is the most important quality a nation can possess for improving its social relations. He defines “hopefulness” as “a ‘historically’ acquired sense of security in facing what the future will bring” that is linked to caring about the nation rather than worrying about its degradation.111 For a culture to be centred on caring for its people and places reflects a positive relation between the nation and its citizens, whereas emphasis on worry and paranoia shows social disunity and mistrust. With care and a

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109 Fraser, Bryce (ed.) *Australia: this land – these people*. The Readers Digest Association Press, Sydney, 1971, p.101
vision of hope, “the constellations of feelings, discourses and practices articulated to hope permeate social life”.\textsuperscript{112}

Accordingly, many texts from the 1990s to the present day have used the changing images and colours of their authors’ world to represent a postcolonial society. Positive cosmological transformation of place in Australian literature makes reconciliation possible by first creating it metaphorically in the imaginations of readers. For example, Mahood’s relationship with place is conveyed in positive imagery, while her polemics challenge past notions of the ‘bush’ as inhospitable and welcome the “re-organisation” of the concept of Australia so that it is fresh and breathes life.

In \textit{Craft for a Dry Lake} Mahood portrays the landscape as a “living” being that is continually calling her to see it anew – with fresh eyes rather than through the old “maps” she carries around, which impose boundaries and separate her from it: “I see from my map that the plains have been fenced in” (p.211). Maps prevent a corporeal experience of place because they focus on an abstraction that cannot connect us with its essence. If we go back to Fraser’s 1971 work \textit{Australia: this land – these people}, we see not only the outdated, anglophile description of the land, but also the vain and superficial efforts to capture its character. Under a chapter heading ‘Putting Australia on the map’, for example, his text reads: “Only in recent years, thanks to modern technology, has this vast continent been completely mapped. The ever-advancing science of recording the land’s physical features is making a major contribution to national development.”\textsuperscript{113} He implies that by mapping the land we can “build a nation” and goes on to explain that:

\begin{quote}
Today’s accurate maps are made by blending aerial photographs with information obtained by ground teams. Well-equipped expeditions fitted with radio transceivers plunge into deserts and thrash their way over mountains. Much of the time it is solid slogging: even the four-wheel-drive vehicles with oversize tyres bog down in sand hills over which they have to be winched.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Here maps are drawn above and away from place. A haptic encounter of the land is minimal and inconvenient. Carter explains ‘haptic’ as:

\begin{quote}
experiencing the place you live in with your body rather than by simply looking at it through a car [or aeroplane] windscreen. Haptic spaces are those that satisfactorily externalise our deep emotional need for community; they create places to embrace and inhabit, places that speak to us. The corollary of this
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{112} ibid. p.9
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Australia: this land – these people} op. cit. p.314
\textsuperscript{114} ibid. p.315
Thus knowing Australia relies on a textual encounter with place in order to know its stories. Narratives about country are still evolving in the literature, unlike mapping, which emphasises mass land coverage in a minimal amount of time and considers itself a final representation. Mahood notes a lecture given to the Adelaide Geographical Society *circa* 1902: “Mr Davidson’s work covers 27 000 square miles, and fills up one of the blank spaces in the map of Australia” (p.183). While mapping the nation is a prodigious task that should not be discredited in view of its practical functions, it does not dispel all our “blank spaces”.

Mahood explains that there is no accomplishment in the maps we draw from aeroplanes because we are only open to a “glancing narrative, its structure spatial rather than continuous” (p.245). Our approach to knowing, understanding and loving this country should be cross-disciplinary rather than limited to the “master design” of geographical mapping, mapping the land from various people’s imaginations who live here. Conventional maps are rigid in their design and do not allow for the recording of a place’s emotional, cultural or spiritual significance, which continually changes. For Mahood, maps only offer a point of departure and separation from place (p.63). Having a map does not signify a sense of belonging, nor symbolise a nation that is not ‘lost’.

Maps written from a colonial viewpoint fail to record the ever changing nature of place or how it ‘grows’. Mahood eloquently notes its shifting reality:

> The journals and maps of our predecessors prove to be misleading, describing landmarks at once familiar and strange, as if they came upon them from a different aspect. At times it seems we are travelling through an altogether different landscape from the one described by the maps we carry (p.159).

The maps Mahood creates are not geographically concrete in their design. Once drawn they can change with the language of the country. If reconciliation depends on knowing, understanding and loving the Other, ‘mapping’ must be understood as multidisciplinary and palimpsestic in nature. ‘Depths’ must be acknowledged.

Discrediting maps or knowing the land geographically, however, can negate discourses of reconciliation that use rhetoric such as ‘road-map to peace’ or ‘map of reconciliation’, which

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116 There is certainly much to be uncovered (via other disciplines) about the land we inhabit. Creative research, for example, makes a commitment to explicating blank spaces – instead of studying a ‘bridge’ between ‘us and them’, seeking to understand the chasm or the blank space that exists between us.
 imply a linear movement with a predefined end point. What creative research shows us is that society is understood and articulated through many disciplines and continuous discursive ‘routes’. Social change is as much a creative progression towards finding a place of belonging with the Other as a political one. Reading and writing literature is a locus in which readers explore their shared kinship with the land at its most personal level. Thus Mahood’s work emphasises the need for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals to map their own sense of place – by finding a way to read/write themselves into the country.

For this reason, some authors share part of themselves with their readers by portraying ‘maps’ of their imagination. In Mahood’s text redrawing ‘maps’ is a metaphor for changing consciousness about place and the Other. She envisages what might be by taking readers to a location to connect with – and showing how they can be ‘touched’ by place even if they cannot touch it themselves. Writers can transform the land, not physically, but in the way it is experienced, ideated and shared. Carter believes that a kinship with it is not based on a material structure but a reinvention of social relations, wherein authors have an important role to play. He argues that:

Before it was known, Australia was named. Before it was seen, it was represented. The operational space of white-settler culture was a mythopoetic invention, product of two forms of place-writing – the map and its repertoire of speculative features, the journal and its inventory of places made after the name. If “Australia” was written into being, it could also be rewritten.117

However, conquest and colonial rule placed such importance on the naming and mapping of places that those that are ‘unknown’ are culturally discredited and undervalued. For example, on her journey to discover (but not reveal) the ‘secret women’s business’ surrounding Hindmarsh Island, Bayet-Charlton writes in Finding Ullagundahi Island:

If you look for Yamba on most maps of Australia you won’t find it, because it won’t be there. Its existence depends on its importance to the person seeking it, but if you live there then it’s bloody important and you’d better not forget to write it down on those bureaucratic maps of yours, mate, or else.118

Bayet-Charlton acknowledges the value of cartography but calls for others to understand that the significance of place also depends on it being (un)experienced and (un)spoken about. The fact that there are places that non-Indigenous people may never ‘know’ complicates efforts towards racial harmony that are based on ‘knowing’ the place we live in. Reconciliation may only be possible when all subjects understand the significance of sacred places – even if

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117 ‘A pattern made of holes’ op. cit. p.1
respect for them means keeping a physical distance that acknowledges their significance to Others.

If Carter’s theory of material thinking bears scrutiny and a sense of place is not dependent on maps, Australia can be rewritten; perhaps even relieved of enduring “uncanniness”. Australia can become a shared place of intrinsic value that does away with the original ‘mythopoetics’ of a barren land to be conquered and controlled through names, maps and shallow geographical descriptions. Mahood’s *Craft for a dry lake* is an excellent choice of text to illustrate Carter’s theory, as the author literally remaps the sites visited in the Tanami Desert in unique ways. She reveals from her private journal about the maps she draws on the surface of Lake Ruth (traditionally named Monkarrurpa): “The maps must be redrawn daily adrift somewhere between the memory of a nomadic past and the dream of a transformative future I write into its surface, as if every particle of dust is a word from the songs” (pp.63-4). She is perhaps listening to the ‘language of the country’, using her body to feel the landscape rather than impose her own descriptions on it. She has a bodily encounter with place using her creativity as a way to “explore and engage with life a way of holding together the thinking process and the unthinking process in a kind of poised tension” (pp. 241 – 42). Undoubtedly Mahood is challenged by this experience, which calls on her to change her consciousness by a process both deliberate and difficult to explain. Similarly, Nandy’s theory of changing consciousness argues that one needs to be mindful of one’s own growing awareness if there is to be significant structural change to society: “Colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness and needs to be defined ultimately in the minds of men [and women]”.119

Often the ability to make sense of a new experience or place relies on subconscious processing over a period of time. For example Mahood attempts to employ language and new signifying systems120 that translate a haptic or bodily encounter with the living environment of the Tanami Desert. She first anticipated becoming familiar with the desert through an artistic journey that would produce artwork and/or a piece of writing: “I was going to draw,  

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Some Black rights activists, like Ralph Ellison, have argued that focusing on one’s consciousness in this way is self-indulgent and an excuse for inaction – see his novel *Invisible man*.

120 This phrase relates to Kristeva’s work in semiotics. She uses the specific wording “signifying practice” to represent the establishment of a sign system through the subject undergoing an unsettling or questioning process that challenges the familiar social framework. When this occurs revolution in society is indeed possible, according to Kristeva. Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature and art*. Blackwell, Oxford UK, 1993, p.18
paint, record, rub, layer, trace” (p.210). Her art and journal writing were ways of capturing memory, the changing landscape and the changes within her inner evolution. She is called to write and paint but also to physically take her experience further: “More and more as I try to make work that deals with the country, I feel the need for this physical encounter, something which cuts through the distance which drawing and painting force.” Despite intending to return to the desert to paint, she admits: “I have used almost nothing [from my collection of paints and crayons]”. Her “energy is taken up with simply being here”.

Becoming connected to place is both physically and emotionally intense, as she allows nature to “take hold of her very core” and “wring her” with a need and a desire she cannot properly fathom or “assuage” (p.194). The land compels and her maps become strange, as she traces this place with her body rather than her brush: “I want to scrape my flesh against the ragged bark of the boree, draw blood, crawl naked into the blinding stillness of the lake surface” (p.195). Her intentions to write and paint the country become more corporeal as she encounters the land through a “letting of blood, a taking of the country into oneself, of taking oneself into the country”. Her experience expands on Nandy’s idea of social transformation through a change of consciousness to show the sensory, as well as intellectual, nature of such change. Just as social structures require physical change and cooperative public action, change in individual consciousness should not be considered passive but physically, emotionally and spiritually engaging. Her encounter with the Tanami Desert, as she describes it, is “physical, almost sexual” (p.195). Finding a way to “understand” and “love” this place is directly linked to an emotional, physical and erotic experience of it. By touching her skin against the earth’s contours, she is able to describe entry into a “zone” that “exists in the memory and the imagination as much as it exists in real space” (p.203), showing what changing consciousness can feel like.

Yet effecting such change proves for Mahood to be an extremely difficult, almost impossible undertaking. Her understanding of the land is problematic, so that at times it is “too austere, these glimpses too deep for my imagination to follow” (p.196). There are stark limitations. Her colonial worldview does not allow her to re-imagine and rearticulate place. As she tries to experience the land afresh, she is continually confronted with her own inbuilt schema of knowledge and experience:

I feel angry, full of wild physical unease, suffocated by memories and maps and history. I want to be here, now, without memory, without a past, without prior knowledge of this place. I want my life and
Possibly Mahood is suffering from what Roland Barthes calls “false consciousness”, whereby the dominant race or class constructs myths to suggest an alternate reality that exists outside ideology but cannot be accessed because of the myths and fictions of the dominant society. Accordingly, this thesis argues that new languages and signs can be created in order to transform the country, that they are necessary for the survival of reconciliation and its discourses. For example, Silverman explains that ideologies constantly clash with each other but, while it may not be possible to experience reality outside of ideology, “it is possible to effect a rupture with one, and a rapprochement with another”. René Descartes offered an alternate theory to Barthes’, arguing that “truth exists independently of discourse” and can be found in ideas enunciated in it that “transparently reflect things as they really are.” Both models are valuable for understanding the transformation of national consciousness, in terms of interracial harmony between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in a postcolonial reality. For example, Mahood first believes that she must adopt a newfound “wisdom” of place and negotiate or “give up” prior knowledge of the Australian ‘Outback’ in order to understand it with Others. She considers for a moment but concedes, “One never truly wishes to give up knowledge, whatever the cost” (p.195). Is this where reconciliation becomes impossible to achieve? When can a state of consciousness be unlearned for the sake of ‘understanding’ the Other and adopting a hybrid identity? Or does decolonisation depend on understanding and critiquing the many guises of colonialism, rather than wishing we did not know of them at all?

As discussed in Chapter 1, postcolonialism in the form of a hybrid society proves difficult in Daryl Tonkin’s Jackson’s Track because cultural values, ideas and knowledge cannot be evenly shared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds to create an idealistic way of being. Similarly, Mahood’s internal struggle to understand the spirit of the land, even in the company of Indigenous elders, shows the complex demands of undoing one’s thinking, imagination and feelings about land and belonging to place. Can reconciliation only be achieved on a personal and individual level, rather than collectively? Is it unrealistic to dream of a holistic, ‘reconciled culture’? Descartes’ ideas suggest a theoretical model of semiotics

122 ibid. p.31
123 loc. cit.
that urges us to block out all other voices and look within to arrive at a new representation of reality.\textsuperscript{124} If reconciliation is assumed to represent ‘oneness’ or unity, it is not so much a cultural ‘oneness’ achieved through assimilation; it is a oneness that an individual feels with home and place according to this text – to be in that place, with those people. What cannot be made to converge in terms of differing and disparate cultures may be possible in an imaginative space where land is an apparent part of reconciliation originating within one’s mind or consciousness. Here it is important not to confuse ‘sameness’ and ‘unity’ with assimilation and colonial rule – as this would discredit efforts towards hybridity.

Reconciliation may be seen as flawed and over-idealistic if it focuses too heavily on national convergence and cultural ‘unity’, as this implies the dominance and power of one cultural group over another. Gelder and Jacobs suggest that “reconciliation is never a fully realisable category; it can never be completely settled”.\textsuperscript{125} They take issue with Kristeva’s thesis of “unity” and argue that a colony will never “gradually belong”.\textsuperscript{126} Instead, they consider reconciliation to be a utopian fantasy that would only ever “function in a climate of sameness”, being a disservice to Indigenous people wanting to escape the confines of assimilation with a dominant society.\textsuperscript{127} Hence, a “united” society should not connote sameness or assimilation. This thesis is arguing instead that it can be a community that is comfortable or ‘at peace with’ a postcolonial reality, valuing relations between people who understand who they are, where they live, where they have been and where they are going. It is rather simplistic to cement non-Indigenous Australians in an “uncanny” position of always being ‘foreigners at home’ because a sense of belonging can be altered.\textsuperscript{128} For instance, Peter Read in \textit{Belonging: Australians, place and Aboriginal ownership} argues there are as “many routes to belonging as there are non-Aboriginal Australians to find them”.\textsuperscript{129} For Read, belonging to Australia is deeply personal and ongoing. He has come to consider himself as “native-born” yet this identity is still growing through his experiences with Aboriginal people and sharing the responsibilities of the land. This does not mean trying to be Aboriginal or adopt specific cultural practices or ways of being; but listening and sharing our experiences of place, understanding our past and taking responsibility for our future, in order to belong to

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\textsuperscript{124} ibid. p.128
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Uncanny Australia} op. cit. p.xvi
\textsuperscript{126} ibid. p.28
\textsuperscript{127} ibid. p.42
\textsuperscript{128} ibid. p.26
\textsuperscript{129} Read, Peter. \textit{Belonging: Australians, place and Aboriginal ownership}. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p.223
Australia. There are no higher degrees of ‘Australianess’ – so long as one has a love of place and people, one can be included in the definition of nation:

young Australians, Asian Australians, foreign-born Australians, rich Australians, seventh generation Australians, rural Australians, just-arrived Australians, poets, artists, country and western musicians, atheists, metaphysicians, spiritualists, those who have worked closely with Aboriginals, those whose land is under Indigenous claim, those who have yet to meet an Indigenous person face to face.\textsuperscript{130}

Mahood devises new language to evoke the land through a sensory experience of its textures, colours, smells and visible characteristics. Her textual exploration shows how applying Ashcroft’s theory that writing can transform societal structures is possible, although success is difficult to achieve. Simply being exposed to writings of the Other is not enough. To change one’s understanding and perception, there must be an emotional and spiritual metamorphosis that can be felt physically as well as intellectually – making the process perplexing and even obscure for those open to it. Implementing Ashcroft’s theory is complicated by Nandy’s idea that individuals must first change their thoughts and feelings towards the Other before structural changes will happen. Ashcroft is correct in arguing that literature is a ‘place’ where a change of consciousness can be stimulated and ultimately occur. Australia was once ‘discovered’ and colonised by the use of language and maps, but can be (re)discovered using new ways of mapping bodily experiences with place and finding new language to articulate these experiences, thus enacting a transformed reality.

**Identifying Freud: the transformation of authority and Western power constructs**

Sigmund Freud’s work on reality and dreams can explain unusual experiences in familiar places or what can be called “uncanny” experiences of place.\textsuperscript{131} He wrestled with the apt usage of the term and after citing dictionary definitions, conceded that there was no exact match in English for the German word *unheimlich* (meaning un-homelike), which he wanted to use in his study of dreams.\textsuperscript{132} While *unheimlich* is a word commonly used in the German language, the closest translation in English is “uncanny”. It was the concept of the subconscious, however, that held most fascination for Freud and where he made his most valuable contributions to knowledge.

\textsuperscript{130} ibid. p. 5
\textsuperscript{131} Gelder and Jacobs’ work on the “uncanny” has been discussed in some detail already, but it was Freud who first introduced the concept in his essay ‘The “Uncanny”’ (1919).
Freud’s theory can be specifically useful in this exploration by means of his analysis of ‘war’ (the antithesis of what reconciliation represents), which gives deeper insight into the subconscious origins of war and the human ability to make peace. In his paper/letter to Einstein, *Why war?* (1933), Freud recognises the negative implications of conflict and hopes it will eventually be permanently eradicated from humanity. He argues that any form of power (such as colonial rule) ineluctably leads to war because it is exercised by people, and that war will only be prevented if humanity “unites” and agrees on an authority that is not human. All subjects should have an “emotional bond” with a general symbol of power that has come into being in some other way than through war. While the transformation of power is not dealt with in Freud’s writing about war, he suggests that people must unanimously care for, respect and recognise a common power in order to construct a harmonious society. Nandy’s notion that a transformed reality requires a change of consciousness includes perceptions of power and authority in a postcolonial society. This may mean exploring the way Others conceive of power and authority, marrying ideas from a dominant society with more radical understandings of a world without human authority figures – to create a ‘hybrid’ understanding of nation. Understanding Freud’s concepts may assist in further expanding Nandy’s ideas on “consciousness” by analysing both the subconscious and conscious states of mind and their roles in reconciliation.

In his text *Earth* (2001) Bruce Pascoe writes how first Australians considered themselves warriors but did not have an authority or leader organising attacks against Europeans. Significantly, this text does not have a narrator for its reader, instead using only dialogue to tell the story. Pascoe’s conversational style emphasises the lack of power structures when engaging in “a good yarn” or one-on-one discussion with a friend. He is recognised as an ideologue for Indigenous authors, his historical fiction correcting many cultural misunderstandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, particularly myths about power and authority. He writes:

I’m Weerat Kuyuut, I been come from all them ol’ peoples, we fought them amerjee, kill plenny whitefella, chase sheep, burn house, we give ‘em run around proper you know. An’ we watch over that Billy Wurrun too, or as we call him Poort Poort Burrun. They get the Wurrun wrong way about. Who are you? they say, and he says Wurrundjerri, and they try and say that but don’t get past Wurrun, and that’s too much for ‘em so they settle for Billy and he says I’m the king and so it’s King Billy. But that one not king, there’s no king, he’s one of the last, but he’s not king, who is there to say who’s king?

134 ibid. p.221

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White fellas want a king ‘cos they wanna deal with the boss, but who’s boss? We all boss, but true way the dirt is boss, the place, all this country boss of us peoples.\textsuperscript{135}

His text points to the flaws inherent in a model of reconciliation based on Western thinking that insists a peace movement should acquire, and be led by, human authority figures (such as national and/or state governments) to organise its objectives. In a controversial proposition, Pascoe shows that Indigenous subjects have great faith in the land as the highest governing body in their affairs, believing it has the potential to organise us. The land does not have a history based on power relations – there is no king, country is the “boss of all peoples”. The Western paradigm of reconciliation is predicated on an organised and people-“led” movement, but perhaps the colonial way of thinking needs to accommodate Other ideas – about how polities are organised and structured by knowing, understanding and loving the land we live in and share with many.

If concepts of power and authority are being transformed, the evidence is in the literature being written and read for this purpose since 1990. A hybrid spiritual authority with influence over our relationships is eloquently articulated in Kim Scott’s \textit{True country} when Father Paul tells the Indigenous main character, Billy:

\begin{quote}
I think God is changing. He must to stay alive in these people. Perhaps we need to think of Him as a great spirit, a creator spirit, an artist. A Creative force behind the world, living in the world, and giving ceremony and the land. Maybe they, we, will end up with a new God here, some sort of major spirit from the Dreaming or whatever, who named everything and us – or should I say the Aborigines? – and created this special relationship. People, creation, the land.\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

In this textual scenario, Indigenous people are no longer oppressed by colonial representations of religion and authority but are equals in sharing their understandings of creation, God and the power of the land. There is a negotiation taking place in \textit{True country} between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of spirituality. Even though Father Paul is not quite sure about the boundaries of inclusion, the land is imagined as one with a creator or creative authority for all Australians – organising us and our relationships with one another and itself. Authority is “changing”, as this text suggests, and the spiritual proximity of people and place is imagined as growing.

\textit{Craft for a dry lake} also presents the idea that nature is a living authority directing us. While recording her experience, Mahood’s poetics allow it to regain the power it held before

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{135} Pascoe, Bruce. \textit{Earth}. Magabala Books, Broome, 2001, p.11
\textsuperscript{136} Scott Kim. \textit{True country}. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1993, p.221
\end{footnotesize}
colonisation. Reconciliation becomes the denouement of her writing as she becomes aware of nature as “one authority” over Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects alike. Further, being conscious of place brings awareness of those who share it: “I can decide whether or not to begin to spend the time, to build up a relationship based on the reality of this place as it is now, and the people who live here now” (p.210). Her journey, as it is represented in her desert writing, describes the growth of a progressive and reforming bond with place. Her feelings of “homeliness” are developed by being aware of nature’s presence as a living organism around and within her.

If the land is alive, does it have healing powers that can help it cleanse itself of its painful history? Mahood describes how she is grieving over the death of her father and making peace with the place where he died:

Now, as I look out across the star-illumined landscape, I see the shapes of grief, settled and quiet, in the crouching hummocks of the Pedestal Hills. Hold it for me, I tell them quietly, hold it for me here in this place which he loved (p.254).

It is her belief that the land is a site of redemption and possesses healing influence. This is not a new phenomenon in Indigenous culture, where land is valued, sung and danced for its medicinal qualities and healing purposes. According to Indigenous woman Margaret Kemarre Turner, for example: “People can sing for the Land and Ancestors to heal themselves. The Stories and songs, after they’re performed, they come true. They’re singing to make their spirit strong”.137 She writes sincerely to make the link between healing and land explicit: “Healing comes from the Land itself. When we’re sick or in mourning we go back to the Land to feel better, and to really relax deeply”.138 This raises an interesting prospect for imagining the land as a place for reconciliation. A message emerges, one perhaps dormant in the subtext of Mahood’s writing until it is ready to become conscious reality: “Maybe in the heart of White Australia is a dried-up salt lake and a dream of redemption, tempered with irony” (p.166). Australian soil was once the site for colonial battles but, ironically, it may be the ‘place’ to make peace through an altered vision of its worth and presence as a healing power. By the end of her text, Mahood has a new understanding that her place also belongs to Others – showing how concepts of place in the Australian ‘Outback’ can be transformed, from ‘conquering’ land in the sense of colonisation to forming an emotional bond with it and the people who love it. What was once conquered, controlled and despised can be

137 Turner, Margaret Kemarre OAM. *Iwenhe Tyerrtye – what it means to be an Aboriginal person*. IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2010, pp.144 – 45
138 ibid. p.132
transformed into a sovereign authority to unite people in a love for place: “If love can purify or save, the love a girl feels is of that order. The country is illuminated by that beam of love” (p.191). When land was originally used as a battlefield, to toil on, control and conquer, there was little chance of reconciliation. But there is hope in the way it is being rewritten as a place for healing, rather than war and demarcation. As colonists once ‘mapped’ the spatial features of their Empires, so places for reconciliation must be imagined in an effort to be realised.

Reconciliation is a concept identified with the emotions of love, particularly for people and place. Freud theorises on war using the dualism of love and hate. He claims only two things keep a community together: violence and emotional bonds (with people, places, ideologies). Violence can force obedience from a community fearful of overarching power structures while, on the other hand, the common love of principles and acknowledgement that legal authority is genuinely good will keep a community peaceful. According to Freud, human beings will be continuously driven to act by emotions of love and hate, terming these antonyms “eros” and “aggression”. Those who are driven to destruction by heightened feelings of aggression will engage in war. The only “antagonistic drive” to combat this aggression is a feeling of eros towards that which provoked the hatred.\(^\text{139}\) Erotica or “Eros” (as explained by Plato) is the psychological change in a subject towards something or someone that initially aroused the opposite emotion.\(^\text{140}\) Only Eros can reverse the state of war and allow “non-human authority” to reign through a collective emotional bond, such as a bond with place. Arguably, nature as an authority to govern and heal relationships may not have been the authority Freud had in mind when he wrote to Einstein in 1933. Nevertheless, his work is relevant because his studies of social psychology have led to better understanding of the human mind and how we imagine war, power, authority and peace in a postcolonial context. Freud’s arguments challenge colonial authority and, coupled with Mahood’s text, delineate the real difficulties individuals have when experiencing a change in consciousness about the Other and the land all Australians call home.

Given Freud’s theory, how does one nation come to love and respect non-human authority such as place? Is it a conscious process of decision-making or does it develop through the continual evolution of postcolonial imaginings as they are written? Mahood puts forward the

\(^\text{139}\) Why War? op. cit. p.228  
\(^\text{140}\) ibid. p.226
idea that authority is not chosen but based on a love that grows, like a child’s love for a parent:

One could neither choose love nor evade it. It was a force of nature, a direct link to the soul. It gave meaning and abolished it. Nothing could be done about love, particularly a child's love, which has no measures or boundaries (p.226).

Knowing, understanding and loving the land we live in are important aspects of reconciliation, transforming the way we perceive the Other and construct our society together. War, and one of its causes, colonial rule, must be undone by changing society’s exclusive dependence on people to govern and organise polities and civil relations. Transformation depends on an authority not gendered, or racially or ideologically biased, but one ultimately loved and respected by subjects from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples – such as the land, which has potential power to bring us ‘closer’ together in space and ideology, because we each value it for our own existence and survival.

**Gendered experiences with reconciliation and place**

Mahood resists a psychoanalytic reading of her work with more than just feminist reservations. She criticises male settlers’ oversimplified descriptions of the Australian landscape, suggesting that their sexualised terms created a consciousness of place inadequate for a land powerful enough to organise itself and us:

> It is fashionable these days to interpret these desires [men have to explore the land] in sexual terms. I think this is a simplistic view, clever and cynical, which overlooks the imaginative, the spiritual and the pragmatic elements that were also a part of the impulse. When I was a child it was my father who authorised the way we moved about the country, who decreed where the tracks should go, who traced the boundaries and fence lines on mud maps. Now it seems equally clear that the country exercised its own authority, which was acknowledged to a greater or lesser degree by the men who developed it. It was as if another country lay concealed under the tracery of tracks, bores and fence lines. This was the country which took hold of my father (p.232).

Freud makes the distinction that men and women possess differing forms of love and desire. Thus the way Mahood experiences the land is quite different to the way her father loved it. She admits: “I think one of the reasons I have come back here is to try to discover what is me and what is him [her father], and to separate them as best I can” (p.49). As a female she must identify and find language for her own fears and desires regarding place, speaking “in a

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141 Mahood’s writing is accessible for analysis and interpretation, even if she does explicitly object to the use of Freud’s theoretical frameworks to access her work. Reading with an attitude that advocates Barthes’ maxim – that authors should be considered “dead” – prevents readers being drawn into the intentional fallacy that sometimes limits texts to one interpretation strictly guided by the conscious intentions of authors.
different voice” to that of her father. Thus reconciliation can be informed by a feminine articulation of land, identifiable in the work of female writers such as Mahood. Earlier depictions of Australia were often recorded by men, leaving women ontologically homeless from lack of language that could have connected them with place. This left them dependent on patriarchal rhetoric to make sense of a place they were not allowed to experience deeply themselves. She writes, “It was men who explored it, men who were driven to find gold and land, and by less tangible desires to penetrate into the unknown” (p.232). The use of phallic expressions associates the experience of settlement with male desire and aggression, leaving female subjects without a language to connect with nature. For example, Mahood explores early White female perspectives of the Australian Outback, particularly writing by nuns who first came to the Tanami desert with the ‘good’ intention of building a mission for Indigenous people. However, these women “found the country full of inexplicable things and privately considered it hell on earth, it came as no surprise that the dust should suddenly wear horns and tails” (p.116). By Christians the land was ‘othered’ using the symbol of the devil – ensuring evangelism would be difficult without reconciliation with people and place. Neglecting the land of Others is of course another way of colonising the people whose culture is so intrinsically linked to its survival. In *Reconciliation: searching for Australia’s soul*, theologian Norman C. Habel describes ‘othering’ Aboriginal people and their land as fundamentally damaging to Australian race relations and crippling to the reconciliation process. In order to move forward harmoniously, he suggests adoption of the “identity principle”, which “asserts that the cultural identity of both parties in a conflict, especially that of the oppressed party, is to be valued equally and not negated as alien or ‘other.’”

What then epitomises modern female consciousness of Australia? What signifying systems do women share when experiencing and articulating place and relations with the Other? Are women placed in a superior position to reconcile with Others through their female encounter with land? Can the representation of earth as ‘maternal’ move away from the male rhetoric that conceptualised nature as female, unintelligible and material? In her second novel *Watershed* (2005), for example, Bayet-Charlton describes this link between land and its people as being like that of a mother and child:

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The sucking and pushing of the womb, through the cervix and vagina, is, to a baby, like the surging, swimming heartbeat of a river. It is the river, my soft safe mother. It is the rivers the Murray Cod swim on forever.144

Indigenous people have always separated ceremonial business of men and women. Accordingly, does nature call different people to reconciliation in different ways? Mahood writes of her experience of Tanami women’s ceremony, invoking the ‘Dreamtime’ through the power of song and dance. As the women begin singing, she explains, they hear a physical change in the land – a sound ‘like blood or water from the ground. They are singing the country and the country sings back’ (p.144). As they dance, the Indigenous women begin to wail for ancestors who once walked this land: “An archetype of femaleness is stepping its truncated rhythms in the half-dark, raising puffs of powdery dust” (p.145). Even though these are not Mahood’s ancestors, she is still able to feel the effect of this ceremony: “The Dreamtime and Aboriginal imaginings of place made visible even to outsiders like me” (144). She may be somewhat excluded from the ritual of country, stuck in an “uncanny” experience of place, but being with these women and rubbing shoulders with them is belonging to place with them: “I am tucked in, close and warm, bodies leaning into one another” (ibid). Her experience transports her beyond “uncanniness” – she is welcomed to place by participating in its ritual, accepting the earth’s invitation to belong here, with these people. Her change of consciousness is not passive, but physical, tactile and awe-inspiring as she ‘hears’ the changes around her.

However, being aware of a changing consciousness does not mean an easy or effortless awakening. It calls for a continual embracing of the Other, not just taking part in one significant event or moment. For instance, Mahood is confused and writes how the ceremony revealed her lack of “real knowledge” or “relationship with, Aborigines and their culture” (p.210). She comes to understand that only time spent with people and country will build a sense of unity with people that live here; she is left with the decision to embrace this place, the people and the moment, or “leave it [her change of consciousness] behind”. Here this section of the text ends, leaving readers to ponder the possibility of new knowledge of Indigenous people in exchange for better race relations. A change of consciousness may allow non-Indigenous subjects to forego the benefits, entitlements and privileges necessary if reconciliation is to redress Inidgenous disadvantage which is ideological as well as systemic.

Representations like Mahood’s are fundamental to a politics of reconciliation inclusive of female understandings of place that need not stem from patriarchal language structures according to this text. Mahood shares personal insights using female sexuality to discover new language to describe place as not completely male or female. A hybrid or postcolonial reality rests on the continued development of ideas and articulations of Australia, its places and people, from the female consciousness rather than the (predominantly) male. Nandy wills a change of consciousness that encompassed all struggles of

absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage.\(^\text{145}\)

Racial oppression is even more severe for those enduring struggles against the ageist, classist and sexist. Hence a paradigm of reconciliation should work to reconcile people on all these levels, because colonialism did not only institute racism, it informed all power structures of the modern world – using ‘race’ to secure White supremacy in areas such as economics, education, politics and culture. As shown in Craft for a dry lake, transformation involves more than just the ‘one-off’ encounter with the Other and demands (re)encountering Others in various ways across many disciplines and cultural experiences. While literature is but one way we can ‘do’ reconciliation, the proliferation of Indigenous texts implies that its contribution counts among many forms of encounter with the Other and place.

In Craft for a dry lake, Mahood bears witness to the young male aggression that drovers and cattlemen exuded while working with her father on ‘Mongrel Downs’ (a name that reflected the attitudes of white land-owners towards the country) p.47. However, few employees were deeply negative and resisted the land to harness control over it. As she writes: “Many whites who live here struggle to articulate an attachment over which they have no control. They leave and return, resentfully, full of anger and indigestible grief” (p.195). The emotional bond her father had with this place is atypical of other men working in the area:

He was not a cattleman at heart. When he looked at the country he did not see rolling acres and fat cattle. When he was younger he saw horizons, mystery, the unrevealed possibilities of the desert. Later he came to love the tall eucalypt forest and saw it as a respite, the place in which his spirit could be at home. I think this was a position which came naturally to him and did not derive from Aboriginal attitudes towards their country (pp.235 – 6).

Mahood is making the point that a connection to land and country is not dependent on one’s race. Whether one is Indigenous or not, there is the possibility of becoming reconciled with the Australian Outback – if it is seen from a different perspective than that bequeathed by early settlers, whose conceptions of place often polarised Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, men and women.

Yet despite the far-reaching effects of colonialism, Indigenous people have never given up their ancestral connection with place, as seen by their impressions of land, which remain so deeply rooted in their imaginations. Paradoxically, Indigenous authors now communicate with non-Indigenous subjects in a language forced on them in the process of colonisation. Is it their writing that is so powerful, or the topic of land they embrace, working to organise us textually? Perhaps the land never gave up on the people who live here, although some only begin to call it home when familiarised with it through literature. In True country for example, Kim Scott opens his novel with an invitation for his readers to embrace country: “You might stay that way, maybe forever, with no world to belong to and belong to you you’re nearly ready, nearly there you might find it’s here you belong. A place like this.”

In Craft for a dry lake, Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects are called to listen to, respect and form an emotional bond with the place that nurtures them. Nature is a powerful force, alive with a purposeful existence in cohabitation with people and other creatures. But reconciliation requires a change of heart towards a shared place, in order to imagine where it can occur. Mahood’s writing traces her own change of consciousness, admitting at first “this place had nothing for me” until leaving it she “felt something reach. An old, hard grip, subtle as blood closing about the bone.” Her literary descriptions anthropomorphise the land’s ability as a living force to touch and communicate with human beings: “The lakes pull me like a magnet to return to the old relationship that was once developed here as a child” (p.166). By writing her experience, she compels others to reconnect with their homeland too. Mahood knows, loves and understands this place as a woman, from a White mother and an Indigenous father. She is at home with who she is alongside Others: “This country is mythological, ancestral. You can’t live in it and not be touched by it” (p.250).

146 True country op. cit. p.13 (the narrative begins its first chapter on this page)
In conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with how place can be rewritten in terms of relational politics – as a home with which all subjects have an emotional bond, measured by the imaginations of readers and writers. Australian writing need not always reflect the land in scientific terms, as only being associated with geography, topography, climate, terrain, towns, sites and the ‘bush’. These approaches can overlook the many influences it has on our relationships with Others who also care about the construction of ‘home’. Preconceptions of the land as the first settlers saw it no longer suffice in a society being rebuilt through cultural reconciliation. The writing and painting of our predecessors is still a record of Indigenous struggle, reflecting the changing relationships with the land and each other. Modern writers have portrayed alternate forms of mapping country that engage the visceral and subconscious, to dream Australia anew. This chapter has argued that a politics of reconciliation appears in the polemical and evocative representations of land and place in modern Australian writing. The natural landscape, as it is portrayed in the literature, resembles not at all the dangerous, rugged and unforgiving ‘Outback’ that has long dominated rationalistic colonial accounts. Land is now written as life-giving, to be experienced haptically and loved as an authoritative being with potential to heal and organise us in relation to the Other. If there is a ‘place’ for reconciliation in literary theory, it is in the transforming depictions of the Australian landscape as our (home)land. Reconciliation is tangible and in some way measurable through literary consciousness so if we love the place we are rooted to from birth, perhaps we can mend our relationships from the ground up. Our place can indeed be transformed and (re)written out of eternal “uncanniness”, as Scott’s final words in True Country confirm: “We gotta be moving, remembering, singing our place little bit new, little bit special, all the time. We are serious. We are grinning. Welcome to you” (p.255).
Chapter 3
It’s not black and white: migrant Australians and reconciliation

This chapter is concerned with the positions of Migrant Australians and Indigenous peoples in the discourses of race relations and reconciliation as they appear in literary texts. How do Migrants relate to Australia’s history, land and culture in the context of race? Do they experience oppression in a similar way to Indigenous Australians, seeing a need for reconciliation with the dominant culture in order to free themselves from colonial power structures? Or are their experiences different? Are they disconnected from mainstream society and nationalist discourses because they want to protect their own cultural identity within a Western country? Or do they too call for and require a change of consciousness towards Others, as Indigenous peoples do? These are only a few of the questions stemming from complex discussions on who should be affectively and practically implicated in Australia’s reconciliation debates. The Migrant’s relationship with the Indigenous Other complicates the process of repairing race relations between ‘colonists’ and ‘first people’ – calling for these binaries to be done away with, redefined, and the non-Anglo Migrant Australian included in discussions about race relations.

To recapitulate the argument of this thesis, Chapter 1 established the relationship between reconciliation and Australia’s history of invasion and the Stolen Generations. This chapter will expand on this discussion, weighing up whether migrants can properly relate to a history that is not their own, gauging where Migrants situate themselves in historical discourses. Chapter 2 underlined the importance of transforming perspectives about the land we live in and share with Others. Can Migrants genuinely care for this land without identifying with its narratives and conceptual representations essentially learned from cultural immersion since birth? Complex questions involving all sides of colonisation continue to emerge when discussing reconciliation, demanding explanation in the space of this chapter.

Firstly, a brief history of Migrant emergence in Black and White discourses will be outlined in relation to the movement of Indigenous reconciliation and in the face of alternate discourses such as multiculturalism. How has multiculturalism challenged and informed present theories and experiences of reconciliation? If we accept multiculturalism as a policy, do we create a platform for better race relations? It could be argued that Indigenous writing
such as Larissa Behrendt’s *Home* (2004) resists over simplistic comparisons with Migrant Australians in a context of multiculturalism because it undermines the importance of Aboriginality, focusing too heavily on general definitions of diversity in Australia. On the other hand, authors such as Mudrooroo, Sally Morgan and Roberta Sykes illustrate through their own experiences of identity formation that colonialism has made little differentiation between Indigenous people and Migrant Australians (with darker skin colour) – repeatedly treating anyone who is not White as Black. These authors justify the position from which they write, arguing that strength against oppression comes in numbers, and capitalising on collective arguments that disempower colonisation in all its forms. Many identities contribute to the nation’s sense of identity, suggesting reconciliation is not dependent on the nation being ‘one’ people with ‘one’ identity, but understanding the composite nature of belonging, that many histories and experiences speak of being ‘at home’ here. The scope of this chapter is necessarily limited to discussing only a few Migrant groups and their position on reconciliation, yet there are many others worthy of acknowledgement and deserving of consideration when negotiating power structures and the politics of reconciliation. Asian subjects will be discussed in relation to Indigenous issues and, although Asian migrants have been discussed as one large group in this chapter, clearly they are not a homogeneous people. This generalisation is not to oversimplify the arguments but to cover more examples of how reconciliation can include larger numbers of people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The second part of this chapter will build on the ideas of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ann Curthoys and Peta Stephenson, who argue that the Migrant’s position in debates about reconciliation is necessary, but an ‘uneasy’ one to discuss. These scholars suggest Indigenous people share much more in common with Asian Migrants than their White counterparts – both experiencing displacement from an original homeland and sharing the struggle to express political identities in a Western society. However, drawing these parallels becomes ‘uneasy’ when it is understood that Indigenous people are not Migrants in their own country – they have regained significant land rights established by a deep connection with land as part of their ancient history, law and culture. The *Mabo* decision (1992) is a testament to the fact that Indigenous people have more rights to particular areas of land than those belonging to other racial groups. There are of course a few examples of Asian and Indigenous experiences crossing over in colonial and postcolonial Australia, which positively and negatively

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[147] For further Indigenous scholarship on the questions of ‘migrants’ and multiculturalism see Rosemary van den Berg’s *Noongah people of Australia: Perspectives on racism and multiculturalism.*
complicate the transformation of Australia’s political identity, making the ideal concept of one peaceful and harmonious homeland significantly difficult to conceive. The revolving nature of conflict and peace between Indigenous and Migrant groups will be explored in Indigenous author Marie Munkara’s text *Every secret thing* (2009) and used to show how unsuccessful attempts by Europeans to control race relations have effected the potential for reconciliation.

In her text Munkara adopts a humorous or ‘tongue in cheek’ style of narration to critique early Catholic missions’ approaches to ‘the coloured problem’ of mixed-race children, raising them as ‘decent citizens’ between the 1930s and 1970s (under the *Child Protection Act* for the removal of Indigenous children from their families). Some children Munkara writes of are from an Indigenous mother and European father but many are of Spanish or Asian descent as well. She highlights how many misconceptions surrounding these children threatened the larger monolithic White society, particularly if mixed-races continued to produce mixed children. Her text explores how colonial desire to maintain economic dominance over Migrant labour and keep the availability of Indigenous women to themselves was supported with institutional structures outlined in the White Australia Policy. But she also reveals how these attempts were not altogether successful at the ground level. Munkara’s characters are confronted with growing forms of racial conflict and oppression but, because of this, they form interesting allegiances with those from diverse cultural backgrounds in response to such social pressures on the mission. The dynamics of race relations in Outback Australia are made complex and unpredictable in this parody about growing up in traditional Aboriginal culture yet expected to conform to Christian doctrine and Western values without explicit freedom to choose otherwise.

It is her humorous style of writing that allows Munkara to set her Indigenous characters free from the coloniser’s gaze, diverting readers’ attention to colonial power structures using writing techniques that poke fun at colonisation and offer postcolonial critique. The techniques of hyperbole and juxtaposition, for example, allow Munkara to make fun of colonialism in the language of her colonisers, proving her ability to influence and renegotiate relationships of power in her literary world. As Bill Ashcroft argues:

> Although it [English] *can* be an ontological prison it *need* not be, for the key to post-colonial resistance is that speakers have agency in the ways they employ language to fashion their identity. The underlying assertion of this book [*Caliban’s voice*] is that colonial languages have been not only instruments of
oppression but also instruments of radical resistance and transformation.\textsuperscript{148}

Ashcroft argues that Indigenous writers are empowered by the act of using the coloniser’s language and literary structures to represent themselves and their reality. However, many may argue that Indigenous writing is not a symbol of freedom but the very confines of its existence, and that freedom from oppression relies on more than simply the publication of a text written in English. For example, Houston Baker argues, quoting William Blake: “Create a system or be enslaved by another man’s.”\textsuperscript{149} Are Indigenous authors “enslaved” by the English language? Ashcroft argues,

\begin{quote}
There is ample evidence that speakers who have been forced to speak a colonial language have felt alienated by the experience. Yet the most exciting feature of post-colonial writing has been the constant and varied demonstration of the way English can be used.\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

English is considered by Ashcroft a “global language” but modulated with “locally produced variation” and these variations point to an ownership of language being used in political and transformative ways.\textsuperscript{151} Few Indigenous writers are, for example, creating their own language ‘systems’ by experimenting with Aboriginal English, cultural themes and aggregate narrative to express creative freedom rather than being enslaved by strict literary conventions that dictate how their stories are written.

Apart from Asian subjects, also of particular interest to this thesis is how Jewish Migrants living in Australia have used the English language to open up a dialectic with Indigenous Australians, comparing – in a spirit of reconciliation – memories of exodus and genocide. Is it appropriate to compare the experiences of two very different histories or does this difficult comparison underpin a continuous dialogue that will always be awkward, but needs to be, in order to reconstruct modern Australia? From which platform do Jewish Australians speak about race relations – as a minority? John Docker argues that Jewish annexation of Palestine positions Jews as colonisers, yet in this country they have come to be colonised by White society and culture too. In the third and final part of this chapter, theories about exodus and genocide will be used as a stencil to analyse Jewish-Australian author Arnold Zable’s text \textit{the

\textsuperscript{149} Baker, Houston. A. \textit{Blues, ideology and Afro-American literature: a vernacular theory}. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, p.82
\textsuperscript{150} Ashcroft, Bill. op. cit. pp. 3 – 4
\textsuperscript{151} ibid. p.6
Fig Tree (2002)\textsuperscript{152} and to explore how this Jewish author contributes to the reconciliation debates.

**Multilateral discourses and shared colonial perspectives**

Henry Reynolds’ work in Australian/Indigenous history has broadened historical perspectives about the construction of nation by challenging historical claims that Australia was settled peacefully. His approach to reconciliation is that a shared history, and essentially a treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, will strengthen racial harmony. Dipesh Chakrabarty, however, finds fault with Reynolds’ dichotomy of a Black and White treaty based on forgiving history, arguing that Reynolds’ point of view (in *Frontier*) “does not address the non-British post-war immigrant” who shares a different history with Indigenous subjects.\textsuperscript{153} Chakrabarty supplements Reynolds’ model of reconciliation because it emphasises the history of conquest and invasion that migrant Australians do not altogether fit. He argues that opening up an alternate discourse that includes Migrant Australians in discussions about history will ensure better success for reconciliation in Australia. For example, instead of the Black and White paradigm Reynolds constructs, he conceptualises a model that offers much broader scope by basing his discussion on a postcolonial analysis of Mudrooroo’s *Us mob* as a textual example. Chakrabarty quotes a passage from Mudrooroo’s text to draw comparisons between Indigenous and Migrant Australians, suggesting they share a similar plight: “To survive, we had to become educated in the conqueror’s ways, and when we became educated we found others in the same predicament as ourselves. And so some of us read Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and Trin T. Minh-Ha.”\textsuperscript{154} The scholars he mentions speak of colonial oppression from their own cultural standpoints, yet their individual experiences are characteristic of Australian Indigenous people also struggling for power and basic human rights in this country. Mudrooroo, for example, identifies these similarities, showing what can be gained from sharing insights with Migrants and fighting for the transformation of dominant power structures in literature. Chakrabarty argues that Mudrooroo’s “colonial model” is inclusive of Black, White and Migrant perspectives of colonisation and, as a model, provides wider solidarity for prospective reconciliation. Chakrabarty affirms:

\textsuperscript{152} the’ spelt in lower case on the cover to emphasise the importance of place as central to key characters in the text.


\textsuperscript{154} ibid. p.3
We now live in an Australia in which the Aboriginal, the descendent of the European settler, and the post-war immigrant are all present. Reconciliation – the acknowledgement of the special rights and situations of the First People – has to involve us all. It is not something that happens simply between the blacks and the whites. How would history-writing reflect this multi-lateral involvement?  

Chakrabarty asks a shrewd question concerning the inclusion of migrant perspectives in Australian historiography. How are Migrant Australians implicated in Australia’s past, both before and after European colonisation? In *The outsiders within: telling Australia’s Indigenous-Asian story*, Peta Stephenson was the first academic to investigate a historical alliance between Indigenous and Asian people expressed in the arts. Stephenson explores not only the Asian and Indigenous experiences of ongoing colonial rule in Australia, but pieces together their long-shared history of relations pre-dating British occupation. She argues that Indigenous and Asian history has been significantly overlooked by many White historians in the master narratives of Australian history and that acknowledgement of the Other’s perspective is significant for national discourses on reconciliation to further develop.

Stephenson uses strong archaeological evidence to suggest that a history between Asian people and Indigenous Australians does exist, exceeding the length of contact with European settlers. For example, there is evidence to suggest that Makassans frequently visited Australia to trade with Indigenous people many years before the arrival of Captain Cook. Stephenson argues that there was no invasion or conquest by these visitors and these peoples have no need to reconcile: “The Makassans recognised the sovereignty of northern Aboriginal peoples, and made no attempt to indoctrinate Indigenes with their religious beliefs, or to take possession of the land.”156 This negates Reynolds’ theory that better race relations should be built on a treaty that recognises the conquest of country; his model of reconciliation would exclude Asian Migrants from such a nation-building process because of the very different history they share with Indigenous Australians. Yet Reynolds’ model of “reconciling history” should not be altogether discounted but used alongside Mudrooroo’s model of “shared” colonial experiences, as all historical experiences are relevant to understanding the complexities of Australia’s changing social relations between people of various racial backgrounds.

For Chakrabarty, there is a direct link between the discourses of multiculturalism,

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155 ibid. p.13
decolonisation and reconciliation. He argues that their conceptual genesis occurred at roughly the same time (after World War II) when new social movements became a phenomenon in the late 1960s to early 70s.\footnote{ibid. p.13} He lacks evidence to suggest that multiculturalism and reconciliation came to be recognised at the same time, perhaps equating reconciliation with the 1967 Referendum when Australians voted for Indigenous people to become citizens of the state and be counted in the national census. Of course Migrant Australians made citizens could vote in this referendum as well, and would have been part of the 97 per cent who voted ‘yes’ to these changes. However, reconciliation was only ever possible \textit{after} the resistance and protest movements of the 1960s, which may have possessed qualities of reconciliation but were not named as such. As detailed in the introduction of this thesis, reconciliation is better recognised as beginning in the early 1990s, since all areas of Australian culture have used the term in a more contextualised and specific way.

Undeniably, ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘diversity’ have been conceptual buzzwords for some time – arising in Australian discourses of racial identity with some continuity since the 1960s. These concepts signify a turning point in national thinking, marking hope for a decolonised world. Yet it would be idealistic to assume that all cultural groups embraced multiculturalism without tension or little anxiety towards its purpose and form. Since there is urgency to discuss reconciliation, this suggests that multiculturalism has been somewhat unsuccessful in creating a decolonised and egalitarian society in Australia to date. Inclusion of multiple cultures in everyday society has not led to completely better understandings, knowledge and love of Others.

How will reconciliation ever be realised when new ideas, presences, traditions and bodies ‘upset’ those who hang tirelessly and systemically to white hegemony? Will reconciliation be as widespread as the movement of multiculturalism has been, or is reconciliation happening in a way that is much more subtle, even unnoticed – occurring as a slow but progressive change of consciousness towards Others through the continuous production of culture? Although wanting and planning for reconciliation can be a conscious and deliberate act, formally recognised perhaps as political action, there are perhaps less obvious ways in which national consciousness is changing. Milestones or events are explicitly marked, such as the 1967 Referendum, but placing a finger on when or how people’s feelings and views towards
the Other began to change is a lot more difficult. Better race relations stems from a change in consciousness that occurs over time rather than ‘at once’ or as the result of one distinct moment, event or happening. Witnessing or measuring social transformation is not, however, altogether impossible and arguably culture can be delineated by explicating ideas, signs and symbols in Australian art and literature. Writing and painting reflect how transformation continues to operate as a complex cycle of inciting then reflecting changes to the status quo – showing how culture is not simply given or supplied to its subjects but written, captured and directed generation after generation.

Chakrabarty believes that multiculturalism has had a positive impact on race relations, as it has allowed Migrant Australians to enter into the debates about reconciliation, rather than simply “take a seat on the side and watch the show”.158 Migrants’ entrance into discourses about Australian nationalism and identity has not, however, been welcomed by all. Ann Curthoys’ research shows that by the 1980s multiculturalism was drawn together with Indigenous issues to create a powerful emphasis on cultural diversity and acceptance.159 It gave both Migrant and Indigenous Australians a platform from which to speak about their identities within the Australian context. However, Curthoys argues that the sharing of this intellectual and public space became awkward when Indigenous people protested about being incorporated within the multicultural and seen as just another group belonging to a large spectrum of ethnicity. Multiculturalism thus may be another way of naming the Other rather than considering how individuals may fit various definitions of being Australian that are not just ethnic Australian – such a term appears to be an oxymoron in dominant culture because its connotations are markedly different to naming a White Australian male.

There are many criticisms of colonial naming of concepts and structures. While a name may have positive connotations, its effects and outcomes may be inherently negative. For example, Sneja Gunew argues that “the constellation of terms – multiculturalism, ethnicity, race, postcolonialism – all have their shifting and shifty roles to play”.160 She argues the survival of minority cultures is at risk of “being overwhelmed by the master narratives of

158 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, op. cit. p.14
nationalism, globalisation and assimilationist versions of state multiculturalism.”\footnote{ibid. p. 107} Is reconciliation in danger of naming frameworks that work to colonise Others? Models of reconciliation that do not include the perspectives of minority groups in their dialogue and design, and exclude views about Migrant history with Indigenous people, can be faulted for keeping Migrant and Indigenous relationships separate and apart, as has been the case for a long time since colonisation and the establishment of the early twentieth century White Australia Policy.

Arguably there are some aspects of multiculturalism that are in opposition to reconciliation and this will now be explored in Larissa Behrendt’s novel, *Home*. Behrendt insists on defending a separate identity for Indigenous people by showing how Indigenous experiences of colonisation are markedly different to those of other racial groups. She explores how multiculturalist ideology complicates the prospects for better race relations, particularly romantic relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects, because multiculturalism does not emphasise individual cultural groups but promotes hybridity and a ‘melting-pot’ culture in the name of better race relations.

*Home*

Behrendt’s novel opens with an introduction of main character and narrator, Candice – a well educated Indigenous woman returning to her grandmother’s country “where the two rivers meet”. *Home* is a cyclical narrative beginning in 1995, before retracing Candice’s ancestors “through the years” (as Part Two is titled) between 1918 – 1982. This peripatetic novel is unified when its cyclical narrative ends in the same year it began. Over this timespan, readers learn how Candice’s grandmother was kidnapped in 1918 and made to work as a maid in the Carlyle house. She has a number of children of her own who face a life of various hardships, racism and oppression. Candice looks back on the hardships of her family’s history and concludes “the ones who win always win” (p.299) – a pessimistic ending compared to the optimistic foreshadowing occurring earlier in the text when she praises *Wuthering heights* as having a “calm hope-filled ending”. In the opening pages, for example, Candice compares herself to the female protagonist, Catherine in Emily Brontë’s classic text:

> If I were Catherine, I could have made him [Heathcliff] happy and set his demons free. I understood the meanness that grew out of him, how the crimes of one generation leave a legacy of bitterness and the stigma of prejudice and, for some, the hope of reconciliation. I relished a passionate, epic struggle and
Candice’s ‘Black’ reality is quite different to the White reality that is represented in the worlds created by Brontë and other Victorian writers of the same century, such as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. Using a dualistic approach, *Home* presents different levels of hope portrayed in the realities of Black and White characters over periods of time. In modern times, the duality of hope (represented by the White body) and despair (represented by the Black body) is still inherent but not invisible as it was in Victorian writing. Candice notes how her White friend from school, Kate, “always looked to the future, dreaming further ahead than seemed real, past the year, past high school. Yet she would do so with such conviction that I never doubted what she saw was true” (p.301). Later Candice concedes, “I cannot see into the future like Kate can” (p.309). As this story is told through the voice and mindset of Candice, the ending stays true to her belief that Indigenous people cannot escape despair, focusing on her misfortunes rather than her triumphs to define her life. For example, she refuses the love of Christoph, a man she cares for deeply; the only man who sees her as exotic – Le Aborigine, “not just some Boong or Abo” as other men have seen her. Christoph is French, however, and she is Aboriginal. When we are welcomed into Candice’s interior monologue, we see how having a relationship with Christoph makes her feel more ‘White’ than she already feels, and for this reason she chooses to end the relationship (p.15).

Ashcroft’s theory of transformation does not elaborate on how Black oppression can be reconstructed when a character is in an intimate or romantic relationship with their oppressor. Interestingly, the complexities of this are made visible in Behrendt’s text. For example, Candice fears that a relationship with Christoph would cause her to betray her Indigenous identity and thus she continues to complete her life of “martyrdom” without him (ibid.). She cannot imagine her future as optimistically as her best friend Kate, escaping instead to the “imagined worlds” created by old books, where she feels safe in the world of Victorian texts because “None of them, in my mind, mistook me as exotically Other. No mention was made of my skin colour” (p.11). Few of the classics explicitly address race, nor include many racial characters. Rochester’s first wife, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, is perhaps an exception, yet her Creole identity is only alluded to. Perhaps it is through reading texts of this era that Candice feels it is easy to love and can love without political innuendo plaguing her; the relevance of race is momentarily shrouded when she is made invisible by the assumed

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universality of whiteness that dominates these texts.

When Candice is alone with Christoph, however, she becomes conscious of her skin as a racial marker of difference. Lying together naked in the dark, she is aware of “leaving nothing between [them] but skin” (p.15). It is not until the end of the novel that Candice meets her grandmother, who reminds her how emotions mark relationships, not one’s skin-colour. On learning this, Candice thinks of Christoph, but the novel closes before revealing whether they are reconciled or not. *Home* is not a love story. Candice “can only imagine what has happened to all those who share my blood. All those loves lost to racism” (p.313). Her decision to leave Christoph is an intellectual one etched against the racist milieu of her grandmother’s time, which she has come to learn about and understand. It was once taboo to intermarry or have children of mixed race during the years of the White Australia Policy and later generations are, according to this text, still feeling the effects of such ideas institutionalised as political policy. There is recognisable need to ‘redo’ culture in this text, reflecting Ashcroft’s theory that transformation is possible for those who choose to embrace it and challenge the status quo. Unfortunately Candice refuses to reinvent herself through her relationships with Others, but through her conscious awareness of racial boundaries she already rejects the reality that has been constructed for her many generations ago. Her character develops a change of consciousness, which in itself is “a passionate, epic struggle and a calm hope-filled ending, a triumph.”

*Home* shows how romantic relationships of mixed-race can be hoped for and one day re-imagined. Although Candice does not act out the “hope of reconciliation” she looked forward to at the beginning of her story, this unforeseen and deliberately sad ending makes radical reconceptualisations of love and intimacy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies possible just by knowing her story. The topic of love and reconciliation as embodied will be addressed extensively in the next chapter, but this text does raise pertinent questions about the decolonisation of Black, White and Migrant love affairs, debunking colonial constructs of romantic love as they were once typified in English classics.

Paradoxically it is the strangers in Candice’s life – those she only encounters briefly – who racialise her subjectivity, mistake her identity and make her feel ashamed of her Aboriginality. In a time of reconciliation, Candice still experiences overt racism in this ‘changing’ world. She is continually mistaken for a migrant wherever she goes; she is
misunderstood and ill-represented, compounding her sense of hopelessness and lack of belonging further, and angering her deeply. On her way to visit her family’s community, for example, Candice stops at a nearby post office to buy a postcard. The assistant picks her as a tourist and starts a conversation about the tourist attractions in the area. Without delay Candice promptly assures her that she is visiting family just ‘outside’ town. “Oh” the woman responds, and Candice realises the shopkeeper was at first “fooled by my light skin” and has mistaken her for “exotically Spanish, Brazilian or Italian” (p.5). Her interior monologue reveals her sense of frustration:

I’m used to this reaction but still it annoys me each time I don’t mind being mistaken for someone from elsewhere, but I mind when the realisation that the dark features are Aboriginal is met with disappointment, confusion or even disgust. I mind when the person observing me feels betrayed by my lightness. (ibid.)

Her identity is often mistaken as being Caucasian, reminding her of the ignorance inherited from public memories of (or lack of remembering) what happened to her ancestors. The policies of the Stolen Generation were made possible because children could be brought up in new homes believing they were White or from a Migrant background. For example, Neil, a relative of Candice, was told he was Italian (p.150) while still to this day, another relative, Thomas, tells people he is Greek or Hawaiian (p.215). Candice struggles with her identity; at times she tries to hide away from her Aboriginality and locate herself as White, while at other times she moves towards the opposite extreme, removing herself further away from relationships with White people. Her lighter skin-colour makes her identity less visible, even obscured by the multicultural assumptions that have come to dominate her world, and for these reasons, she resists multicultural ideology and a relationship with the man she loves because being alongside a Migrant lover could obscure her subjectivity and emphasise her hybridity above that of her Indigeneity.

Behrendt does not suggest Australia should ever be ‘monocultural’ and she writes of Migrant characters affectionately using benign textual representations. For example, Chinese girl Xiao-ying is a great friend to Candice’s grandmother, Elizabeth, while German migrant, Grigor, is the father of her children. As a migrant, he speaks of how multicultural values work to disempower both migrants and Indigenous subjects, criticising multiculturalism for reinforcing the separation of outsiders and working to exclude Others collectively under national frameworks with ambiguous names. He tells Elizabeth that, “We are outsiders, you and I” and that “We need to safeguard the true international spirit which allows no
nationalism to arise and we need to capture that spirit which welcomes the proletariat movement no matter which nation it comes from” (p.102). In this text, multiculturalism is not named as a form of nationalist rhetoric. Racial alliances are possible but only when racial, cultural and historical differences are noted as a movement belonging outside of nationalist discourses, in this instance through the internationalist labour movement. Reconciliation is possible as a polemical movement because, while migrants may be politically disempowered by national politics, they can be empowered when using English to access and represent ideas freely: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t is I know how to curse.”

As discussed in a previous chapter, naming was commonly used to colonise the Other and *Home* also shows how Europeans forced Indigenous people in institutions to change their names to sound more Western, as a form of assimilation and control. Yet Behrendt’s work undermines colonial naming and suggests such naming of Others was never going to be final. Candice’s grandmother, Garibooli, for example is renamed Elizabeth in the White household she works in. Yet Candice only ever identifies her grandmother by her Aboriginal name because she will not betray her grandmother’s Aboriginality, which is linked to her own. *Home*’s ending culminates in quiet triumph as the final words read: “‘Garibooli’, I whisper. I like the way the word sounds on my tongue. ‘Garibooli’. ‘Garibooli’. ‘Garibooli’” (p.317).

**Reconciliation: going beyond a politics of inclusion and exclusion**

This thesis argues that literature is a site for counter dialogue, the articulation and interrogation of national discourses, including reconciliation, and that literature is a space where alternate subjectivities can be formed, reflecting political freedom. When Indigenous writers create novels, it constitutes a sign of their power and freedom to liberate themselves from colonisation by using the English language to represent themselves. The controversy surrounding Mudrooroo or Colin Johnson’s writing as an Aboriginal came into question in 1996 and he was criticised for being unauthentic, suggesting that only an Indigenous person defined in a particular way could comment on Indigenous issues. *Mongrel signatures: reflections on the work of Mudrooroo* argues, however, that “articulation” is more important than “authentication” when discussing issues of race and oppression. Does it matter *who* advocates for Indigenous issues if the way in which one does this is better for race relations? Mudrooroo has contributed a lot to public forums regarding the plight of Indigenous people,

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163 Ashcroft, Bill. op. cit. p.2
debunking racist misconceptions and bringing new knowledge of Indigenous people to the forefront. His poem for Ruby Langford Ginibi, for example, was written about her grandfather Sam Anderson, one of only two Aboriginal cricketers to ever get Sir Donald Bradman out for a duck, yet Mudrooroo’s work is the only space it has ever been acknowledged in writing.164 Mudrooroo is able to transform his subjectivity in a way which is flexible by knowing, understanding, loving and living alongside and as the Other. Annalisa Oboe argues that “By assuming different names, Mudrooroo is seen to be branching out and making contact with different experiences and realities around him”.165 An example of reconciliation being practised perhaps?

Writing is a practical form of renaming oneself in the world. Yet the reader’s response to such naming is also fundamental in this process. Oboe argues that readers, too, participate in the naming of characters and the authors who create them; they choose how they will receive the works of Mudrooroo, Roberta Sykes, Sally Morgan, for example: “Our own reception of Mudrooroo is part of the process of naming him, of authenticating his work and contributing to its definition”.166 Readers may accept the articulation of Mudrooroo’s work while not being convinced of his so-called authenticity. Does this allow for an open reading of all works that articulate Aboriginality even if the author is not biologically Aboriginal? What of work written by Migrants and White Australians who wish to comment on topics that involve Indigenous people, history and reconciliation? Multiculturalism has perhaps allowed for such readings to become more transparent, making language a part of how one culturally identifies. It can make a positive contribution to cultural construction when it is not utilised as a “master narrative of nationalism”. Subjectivity is flexible, as Homi Bhabha argues: “Culture is less about expressing a pre-given identity and more about the activity of negotiating, regulating and authorising competing, often conflicting demands for collective self-representation”.167 If a writer is willing and able to contribute to better race relations and articulate an understanding of knowing and loving the Other then readers can appreciate their work. Mudrooroo and Roberta Sykes have contributed to the production of new realities by

164 ibid. p.227. Similarly, I once knew an Aboriginal woman whose great grandfather, Claude Ponto, was shot by Ned Kelly during one of his attempts to arrest him. He was a tracker for the police but his story has not been publicly acknowledged either. When does the authenticity of telling this story become more important than telling it per se?
165 Oboe, Annalisa (ed.) Mongrel signatures: reflections on the work of Mudrooroo. Rodopi, New York, 2003, p. xiii For more information on what the Nyoongar people say on the matter of Mudrooroo’s Nyoongar identity see Little and Little, Eggleton and/or Scott.
166 ibid. p.38
167 Bhabha Homi K. ‘Reinventing Britain: the manifesto’ in Wasafiri, Vol.29 Spring 1999, p.38
using their skills and talents as writers to inform and construct an alternatively conceived world. Their contributions are complex because they were brought up to believe they were of Indigenous descent yet learned as adults that they were from Migrant backgrounds. Their writing may be contentious for this reason, but it shows the parallel experiences Indigenous subjects and Migrants share growing up in Australia and treated as the Other. Without their contributions, there would not be a place in reconciliation where Migrant readers can love the Other simply by empathising with the dispossession and institutionalisation that Indigenous people have endured since colonisation. These writers allow White readers to gain insight into how one can understand the Other without necessarily being of Indigenous ‘blood’, making reconciliation possible. In *My place*, Sally Morgan describes how she has come to an awareness of her Aboriginal heritage. There has been debate about whether she is deserving of the benefits of claiming Aboriginality as she recalls asking her Nan, “What people are we?” — articulating the greatest challenge to arguments concerning reconciliation and national identity. If we continue to ask what kind of people we are, we can change our material world.

A literary alliance: Asian and Indigenous subjectivities

Peta Stephenson argues that institutional racism, embedded in laws and governance, has been used in Australia to control and restrict Indigenous people and to ideologically construct their identity as well. The concept of institutional racism in colonial societies has also been termed “epistemic violence” by postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak, who writes extensively on the Indian subject in British India and shows how colonisation has worked against first peoples in a similar way all over the world. By enforcing laws and restricting certain rights of Indigenous people, the Empire was saturating the nation with White dominance and control in areas such as the economy, trade, infrastructure, education and so on. The Australian government restricted Indigenous people from voting up until 1967 and this was a way of keeping the Black Other outside dominant White culture. Similarly, the White Australia Policy was a way of keeping Asian people at bay from Australian life and borders. A history of exclusion and being kept ‘outside’ White society has ultimately led to both groups being identified by Stephenson as: “the outsiders within” (the title of her book). In White society, Asians and Indigenous people have together been labelled as representing the unwanted Other. Asians have been characterised as swamping the land, while Indigenous people are

seen as taking it through land claims. As an effect, the twinning of these groups has led to what Stephenson recognises as an “alliance”, and this alliance she argues is represented in modern art and literature. Her concept of an already existing alliance between Indigenous and Asian Australians suggests that the politics of reconciliation that exists between Black and White subjects is uniquely different and must be qualified.

Stephenson identifies that in towns and cities such as Melbourne, Perth, Darwin and Broome there has been “a renaissance in Aboriginal – Asian cultural production” that has seen the engagement of Indigenous and Asian novelists, playwrights, poets and visual artists contributing to “a new ‘cultural script’ that reflects the plurality and fluidity of contemporary Australian identities.” Stephenson’s book was the first national study of Indigenous – Asian alliances in the arts to be published; what this thesis seeks to contribute to this area of work is to address the question of how these alliances reveal a certain dimension to reconciliation and how modern fiction writing is one complex site for such dimensions.

*Every secret thing*

Marie Munkara’s *Every secret thing* was the winner of the 2008 David Unaipon Award for an unpublished manuscript by an Indigenous Australian author and, since its publication, has won the 2010 Northern Territory (N.T.) Book of the Year award. The cover of this book is rather unique and includes a large black-and-white photograph of a White middle-aged man sitting behind the wheel of an overcrowded bush vehicle. There are probably twenty Indigenous children piled in and on top of the vehicle, their arms waving for the camera. Even though the photo is black-and-white (to signify the time this story is set) the reader can still see that all these children have varying shades of Black skin. Some ‘colour’, however, has been superimposed on the photo and appears as pen scribbling on certain parts of the picture. Blue, green, pink, orange, white and yellow markings trace over the church in the background, highlight the wheel and bumper-bar of the car, refigure the grass and inscribe the sun on the back cover. The reader is warned that this is a story that satirises and scribbles over the history of Australia’s Outback Christian missions. It criticises the deliberate and intended assimilation of Indigenous children, particularly of mixed blood, that was carried out by the epistemic involvement of the Catholic church.

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170 ibid. p.12
The photo of Munkara laughing on the title page suggests perhaps that this text should be read with a sense of humour. Underneath her photo, I read the personal message she has generously signed for me with her own pen at the N.T. Writers’ Festival: “happy reading”. Although not all the content of this work incites “happy reading”, as serious themes of rape, molestation, death and suicide are dealt with in this text, references are made to make fun of the way missionaries thought they could treat Indigenous people under the ignorant belief that they could make Black people White without considering the aftermath of suicide that deracination and the struggles of resistance imply.

Munkara writes from an ‘insider’s’ perspective – as someone who may have been ‘outside’ politics by being brought up on a mission – but as a writer from this perspective can transform the ways in which the history of the missions, and the different races who lived there, are spoken about and remembered, empowering people of the past by giving them political and polemical representation. Imagery, tone and narration are the vehicles Munkara uses to transform Indigenous subjectivity in relation to the White and Migrant Other – attributes belonging to the English language but used to decolonise the Other – a technique that has been named by Bhabha “mimicry”. Speaking traditional Aboriginal languages was often banned in many missions but Munkara demonstrates how the English language can be used to make fun of and laugh at the intention and control of colonial institutions. Ashcroft’s theory of the transformation of English in postcolonial literatures reinforces the need to “celebrate the inventiveness, strength and power of writing from post-colonised cultures” by showing how Caliban used the language of his colonisers to inform many kinds of response to the colonisers.\textsuperscript{171} He uses aggression to curse Prospero while Munkara uses humour as an effective response to colonisers in their imaginary worlds. Both writings work as colonial resistance in the form of “mimicry” and may appear to conform to colonial conventions of the English language, but are in fact resistance camouflaged. As Bhabha explains: “It [writing] is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare”\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{171} Ashcroft, Bill. op. cit. p.15
The front cover of Munkara’s text does not bring into focus the Migrant’s presence on the mission or their relationship with Indigenous people. However, the inclusion of Migrant characters, such as Spaniards Mingo and Gringo and Chinese cook Wing Wong, supports a broad definition of who has relations with Indigenous people: there are perspectives that extend beyond Black and White conversations about race. Stephenson terms the inclusion of Indigenous, Migrant and White perspectives as a “triangular view” of relations in Australia. In her book, the “triangular view” is inspired by Joseph Johnson’s painting, *A game of euchre*, which shows three men, a Chinese, an Aborigine and a European, sitting at a table playing a game of cards. This painting also became an inspiration for British-born Australian novelist, Alex Miller’s *The ancestor game* (1992), in which he writes of a three-way friendship between Chinese protagonist, Feng, a White man, Patrick Nunan, and an Indigenous Australian, Dorset, who journey towards an understanding of Australia’s past. Stephenson incorporates the “triangular view” that is imagined in Miller’s text and applies it to how the discourses of reconciliation and multiculturalism may be thought about and understood. However, there are significant Others missing from Stephenson’s paradigm, such as Afghans who also helped to build Australia’s infrastructure alongside the Chinese. The theory of identity is a paradox in this sense because it marks difference through the process of exclusion. Stephenson’s work is also limited when discussing feminist views of Australia’s Asian and Indigenous history, but it shows that nationalism has in the past been constructed and dictated by men – voices of Indigenous, White and Asian women have been silenced from history’s main manuscript. Although Stephenson’s paradigm of “the triangular view” is not altogether new and only uses men as its example, it is still very useful because it emphasises that broad perspectives should be part of our definitions and frameworks of race relations, something we are beginning to see in the politics and polemics of Australian writing being discussed in this chapter.

The mission Munkara writes of is a patriarchal place itself: the priests are in charge, followed by brothers, who are considered superior to nuns. The sisters are often taken advantage of sexually, judged and even mentally and emotionally antagonised by a few of the brothers running this establishment. There are other men here too, some Indigenous, but mostly those who come in from town to work at the mission because it is terribly run down and in need of repairs and renovations. The author writes:

But the buildings weren’t the only thing that had expanded over the last twelve months. Many a trim
black waistline had also grown as a consequence of the passionate indulgences of the emigrants who had been shipped in for the rebuilding and, much to Father Macredie’s unease, black births were becoming more the exception than the rule as coloured births steadily grew at an alarming rate. Two Spaniards by the names of Mingo and Gringo were, in Father’s eyes, the worst offenders. They openly caroused with the young women, lavishing them with inexpensive gifts that they had shipped over in bulk on the barge with the building supplies. It was obvious by the big aquiline nose that was appearing on the little newborn faces with alarming regularity that a good proportion of the coloured babies were the offspring of these busy and very productive brothers.¹³

Munkara’s narrative is unconventional and she reminds the reader here that the narration is from “Father’s eyes” and likely to be biased by his very feelings of “unease” channelled towards the Migrants, who are probably named by him, with labels that ridicule through rhyme and definition. For example, “Gringo” literally means ‘alien’ or ‘undesirable foreigner’ and is used especially by Latin Americans to refer to White Americans or British. It is the former meaning of ‘Gringo’ that Father Macredie intends in his usage of the term, but it is the latter meaning of the word that appears in the joke about the White priest, who is most likely of British ancestry himself. He has preconceptions about the Migrant men’s sexual behaviour, making criticism of their behaviour, suggesting it is them impregnating young Indigenous women on the mission because it is Spanish men who have big, hooked noses and must pass on these genes to all their offspring. Their relations with Aboriginal women at the mission are not presumed to be characteristic of love but, rather, the consequence of cheap gifts and we are told how effectively bribing works on easily persuaded Aboriginal women. However, on the subsequent page, Father Macredie comes to realise that “Kwarikwaringa’s three-month-old coloured baby girl looked nothing like the two brothers” and actually a lot like Brother John (p.78). The mirror of critique is held to the faces of these religious men employed to ‘protect’ Indigenous people but instead compete for sexual access to Aboriginal women. Mingo and Gringo are sent home and the brothers are left with the women to themselves: “And no-one thought to ask those men of the mission who pretended to serve their god but instead were busy helping themselves to the black women what they were going to do about the kids they’d fathered, did they?” (p.79).

In The outsiders within, Stephenson argues that the need to undertake restrictions on Asian/Indigenous labour and sexual unions was the result of “white colonial anxiety about an ability to maintain sole possession of the country and its resources.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ ‘New cultural scripts: exploring the dialogue between Indigenous and “Asian” Australians’. op. cit. p.59
priest and brothers seek to maintain control of Indigenous and Migrant people for their own personal gain and to extend their superiority. This is emblematic of the larger “white colonial anxiety” that fuelled control of Australia’s Indigenous and Migrant people on a macro level everywhere. For example, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, attempts were made in certain parts of Australia to restrict Asians and Indigenous people from engaging in sexual relationships. In 1897, Queensland introduced the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* to separate these communities and control the movement and activities of Indigenous people, including the removal and relocation of children of mixed descent from their families and traditional homelands.  

This measure was introduced largely because of claims by missionaries and humanitarian lobbyists, who complained to government officials that Indigenous people needed protection from exploitation, disease and the abuse of alcohol and opium. The art of Munkara’s humorous storytelling is her ability to expose the hypocrisy of particular characters in relation to these laws in her own literary world. For example, if the mission was meant to ‘protect’ Indigenous and Migrant people from the abuse of alcohol under such laws, then they are revealed to have categorically failed – when discussing what to do about Mingo and Gringo’s “lustful affairs” with the Indigenous women at the mission, Brother John suggests, “Why don’t we spend some of the money we saved by employing migrants on alcohol for them? That way they’ll be too pissed to go chasing the women” (p.78). While considering this a possibility, they get drunk themselves on bottles of whisky. Readers learn that the Indigenous people on the mission are not in danger from the circulation of opium from Migrants, but from the distribution of illicit drugs such as marijuana, which is being handed out in ration packs by the “mission mob”. Yet the “bush mob” used leftover seeds in the ration packs to plant and grow their own marijuana, rather than depending on the missionaries to supply it: “They must have been doing something right because no-one died or got poisoned, they just got really, really happy and their smiles got even bigger” (p.132).

Munkara shows how particular characters deliberately defy restrictions placed on them, and do so with a sense of defiance. In the story we learn of a very young Indigenous girl, Juta, who is promised in marriage to an Aboriginal man, Djamu, against her will. Juta is a willing and consensual participant in three affairs but is not free to have more than one husband. She

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175 *The outsiders within: telling Australia's Indigenous – Asian story* op cit. p. 62
176 *Loc. cit.*
cannot even have one of them to help raise her newborn daughter. She is left on the fringes under the control of Father Macredie, who arranges for her to marry Caleb, a lonely young man who plays an instrument in the mission’s band and who is seeking a wife. She is ‘protected’ but remains voiceless; only her eyes signify that she is not disappointed when she finally has the chance to look properly at Caleb. She does not speak but watches “the road falling away behind them as she headed into the unknown” (p.87). The Aboriginal woman certainly has a presence in Munkara’s text; yet she does not speak. What may appear as the continued silence of the subaltern woman finds voice in the very way she is represented – it is her very silence that communicates volumes about the feminist challenges to building race relations with men, whether they are White or Migrant.

The inbuilt psyche of ‘protection’ that was instituted in the 1800s by colonial rule remains prominent. Arguably, reconciliation is a discourse about bringing people ‘together’ but such a concept is in danger of reinvesting in the culture of ‘protection’, which history has already seen, whereby Indigenous people were considered vulnerable, dependent and at risk of their own demise, therefore needing to assimilate in to White culture. As a way of challenging these systemic myths, Indigenous leaders espouse the notion of ‘self-determination’ when discussing politics and policies about Aboriginal people lacking control over their lives and communities. Is it believed that a community that is ‘out of control’ is perhaps easier to ‘control’ from without? Does reconciliation ever fall under an attempt to control a community seen as out of control but named as ‘working together’?

The use of naming is a form of colonising the Other. Like Mingo and Gringo, the naming of the Chinese cook in this text is also significant and has racist connotations implied within the subtext. Wing Wong is a name (like Gringo) that allows the “mission mob” to degrade the Chinese man. The use of alliteration implies reference to a practical joke children once played over the telephone: children would dial a random phone number and after a stranger picked up the phone, they would put on a Chinese accent and asked if a Mr Wing was there; On hearing ‘no’, the children asked if a Mr Wong was there. If again the answer was ‘no’, they would quickly reply before hanging up: “Sorry, I must have Wing the Wong number”. Humour was used to make fun of the Asian Migrant’s accent and limited grasp of the English language. In Munkara’s text, humour is used to show how White characters excluded the
Chinese from mainstream society, particularly fatherhood. For example, readers learn that Juta had “an arrangement” with both Harold and Wing Wong because she did not want to disappoint either of them. Yet Harold is certain when he looks into the face of Tapalinga that “she was definitely his child; she was too white to be that damned Chinaman’s” (p.86). The tone of his remark displays his ethnocentric belief both in the superiority of White skin-colour and a “white colonial anxiety” that sees the need to continue the dominance of White skin-colour through reproduction.

However, relations between Indigenous people and Asians have not always been restricted and challenged. During the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, before colonisation and the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous Australians in the north experienced annual visits from fisherman and traders from Makassar. Stephenson argues that:

1788, the starting point of Australia’s white settler history, belongs to a continuum of visits and is neither foundational nor final. The British arrived years after Asians had negotiated economic and social relationships with Indigenous communities.  

These longstanding relationships were sadly overlooked and denied in 1906 when Makassan visits were made illegal by the Australian government. Stephenson argues that the Aboriginal communities in contact with Makassans were not informed by the government of these new laws and were instead left wondering why the Wet season of 1906 – 07 came and went without an Indonesian boat to be seen.

In *Every secret thing*, the history of Indigenous and Makassan relations is represented and characters defy restrictions placed on them. In the chapter ‘The Immaculate Misconception’ Puntaninga is born to an Aboriginal mother and Indonesian father. We read that while her mother, Wuninga, is washing herself in the sea, her husband is “busily harvesting trepang a few hundred miles further down the coast at a place known to him and his crew as Mani Mani” (p.38), perhaps a place not ‘mapped’ under this name but known to the men who are familiar with the history of fishing in this area and the Indigenous people they share it with. We come to understand that this history has been overlooked by the missionaries/White Australians and has become a great “misconception” (as this chapter is titled). Munkara explains how:

A Macarresse prau [Indonesian boat] owner and captain from Barrang Lompo [a village on the island

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177 ibid. p.22
of Celebes in Indonesia], Bapa Upa [luck] had paid many visits to the shores of the bush mob, although
the mission mob would have you believe otherwise. No, the Maccassans\textsuperscript{178} have never been here,
they’d say, apart from the bush mob, we were the first (p.37 – 8).

The “mission mob” had no idea who had fathered Puntaninga. Once the colour of her skin
darkened, she looked just like the other “bush mob kids” and the “mission mob” were still
none the wiser. Even though Asian people and Indigenous people were separated by laws in
Australia, here at the mission they are placed together as Black – Other. Both racial groups
are discriminated against in similar ways and experience isolation from mainstream culture,
keeping them as ‘outsiders within’. Rather than turning against each other in order to win
status and power within mainstream society, Stephenson argues that enforced separation was
instead a “vehicle for the revitalisation of their [Asian and Indigenous] connection, and
perhaps most importantly, to be agents of their own identities.”\textsuperscript{179}

Munkara's text \textit{Every secret thing} portrays the ways in which Asian, White and Migrant
views and relationships overlap and at other times break down. Forced separation was clearly
a pre-emptive measure to control relations and ensure White control and dominance.
Discussing reconciliation from a “triangular view” creates better vision of what a paradigm of
reconciliation could look like and how it could be assessed. Reconciliation, as it appears
textually, acknowledges the breakdown of Asian and Indigenous relationships and thus the
significant damage done to the welfare and identities of these communities.\textsuperscript{180} Reconciliation
must mean recognising the longstanding history between Indigenous people and
neighbouring Asian communities that existed long before European settlement. While Asian
people may not share a history of conquest and invasion, their entry to Australia as citizens
means they are the beneficiaries of this history too: reconciliation is not only a two-way
discussion between Black and White Australians; there are multiple seats at the table that
informs the reconciliation debates, its definitions and frameworks. As the first part of this
thesis has argued, there are many reasons that Migrant Australians are implicated in the
concern for Australia’s race relations of the past, present and future. There may be an

\textsuperscript{178} The spelling in this quote of “Maccassans” is different to Stephenson’s spelling “Makassans” and thus both
are used in each context relevant to the author.
\textsuperscript{179} ibid. p.57
\textsuperscript{180} An Indigenous elder from Elcho Island once said in relation to the outlawing of Makassan visits to
Australia’s northern shores in an interview with Stephenson in 2004: when “the business has been stopped that
was the biggest impact in Yolngu society because they were making families.” ibid. p.23
understanding of colonial rule and the experience of being treated as the Other, a history of social and economic relations that exceeds the two hundred and so years of Australia’s colonisation or there may be a similar understanding of cultural beliefs, practices, signs and symbols.

Of course not all Migrants are from Asia and enabled to participate in the discourses of reconciliation based on these grounds. Jewish Migrants from the Middle East and Europe, for example, have a different interest in relations with Indigenous people. Jews and Indigenous Australians may not share a prolific history but both have experienced ‘genocide’. Unlike Indigenous Australians, however, Jews have been accused by the Palestinians of reciprocal racism, the invasion and the colonisation of Palestine – positioning them in the debates as both colonisers and colonised.

The imagining of a Jewish and Indigenous Australian race alliance in the *Fig Tree*

African author Arnold Zable is of Polish-Jewish origin and migrated to Carlton, Victoria with his parents when he was a small boy. His novel *the Fig Tree* (2002), is auto/biographical in most parts and describes his home in Melbourne with fond vividness. He takes the reader to faraway places, Ithaca and Greece, to explore the concepts of migration, home, identity and belonging in two worlds – here and there. Zable writes in English but has a deep respect for the Yiddish language and Jewish stories, seeking to preserve the literature of his ancestors, particularly poetry and song, by writing of them in his literary pastiche:

> These writers were among my first mentors. They gave me a vision of my past that was both magical and terrifying. They enabled me to move in two worlds – both the neighbourhood in which I was raised, and the world of my forebears who had fled here from troubled lands. Their books were written in *mamme loschen*, the mother tongue, a language in which my elders could express their longings and ideals. This was the short-lived miracle known as Yiddish literature, and this tiny cottage on the edge of the world had helped preserve it.181

Zable shows how the preservation of Yiddish literature has preserved the memories of Jewish

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181 Zable, Arnold. *the Fig Tree*. Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2002, p. 209. Writing, thus, has two functions: to transform the world, as Ashcroft theorises, to make it “better”, and the second function is to preserve language, memories and cultural values that inform the future of the new world being created. “To be a writer is to search for the contradictions that exist within us all because injustice cannot be forgotten, because there are things that must not be unsaid” (p.139). Writers do not set out to decide the function of their work – to ‘transform’ or ‘preserve’ culture – this is perhaps more a natural process that takes place in a writer’s subconscious. These functions do not appear to be in opposition with one another, but what may be contested, are the moral discourses of a text or whether its themes represent positive or negative implications for a changing world.
homelands, even after his ancestors have long passed away, showing how literature that evokes memories is also a form of resistance writing because it appears camouflaged as ‘memoir’ but works in more dynamic ways of transformation. As Zable notes, it was Yiddish literature that allowed him to more authentically exist in two worlds – as an Australian Jewish Migrant.

To accurately capture the nostalgia that consumes his relatives, Zable quotes the address of a Yiddish poet, Melekh Ravich, who visited Melbourne in 1933 and spoke to fellow Jews now living in Australia. He writes:

*Do not throw out the mother tongue. Acclimatise but do not assimilate, was the poet’s catch-cry. There is space enough here to accommodate difference, and to absorb the treasures of many worlds (p.197).*

Ability for first-generation Migrant Jews to connect to a land that Indigenous and non-indigenous people call their home is problematic for the process of reconciliation dependent on “participatory belonging” for its success. Ghassan Hage coined the term “participatory belonging” to explain how citizenship and belonging are based on ‘caring’ about the nation and building relations with Others through active involvement and participation in the community.182 As was discussed in Chapter 2, a love, knowledge and understanding of Australia, its people and a sense of place seem necessary elements for reconciliation to take ‘place’. It is dependent on citizenship involvement, but this could include the creative writing and artistic projects to depict nation and the deeper commitment one elucidates with nation through feelings and motivations of love.183 Raimond Gaita contends that reconciliation depends on a relationship with one’s country that is “different from, and in many respects deeper than, citizenship” and calls it an “identity-forming relationship” that goes beyond the respect, loyalty, obligation and gratitude a newly naturalised immigrant might feel.184

Zable concedes this same dilemma, which Hage and Gaita identify, explaining how many new Jewish Migrants feel torn between the old world and the new when first moving to Australia:

*This is the fate of many first-generation migrants. It is the curse of being torn between coming and going, between new worlds and ancient longings. It is the state of mind in which one ponders, “Where do I belong? Where is my true home?” It is the state of spirit in which one oscillates between confusing*

184 loc. cit.
The oscillation between feeling excited about coming to a new home but feeling as if one does not truly belong in an unfamiliar place, is somewhat like the “uncanny” feelings many White citizens may also feel about their place in Australian culture. Zable explains how for many Jews there are elements of gratitude towards place and people for being saved from persecution in their original homeland. Gaita argues how this gratitude is typical of naturalised citizens but perhaps not identified with the experience of White Australians born here. *the Fig Tree* articulates the ambivalent feelings of many European Jews coming to Australia, calling it both a “blessing” and a “curse”. Zable’s ancestors were blessed to be saved from the violent persecution of Hitler and Stalin, but leaving one’s homeland in a state of exile is certainly a painful experience, “a curse” resulting from Nazi occupation in Europe.

Analogous to Jewish Migrants’ finding a haven in Australia, Indigenous people have expressed ambivalence about growing up in Christian missions. Many have explained how missions were a blessing in the sense that Aboriginal people were protected from racist shootings and the deliberate poisonings of Indigenous people in White communities, and because they were given adequate food and supplies and immediate medical attention after coming into contact with introduced diseases, after their main food sources became significantly low due to pastoral land clearing. But the missions also cursed the culture of Indigenous people by quashing the use of their first languages, prohibiting spiritual practices and separating them from their family and homelands. For example, Ruth Hegarty’s autobiographies *Is that you Ruthie* and *Bittersweet journey* detail her fond memories of time spent at Queensland’s Cherbourg Aboriginal Mission while regretting the disconnection from a traditional lifestyle and the loss of her mother’s Gunggari language. Finding a new and redefined sense of belonging in Australia has been a personal and political struggle for both Jewish Migrants and Indigenous people, but for clearly different historical reasons.

This dualism of this “bitter-sweet”, which Hegarty names, and “a blessing and a curse”, which Zable identifies, is personified in John Docker’s apt analogy of colonial history and its implications for future generations. He writes: “Every utopian desire is shadowed by its dystopian double, that Utopia and Dystopia are allegorical twins spinning through space and
time, clasping and clawing at each other, creating and devouring amidst history’s ruins”\(^\text{185}\). Indigenous Australian literary genres are classified in much the same way, depicting tropes of colonial dystopia and postcolonial eutopic possibilities. Writing of early colonisation, the demise of Indigenous people and their culture and violent resistance to mainstream culture constructs an Australian identity that is recognisably dystopic. Emerging texts representing postcolonial freedoms, social transformation, reconciliation and reclamation of land and human rights epitomise utopic visions and the political possibilities that inform structural change. There is no easy emancipation from an “uncanny” identity. In search of a national desire for reconciliation, we begin to understand its many complex forms and opposing doubles. Reconciliation may not be the symbolically purified sanctum and collective configuration that an idealistic paradigm promises, but even then, this pure model would only be seen as ideal in the eyes of the dominant society, which sacrificed little of its own cultural attributes for the benefit of what it may see as having only one national view. Reconciliation may mean coming to terms with and embracing “uncanniness” as a state of relations that respects strangeness and familiarity – memories as well as new beginnings. Reconciliation will include the many Migrant, Black and White discourses (each multiple in themselves) by understanding that this conversation is ongoing; that new cultural understandings and improved relations are represented by the metaphor of the palimpsest – writing over but not erasing existing text – becoming but not altogether leaving behind.

Julia Kristeva explores French dynamics of nationhood, arguing we are all foreigners to ourselves as much as we are in relation to Others; but this can only enrich the idea of a nation.\(^\text{186}\) She writes:

Indeed, I am convinced that, in the long run, only a thorough investigation of our remarkable relationship with both the other and strangeness within ourselves can lead people to give up hunting for the scapegoat outside their group, a search that allows them to withdraw into their own ‘sanctum’ thus purified: is not the worship of one’s ‘very own,’ of which the ‘national’ is the collective configuration, the common denominator that we imagine we have as ‘our own,’ precisely, along with other ‘own and proper’ people like us?\(^\text{187}\)

Jewish perspectives enrich the idea of nation and reconciliation. In Zable’s Australian tale he includes Jewish beliefs and cultural practices, applying key concepts to the understanding of reconciliation. For example, he writes of the ancient Jewish practice *filoxenia*, or “the love of strangers,” which is the sacred bond that exists between host and guest: “It is the practice of


\(^{187}\) ibid. p.51
welcoming the outsider, the passing seafarer” (p.166). Such a concept is reminiscent of the relationship between Indigenous people and the Makassans, falling short however of government attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees. In response to mounting fear and hysteria towards asylum seekers, Zable read the following passage from *The Fig Tree* at the Northern Territory Writer’s Festival in 2010:

Perhaps we need to venture out and become seafarers again. We need to see the ropes being untied and flung on board. We need to cast off and watch the gap grow between water and earth. To drift awhile, beyond sight of all land. And then return, and see the continent anew. To see that it is an island after all. We need to approach with nothing but the clothes on our back, and hope that awaiting us is not one-eyed Cyclops, ready to hurl us into the sea, but people of good heart. Perhaps then, we will recall that our own forebears were strangers who approached these alien shores by boat (p.168).

For Zable, the worst outcome for a refugee is not necessarily the prospect of dying at sea but the cruel dispossession and even worse privation of being considered less human and denied recognition as a social being while never being welcomed to the definition of humanity. Reconciliation therefore extends to a conversation about who is welcome to Australia and why, and who has the power to prescribe relations with people who have not yet reached their destination and intended home.

The process of racialisation and othering has for a long time separated people on the basis of their skin-colour. Racial appearance has dictated whether one can be said to ‘fit in’ or is a threat to a nation’s self-image. In Australia, White people are assumed to fit the category of belonging because their majority status renders them invisible in a country racialised by this same group. Ethnic migrants, on the other hand, are not White but can still ‘fit in’ if they have assimilated into Western culture. As Bhabha theorises, people of race ‘fit in’ by way of “colonial mimicry” – a subject engages in mainstream society and is almost the same but still looks different.188 Those who neither belong to whiteness nor ‘fit in’ to White socio-political expectations are left as outsiders, and may be seen as a potential threat to Australia’s security and way of life. Is it inherent that citizens want to defend geographical and symbolical borders from perceived internal or external threats? Hage argues that the nation is experiencing “paranoid nationalism” – a feeling of being challenged by Others – even if they are not “an external threat, deteriorating the relationship between the national subject and the motherland.”189 If a nation is not willing to give hope to refugees or Indigenous people, it is not because it is full of immoral people as such; it is because such members of the nation lack

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189 Hage, Ghassan. op. cit. p. 39
broader political feelings of hope. Hage argues that a hopeful nation reflects people who are hopeful of themselves as well as Others; thus investing in reconciliation extends to Migrant discourses about nation and belonging because they raise the issue of hope for the nation.

Zable believes that stories link us to collective pasts and, above all else, identify each of us as human. He believes that all humans have the ability to do good or bad in the world. Thus, humanity will be in a continual state of being at war and at peace with one another. He writes: “This is how the pendulum swings, from a coarse bluntness to unexpected tenderness. These are the two sides of our warring natures, the cruelties and kindnesses that govern our lives” (pp.142 – 43). the Fig Tree observes the philosophy that reconciliation will inevitably be an ongoing flux of hostility, tension, anxiety, war, understanding, oneness and love because it concerns humans in this process of nation building in a postcolonial context.

Zable’s work can be analysed as presenting a paradigm of reconciliation from a Migrant’s perspective, which is quite different to Stephenson’s “triangular view”, and asks one to understand the Other as human. Such rhetoric is common when discussing reconciliation with the principles of equality and human rights. Identifying ourselves and the Other as ‘human’ can be useful in absolving the typical binary of Black and White in the reconciliation debates, and thus including the Migrant Australian by neutralising cultural differences on the basis of human interest. If people are first categorised as ‘human’ rather than belonging to a ‘race’, we could set aside all that is understood as Other and difference might be accepted within dominant Western understandings of what it means to be ‘human’. On the contrary, Wendy Brady and Michelle Carey argue that “to merge all beings into a common identity of ‘humanity’” does not work to “dispel whiteness”, and therefore if the nation became “colour-blind” it would have the “inability to ‘see’ the imposition of power over those who are different.” Approaching reconciliation from a ‘human’ perspective, rather than a racial one, can be problematic when the ‘human’ identity becomes a priority in a globalised world and devalues Australia’s minorities for hegemonic purposes and neglects the dynamics of Australia’s own unique relationships with Indigenous people. Acknowledging race and humanity in the language of race relations further assists in teasing out some of the

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190 ibid. p.9
complexities of reconciliation as it is represented textually.

In his first chapter, ‘Telling tales’, Zable advocates the power of storytelling with an eloquent passion that speaks to the main enquiry of this thesis: that literature can ‘do’ reconciliation by creating social visions etched in words. As Ashcroft argues, fiction writing is immensely powerful and colonised subjects can use language to transform the world by re-imagining how the world should be reconstructed. Reconciliation can perhaps be forged from textual design as polemics work to rename and conceptualise the world in the way we see Others. In *the Fig Tree* Zable shows his readers that stories change or alter the way we see the future but it is also important for us to remember the past in this process of change and transformation too. For him, telling stories and listening to each other are an obligation to be met in all our relationships:

> Ultimately, we tell stories because we must. Stories are what make us human. Stories can reveal a forgotten past. Stories can uncover hidden injustices and record the contradictory impulses that drive us. And stories link us to the wisdom of our collective pasts (p.5).

Indigenous Australians have a recognisable history with Asians and Europeans that directly involves these racial groups. But can Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians recognise a “collective past” with Jewish Migrants who arrived here as colonists with the First Fleet and then in much greater numbers after World War II? It is believed that there were at least eight and possibly up to fourteen Jews present on the First Fleet, which arrived in Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788. But these Jews were not othered or racialised because they were seen as essentially British. Their differences were not marked by race but by religion. They did not enjoy the same rights as Christians, but looked White and behaved in mostly the same ways to ‘fit in’. However, their religious differences did eventually render them different and in the 1850s Jewish Australians struggled for the right to set up their own charity organisations and celebrate their religion more openly.

In the early twentieth century, in Australia and internationally, Jews suffered great ridicule and were made the archetypal Other in the form of cartoon drawings that appeared in public newspapers because of their religious differences. They were depicted with big noses and dark clothing, but such typecasting was targeted at Jews who had recently arrived from Europe to Australia and emphasised them as being Migrants rather than as a religious group.

193 ibid. 94
Needless to say, these people did not suffer the same prejudice and discrimination as Indigenous people have. They could still speak their first language or Yiddish if they chose to and practise spirituality in their own schools and communities – a privilege that was made possible by the efforts of former White Jews who had settled here in the century before.

Jews arriving in Australia enjoyed many more privileges than their Indigenous counterparts and perhaps came here with the view that Australia was a large and lucky enough country to make for a Jewish homeland. Hilary L. Rubinstein argues that in the 1930s Jewish settlers moved into northern Australia with the same intent as those Jews who moved into Palestine – to turn arid deserts into fruitful and fertile districts for farming. Docker also observes that in this account, migration history in Australia is an extension of White beliefs about *terra nullius*. The state of Israel has been accused of making Palestinians strangers in their own land, and this narrative has led to further suspicion and alienation of Jews in Australia. However, since World War II, memories of the Jewish Holocaust have changed the representation of Jews as Others and Jews are commonly represented as pathetic victims forced into exile from their European homelands. Their representation in history potentially shifts from being agents of colonisation to victims of assimilation in new homelands – making their position in the reconciliation debates deeply complex because they speak from an eyewitness or first-hand position about war, genocide and displacement.

After World War II there was greater pressure on Australia to receive Jewish refugees from Europe and, as an allied force, for Australia to show extended disapproval of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the arrival of European Jews was met with considerable hostility from the Australian Jewry who still saw them as ‘aliens’ rather than fellow Jews. Middle Eastern Jews were treated with greater suspicion and contempt and in 1954 the Department of Immigration distinguished them as different to Australian or European Jews based on their race and classified them as ‘Eurasian’ under the White Australia Policy. The positioning of

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194 Docker, John. op. cit. p.172
195 loc. cit.
196 Aboriginal elder, William Cooper, has been honoured with his own memorial and garden at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. Cooper led a protest march in Melbourne against the treatment of Jews in Germany only weeks after Kristallnacht in 1938. Lyons, John. *The Weekend Australian*. July 31 – August 1, 2010, p.4. This article demonstrates the reciprocal nature of reconciliation under the paradigm of respect for all human beings. Cooper demonstrated an ability to show compassion and empathy for those who had had their stories burned and their properties destroyed.
197 Stratton, John. op. cit. p. 325
198 ibid. p.329
Australian Jews at the table of reconciliation is somewhat of a multifaceted quagmire: the plurality of the Jewish identity means they do not fit neatly into Stephenson’s “triangular view”, which argues that Asians have a relevant place in the reconciliation debates because of a shared history with Australia as a neighbouring country and a shared sense of discrimination with Indigenous people (although this may also be true for some Jews). Zable’s writing can be overgeneralised at times but even so, *the Fig Tree* enlightens discussions of how Jews identify with Others in Australia because of their shared humanness, their persecution, discrimination and above all their will for a better world.

In this text, Zable gives an example of a Jewish perspective of Indigenous Australians and describes how a visiting Jewish poet, Melekh Ravich, encountered ‘Outback’ Aborigines and took a number of photographs to record his observations of Others during the 1930s. Zable writes: “Ravich drew his audience into the heart of Australia’s hidden shame. While he displayed some of the prejudices of the times, and depicted Aborigines as a lost and dying race, in his photos he stands beside them, on equal ground”. Ravich was photographing Indigenous people as a “dying race” but he arguably captured the same despair and hopelessness that is portrayed in so many photos of Jewish prisoners in Nazi concentration camps in Auschwitz, and elsewhere for instance, waiting to be saved from death. Ravich visited Aboriginal people and “noted their troubled eyes. He could see in them a familiar look, the gaze of the outsider, of a people estranged within their own land. He could see, also, their ability to travel light. They too were eternal travellers, forever on the move, hunting and foraging for survival” (p.195). “Travelling light” is perhaps a metaphor for not giving in to dominant powers despite what those powers have taken away from them, both spiritually and culturally. Many Jews survived the Holocaust under the most horrific of circumstances, but it was their will to survive that has meant they lived to tell their story. Ravich observes that the Aborigines he met had this same determination to survive, as if they too had witnessed the genocide of their own people, a “hidden shame” of history. He observes that many Jews have much in common with Indigenous Australians, particularly their rendering of debates about ‘genocide’ and collective trauma. Is there a shared understanding between Indigenous people and parts of Australian Jewry who relate to the impositions of feeling hatred yet wanting to forgive; a desire to change the future of the world without having to negotiate the importance of public memory?

Asians and Indigenous Australians suffered similar repression under colonialism in Australia
and these groups formed artistic allegiances to pursue political identities that were not considered inferior to those of Whites. Their similar struggles formed an intersection where discourses of reconciliation and multiculturalism could meet. But can we compare the violent wars inflicted on Indigenous people during the invasion of Botany Bay and the later policies of the Stolen Generations with the Jewish Holocaust? Is it in any measure equivalent to compare the removal of 20,000 to 50,000 Indigenous children of mixed descent from their families and homelands with the murder of six million Jews (gypsies, homosexuals and disabled people) by Nazi Germans? Many argue that under the definition of genocide given by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Australia is guilty of the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group” and the Bringing them home report was evidence of a crime against humanity. On the other hand, there are those such as Inga Clendinnen who argue that the term ‘genocide’ should be less general and more clear cut and that Australia’s history of invasion and the Stolen Generations should not be considered ‘genocide’ because the perpetrators in these events were well-intentioned. She argues that although Indigenous people suffered terrible hardships, Australia’s ‘protection’ policy was unlike The final solution because Indigenous people did not end up in mass graves. Similarly, Christopher Pearson, a former speechwriter for John Howard, argues, “There is no sensible comparison between post-contact Australian history and Hitler’s slaughter of 6 million Jews, whose sufferings it demeans for the sake of a rhetorical flourish.” His argument of a “rhetorical flourish” in the History War debates echoes the stance of conservative and right-wing thinkers who accuse a “new class” of left-liberal intellectuals of meddling with the definition of ‘genocide’ and using it as a weapon to reinforce cultural hegemony. There is an eminent struggle between left and right politicians to define history according to their beliefs about Australia’s past. But perhaps it is this arguing to-and-fro that in fact builds a nation and contributes to its narrative. This narrative may appear to be divisional but may be a necessary process in the cosmogony of social repair that reconciliation hopes to achieve. As A. Dirk Moses argues:

No factions of the intelligentsia, particularly the left and right-wing factions with their absolute answers to “the past”, are able to impose themselves. Such a public sphere is the basis of a “self-critical

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200 ibid. p.130
201 ibid. p.143
202 ibid. p.136
203 Moses, Dirk A. ‘Coming to terms with genocidal pasts in comparative perspective: Germany and Australia’, Journal of Aboriginal history, Volume 25, 2001, p.92
“community” and it permits the problems highlighted by the perpetrator trauma to be addressed against an open horizon about the meanings of the past.  

Is there, as Moses argues, an open horizon against which the truth can be constructed? Surely reconciliation is not dependent on which side of politics has the power of persuasion to “impose themselves” in the minds of subjects at the time. As this thesis argues, politics, along with historical argument, are only two of many facets belonging to the discourses of reconciliation, and neither are able to directly answer the many questions that stem from issues of colonisation. However, there is power to be found in what Moses suggests, the ability for a community to be self-critical. This is perhaps one of the most honourable traits a colonial society could adopt, and being able to critique societal prejudices and the roots of colonisation is the most valuable tool invested in the process of reconciliation. Literature and literary criticism is one mode by which a society can construct and project a culture that values self-criticism as key to reconciliation – thus a mode of ‘doing reconciliation’.

It is difficult to find an acceptable definition of the term ‘genocide’ when discussing the comparative contexts of Germany and Australia. Andrew Markus suggests that there are degrees of classifications of the term ‘genocide’, which the United Nations Convention should take into account and which differentiate the experience of Jews and Indigenous Australians. He argues that Aboriginal people had their land taken over by armed forces but the government did not sanction the mass killing of Indigenous people in the nineteenth century, and that the people to blame are the pastoralists who did deliberately kill many of these first people with the intention of eliminating what they thought of as a subordinate race.  

The Australian government did not order, institute or put into force mass killing and cannot be blamed for ‘genocide’ under Clendinnen’s or Pearson’s definition of the word, due to the lack of ‘intent’ to commit murder on a mass scale. Captain Arthur Philip had clear orders when arriving at Botany Bay: he was “by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives” and to “live in amity and kindness with them” or else he was to punish anyone who should “wantonly destroy them, or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations.” However, despite his orders, massacres did take place and there were many shootings, decapitations and poisonings of Indigenous people,

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204 ibid. p.108
which continued into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{207} For example, the last shooting by a police party is recorded to have taken place in 1928.\textsuperscript{208} The policies of the Stolen Generation followed not long after that and redefined the act of ‘genocide’ again. The government did not orchestrate the mass killing of Indigenous people under its new policy but did suppress Indigenous culture, language and religion by the indoctrination of assimilation, and this ended the lives of many Indigenous people as they once knew it. For this reason Australia is arguably guilty of what Markus terms ‘ethnocide’ – the deliberate oppression of a racial group “but stopping short of physical destruction”.\textsuperscript{209} Thus what cannot be deemed ‘genocidal’ by intent can still be seen in the Australian context as being ‘genocidal’ by effect.\textsuperscript{210}

In \textit{Convincing ground} Bruce Pascoe writes extensively of the “genocidal effects” Indigenous people have sustained since the invasion of Botany Bay and argues that there was in fact genocidal intent. British soldiers were the first to take arms against Australia’s Indigenous people and these men were employed by the head of state. Pastoralists at this stage included convicts, who were not to be trusted with a gun or bayonet for fear of rebellion. Yet why did they later become the only ones to blame? The distinction between what was ‘genocide’ during the early invasion of Australia and ‘ethnocide’ in the later years of government policies must be made explicit when talking about it in the context of reconciliation. Both genocide and ethnocide have impacted greatly on relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, despite there being differing degrees of physical destruction. The level of destruction to Indigenous people, both physical and cultural, can be measured as continuous over the last two hundred years. Tony Barta argues that all Australians have a relationship with Indigenous people that is one of genocide.\textsuperscript{211} “Such a relationship is systemic”, he writes, and “fundamental to the type of society rather than to the type of state, and has historical ramifications extending far beyond any political regime.”\textsuperscript{212} It is not the fact that Australia was colonised as a democratic or capitalist society, but that our relationships were founded on the objective of land ownership.

Both peoples, the Aboriginal inhabitants and the invaders, needed the land. Because of the needs for which different people needed the land, and because of the cultural gulf in understandings about the land, coexistence was impossible.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{207} ibid. p.245  
\textsuperscript{208} ibid. p.249  
\textsuperscript{209} Markus, Andrew. op. cit. p.58  
\textsuperscript{210} Bartrop, Paul, R. op. cit. p.93  
\textsuperscript{211} Barta, Tony. op. cit. p.240  
\textsuperscript{212} ibid. p.239  
\textsuperscript{213} ibid. p.247
Understandably, Barta does not mention the word ‘reconciliation’ in his work, which was published before the movement gained momentum in the 1990s. However, he does make an astute prediction about the state of future relations and how they are implicated by what happened in the past:

They (Indigenous people) know that the relations of power between black and white may still be modified, but that their fundamental weighting will not be changed. In that sense the relations of genocide are alive, and every negotiation will continue to be witnessed by the Aboriginal dead.²¹⁴

Barta’s opinion shows the complex process of reconciliation to repair or modify relations and its difficulty in transforming relations between people who were first introduced by violence and death. Reconciliation may thus continue to evolve as a discourse that will always address genocide, land expansion and colonisation, but it is the action and will to address its memory that will stimulate a new dialogue between peoples. There is a paradox that haunts the very process of reconciliation and obstructs its ability to make peace, because there is no way to resolve, forgive and forget Australia’s colonial experience.

Both Indigenous Australians and European Jews died as a consequence of direct actions taken against them. The difference between European Jews and the experiences of Indigenous Australians must be noted for clarification of what is to be reconciled here in Australia. Nonetheless, Australian culture must find its own language and ways of remembering and confronting its past. Articulating the past may initially require the Jewish Holocaust as a point of comparison but should not be dependent on its terms, metaphors or structures. Since World War II, Germany has institutionalised its own public memory of the Holocaust and inscribed certain “personality structures” to define its national identity.²¹⁵ For example, practising Nazism or displaying the swastika are deemed illegal and repairing Berlin was a community affair. About the same time ‘reconciliation’ became part of the Australian culture, its public vernacular and, perhaps too, a framework for coming to understand and talk about its history of genocide and its tremendous impact on Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Reconciliation is a part of our own “personality structures” or desired personality traits as a nation seeking to be better understood.

In his article ‘No sensible comparison’, Neil Levi argues that to compare the Jewish

²¹⁴ ibid. p.249
²¹⁵ Moses, Dirk A. op. cit. p.95
Holocaust with Australia’s treatment of Indigenous people is necessary but calls for the exploration of explicit differences. He warns that if Indigenous people were seen to have been treated exactly like Jews, this would create a “screen memory” of Australia’s history and could see the Holocaust memories replace or “screen” over the traumatic events of our own local histories. Using the Holocaust as the main example of genocide could underestimate the enormity of specific tragedies that occurred elsewhere, such as Australia. As a rule: “the local history must give way to Holocaust memory because there is no room for both.”²¹⁶ Have Jews who brought their history with them to Australia found enough room to understand Australia’s history as well? If we hold up both the memories of the Holocaust and Australia’s treatment of Indigenous people with direct reference to their differences, we enable a more self-critical approach to our past and envision the future with reflective caution. Responsibility for how Indigenous people were treated is not bypassed on the premise that ‘we are not Nazis’ but by recognising that ‘we too are colonialists.’ Can these ideas damage relations? Levi argues: “It is not so much the recognition of having committed criminal acts that has the potential to shatter the national ego ideal, but rather the reference to the Nazis.”²¹⁷ What has been a great challenge to reconciliation in Australia has been finding the language to articulate our remembering of the past in a way that captures the seriousness of particular events but does not incite the same immense guilt as the Jewish Holocaust. Levi believes that:

> It is one thing to identify oneself with the perpetrators and apologise on their behalf, and quite another to identify oneself as a perpetrator and face the consequences of one’s actions. It is the latter that has been an impossibility in Australia.²¹⁸

Reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and White perpetrators is quite a different process with a different set of politics. Perhaps this is where Zable’s paradigm of shared “humanness” is useful for disentangling the many terms, definitions and references of blame that complicate the reconciliation debates beyond the purpose and practicality transformation hopes to evoke. Rather than over-emphasising the past, there is also a need to move forward as a humanity that has been bequeathed the public memory of its ancestors but also the power to create new memories for the future.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Levi, Neil. op. cit. p.126
²¹⁷ ibid. p.139
²¹⁸ ibid. p.148
²¹⁹ A television advertisement aired on national television to promote reconciliation had the slogan “unfinished Oz” and asks Australian viewers to consider that reconciliation is not just about the past and to finish what we started. This is evidence of a similar line of thinking that has made its way into grassroots discussions about reconciliation and populist politics.
**In conclusion**

As this study has so far shown, literary authors have been instrumental in the process of a reconciliation that is not just political, but proves to have polemical and poetic functions as well. Arnold Zable is a Jewish Australian who writes of the very raw memories of the Holocaust and how his ancestors came to survive such a tragedy and reconstruct themselves through the arts. He also writes of the oppression of Indigenous people in a comparative sense, not in a way to ‘screen’ Australia’s history but to structure the Migrant’s position in the discourses of reconciliation as “humans” who have witnessed a whole range of atrocities, which define us as people in a global context. A reading of Munkara’s text *Every secret thing* argues that Stephenson’s “triangular view” is helpful when negotiating history and reconciliation, whether through visual art or humorous writing. Larissa Behrendt’s novel *Home* deals with the complex narratives of multiculturalism and its debates with particular aspects of reconciliation. It also raises interesting questions surrounding the construction of ‘love’ in a postcolonial reality. This will be discussed in greater detail with examples from different texts in the following chapter. Meanwhile, this chapter has determined that there is a place for Migrant Australians in the debates about reconciliation, but this place is not easily defined, taken up or permanently maintained. Their place will likely shift and change as the national constructions of reality and our relations with all those who share it (not just Black and White) inevitably shift and change as well, through the writing of fiction and impact of ideological phenomenon, establishing that what *can be done* must first *be imagined*. 
Chapter 4
Reconciliation as embodiment: knowing the Other through touch and emotion

It is feeling that bridges the spatial gap that separates us from others, and puts us in touch with them.\(^\text{220}\)

Ashley Montague

For to love friendship, it is not enough to know how to bear the other in mourning; one must love the future.\(^\text{221}\)

Jacques Derrida

A politics of love is necessary in the sense that how one loves matters; it has effects on the texture of everyday life and on the intimate ‘withness’ of social relations.\(^\text{222}\)

Sara Ahmed

History shows that non-Indigenous authors have since colonisation dominated the ways that Indigenous bodies have been characterised and represented. Apart from David Unaipon’s writing during the 1920s, settlers, explorers and non-Indigenous writers of fiction, criticism and social commentary represented what it meant to be Indigenous until the proliferation of Indigenous writing in the 1960s. The way ‘Black’ bodies were imagined, named and articulated in colonial thought constructed a distance between Black and White bodies based on a confused construction of Black subjects as noble, yet potentially savage or dangerous. In his article ‘The status of the Aborigine in the writing of Henry Lawson: a reconsideration’ Chris Lee, for example, argues that Lawson represented the division of attitudes that settlers had towards Indigenous people in the late 1800s.\(^\text{223}\) Lawson’s writing shows how ideological differences were to be inherited by a later generation of readers and writers, few seeking to reconcile the textual representations of the ‘Black’ body in the latter part of this century. For example, Indigenous writer Kath Walker’s poetry is renowned for her representation of the Indigenous body as a site of resistance and political struggle – one day being free from oppression, physical restraint, neglect of bodily needs and rights over the Black body. In her poem ‘I am proud’ Walker revokes negative constructions of ‘Blackness’ and presents new understandings of what it means to be Black:

I am black of skin among whites,


And I am proud,
Proud of race and proud of skin. 224

In her collection of poems *We are going*, Walker admits the possibilities for transformation that come with reconstructing self through language and writing. In ‘An appeal’ she articulates her powerful position to transform the Black body from oppression when she writes in the second stanza:

Writers, who have the nation’s ear,
Your pen a sword opponents fear,
Speak of our evils loud and clear
That all may know.225

Such prose evoke cultural responses to the way race, blood and particularly skin have been written and used as arbitrary signifiers of difference between bodies and used for the negative and ‘dark’ representation of Black subjects. Social registers linked to settlers’ feelings of hate, scorn and disgust towards the Other can, as Walker demonstrates, be rewritten, undone, created again.226 Subsequently writers beyond the 1960s have continued this new signposting, symbolism and imagining of ‘Blackness’. During the 1990s in particular, many Australian authors of various races represented themselves as hybrid: their bodies fluid or fixed, mobile and channelled in different places around Australia and in various contexts in relationship with Others – rather than represented in antithesis or dualistic contrast to Indigenous characters and subjectivity. The eloquent articulation of otherness and belonging by particular authors is an example of how the once constructed distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies is being significantly narrowed, illustrating that Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies may be seen, touched and used differently since. Perhaps literature is the ‘place’ where peace can be born, dreamed and inspired by dispelling myths about the Other as ‘dark’ and untrustworthy, showing how the Black body is not always a site for suspicion and pain. New ways of using language in creative writing have thus empowered Indigenous writers and created new possibilities for reconciliation.

The concept of reconciliation has emerged in postcolonial Australia and found its ‘flesh’ (or

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225 ibid. ‘An appeal’, p.39
226 Sara Ahmed notes how using the skin is a way of thinking about boundaries between bodies as the skin is also a body’s mechanism for keeping out foreign agents. This analogy suggests a relationship between the ‘human body’ and the body politic, which also constructs mechanisms or ‘skin’ to keep out foreign agents, such as policies to prohibit the entry of asylum seekers to Australia. *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*, Routledge, London, 2000, p.45
definition) in the body politic through the use of literary and everyday language found in various textual representations. As a concept, reconciliation has grown as a notion of knowing, loving and understanding the Other with far-reaching political and personal benefits for many subjects. The proliferation of Indigenous writing is evidence that bodies are being represented in new ways; being used to write, perform and express bodily encounters that reflect similarities and difference within a context of moving forward. In ‘Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television…’, Marcia Langton argues that Indigeneity is manifested through the articulations of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects engaging in intercultural dialogue and building on imagination, representation and interpretation of identity. Intercultural dialogue, as it sometimes occurs in reading and writing, has transformed the long-held position that the Indigenous body is only ever a site for oppression and struggle, and, a recipient of love and forgiveness in the same breath. Bodily transformation has been written into being and witnessed in the modern-day writing and polemics of a few Australian authors who, through their craft and literary talent, challenged physical, social, cultural and historical ‘distances’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Meme McDonald, Love like water (2007), and Diane Johnson, Lighting the way: reconciliation stories (2002) have shown how emotions and stirring an emotional response in their readers can create closer ideological proximity with Others.

This chapter is in two parts: the first explores the theory of affect and emotion in relation to reading and writing; while the second part analyses bodily encounters between certain characters in McDonald’s text and how these encounters significantly implicate the larger social and cultural body it represents, shapes and transforms. Also in this later section, Johnson’s work will be discussed in view of the reality that Australia’s race relations have been reconstructed by the way subjects use their bodies, to imagine, write, create art and build material spaces in which bodies can meet and ‘impress’ on each other. The production of literature, art and architecture allows for reconciliation to take ‘place’, not as an event, but as a process of everyday embodiment. In this sense, ‘doing reconciliation’ is evidenced in the specific language constructed in literary expression, and how this language

227 Langton, Marcia. Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television…: an essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things. Australian Film Commission, Sydney, p.83

228 David Hume uses the word “impression” in his work to suggest that people use emotion as well as cognition to form an impression but this impression also depends on how subjects and objects impress on us. The text as an object can have an impression on its reader, it can give them an impression, create an impression and, most importantly, leave an impression on a reader. The cultural politics of emotion. op cit. p.6
of reconciliation (centred on themes of history, place, nationalism, bodies and spirituality) becomes more and more alive in everyday speech. How a nation uses language is evidence of a nation’s psychology – how a majority thinks, feels and behaves towards Others.

The theoretical frameworks informing the explication of the two texts mentioned above are dependent on the work of Sara Ahmed, who contributes to the area of politics and emotion, arguing that “emotions work to shape the ‘surfaces’ of individuals and collective bodies.”  

She believes that “emotions become attributes of collectives” and that the “national character” (what the nation is like) is a direct result of how bodies move away or towards other bodies in culture. Ahmed explores the production and circulation of emotions in her research, stating that “feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation. The circulation of objects allows us to think about the ‘sociality’ of emotion.” This may include the ‘nation’ or even the concepts of ‘love’ or ‘reconciliation’, which are produced through the circulation of emotion to be ‘sold’ to the general public. Emotions are not just a psychological experience belonging to an individual but are exercised as social and cultural practices. Ahmed notes that “we need to consider how emotions operate to ‘make’ and ‘shape’ bodies as forms of action [or inaction], which also involve orientations towards others.” Contact with Others can be manipulated or inspired by the circulation of emotion and the surfaces or boundaries of how we feel and, in essence, who we are as a nation is also negotiated through social and cultural practices (such as reading and writing).

Ahmed’s work is relevant to this thesis because she overtly addresses how the nation is oriented, named and spoken about and how this can reflect (but also affect) the way society feels about itself as a collective. For instance, Ahmed directly asks: “What does it do to say the nation ‘mourns’?” How is mourning expressed as a nation? Government leaders are elected to speak on behalf of a nation but does a statement do more than simply name an emotion? This brings to light similar questions pertaining to reconciliation: what did it do when former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said “we are sorry” to Indigenous Australians who had been stolen from their families under the Child Protection Act from the 1930s–1970s? His speech act showed how language could reflect emotion as being both ‘his’ and ‘ours’,
belonging to and affecting everyone. However, Ahmed argues how speaking about the Other’s pain as one’s own can be a form of violent appropriation if the Other’s pain is forgotten and replaced with a wound belonging to the nation.\textsuperscript{234} Similarly, appropriation could also be recognised in writing and speech acts that did not acknowledge Indigenous history and generational pain but focused too much on reconciliation, love and idealist relationship structures that emphasise ‘sameness’ – touching only on superficial or redundant differences such as skin colour rather than cultural beliefs.

Ahmed recognises the sheer “impossibility of reconciliation” because it is paradoxically rooted in collective politics and demands that “we live with and beside each other yet we are not as one.”\textsuperscript{235} She suggests that “the idea of a world where we all love each other, a world of lovers, is a humanist fantasy”,\textsuperscript{236} negating the traditional definition of reconciliation being the coming together of all people as ‘one nation’. Yet it is a misconception to assume there is only one definition of reconciliation. Or ‘love’ for that matter. There is more than one position from which these concepts can be spoken about and spoken about together. Is it appropriate to embrace the concept of reconciliation as a nation when it invests in the future rather than objectifies and owns Indigenous people of the past? The future is yet to be realised and therefore belongs to everyone: it is subject to creation by those who choose to dream of it. To love friendship is not enough. To know how to bear the other in mourning is still not enough: one must love the future.\textsuperscript{237} There may be three ways in which to understand reconciliation as a concept based on Derrida’s theory of friendship; firstly, reconciliation is concerned with history – or the way the past may be seen. Secondly, it concerns how subjects are embodied in the present; and thirdly, it concerns how our relationships with each other, nation and place are imagined and in turn constructed for the future.

Jacques Derrida’s philosophy of friendship is a model used in this chapter to question whether reconciliation is a political expression of ‘friendship’ or a concept that is problematic.

\textsuperscript{234} ibid. p.33 There was much contention surrounding the issue of whether the Stolen Generation should be awarded government compensation and an argument was proposed that compensation would make the Prime Minister’s apology seem more sincere if the “nation’s money” was given to these people for their pain: it would then represent an apology spoken by more than just one person. This would have been one way to respond to and acknowledge the Other’s pain, yet without claiming it as our own. Non-Indigenous subjects can empathise with the pain felt by the Stolen Generation but they cannot say we have reconciliation because we claim to be a nation in mourning or feel the Other’s pain.

\textsuperscript{235} ibid. p.41

\textsuperscript{236} ibid. p.139

\textsuperscript{237} Politics of friendship. op. cit. p.29
to race relations because its principles are overly simplistic. As has been discussed, reconciliation is heavily hinged on knowing, understanding and loving the Other and similarly Derrida’s model of friendship also supports the concept of love as significant. He argues that the suspension or interruption of love in a society is “the other, the revolution, or chaos; it is, in any case, the risk of an instability”, arguing that if we do not love the Other we find ourselves ‘out’ of friendship with them, observing how bodies that retract from one another refuse the important process of discussion and inhibit the social and political practice of listening and speaking to one another, making relations impossible to build on or repair.

On the other hand, Derrida can appreciate the contradictory nature of friendship – especially a friendship that is born out of colonisation and invasion – recognising how the concepts of friend and enemy commonly intersect: “The two concepts (friend/enemy) consequently intersect and ceaselessly change places. They intertwine, as though they loved each other, all along a spiralled hyperbole”. Therefore reconciliation may insist that bodies be drawn closer to each other, but prompts the rejection of colonisation to continue – seeing the Other as a ‘neighbour’ rather than an obliging friend. As this thesis argues, reconciliation is firstly a creative process implicated by love but limited to locating the Other as a friend in postcolonial literature. Writing may not always be a force of fantasy, but work between the potentiality and actuality of culture, reconfiguring the way we feel about Others: not always loving, not always oppositional, but perhaps some of the time understanding the Other.

Can Indigenous writers write beyond their own oppression, creatively transforming the world in which they live by knowing the Other and allowing Others to know them through the sensibilities of touch and emotion? It is important to note that the theoretical work of Bill Ashcroft (which has so far been imperative to this thesis) remains a significant thread in the discussion and analysis of reconciliation in this chapter, building on his ideas of social transformation through character dialogue and narration, but extending his theory to include the effects of writing about touch, movement and emotion as transformative as well.

Are emotions intertextual?

Emotions are the physical and psychological response that an individual or collective has to a given situation, topic or issue. How do characters situations, plot and themes make a reader

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238 loc. cit.
239 ibid. p.72
think and feel when engaged with a novel? What are the physical and psychological responses stirred from certain ideas, images, symbols and dialogue? In his work on perception embodiment and flesh, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that emotions are experienced as both cognitive and behavioural, made up of many dimensions or “sides”.

For example, an emotional experience can have a personal response that relates to cognition, memory, audition, tactility, imagination etc. yet emotions are not always visible on the body – what is required is the outward expression from the individual to make their feelings known. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perceptible phenomena, if an emotion is to reach complete realisation, it must first come to find expression, gesture and speech (in a text for example). Gesture and speech are ways in which we use our bodies to communicate emotions, give them visibility and even allow them to have significant impact on Others, even if the reasons that one reacts in a certain way are not always clearly readable by individuals and/or groups. Emotion may only ever be comprehensible to those “living in a similar emotional ‘world’”: there must be a common understanding of emotion (an understanding of where one may be coming from) in order to comprehend the emotion that is being communicated or portrayed.

Theories of affect and emotion are relevant to this thesis if reconciliation is thought to have specific emotions tied to its conceptual understanding, for example, how the emotions of guilt, sorrow and hope are communicated and evoked in writing about reconciliation. If social transformation depends on psychological change (as Nandy argues), where does Merleau-Ponty’s theory of emotion also fit? A reader’s emotional “side” may be “touched” by the encounter with a text, stimulating his or her perception, memory or imagination. These emotional “sides” are located in the mind and perform a function as part of one’s intellect. Norman Holland explains how affect works within the psyche: “The ego experiences emotion as motive and byproduct as it negotiates with id, superego and reality.” It is the product of complex workings of the brain that materialise as emotions, moods and thoughts. Thus one’s body can have a textual encounter and be “touched” by another who has the ability to evoke emotions through writing as a ‘speech act’.

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241 ibid. p.92

242 ibid. p.90

Thus it can be argued that emotions are intertextual – they can be stimulated, controlled and expressed in ways that are not altogether tactile or through physical interactions. Reading, for example, stimulates emotions that produce psychological and behavioural responses, as Nandy advocates: “Social change then comes to mean not only changes in rites, rituals and practices, but also a changed relationship between cultural symbols and motives”.

Reconciliation, as it is thought to be part of social transformation, must include the deliberate construction of how subjects think, feel and act towards Others. In this sense, literature ‘does’ reconciliation because it has the power to construct a culture that values all three ways of being in the world with Others.

This is not to say that a text can create a unified knowing about the world but it can create a ‘place’ where an idea, concept or emotion can be shared in multiple ways, multiple times over. As discussed in the following textual analysis of *Love like water*, McDonald uses a world of common symbols and signifiers, such as Uluru, the desert, Indigenous artwork and flying in an aeroplane, to communicate many possible understandings of characters and their world. She introduces new concepts by deviating from more typical signs and carefully leading her reader to a unique encounter or emotional experience through language. It is how she writes of emotion and how emotions are given ‘expression’ and ‘speech’ by her characters that influence how the text's thematic messages may be received and, moreover, Indigenous characters freed from oppression. It is not always important what emotion is captured (as this will vary from reader to reader) but, rather, what the emotion does – what affect it has on the reader. The quest of this research journey is to point to the possibilities for transformation; it does not record the experiences of individual readers – which may be many and varied over an extended period of time. Thus, it will be elicited that an interpretation of McDonald’s text is that reconciliation is dependent on exactly this – many encounters with many Others throughout one’s life – the reading and re-reading of many texts working to construct culture.

‘Affect’ is the compelling nature of art and literature, which draw us into a particular state of feeling, altering our perspective. What may begin initially as the visceral stirring in an individual who then ‘owns’ that emotion, later becomes the response shared with a community’s recognition of the similar symbols and emotions. The reader, for example, is affected by a text because they can make sense of common and already familiar codes

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belonging to that community once they are articulated and named. A text can have multiple interpretations, however, and there are always a number of symbols that do not allow for the sharing of a text with others. On the contrary, Lauren Berlant believes that affective criticism has the scholastic obligation to locate the history of significant moments of shared affect in literature. While a text may be read differently by individuals, historical moments such as the reconciliation movement can be reflected in literature; the “shared affect” of Mabo and other land-claim decisions named and identified in writing since 1990. For example, Lisa Bellear writes in her poem ‘Mr Prime Minister (of Australia)’: “Good luck with ‘Mabo’, actually Mr Keating, you will need the spirit and energy from a 100,000 year history.”

According to Merleau-Ponty, a text may be “touching” for a reader because an emotion may not only be a “passive movement” dependent on a wholly “active’ experience” that is face-to-face with another. Ultimately, reading and writing can be seen as a bodily encounter, even if they are done alone, because they rely on bodily responses while one reads or writes, such as memory, cognition etc. A text’s meaning is therefore tied to the exchange of feelings and emotions stimulated by language. In The cultural politics of emotion, for example, Ahmed feels “touched” by the power of Audre Lorde’s writing and her own response to this particular literary work “is a way of understanding how encounters always involve, not only a meeting of bodies, but between bodies and texts (the face to face of intimate readings), in which the subject is moved from her place.”

Writing and reading are an encounter between bodies and texts. Texts allow for one to be “touched” by the evocation of a story and “stirred” by the struggles faced by characters as readers witness their lives vicariously. Reading about another can have a significant effect on an individual. As Stephen Frosh proposes, texts have the ability to map the coordinates of a reader’s “inner space”, arguing that imaginary worlds should be scrutinised as much as the “outside world” because by “reading the other, we reconstruct ourselves.” Even though a novel is not made of flesh and bone, nor has it the ability to ‘feel’, it does have the power to ‘speak’. Language is used to say something about ‘real life’ and can ‘direct’ a reader’s line of

246 Favret, Mary. The study of affect and romanticism. Indiana University, USA, 2009, p.1162
247 Bellear, Lisa. ‘Mr Prime Minister (of Australia). Dreaming in urban areas. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.27
248 Sue L. Cataldi. op. cit. p.119
249 ibid. p.40
250 Frosh, Stephen. ‘Time, space and otherness’ in Mapping the subject: geographies of cultural transformation (Steve Pile & Nigel Thrift (eds), Routledge, London, 1995, p.289
vision (not only to the words on the page) but to new and profound ways of seeing life through the eyes of one’s mind.

A text’s ability to ‘speak’ brings it to life and offers the reader a new way of being in the world. The emotional encounter between a reader and a text may be a “passive movement” but it is one that forges a relationship that moves or shifts a reader’s emotions, perceptions, memory and imagination in a profound way. Ahmed argues in *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*:

> We can think of reading as a meeting between reader and text. In this context, to talk of encounters as constitutive of identity (that which makes a given thing a thing) is to suggest that there is always more than one in the demarcation of ‘the one’: there is always a relationship to a reader, who is not inside or outside the text it is through being read that the text comes to life as text, that the text comes to be thinkable as having an existence in the first place.251

To understand the power of language and textual encounters, Ashcroft argues that if one has the power to use language effectively, they have the power to change their life and the lives of others. “This does not mean that language is life”, but it means language (and how it is used in literature) becomes an emotional site for cultural identity and the transformation of a society to occur.252 To take this idea further, this thesis asks: does the naming and performance of emotions, which texts provide, extend to touching not only a reader, but the nation's flesh’ or polities as well? Can public feelings about Australia’s past and how a nation represents Indigenous subjects be reconstructed through the expression of emotion, moving readers in such a way as to influence the way we might imagine the future and hope for reconciliation?

**Do emotions drive social and political change?**

How we feel is symbiotic with how we identify ourselves. Our identity is not a given product – we ‘feel’ our way as our identity is shaped by society or group(s) and our feelings become mixed up with those of others who act as significant influences around us. One’s body cannot escape being caught up with Other bodies or solely dismembered as a separate body from the world. As Cataldi argues, “We cannot deceive ourselves about the extent to which our bodily flesh is embedded and engrossed in the flesh of the world or about the extent to which the flesh of the world is engrossed and embedded in us.”253 As already established, emotions are

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251 *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*, op. cit. p.7
253 Sue L. Cataldi. op. cit. p.119
experienced in the body and expressed through gesture and speech. Politics are a form of emotional expression in the body politic – a response to how society feels about a particular issue or event affecting the whole nation. Politics affect the emotions of a polity, a group or individual because specific ideas and feelings can be ‘produced’ for circulation – for example, campaigning feelings towards asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

Emotions have always mattered in politics. The connection between politics and polemics is not a new phenomenon: Anthony John Harding’s research into the writing of early eighteenth century poets and novelists across Europe, for example, shows that literature has always been a product of human record-keeping, reflecting on events such as politics, war and revolution. Harding considers writers such as Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge to be earnest moral thinkers who appeal to mass readership and consequently the larger polity. These writers map human relationships and explore what inspired, nurtured and refreshed connectedness in European society, for example, after the fall of the Bastille in 1789, when political issues assumed immediate day-to-day importance over issues such as morality and love. Although there is a longstanding history of research in the areas of literature, politics and emotions, the ways in which politics and emotion can be articulated still continue to find new forms of expression and bring about a better understanding of how emotions can be named, manipulated and oriented towards particular political causes. Writers continue to be regarded as moral thinkers, muses for social and political rhetoric and agents of change.

Much has already been said about the ‘place’ for Derrida’s concept of ‘love’ in the reconciliation debates, but what of sex? Sexual intimacy between Black and White bodies is a complex notion to discuss in light of reconciliation because sexual abuse of Indigenous women was also used as a form of colonisation and oppression. It is important to remember, however, that this was not always the case, and reconciliation has showed political and social potential even since early invasion and settlement. Paul Carter’s *The calling to come* locates the power of love between an Indigenous/non-Indigenous couple at the very onset of British arrival to the shores of eastern Australia. Carter’s writing refers back to January 1788 when a thousand Europeans met with some thousand Eora people and William Dawes fell in love with an Indigenous woman, Patye. Carter’s interpretation of Dawes’ notes is presented in the

255 ibid. pp.1–2
form of “a modern poem” that is said to “illustrate the ways in which culture, history, relationships and one’s own identity are fluid and negotiable like any conversation.” At the same time as contest for power and colonial influence, there was a physical bodily encounter between William and Patye, suggesting that before there was oppression of Indigenous people there was the potential for individuals to construct reconciliation: “Fleetingly there appeared a moment of enchantment, of strange miscommunication that allowed spaces for curiosity, caring, for putting off the end the intimate exchanges of words, of breath, and we assume body, between William Dawes and Patye”. Even before they had properly begun to speak to each other, they had already been spoken: Dawes discovered “the calling to come” – to be drawn in relationship with the Other based only on love and a serendipitous encounter with her. Perhaps the potential to love Others existed in many forms when settlers first arrived to Australia but ‘love’ was considered too averse to the principles of colonisation, which upheld division and conquering the land with little interaction with those it belonged to. Carter’s work gestures towards the possibility that a longing to encounter the Other and to understand each other’s intention, emotion, expression and use of language has never really left us since these early days of settlement. Arguably, particular texts signify there is still a “calling to come”: a relentless yearning to come to know, love and understand one (an)other in a literary process continually being constructed and realised.

As Chapter 1 outlined, reconciliation is inextricably linked to emotional responses about Australia’s history of colonisation. The emotions that surround discourses of reconciliation include feelings of sorrow, guilt, anguish and contempt when thinking about and remembering the past, yet by realising the political possibilities of the future there are feelings of elation, anticipation, hopefulness and excitement also to be felt. Is ‘reconciliation’ the name given to bodies moving closer towards each other as they move towards these more positive feelings about the future? Or is the concept of friendship an idealist fantasy built on the orientation of emotions that continue to control and oppress Black bodies in the name of ‘friendship’, still marking Indigenous people as different and positioning them in a certain way that benefits White Australia – since colonisation has always inferred that only our feelings matter. Is reconciliation little more than a growing fetishism with Australia’s national story of progress? There is evidence to suggest that the evolution of such a concept as

257 ibid. p.vii
reconciliation into words is representative of an actual ‘change of heart’ — that the body politic has in some way been touched or moved towards the Other. Reconciliation can be seen as a national ideal that has been produced by the movement of bodies, yet it is also an ideal that fails to return subjects back to one national ideal or one community. Some argue that these notions point to the failure of reconciliation because as a model of one-to-one friendship it infers the need for a singular community and to share one life.\textsuperscript{258} However, reconciliation takes many forms and belongs to many changing paradigms – as many as there are Australian texts that address race relations since 1990. This chapter provides space to analyse and discuss two texts as examples of how reconciliation may be embodied as knowing the Other through touch and emotion, yet not necessarily as perfect friends.

**Literature as engagement in intercultural affect: a literary analysis of *Love like water***

*Love like water* (2007) by Meme McDonald is a text that cannot be easily twisted to fit *ad hoc* theory and postcolonial criticism. This text was not chosen because it neatly situates itself in any single argument already presented in the first half of this chapter. It was chosen for its accessibility in relation to critical exploration of reconciliation and ideas that refute or negate the possibilities of reconciliation being the “living together as one community, forever.” McDonald’s work also characterises how emotions are intertextual and the way that emotions are expressed, embodied and stirred plays an integral part in the process of reconciliation as it occurs textually. McDonald’s imaginary world mirrors an emotional body politic, showing how emotions appear on characters’ bodies to become social and political marks on the body politic or ‘nation’s flesh’. As Ahmed argues, on a bodily encounter with the Other each subject undergoes significant transformation, which she terms “hybridisation”: each subject is not entirely absorbed into the other’s world but is never the same.\textsuperscript{259} When Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects get close enough to see and touch each other intimately in this text, there is a movement between social and political spaces as their Black and White bodies encounter one another and disrupt understandings of two cultures, producing new understandings of the nation for readers to also construct. Derrida’s philosophy of friendship suggests that the exchange of emotions can lead to subjects sharing ideas and sentiments about national identity. As the novel progresses, McDonald’s characters

\textsuperscript{258} *Politics of friendship*, op. cit. p.35
\textsuperscript{259} *Strange Encounters* op. cit. p.12
experience powerful bodily encounters and establish hybrid identities that cross a number of social and political contexts. However, characters’ transformation does not lead to an everlasting friendship or the sharing of one life. In McDonald’s imaginary world, one is not expected to change or ‘transform’ for the Other but it demands that each individual character reflect on their own feelings and emotions in order to understand the Other.

The characters’ bodily encounters in this text show how one can indeed get ‘under the skin’ of the Other but it is individuals who, through bodily encounters and experience, work to reconstruct themselves – the way they think, move, etc. in relation to the Other. This reconstruction is a conscious rather than passive exercise and is fundamentally psychological. Even though transformation here depends on another subject to cause an effect, the transformation that occurs is within: it is an individual experience and private. The personal transformation of one character is used to gesture towards the issues surrounding reconciliation as a communal process that involves everyone, or the nation as it exists as many polities across a vast geographical distance. What translates as reconciliation in this text is that emotions of love and friendship towards Others are dependent on the one-to-one encounter with many others and not a relationship with one person for the rest of one’s life. Relationships between non-Indigenous subjects and the way they share their experiences with Indigenous people, how one feels and speaks about them, are also pivotal to the continual reconstruction of the Black body in new and positive ways that benefit race relations.

*Love like water* is a novel about a young non-Indigenous woman called Cathy who moves to Alice Springs – the centre of Australia to “centre” herself after her fiancé, Dave, dies in a sudden car accident. The setting of this text is referred to as the ‘belly-button’ of the nation (p.48) but as we keep reading we learn this reference is very much tongue-in-cheek and that the centre of one’s experiences with Others is located in parts of the body with much greater functions and significance – the mind, (where Merleau-Ponty argues emotions are created) and heart (the centre of emotional affect according to Ahmed). We also learn that at the end of the novel, when Cathy leaves Alice Springs to return home to family and friends in Gadunga, Western Queensland, her greatest challenge is staying true to what she thinks and feels about Others and explaining her psychological and emotional changes to those who may not understand. Since meeting Jay, there exists an ideological distance between her and those she is close to. She tries to imagine what Dave and her brother would make of her “smiling at a stranger who wasn’t their kind of people” but concedes “maybe it didn’t matter anymore”
The psychological changes that occur in Cathy are described as being emotional changes as well, and she notes “a hardness came settling in round her heart. Not just her physical self, but the rest of her was becoming separate” (p.122). Cathy’s feeling of distance from those she was once close to is mirrored by Ahmed’s theory that all encounters are mediated. Ahmed argues that an encounter:

drills across of subjects in their meetings with others. 260

For Cathy, the ones she was once close to are becoming more like strangers because they do not understand her. It is without understanding that significant distance is created between subjects, even relatives, but this distance and proximity are never final, they continue to expand and contract through the experiences of touch and emotion.

Another example of Cathy’s identity being challenged by those who claim to ‘know’ her is when she sees Billy, an old school friend, at a B&S ball. Cathy asks him whether he feels that he belongs in Alice Springs or whether he misses the land where he grew up. Billy’s reaction is hard:

Crap. Don’t talk crap. Just don’t talk. And none of that Abo shit, okay? That crap about belonging. I’m mates with your brother. I told him your family’s not like that. I’m calling you what you are, a fuckin traitor. To your own (p. 272).

Cathy and Billy's experience raises questions about the resentment and division that reconciliation can manifest, not only between individuals, but between bodies of epistemic communities. What if reconciliation was successful in ‘touching’ those who were open to its discourses but isolated others who adopted ‘harder’ positions towards race relations? How are epistemic communities strengthened and how do we find solidarity through reconciliation when opposing views are so largely disparate and argued with such passionate emotion? To resolve these questions would be to assume that reconciliation has a definitive end-point and is not subject to degrees of understanding that are both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ in philosophical approach. However, the ongoing encounters with many others ensures that reconciliation is an indefinite process with as many outcomes and approaches as there are individuals touched by its affects in various spaces. This incident is, however, bigger than the two people involved. Their feelings and reactions represent the much larger narrative that tells of social and political race relations at the national level. Ahmed argues that the body politic is also an

260 ibid. p.7
emotional narrative that shows how “bodies slide into each other, in such a way that aligns some bodies with other bodies, engendering the perpetual reforming and de-forming of both bodily and social space.” Ahmed believes the political body proves to be one of “hardness” in its orientation towards Others and that this resembles the hard, White, male body, which is shaped by social reactions such as anger or rage towards the Other. Billy’s reaction to Cathy’s way of thinking and feeling about place and Others works to shut her out of the social space in which she once belonged, and perhaps even the larger political space she could relate to before her personal transformation.

Jason Johnstone (Jay or JJ), is an Indigenous radio announcer who moves to Alice Springs at the same time as Cathy. Cathy’s interior monologue reveals that on getting to know Jay, she is shown another sort of love – a love for country, a love for Others and a love for herself. These two characters are emblematic of the relationship between being physically ‘touched’ and ideologically ‘touched’ through the emotional effects of love. They also show how their movement away from or towards each other has a significant effect on the way they see themselves, the place they live in and their perception of the nation they belong to. By the end of the novel, Cathy sees the great epiphany she has been part of and, even though she is alone, she considers herself to be in good company. She has begun to see herself differently, feeling a sense of belonging even though she is alone.

As mentioned above, the reference to Alice Springs as the “belly-button” of the nation is generally atypical in Australian writing. Alice Springs is more commonly referred as the ‘heart’ of Australia because its geographical position is almost exactly central and it is set in Australia’s Outback desert with the riches and wonders of Uluru, a national icon that somewhat resembles the shape and colour of a human heart. On the contrary, Uluru is described by McDonald as “blanketed in cloud, with lightning snaking out of the sky and torrents of water tumbling down its sides, as if from the wailing of a broken hearted god” (p.129). There is a great paradox revealed in McDonald’s writing and Alice Springs is portrayed as an emotional wasteland invaded by wandering strangers: “People got lost wandering places they knew nothing about” (p.149). The setting reflects Ahmed’s description of “a failed community” because it is “one which has weak or negative connections: where

261 Strange Encounters op. cit. p.49
262 The Cultural Politics of Emotion, op. cit. p.4
neighbours appear as if they are strangers to each other.” Subjects have few positive feelings towards each other in this town and bodies are commonly separated and isolated from Others – the epitome of physical distance is created between subjects through the construction of negative opinions about the Other founded on bodily differences such as skin colour. Like a bellybutton, Alice Springs may be perceived as a place with ambiguous purpose, yet symbolic of the potential connections each person may have with one another in this town if they are open to them.

In *Love like water*, McDonald introduces readers to the textual theme of getting to know strangers as neighbours. This catchcry appears in the first page of this text and pervades the narrative thereafter. We are told in the first paragraph, for example, that it is not the weather in this desert town that would get to Cathy, “it was sleeping with neighbours just a snore away” (p.3). Cathy is uncomfortable being in proximity to others and, from the moment she arrives in Alice Springs, she notes that she is surrounded by strangers: she takes a rented room and sleeps “on a mattress used by people she’d never met” and considers it to “be like getting into bed with strangers” (p.3). Margie explains to her, however, that she is lucky just to have her own room because Alice Springs is “chockers with ring-ins like us patching up the mess” (p.12). Cathy does not understand what Margie means by “mess” and when she asks her, it appears Margie is not quite sure either: “Blacks making a mess of themselves, or something or other, I don’t know. Aboriginals everywhere” (ibid.). Despite the presence of Indigenous people “everywhere”, Margie has little to do with even one Indigenous person, maintaining a physical, emotional and ideological distance by assuring herself that knowing and understanding Indigenous people is the work of others and not herself.

Similarly, Jay arrives in Alice Springs as “a stranger in a strange place” (p.14). Even though Jay is an Indigenous man from the coast of North Queensland, there is a distance between him and the Arrernte people of this area that is greater than the spatial difference geography has created:

> There was one main difference between his mob from the coast and this desert mob. The whiteman had raped his mob longer, that was all. Messed with their traditions, their language, their songs and their dances, their stories and everything they’d lived by. That’s what blackfellas across the country had in common, they’d been messed with.

Two ideologies between Blacks and Whites become apparent: those who believe “Blacks are making a mess of themselves” and those who believe Indigenous people and their culture

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264 *Strange Encounters* op. cit. p.26
have been “messed with”. This creates divisions within the community and boundaries are marked between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by these terms. Divisions also exist between many non-Indigenous people who situate themselves in either school of thought. Thus skin-colour does not always represent these differences in opinion, and marks are made on the body or in bodily spaces to define ideological boundaries between subjects of various backgrounds and race. For example, Cathy wanders past the door of their non-Indigenous housemate’s room and finds it “plastered with stickers the black, yellow and red of the Aboriginal flag had Land Rights sloganed across the middle” (p.11). Later in the novel, Cathy seeks to find a poster of her own and wanders into tourist shops to look at Indigenous art. She finds these shops to be filled with “chatty people boasting that they sold the genuine article on behalf of their Indigenous best friends”. One particular woman told Cathy that before acrylics and canvas were introduced to Indigenous artists, their masterpieces had for thousands of years been painted on bodies for ceremony. Juxtaposed with this comment, however, Cathy watches how “the woman flung canvases one on top of each other on the floor” (p.128). This unnerves Cathy, suggesting that reconciliation may be accessed through art and culture and embodied in the flesh: as Cathy thinks to herself, “These paintings were not for buying in small pieces and nailing to walls. They were bigger than that” (p.128).

In this town, people’s bodies are defined by the surface of their skin-colour and the difference between Black and White becomes a point for division and segregation. For instance, Black and White bodies are separated in particular social spaces: the Australian Hotel where Cathy works is segregated into two areas for drinking: the Lounge is a place where Blacks can drink and the Spinifex Bar is exclusive to Whites. It is while Cathy is working in the segregated section of the pub that she meets Jay. “He said hello when her back was turned” (not yet face-to-face) and when she turns around, she is surprised to see it is not someone she already knows as “he sounded like a friend” (p.54). Cathy and Jay experience their first bodily encounter as their hands touch for a moment longer than they felt they should, and Cathy admits to herself that she “was not expecting to shake hands with a stranger” (p.58). Their bodily encounter shifts the dynamics of their relationship from being strangers in the Lounge to something more like neighbours reconstructing personal spaces outside of social and political conventions. As we see, Cathy’s boss Max quickly reminds her of Jay’s bodily position in the bar – his skin is used to mark him as a stranger to the Spinifex Bar and imprisons him to the Lounge: “It’s a hard call,” Max said. “He’s probably a nice guy. It’s just that a town like this is a war zone when it comes to black and white” (p.113).
The social spaces in the Australian Hotel are symbolic of social and political markers restricting Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from ever listening or speaking to one another in fear of what could become what McDonald terms a “war zone”. For instance, McDonald uses the imagery of a war zone to describe how Margie was feeling about being in Alice Springs: “She didn’t know how to react to a place that looked like a war zone in the middle of the lucky country she’d lived in all her life and thought she knew” (p.24). The social/political concept of Australia being the “lucky country” is shattered here but not immediately replaced, leaving the reader to contemplate whether a new world order can come from recognising the decay of a society and its relationships, or will this bring further instability and unrest? As discussed above, Derrida argues that a community without the opportunity to make friends will inevitably become like a war zone, as Max and Margie fear. To reiterate, Derrida calls a community without friendship “the other, the revolution, or chaos; it is, in any case, the risk of an instability.” Instability and chaos already exist in this literary representation of Alice Springs as a place to challenge physical, emotional and ideological distances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects. What is the alternate representation for Black bodies as a site no longer oppressed and suffering and in pain? Jay recalls the singer/songwriter Bob Dylan and suggests, “Bob needed to lighten up, get himself a sense of humour. He’d die with all that pain, if he was a blackfella” (p.108). Love like water shows how ‘knowing’ the Other is a slow emotional and psychological process that occurs only by narrowing social and political distances by initiating positive experiences with the Other, despite fears that the Other is dark, suspicious, dangerous and existing only in a war zone. Coming into ‘touch’ with Others is itself a conscious effort to think, feel and behave differently.

Unlike Margie, Jay is a character who is particularly aware of the affect touch can have on self and Others, setting out to deliberately ‘touch’ those around him by literally embracing them with a hug. His is a unique way of engaging the Other in an emotional struggle for reconciliation and offering a way to transform society by coming face-to-face with one individual at a time. Jay’s antics are a lot different to those practised by older family members, who fought for political change during the era known as resistance and protest. But although their ways were different, his elders were fundamental to the changes made for Indigenous people at that time and Jay recalls how:

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265 Politics of Friendship. op. cit. p.29
He’d always been a lover more than a fighter. When he got game to test the hug beyond the safety of family, it had powerful results. As a DJ in the clubs he didn’t find it hard to get brave, hugging when people got ripped or boozed or both, his hugs were a life raft to keep sinking ships afloat. From the nightclubs, he got game to take the hug further. Now, when he got introduced to men, women, young or old, cats or dogs, he’d lay a hug on them. From one hug he could tell a lot about a person. It was his most reliable weapon. Even lost souls rarely resisted one of his hugs, if he was game to give it. Giving hugs was about overcoming fear. His elders had fought with their fists and with everything they had, to stay alive. He knew they were the only reason he was here today. He was carrying on the fight, in his own way, with the Battle of the Hug. (p.20)

Jay’s attitude towards racial harmony is honourable because it comes from a place of love; the tone is unsure though – opening with the cliché of being more a lover than a fighter and admitting he is only able to love because his forebears fought before him with their fists. Even though his message is about “hugs”, the language is still aggressive: “He’d lay a hug on them’ – suggesting the power that an embrace can have against prejudice. Humour is also powerful in the writing of Others and here it symbolises the light-hearted tone of voice and word choice used to connect with readers on a ‘friendly’ level – for example, he mentions the way cats and dogs cannot even escape his love, thereby saying that reconciliation is pervasive and strangely cross-contextual. For example, how are dogs and cats treated in places where there is little hope? Jay continues to work for the plight of Indigenous people in a way that belongs to a new era in post-colonial race relations. This era implicates non-Indigenous people in an even more direct way than was seen during the 1960s and 70s and is not about directing rage and passionate lament towards the Other but getting in-touch with them and exploring alternate feelings of emotion towards them. Yet, responding to colonisation in a way that is tactile and personal is a radical way of seeking better race relations – particularly when some forms of touch have been used to subjugate Others in the past. For instance, many remember the way power was structured and emphasised through ‘touch’ on Outback cattle stations. Some drovers ‘touched’ Indigenous cattle hands inappropriately as a way of investing fear and vulnerability in young women through sexual violation and possession. They commonly referred to the role of Indigenous women on their stations as being ‘all day in the saddle and all night in the sack’.

McDonald deals with current fears of sexual violation by showing the complexities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous sexual relations. A personal relationship cannot exist in a vacuum outside political and social ideology. For example, Margie tells Cathy of an inappropriate way she can engage with the plight of Indigenous people that incorporates both politics and sex: “‘Hey we worked out a way you could pay off your debt [of] being rich,’ said Margie. ‘We reckon you should get it on with a black guy’” (p.91). However, Cathy
finds it personally difficult to separate sex and love: “She’d grown up on eyes closed love [making], I’m yours forever or I’m nothing” (p.168). The concept of sharing one’s life, however, is complicated by Jay’s contrary view about love:

He wasn’t sure he could mend enough heart to love one person in that man and woman way. He was better at loving everyone. That was safer medicine. One night could be an eternity, he reminded himself. It was a risk having only one set of arms to fall into (p.334).

Perhaps it is Jay who uses sex for his own personal, political and social plight: “He wasn’t wanting to love the barmaid. He was wanting her to numb his pain … there was no decision, only the need to connect” (p.166). Jay’s reasons for connecting with Cathy become obvious when he says to her in this moment: “‘It’s not what you call me. It’s what’s in there’… It was her heart he was meaning, nothing else”. The chapter ends with words that invoke Paul Carter’s story of Patye and William, suggesting the possibilities of transformation through touch and emotion: “But he kissed away her words and they began again, a gentler, slower kind of coming” (p.168).

The concept of ‘touching’ the Other is a difficult praxis for reconciliation to understand when there may exist the fear of touching others who are strangers to ourselves. We do not like to touch those we do not know, yet we will never know the Other as long as there are boundaries that prevent us from ‘touching’ and from being ‘touched’ in return. According to Ahmed, “The recognition of strangers involves the demarcation, not only of social space, but also bodily space”. To realise the potential of reconciliation and get closer to the Other in a space that is social and political also requires the exploration of bodily space and coming to know, love and understand the Other on a much more personal level – social, political and personal spaces are interlocked and embedded in a politics of emotion that is deeply affected by Australia’s history of colonisation, and to encounter the Other in one space is to come face-to-face with them in all three.

Jay demonstrates the difficulty of executing his own philosophy of touch, facing a number of interior challenges before he can live out what he deems to be “The Battle of the Hug”. For example, Jay feels he needs to confront Max about his exclusion from the Spinifex Bar or else “He’d store it [his memory] on the shelf marked Reason to Hate” (p.83). Jay tries to tell himself that these negative emotions only make him a “victim” and he begins to negotiate the need to change his perception and see himself as “a survivor” and that, “The first person he

266 Strange Encounters. op. cit. p.15
met tomorrow he’d be hugging them up just that bit harder, daring something good to happen” (ibid.). However, Jay soon lapses into a state of anger once more and the “whitefella living inside of him” challenges his ego: “You’re not about to fight no wars. You’re a mongrel halfbreed no-good loser. What made you think you could walk into the Spinifex Bar?” (p.84). Aware of how the dominant culture has defined him as physically different, Jay is made a prisoner in his own flesh. The spatial restrictions placed on his Black body emphasise difference and treat him as defiled, dirty, dangerous, contaminated, impure or sick and deny him entry to places such as the Spinifex Bar. Jay realises that entry into the dominant culture is dependent on how White subjects perceive his body and he hears the voice in his head telling him to “Make some do-good whitefella your mate. Charm him with your Dreamtime stories, then we’ll let you poke your butt in the Spinifex Bar. But as long as it suits us, remember that” (ibid.). Relationships are seen here as possible but never equal without emotional and psychological transformation in both Black and White subjects. Ahmed argues that colonial encounters will always involve conflict, an asymmetry of power, and the meeting will always be antagonistic because of a two-way understanding of Australia’s history and colonisation.267 If there is reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Jay’s world, he believes it will be conditional and the relationship may not be one of friendship but something more like that of neighbours with unsettled differences while the slow process of knowing, understanding and loving the Other is more deeply realised.

It is not until Cathy is travelling home that she realises “The relationship she most wanted was this one, with herself. She wasn’t sure who that self was, but she would get to know this stranger” (p.345). It seems the process of knowing oneself in relation to the Other is never complete, a continuing to construct oneself over and again as one encounters many more people throughout life. It is by coming to know, understand and love many Others that Cathy can challenge racial boundaries everywhere, and work to reconstruct the social and political spaces she inhabits at different times. McDonald’s text proves that reconciliation is impossible when conceptualised as the sharing of one life forever, and that it is the continuous face-to-face meetings and departures with many Others in different places that will have the largest possible effect on race relations and the transformation of society. Not all encounters lead to transformation (as Billy’s character highlights) but the opportunity to speak and listen to Others is important if personal transformation of one’s self is to be

267 ibid. p.8
realised. While encounters with Others may not eventuate in a relationship of long-lasting ‘friendship’ and the sharing of one life, one’s life may be ‘touched’ in many ways and at times located side by side – ideologically – with those of many Others.

**How are we to know the Other if we cannot see her? A literary analysis of *Lighting the way: reconciliation stories***

In *Lighting the way: reconciliation stories* (2002), Dianne Johnson defines reconciliation as “The significance of a new stage in personal relationships in which previous hostility of mind or estrangement has been put away in some decisive act.” Her collection of true stories works to record a number of “decisive acts” that point to the “new stage” of personal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people since 1990 and shows how the body can be a site for redemption and forgiveness, rather than only resistance and protest. She demonstrates how bodily encounters with the Other can be represented textually and in turn ‘touch’ many others belonging to a community of readers. *Lighting the way* may be a representation of political actions carried out by relatively few, but the publication of these has significant implications for everyone amenable to cultural production that is hinged on ‘touch’ and feelings of emotion. It has been described as capturing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in a way that illustrates what has been and could be. In an online review, the Chancellor of the University of Canberra, Wendy McCarthy, wrote: “Dianne Johnson has written a wonderful, eclectic collection of reconciliation stories. To those who ask, what can I do?, my response is read these and be inspired. They capture the strength, trust and humility of the reconciliation process”. McCarthy uses the term “inspired” as a verb for doing reconciliation, but the 23 chapters in this text must ‘do’ more than “inspire” readers to a sense that reconciliation matters. They must exemplify how shifting the way one may think, feel and behave towards Others is being open to the psychological, emotional and spiritual changes of a reconciled life. Reconciliation is not just a sporadic occasion, an exceptional event or the publishing of a few texts: it is a way of being with Others.

Bodies are impressionable. Whether collective or individual, bodies can experience the affect of emotion through actions that do not involve physical sensations or the one-on-one touching of skin. This text captures how Black *and* White bodies invoke passive movements

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of emotion that impress on the mind and soul of the body politic through the way bodies are used to produce artworks, song-writing, memorials, land returns and personal reflections. It is evident from these stories that love is inherent in each individual labour of creative expression and that the purpose of their endeavours goes far beyond aesthetic or aural pleasure for the few, transforming their whole world. For the acts of singing or painting alone would only produce a finished product and a memory of its completion, but with the textual immortality that Johnson provides, this means that through these acts and their recordings, reconciliation becomes a far reaching process of cultural affect. Reconciliation is therefore both textual and material: dependent on polities and polemics to find expression, meaning, longevity and cultural significance that encompass the body politic. Fundamentally, the writing of stories such as these allows for one to ‘see’ the Other in a particular light, not just their finished work. A textual space is created to offer a bodily encounter that invites the reader to know, understand and love the Other differently.

Although Johnson’s work is a collection of 23 stories, this textual analysis will focus on three of these in detail and discuss how Ahmed’s theory of “touch” is intrinsically linked to Luce Irigaray’s theory of “seeing”. Irigaray argues that without ‘touch’, seeing the stranger is not possible. *Lighting the way* provides a textual example of how a reader can ‘see’ both themselves and the Other in a new stage of personal relationship and be ‘touched’ by specific actions and gestures as they are presented in the text. Hence the title of this book, *Lighting the way*, is a metaphysical representation of the very act it seeks to employ: by using language as its candle to light the way to social transformation. As Ashcroft’s theory of transformation heralds, writing and reading are the ways in which Others are written out of oppression and change their worlds. To add to this, Johnson’s work illustrates the efforts of many non-Indigenous people and how their acts of reconciliation are also written as a way of reflecting on how White or Migrant subjects can be seen and touched in a way that also transforms into a new world order. While Johnson argues that her collection of stories reinforces that reconciliation, “has been forever sown into the hearts, minds and consciousness of ordinary Australian people” (p.v), this chapter argues that the Australian monolithic consciousness is, however, still (and will always be) developing, and that creative works such as Johnson’s catalyse this development and in fact ‘do’ reconciliation in multiple ways, rather than simply reflecting its presence in the community.

The title *Lighting the way* lends itself to generalisations about ‘light’ and ‘seeing’ that are
deeply entwined in the history of Western thought. For instance, light has been thought of as an invisible medium that paradoxically opens up a knowable world and ‘seeing the light’ becomes a metaphor for existence: seeing the invisible in the visible. Like Derrida, Irigaray argues that metaphors of light make up the language of philosophy and the foundation of metaphysics, a cliché that is seen as a negative in Derrida’s theory, but can be used when speaking more specifically about reconciliation and understanding how Western thought has constructed it in ways that need further interrogation. Thus it is of no surprise that metaphors of light have also found their way into modern-day Australian literary references. This chapter has thus far focused on the language of ‘touch’ as it is articulated by Ahmed, in her theory of politics and emotion, along with Derrida’s politics of friendship. However, it is worth introducing the ideas of Irigaray, which suggest that ‘seeing’ and ‘touching’ should be explored together as a conceptual couplet. In Irigaray’s theorisation of vision and touch, she argues that “without the sense of touch, seeing would not be possible.” To see the Other is to become aware of the Other in a new way that was not conceivable before a particular encounter – there is a knowing about one’s self and the Other in terms not already dictated and one begins to see and experience the world in new ways made visible through the effects of ‘seeing’ and ‘touching’. ‘Seeing’ is not just recognising that a subject is present but understanding how one is in the world; there must be a cognitive response to the body’s visual recognition of the Other. For Irigaray, to ‘see’ means “there is an association between a mind’s eye and the body’s eye just as there is between the sun and the purity of light.” Seeing and touching the Other is not only a physical encounter, but one can encounter the Other in a way that is emotional and intellectual, for instance, coming in touch with another’s creative work, such as art, and reading the story of how that art came to be and understanding what it represents. An impression left on one’s eye will become an impression on one’s mind and perhaps even change the way one lives in the world.

*Lighting the way* shows how painting is an act of reconciliation and to see particular works is to be involved in their workings. The story in Johnson’s collection, ‘Bunjil and the barber shop’, details Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies collaborating to create a painting that, by its very action, ‘does’ reconciliation for those involved – the customers who view the

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271 ibid. pp. 14 & 16
272 ibid. p. 21
273 ibid. p. 23
artwork and Johnson’s readers who imagine it. The story tells how Croatian emigrant Ivan Ratitic owns a barber shop in inner-city Smith Street, Melbourne, in 2000 and wants to fill the empty spaces on his walls with images that reflect reconciliation. Ivan begins looking for Indigenous artists and finds that one of his clients, Eugene Lovett, is an Indigenous artist and willing to participate in the making of the mural. Ivan invites three more artists, this time non-Indigenous, to also work on the mural and after four weeks,

The end result of the collaboration is a splendid five-metre mural depicting themes from the lives of the Gunditjmara people, having as its backdrop, the Grampians mountains landscape as viewed from the area around Dunkeld in Central Victoria (p.9).

Initially the mural was to be called “Jmara Dreaming” but the artists insist it be called “Ivan’s Dream” to represent his vision of reconciliation and acknowledge how dreaming is an essential part of the construction of place and the spaces we share. As the elder who unveiled the mural expressed in his speech the evening it was commissioned,

Four individuals that came together have tried their best to hopefully share in their own ways with you, and hope you can see much deeper into the mural and the feelings put into it. It isn’t just a mural – it’s a lifetime that we can only imagine (p.11).

By ‘seeing’ the mural one also sees the future in a way that is bright and optimistic. By reading about its production, as Johnson portrays it, many others (across the country) become aware of its existence and power. While a reader cannot ‘see’ or ‘touch’ the mural, there is an encounter between the reader and the text that invites them to ‘see’ the artwork and the spirit in which it has been created through the ‘mind’s eye’ of the reader. The act of viewing and/or reading means to participate in the making of the future, as the Indigenous elder put forth in his speech. As academic Jennifer Loureide Biddle argues in Breasts, bodies, canvas: Central Desert arts as experience, “‘we’ as viewers equally experience a world made in and through the act of our viewing”.

Does the reader, however, ‘see the light’? Do they see the Other in a light that is outside of colonial frameworks and in light of reconciliation? Johnson’s intentions of publishing are essentially good. But even the way she writes of the Other cannot escape colonial expectations of the Black body and how it is to be used. For instance, part of the story focuses solely on the life and person of Indigenous artist Eugene Lovett – no other enquiry is made into the lives of the non-Indigenous artists. Under the gaze of a White author, Lovett is

depicted as an Indigenous man who does not only participate in reconciliation, but must be “saved” by it – as if his opportunities are limited without the intervention of the White body – “Eugene is deeply appreciative of Ivan’s attempt to reach out to the local Koori community in Fitzroy and for him personally, the painting has led to a new lease of life and a positive focus. Until he began work on the mural, his life had been on a downward spiral” (pp.9–10). Unfortunately Johnson does not elaborate on the effects the mural had on the other three non-Indigenous artists. Their bodies are somewhat privileged over the Black body because they have an ability to move (paint) without judgement or explaining why they are doing so, whereas the Black body is assumed to be already knowable and seeable through the gaze of dominant subjects. In this dichotomy, sight is opposed to touch when the reader becomes the ‘gazer’ and not a ‘toucher’. Irigaray argues that in sight, we remain “at the service of perception from a distance” but by letting ourselves be touched differently, we may “escape from a dominant scopic economy”. The discourse of reconciliation, as it is presented in this story, assumes that Indigenous people are in ‘need’ of reconciliation rather than ‘worthy’ of the effects it can have on an entire community, which is, in this part of Fitzroy, predominantly multicultural with the potential of escaping a narrow “scopic economy”. Seeing the Other thus involves seeing how one sees the Other and the shift of thinking outside the “scopic economy” Irigaray describes, by imagining new ways of seeing and touching many Others.

The story closes, however, with reference to the gaze of “Bunjil”, the eagle and creator spirit that can be seen in the centre of the artwork: “One wonders how haircuts under his beneficent and wise gaze could ever be the same!” (p.14). Clearly Johnson has a high respect for the creation story that belongs to the Gunditjmara people, as she presents ‘Bunjil’ as a real being who intervenes in the lives of everyday people, just as Indigenous culture implies in the creation story of this area. Johnson’s work can be credited for the way it does justice to the amount of hard work that went into producing the mural; as Ivan expresses, “The whole work has been done from the heart”; it is a labour of love that has defined the bodies of the three non-Indigenous artists as sites for redemption. For Eugene, however, his participation marks his body, not with ‘appreciation’, but with forgiveness: he is willing to stand side-by-side with Others and share his people’s stories – an offering to get ‘closer’ to and encounter reconciliation.

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275 Irigaray, Luce. *The sex which is not one*. Cornell University Press, New York, 1985, p.113
Johnson also writes of a similar act of “redemptive” reconciliation in ‘The clasping hand’ – a story that offers another example of the non-Indigenous body being used for intensive labour to produce a work of art. In September 2000, a prodigious sand sculpture appeared in the shape of a hand in the Todd River outside Alice Springs. The sculptor/artist Julie Taylor physically shovelled and shifted tonnes of sand in temperatures rising over 37 degrees in an effort to produce a tangible symbol for reconciliation that would attract many bodies to one space or location. Johnson writes: “It was hot and hard work, digging, loading, and barrowing the many tonnes of sand to raise the proposed site to the height that Taylor needed” (p.180). The sculpture of sand appeared the colour of White skin in the bed of the dry Todd River – cynics may say it resembled a tourist’s sandcastle in the Others’ place, questioning if it would have greater effect if it appeared in the main street of Alice Springs? Reconciliation need not always take ‘place’ in tourist attractions such as Sydney Harbour Bridge, and more recently hands have popped up everywhere during Reconciliation Week – in schools, parks, shopping centres and libraries. Julie Taylor’s single act of reconciliation is noteworthy, however, and only a labour of love could have produced this large eight-metre by ten-metre hand, which stood in the riverbed for several weeks. Taylor’s hands worked tirelessly to construct this piece and her example evocatively indicates the hard work needed to construct a culture that incorporates reconciliation in its design. The way bodies are used, particularly hands, determines not only how beautiful the world can be seen but how beautiful it can be to touch.

The significance of the ‘hand’ alludes to the importance of ‘touching’ in the reconciliation process, as well as echoing the forest of hands across the nation at this time as part of the Sorry events. At first Taylor thought she would create a sculpture of “the iconic black fist raised in militant defiance” but later thought that this would be “inappropriate in the Australian context, where land and landscape are so intrinsically associated with Aboriginal rights to their traditional countries and culture” (p.179). After all, Johnson’s stories represent a “new stage in personal relationships” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that have not been constructed with fists or the negative implications of resistance, which invokes violence, war or bloodshed. Land rights have been fought for and won by peaceful means such as walk-offs and through legal cases in the courts, the most significant of course being the Mabo case. Thus Taylor decided to “turn the iconic raised fist and soften its edges” and sculpt a clasping hand as she saw it, “holding onto what is important” (ibid.). Taylor uses the material construction of her artwork to engage in the discourses of reconciliation and express a message to the much wider community: Aboriginal people should “hold on to their culture,
land and beliefs” and non-Indigenous Australians should “recognise and respect this as fundamental to the need for reconciliation” (ibid.). Perhaps Taylor is making an obvious statement to Indigenous people who see culture as fundamental to who one is and not something that can be simply possessed, given or held on to as the clasped hand connotes. However, Taylor reiterates an important message that has been apparent since the reconciliation movement began to forge a discourse of its own in the 1990s – her sculpture implies that coming into proximity with Others should not assimilate Indigenous subjects but develop a shared respect for one another through coming to know, love and understand the different cultures as they exist. There is both a giving and taking of ideas about who we are as a nation, our shared history and the many possibilities for the future.

Conversely, hands are also used to stop people from entering a space or proceeding in their actions. A message is clear when one raises a hand to stop another ‘in their tracks.’ Taylor was aware that her idea to build the sand sculpture in the Todd River might not be appropriate and she could be stopped by Indigenous people who believe the river (Lhere Mparntwe) is a very special place. We are told that Taylor “was reluctant to go any place where she may inadvertently be destroying something precious” (p.178). The Todd River is also an infamous spot where numbers of Indigenous people drink and where many homeless people camp night after night. The number of Black bodies that occupy this space draws unstated boundaries of territory and it is no wonder that, when Taylor walked in the bed of the Todd River, she admits feeling “Like I was walking into somebody’s living room”. After seeking permission from appropriate people to undertake the sculpture in the riverbed, she renegotiated, however, the social space of the Todd River and by simply allowing her body to enter the space of the Other’s and toil with the sand, which once worked to draw a line between Black and White bodies, she built a space for proximity with Others. After some time, hundreds of footprints could be seen surrounding the sculpture before it began to dissipate – reminding us that encounters with the Other, in any space or form, are never permanent and must be worked for over and over again. Johnson’s writings have, however, worked to immortalise the vision of this artwork, if not the artwork itself, and salvage its effects for her readers. What it does not do, however, is provide a shared space to learn of what the individual effects may be – these are often personal and very much private, but the spirit in which this art piece is described provides a positive experience for readers – an opportunity to depart from the ‘war zone’ that was perhaps perceived of before Taylor constructed her sand sculpture. This story belongs to one of many relevant to an ongoing course of improving race relations through ‘seeing’ and
‘touching’ through reading and writing.

The hand is a well-recognised trope in the language and expression of reconciliation. As Johnson’s story ‘Sea of hands in the mist’ confirms, multicoloured hands have been planted in “countless configurations all over Australia as symbols of reconciliation” (p.38). It is an act of reconciliation done over again by many people and one Sea of Hands can include up to thirty thousand hands being laid out or ‘planted’ at the one time (p.42). This story recalls Dianne Jacobs’ initiative to bring the Sea of Hands project to the town of Katoomba. Reading of the event somewhat makes its happenings occur once more, as the collection of feedback from participants is certainly awe-inspiring and potentially ‘touches’ those who read it. Several comments shed ‘new light’ on how reconciliation may be perceived and one particular participant makes the very learned point that “no one owns the Sea of Hands. People lend ideas and energy to it – through designs, and by planting, weeding and guarding, but no one is its owner or keeper. It belongs to no one – or to everyone’ (p.40).

Reconciliation, like any concept, cannot be ‘owned’. There is the founding or establishment of an idea but many oversee its continual construction and delivery – it is lived out in everyday lives belonging to the body politic and is constructed over and over in many forms and spaces through hard work or ‘heart work’ (p.43) of individuals who contribute to its building and development. It is an empowering notion to suggest that contributions made by one person to reconciliation can have much larger effects on the way one is in the world, how they ‘see’ themselves, Others and the nation. As Johnson published about the experience of one participant in the Sea of Hands: “I felt like I was involved in transformation … transforming outlines of patterns into a sacred whole. It was like I was transforming myself, the earth, the country” (p.39).

This participant also introduces an interesting aspect of reconciliation that has so far not been discussed. He or she raises the idea that ‘the sacred’ is implicated in the conceptualisation of reconciliation, that bodies may encounter one another in spaces that are not only social and political but also spiritual. Even though ‘reconciliation’ is a religious term stemming in part from Catholicism, referring to the sacrament of confession, in the context of race relations it is commonly used as a social or political term pertaining to the forgiveness of colonial history and colonial treatment of Indigenous subjects. But can the terms correspond in their meanings of bodily encounters that are experienced as deeply spiritual? We are told by another resident of Katoomba: “It wasn’t until I became involved [in the Sea of Hands] that I realised it is a
sacred thing. I don’t understand how cardboard boxes of coloured plastic cut-outs can become a sacred living creature” (p.40). This personal reflection ‘sees’ the sacred in this act of reconciliation and is ‘touched’ by a very special image he or she shares with the imaginations of many Others. Interestingly, this person slept with The Hands and when he or she woke up at sunrise, “all the hands were connected by cobwebs hung with sparkling dew drops. It was such a special image – a sacred image” (p.39). This person is clearly touched by the splendid image of cobwebs glistening from each hand and her experience raises questions of how a spiritual encounter can create closer proximity with Others. This chapter does not provide adequate space to explore these ideas in greater detail but Chapter 5 will elaborate on this sacred dimension of reconciliation as it is brought to light in the powerful work of Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*.

**In conclusion**

Chapter 4 has elucidated, however, that bodily encounters are significantly engrafted in the processes of reconciliation through the sensations of touch, seeing and feelings. To encounter texts by Indigenous authors is to encounter reconciliation as a lived reality. Stories should not be ignored for their crucial effect on relations because it is stories that evoke feelings and thoughts about radical political possibilities. Rather than seeing literature as an incidental byproduct that might accompany ‘real’ historical events, it is refigured as a catalyst for them. Texts *Love like water* by Meme McDonald and *Lighting the way: reconciliation stories* by Dianne Johnson represent Black, White and Migrant bodies as activists who, through their creative labours of love, can construct a culture of reconciliation by impressing on the flesh of the body politic with their bare hands. Their work encounters the reader in such a way that it engenders a response, potentially changing ways of seeing, touching and being in the world. The Black body need not remain a site of oppression, hatred or anger but can become the benefactor for healing and the ‘for-giver’ of hope, transformation and, ultimately, forgiveness. The calling to come is palpable. Reconciliation will continue to manifest and reconstitute itself in many forms: the textual or polemical, the material, social and political, so long as subjects continue to rely on seeing, touching and feeling in order to know, love and understand many Others rather than accepting already constructed ideas that the Other is dangerous, suspicious, sick and an active participant in an unchanging “war zone”. To move in opposite directions requires some “instability” by challenging the status quo and narrowing a spatial distance that operates on a discourse of racial and cultural opposites, whereas bodies
that are different but in close proximity suggest an alternative understanding of embodied
difference: rather than being opposites, people might instead be regarded as “neighbours”.
For Derrida, love conjoins bodies ‘in’ friendship and opens them up to future possibilities (to
love friendship is to love the future).

Chapter 5
Reconciliation as a discourse on belief and one of belief itself: exploring the sacred in Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*

Indigenous people could make reconciliation happen; we could sing it into being if we wanted to.  

Anonymous Pitjantjatjara Elder of Central Australia

Kinship is the traditional way that Indigenous people identify and relate to one another, situating the individual in a family and tribal group denotes belonging to a traditional place or country. As Margaret Kemarre Turner explains in *Iwenhe Tyerrtye – what it means to be an Aboriginal person:*

Kinship holds Aboriginal people really close and strong, it holds everyone tightly together. *Anperrirentye* guides and cares for all the generations of people that have lived within the cradle of their Land. It’s been like that always, stretching from the Creation, and it endures forever. It’s in the Histories. If you don’t relate to each other like this, nobody can know who you are.

Kinship informs Indigenous people of who they are in relation to others but it also prescribes a way of behaving towards others too – who can be spoken to directly and who may marry and have children together. It is codes of practice for Indigenous people and a way of being with each other. Indigenous beliefs about human relationships are thus culturally specific and embedded in ancient and traditional discourses, which continue to have meaning today. Since colonisation, however, government policies of assimilation forced Indigenous people to adopt Western belief systems – the concept of kinship has never been widely understood in Australia’s White mainstream culture. Following the dawn of the reconciliation movement in 1990, however, there has been a growing interest in Indigenous culture – particularly the sacred – emanating from the areas of art and literature all over Australia. As Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden note in *Intimate horizons:* “As Indigenous peoples

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277 To begin this chapter, I turn to a very personal account of contact with an Indigenous elder from the Pitjantjatjara country of Central Australia in 2007. He remains anonymous for ethical reasons but noting our discussion is important as it significantly shaped my understanding of how reconciliation may be viewed and spoken about by Indigenous people. It also made me acutely aware of how non-Indigenous people may too be implicated in the sacred or more ‘secret’ business of human relationships, even if we are unaware of its happenings. The quote here appears in light grey as a reminder that postcolonial societies depend on stories and language that lie outside the bounds of White publishing houses, and that ideas are expressed in language-forms such as speaking to inspire reconciliation. Everyday voices from remote Indigenous communities whisper here – as a way of representing different perspectives of oppression and visions of a new world order from those who may be illiterate. This man’s opinion was not officially recorded in an interview or taped word for word; his voice remains a ‘palpable spirit’ that has informed, shaped and inspired the arguments for this chapter.

278 Kemarre Turner, Margaret. *Iwenhe Tyerrtye – what it means to be an Aboriginal person.* IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2010, p.76
began to speak back to their colonisers, opening up new worlds of understanding about the land and human relationships with it – they have led the way in uncovering a sacredness peculiar to Australia.” These critics outline the ways in which literature has the capacity to represent the sacred and transfer ideas about the sublime into an Australian consciousness.

Yet, reading texts such as Carpentaria by Alexis Wright proves that there is still a lot that remains ‘unknown’ about the sacred when deconstructing Indigenous writing, and a sense of ‘unknowingness’ still protects it from being completely understood or appropriated in mainstream culture. There is much we do not know, and perhaps may not ever know, about Indigenous people and, while literature has the capacity to inform an Australian consciousness of the sacred, it also speaks in dialectics of ‘unknowingness’. Indigenous authors gesture towards the significance of the sacred while upholding a manner of secretiveness in their writing.

This raises the main questions of this chapter: where might the non-Indigenous subject be located, if at all, in the complex system of traditional and sacralised human relationships, and what does this mean for reconciliation which anticipates knowing, understanding and loving the Other in a new or transformed world order? If we do not relate to our Indigenous counterparts through the paradigm of kinship, then is Turner correct in saying that “nobody can know who you are”? Yet is it even possible to know the Other in a way that is deeply sacred because it is often secret? There are secret discourses that flow in and out of our discussions about reconciliation with Indigenous people that may not be properly understood but need to be acknowledged and respected – even if the ‘secrets’ are never revealed and the workings of the sacred can never be owned. Kinship or human relationship is intrinsically linked to notions of the Indigenous sacred and, if reconciliation is to be better understood and made possible, we must explore the boundaries from which it can be read to improve race relations, yet not expose secret business of Indigenous cultures.

There are possibilities and impossibilities of paradigms that inaugurate notions of the Indigenous sacred and race relations. Reconciliation is both a public and private matter (much like reading and writing) and literature is a far less invasive way of exploring reconciliation.

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and the sacred in academe. The sacred may be impossible to ‘see’ in political action but may possibly be felt in its polemical representations found in literature – for instance, *Finding Ullagundahi Island* by Fabienne Bayet-Charlton details the inappropriate request for political officials to document the nature of secret women’s business during the Hindmarsh Island bridge dispute of the 1990s. Local Indigenous women protested against the building of a bridge to Hindmarsh Island on the premise that the Island was a sacred place for secret women’s business. Bayet-Charlton’s polemical writing has the ability to allude to the sacredness of place and make it ‘felt’, yet without disclosing its secrets and making it ‘seen’; the sacred is felt through language but is not in language itself. As Ashcroft et al. suggest: the presence of the sacred can be “apprehended” in literature and “there are ways of experiencing, responding to, of ‘understanding’, the world apart from structures of meaning, that are, apart from the kind of interpretation that can be fixed in language.”

Thus thinking about reconciliation in only legal or political terms constructed from Western thought in the form of government acts is a reductive approach to understanding the possibilities of intercultural relationships. While the sacred is a difficult dialectic to engage with, questions should be asked about the way we use language to identify the Other and read Indigenous texts so that *our* own business with Others might make its appearance.

This chapter explores the textual representation of reconciliation as sacred in Alexis Wright’s award-winning novel, *Carpentaria*. Admittedly, this text was quite difficult to read; it stretches over five hundred pages in length, yet parts of the novel are somewhat incomprehensible (not unintelligible) but pieces are invisible to the non-Indigenous reader – the meaning is inarticulate but one feels there is something more there. Wright uses English in a way that allows her to avoid talking about the sacred, while at the same time implying its workings are incessantly present and real. Her epigraphs appear to be in code and confusing to those unable to identify specific cultural references, sign systems proving problematic, yet deeply intriguing. Critic Alison Ravenscroft has also described *Carpentaria* as a particularly difficult text to understand, labelling it a “labyrinthine narrative” because “one story [is] folded between others as if in parenthesis.” She shares an honest encounter with the text, having to ask herself: “how to ‘make sense’ of this? How to read?” This is not a criticism of Wright’s creative work. On the contrary, she argues that an “unresolved” text need not

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280 ibid. pp.11 & 17
282 ibid. p.206
always be a failure, but rather is an accomplishment.\textsuperscript{283}

What can be appreciated about Wright’s work is that she seeks to name her reality her way – another textual example of the colonised using the English language to transform oppression – moving beyond simply rewriting her world order to totally obliterating it. With an apocalyptic explosion towards the end of the text, she proposes the possibility of starting again. Radical possibilities for the future are gestured towards but not brought into language here; differences between the coloniser and the colonised are signalled in confronting ways and arousing animosity when she writes of “the end” – a world left unreconciled, yet no longer colonised. By doing this, does she reveal that reconciliation is a reality that escapes representation, only possible if it can be imagined in diverse ways and represented in language that does not repeat itself? “A nation chants, but we know your story already”.\textsuperscript{284} Should non-Indigenous readers be frightened by a text that invokes ‘the end’ or should we look forward to Wright’s proposal of a new life? While \textit{Carpentaria} is an intense and highly complex text, its meanings are relevant to the changing nature of race relations in the face of cultural tradition, modernity and the future – it is a unique intellectual \textit{problematique} that proves reconciliation can be elusive, knotted and sometimes appear as silent paradigms (nested within traditional Indigenous understandings of the sacred and human relationships).

\textit{Carpentaria} does not only address the sacred as a literary trope – by writing of the sacred, Wright incites its very power and affect. In the same way that traditional storytelling might invigorate the sacred presence it speaks of, this text also participates in sacred undertakings, considering that reading and writing (about ‘reconciliation’) is a sacred process itself and may contribute to it being “sung it into being” (as the opening quote of this chapter suggests). There are many references to singing and music in Wright’s text; her very style of writing is pervasively musical – as if she were singing up spiritual ancestors in her own literary world to assist in the intricate workings of her profound story and pointing to the possibility that literature can in fact ‘do’ reconciliation as a sacred or spiritual process belonging to transformation. As previous chapters have discussed, social transformation is dependent on the physical, emotional and spiritual transformation of a nation and its subjects, particularly how a nation remembers history and constructs the meaning of place. How subjects think, feel, speak and behave towards Others is captured in a nation’s poetics and expressed in

\textsuperscript{283} ibid. p.195
everyday polities. *Carpentaria* is not a sacred document but it demonstrates how the sacred interferes in everyday human relationships – as Ashcroft et al. argue: the sacred is “accessible through literature if not in literature, sensed through language if not in language”.Within the text, the sacred is sensed through stories, songs, places, natural events (such as cyclones and storms), specific ancestral spirits and other ‘things’. It is not considered to be fictive by the author and certainly not by those belonging to the Waanyi (and Ganggalida) tribe in her home in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Here, the sacred has a real presence in the lives of its people and they believe the sacred has created the world with the power to renew it. Sacredness is not synonymous with myth, magic or the magnificent (as English interpretations have sometimes confused it with ideas about the Dreaming) but, as Frances Devlin-Glass argues, *Carpentaria* “provides a powerful vehicle for analysis of coloniality and its misrepresentations of the Waanyi real.” She suggests that terms such as “magic” should be avoided when describing Indigenous belief systems and more appropriate terms may include the *supervital*, which infers that the natural world has sacred powers. Therefore, the sacred (as it is seen in nature) can be considered more than just the sublime or aesthetic, and redefined as having an active and existential purpose in people’s everyday lives, including relationships.

The final pages of *Carpentaria* detail “The end”: nothing is left but place itself – no political structures to be upheld, and culturally the town is *tabula rasa* – neither complete nor finished. Do readers interpret the area as a place for reconciliation to occur after the cyclone splits the town into separate islands? In her reading of *Carpentaria*, Laura Joseph argues that the concept of nation is rejected through the creation of new islands and quotes Bachelard’s argument that “a poetics of the storm is a poetics of anger”. But what makes this textual ending one that is not antagonistic or hostile is that, despite how the world has changed, the

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285 Ashcroft et al. op. cit. p.323
286 Patrick Wolfe’s work is extensive in the area of analysing and recording the history of Australian anthropological conceptions of the Dreaming or Dreamtime in Indigenous cultures. He argues it was W.E.H. Stanner’s article ‘The Dreaming’ that referred to Indigenous people as a collective and thus gave a collective translation of the Dreaming to all Indigenous people. Wolfe describes the name ‘Dreaming’ to be “a single alien word, introduced through conquest” and not appropriate to all aspects of secret/sacred knowledge or rituals. Wolfe, Patrick. ‘On being woken up: the Dreamtime in anthropology and in Australian settler culture’ in *Comparative studies in society and history*, Vol.33, No. 2, April 1991, pp. 215 & 218.
288 loc. cit.
289 Joseph, Laura. ‘Dreaming phantoms and golems: elements of the place beyond nation in *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter*’ in *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, Special Issue, 2009, p.6
longing to seek, build and believe in new beginnings is still possible with remaining characters Will and Hope. Although a double impulse of destruction and renewal is brought by the cyclone at the end, Wright leaves her readers with the possibility that a new world order may be constructed (or sung into being): “It was a mystery, but there was so much song wafting off the watery land, singing the country afresh as they walked hand in hand out of town, down the road, Westside, to home” (p.519). Sacredness, as it appears in this text, has the ability to interfere with human relationships and the way characters live. At a point of destruction and chaos, healing is possible for cultural renewal and transformation of their world. The final chapter ‘Coming back’ illustrates this through the sublime imagery of Hope and Norm Phantom rowing out to sea in search of a separate island from the once dysfunctional town of Desperance. Their journey is, however, divided; Hope believes she can find Norm’s son, Will, but he is unsure whether he will ever see his son again and live together as they once did before the cyclone. However, Hope has seen Will in her dreams – floating on another island she calls “junk pile island”, trying to reach out to them, but drifting further away (p.512). Norm realises her epiphany is rare, and this sense of a new beginning is special: “I never seen a thing like that before and I don’t suppose I am ever going to either” but “What surprised him even more was how she could describe the floating island in every last detail as though she had been involved in its construction.” Likewise, Will is certain of Hope’s vision and believes they will be reunited: “He was convinced she was urging him on to the place where they would finally be reunited … he was convinced she and he would be alive in this place” (p.465). On the other hand, Norm tells himself that Hope is trying to fool his judgement, steering the boat in her own direction towards Will and the arrival of a new world rather than restoring the old: “The currents were changing and soon, the Wet season would bring the cyclones again who knows where they would end up … condemned to live the remainder of their lives in a purgatory of revisiting, duplicating the wars of all the peoples through the ages of time?” (p.514). During destruction and chaos, conflict and struggle open up a ‘place’ for a new reality; without destruction, there cannot be renewal or extraordinary possibilities without also experiencing conflict.

The sacred is seen in this text as a form of destruction and renewal in the lives of its characters, including those who are non-Indigenous and Judaeo-Christian, making a few references to the Old and New Testaments. The term ‘reconciliation’ stems from Christian belief and refers specifically to the Catholic sacrament of confession for the forgiveness of sins, and it is not surprising that Christian associations of ‘reconciliation’ have bled into
political understandings of the modern-day concept. For instance, the notions of divine healing, saying sorry, repenting and the belief that relationships with each other and a higher power will experience natural cycles of destruction (anger) and renewal (love and forgiveness). Is spirituality relevant to the political movement of reconciliation? From the Nietzschean position that ‘God is dead’ and spirituality is now essentially absent from culture, politics and philosophy? Contrarily, Veronica Brady believes that the sacred is suppressed in Western culture and is unfortunately now considered archaic. She believes that our settler society has come to place too much emphasis on “economic development, material productivity, conspicuous consumption and technological efficiency” and that “ecological understanding” and “the transformation of chaos into cosmos” have lost their “imaginative and spiritual way.” Similarly, in The feminine and the sacred Julia Kristeva argues that a society preoccupied with technology and profit will not favour inquiry into “spiritual restlessness”, which could have the potential to constitute a “destiny, a biography”. What are we missing if we continue to deny the presence of the sacred in cultural production? If mainstream society continues to refuse the Indigenous sacred because we cannot articulate its workings, then what is our nation’s destiny with Others? Could an engagement in the mystery of the sacred rightfully be the emergence of meaningful relationships, beginning with the relationship between writer and readers? Thinking of reconciliation vis-a-vis writing about the powers of the sacred could be a way of speaking in a language that does not repeat itself, invigorating cultural renewal.

As will be discussed in greater detail below, Carpentaria shows how Christian doctrine and Indigenous spirituality inform models of reconciliation and the politics of race relations. The people of Desperance/Uptown belong to a society trying to make sense of modernity, the death of religion in an age of technology and consumerism, yet despite the Uptowners’ preoccupation with the modern world, they are still deeply affected by the sacred, although few are aware of its exact form and power’s: most experiencing the sacred in a way that Maurice Blanchot describes as “a presence which is also an absence”. The sacred is present

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292 ibid. p.141
294 loc. cit.
295 Brady, Veronica op. cit. p.147
but the full awareness of its affects or deeper meaning is however absent or understood later. This Orientalist reading of the text argues that the sacred has inexplicable effects on characters who live within the cradle of Desperance/Uptown – similar to the argument that King Tutenkhamen’s tomb had an effect on those who opened it in the 1920s – these characters are affected by the sacred as it confronts them in nature.\footnote{Gelder, Ken. ‘Private knowledges and the public gaze: Aboriginal writing as property in the late twentieth century’ in Working Papers in Australian Studies, No.64, 1991, p.13} Being aware of the sacred or ‘King Tut’ effects is particularly relevant to the politics of reconciliation because it shows that our relationships can be affected by ‘something else’ other than politics or the law, and that literature has the power to invoke a reader’s intellect, memory, emotions and spiritual responsiveness to change.

**Opening up: The Novel**

My own copy of *Carpentaria* appears somewhat senescent and careworn. The corners of the front cover are curled up and there are earth-coloured stains across the top, bottom and sides of the pages from being handled in the desert over an eight-day research trip in the Pitjantjatjara Lands. In the evenings I would sit on a rock and immerse myself in the pages, ponder ideas and get ‘lost’ in the narrative and its convolution of new meanings and signs. Being on sacred Indigenous land better prepared me, I think, for deep inner listening and quiet awareness of the sacred, which permeated its pages and demanded a different type of reading. In an interview, Alexis Wright has said she wanted *Carpentaria* to be: “the voice that Australians have never listened to. It’s the voice of Aboriginal elders speaking about people and country, talking about what Aboriginal culture is, what it means and how it might work in the future”.\footnote{England, Katharine & Deborah Bogle. ‘Place of hope and desperation’ in *Advertiser*, 30 June 2007, p.W8}

When I opened up the novel, I read *The first words* by Seamus Heaney. His poem reinforced the position from which I had chosen to read and his poetics established the importance of language as not merely words, but an enlivenment of the spiritual and the sublime:

\begin{quote}
The first words get polluted 
Like river water in the morning 
Flowing with the dirt 
Of blurbs and the front pages.
\end{quote}
My only drink is meaning from the deep brain,
What the birds and the grass and the stones drink.
Let everything flow
Up to the four elements,
Up to water and earth and fire and air.

This poem suggests that the sacred does not only belong to nature but its affects also concern intellectual beings as well and are felt in “the deep brain”. His poem tells us that the sacred is linked to the vicissitudes of the elements, and that humanity cannot be nourished by words alone, as words are merely “blurbs” and “front pages”. Heaney’s poem is emblematic of how the sacred must flow into our everyday lives – just like the water we drink or the air we breathe.

Carpentaria’s first chapter, ‘From time immemorial’, begins with a “blurb” about the setting of the text: “A nation chants, but we know your story already” (p.1). Even though these words appear in the blurb, they are not an isolated quotation; the same words are subsequently found throughout the novel and echo how national discourses such as reconciliation have become repetitive and without effect. What follows on the main section of the first page is, however, an ancient creation story that tells of the ancestral serpent’s creation of the Gulf of Carpentaria: “The ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity.” This creation story does not appear in the “blurb”, where typical Western ways of reading might place it (away from the main story because it belongs to the past). Instead, the sacred “flows” into the main part of the story – it is part of the present story being told. The sacred is not a reference belonging to the peri-text, thus showing how it is naturally part of Indigenous people’s everyday lives: “It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin” (p.2). This inseparable link between the creation of the land and the present day is typical of many Indigenous cultures across Australia. As Brady notes in her research, for Indigenous people “the land speaks of community and continuity, linking past and present in a continuing story which goes back to the origins of life itself and connects the individual life to that of the cosmos.”

298 ‘Towards an ecology of Australia’. op. cit. p.145
There is a direct contrast between the blurb at the very start of the chapter, which pronounces the end: “Armageddon begins here” (p.1), and the main text, which signals readers to “the beginning” of time and the creation of the land from the serpent’s own viscera: 

Looking down at the serpent’s wet body, glistening from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria (p.1).

From the very first page, the notion of endings and beginnings are intrinsically evoked and we learn that even the serpent must “escape back into its natural environment of darkness” (p.2). His workings as a sacred being belong to a natural cycle of absence and presence in the destruction and renewal of creation.

Towards the final part of the chapter, however, Wright establishes a mood of conflict and anger. She points to the fear of war inherently caused by the conflict of people, particularly between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of Desperance: “But this was not Vaudeville. Wars were fought here. If you had your patch destroyed you’d be screaming too” (p.11), showing how colonisation has interfered with the lives and culture of the river people and how land has been stolen from traditional owners. Western belief systems, such as religion, have been forced on Indigenous children from a young age and, despite this, we are told that the Indigenous sacred remains omnipresent in this country – it has not been destroyed by the works of colonial oppression as it continues to flow in the lives of the people and “permeates everything”:

The serpent’s covenant permeates everything, even the little black girls with hair combed back off their faces and bobby-pinned neatly for church, listening quietly to the nation that claims to know everything except the exact date its world will end. Then, almost whispering, they shyly ask if the weather has been forecast correctly today.

The sacred can be both present and absent at the same time and felt in this textual example by the changes in weather but absent from the minds and epistemology of the townspeople, who blame the weather forecast as inaccurate. A change is coming and something else is about to be told; something that cannot be predicted, foreseen by science or “forecast correctly today”. The language that Wright uses here works to insinuate that the sacred is present, while not openly disclosing its workings; it appears both in and outside of language: the sacred is “listening quietly to the nation” and must be “whispered” about. The sacred has not been named or located but gestured towards without directions as to how it can be read. Such a style of writing is atypical of colonisers’ use of English and an example of writing oneself out of oppression. The series of non-linear nodes and pathways characteristic of Wright’s style is
not to ‘trick’ or anger readers, but to remap the intercultural zone where non-Indigenous readers may begin to feel the presence of the sacred and come to understand its significance to Indigenous people.

At this point many non-Indigenous readers may doubt their ability to connect with a text that is not neatly packaged for the conventional presentation of a foreseen ending, asking themselves Ravenscroft’s recurring question of How to read? In response to this, she suggests reading *Carpentaria* by using “a different paradigm, and this is the paradigm of radical uncertainty, an impossible dialectic” in order to access its textual meaning. She does not suggest White readers give up on the text but appreciate its enigma, get lost in its irresolvable signs and traces of the sacred. Readers cannot come into absolute knowledge of the Other but can surrender to specific reading and writing differences between the colonised and the coloniser, appreciating how Indigenous writers may use language in original ways for political and cultural purposes. As Ashcroft argues, Indigenous fiction writing can transform the world of the oppressed by using language in unique and unpredictable ways, potentially painting a different picture of the world, one that frees them from colonial ways of seeing only one picture of reality, which has been seen so many times before. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s earlier work argues that when a society stands forth in their position that ‘this is how it is’, we are merely tracing round the frame through which we look at reality. In effect we are trapped within a picture that has been drawn ‘in our language’, repeating itself and preventing us from getting outside this picture. Fiction writing can, however, present for us alternate pictures of the world through the articulation of fresh symbols and ways of seeing reality. *Carpentaria* is not a failure because it makes demands of its readers’ ability to read differently; it is an accomplished text because it draws for us a new way of seeing reality with Others in an alternate world. For example, Will believes in Hope’s dream for their future even though he cannot properly see or articulate it. He waits in the nexus of (un)certainty:

He rethought their reunion, trying to capture some unapparent feature in the flat ocean of the vision he had just seen, to pinpoint a location, a direction to travel. Nothing resurfaced of this broken dream. The images could not be properly remembered or held up for scrutiny like a photo of a place, or a map (p.465 – 6).

What this text illustrates is that the nation may continually move towards postcolonial frameworks of reconciliation but never properly arrive at a specific “end” – as this would mean Armageddon. There are both possibilities and impossibilities of starting again, and later

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299 *Dreaming of others: Carpentaria and its critics*’ op. cit. p.197
chapters show an urgency to find language that articulates cultural destruction and renewal as part of postcolonial discussions about reconciliation but does not disrespect ideas about the Indigenous sacred or infer the end of the Earth. The spiritual objective of reconciliation does not have to be utopian or unrealistic but it does need to find a language in the national vocabulary about the Other. Perhaps what we may learn from representations of the Indigenous sacred is that ‘dreaming’ is an inherit part of constructing the future and that dreaming could itself inaugurate a politics of hope. Turner writes of learning how to be a sacred part of human relationship and existence in the world:

*Akaltyele-arle-anthemeye – teaching* – is a really sacred thing, because everything that we’re learning is sacred, sacred things about our existence: *Nthakenhe amangkenhetyeyeke*, to grow up how to be, how to continue growing and learning in the right way throughout our lives; *nthakenhe anenhetyeyeke*, how to live the life stretching out before us, to continue living the life we were born to live; *nthakenhe apeke ilenhetyeyeke ane arenhetyeyeke*. And how to see life, and how to know life, and also what life is; the life that keeps on being described to us and seen by us; how that has to be. This is the way they used to learn us, our old people, *alakenhe*.  

The presence of the Indigenous sacred is important for reconciliation because it is of value to Indigenous people. However, there are times throughout *Carpentaria* when non-Indigenous characters take a tokenistic interest in the Indigenous sacred, offending people and hindering relations in the town. In Chapter 1, for example, a number of politicians and mining executives gather in Desperance for its “white linen ceremony” – a ceremony organised by the mining officials to show respect to the local Indigenous people by publicly renaming the river after a traditional elder. However, the sentiments of this gathering make the goal of reconciliation material, rather than spiritual, because the same people are also “pillaging the region’s treasure trove” (p.9). During the ceremony, the state premier officially changes the name of the river “from that of a long deceased Imperial Queen, to Normal’s River.” The traditional people gather to hear the announcement while mumbling to themselves in language “*Ngabarn, Ngabarn, Mandagi*”. These words are not translated into English but we are told that “those who knew a fruit salad full of abuse in the local languages” knew Normal was not giving a thank you speech in response to the ceremony and the renaming of the river after him, and the traditional people were said to have “belly-laughed themselves silly because the river only had one name from the beginning of time. It was called *Wangala*” (p.10).

Yet, the specifics of the river’s sacredness are not disclosed and we are left with an

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*Iwenhe Tyerrtye – what it means to be an Aboriginal person.* op cit. p.198
‘unknowingness’ (not to be confused with ignorance, as one is fully aware of what has been shared and what must remain a secret). Readers witness how writing the sacred is an act of empowerment for Wright and leads imaginatively to the transformation of her world by emphasising the permanence of particular cultural beliefs, allowing silence to resonate as protest in her work. What may seem reductive and imprisoning to a non-Indigenous reader is liberating and transformative to the Indigenous writer. In Wright’s world, reconciliation thus becomes a journey into the interior self and not a plundering to cover up the taking of the Other’s land, which the mining executives try by covering up the destruction of the land with that of a superficial ceremony that traditional people cannot take seriously and are instead offended by. Profit and technological advancement do not belong in the parlance of the Pricklebush people – their way of speaking about the world and human relationships involves a shared vernacular – built on shared understandings of the land and the sacred.

Despite the obvious elements of Wright’s work that remain ‘off limits’ or secret, readers are let in on the Pricklebush people’s “joke” about renaming the river. In Chapter 3 of this thesis, humour was discussed as a writing form that works to decolonise Indigenous subjects by reverting the gaze back to colonisers as a laughing matter. However, humour can also be used as a form of speaking and listening that builds relationships. Margaret Kemarre Turner comments on the importance of jokes in building a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who live in two separate cultures: laughing together and sharing jokes is a way of overcoming difference and engaging in a discourse of “friendship” and that a friend is someone “you can rely on, and say things with, and joke. Not an angry joke, but just a good laughing joke.” Do we read Wright’s tone and style of humour as hostile, patronising and part of a malicious joke? Or is her work a satirical work that makes fun of the dominant culture, while letting Others in on the joke as a way of speaking about colonisation?

There may be a basis for reconciliation when Indigenous writers imaginatively represent the sacred and its presence may be felt: an invitation allowing non-Indigenous subjects to get closer to the Other, yet without getting so close that their knowledge becomes colonial possession. In Carpentaria, a few Indigenous people in Desperance avoid getting too close to Others for fear of being continually possessed and oppressed, and are referred to as yinbirras:

These Yanngunyi were people who lived beside other real people, and even though you could hear them going about their daily business, shouting at each other to listen, they would not let anyone see

302 ibid. p.221
Many Indigenous people attend the “white linen ceremony”, however, and their presence points to the travesty of the officials’ efforts to reconcile with the locals before mining their land. Mining officials attempt to ‘give back’ the river to the Pricklebush people, even though they have always remained spiritually connected to it from the beginning of time. This textual example may suggest that discourses of reconciliation that are dominated by Western politics are (laughably) ignorant of Indigenous culture and do not acknowledge the Indigenous sacred. Therefore how can such a discourse resonate with Indigenous people, whose very beliefs about human relationships are engendered in traditional discourses or stories pertaining to kinship, the land and the sacred? Wright explains how cultural norms are constructed and passed down through sacred stories:

Men such as Norm Phantom kept a library chock-a-block full of stories of the old country stored in their heads. Their lives were lived out by trading stories for other stories. They called it decorum – the good information, intelligence, etiquette of the what to do, how to behave for knowing how to live like a proper human being, alongside spirits for neighbours in dreams (p.246).

Local, state and national politics do not figure predominantly in the Indigenous imaginations of the Pricklebush people. It is the polemical representations of how to behave as a “proper human being” among ancestral spirits that is most important, suggesting that perhaps a form of ‘meaningful coexistence’ is only possible by understanding the importance of the Indigenous sacred and its interplay in human relationships (in modern and ancient stories). Non-Indigenous people must accept an absence of ever knowing the Other’s traditional and more secret stories but believe that better race relations may depend on elusive, knotted and silent paradigms of knowing, yet not knowing, the Other and their sacred world. Thus reading *Carpentaria* is a form of ‘doing’ reconciliation in this way by approaching the unknowable, the sacred and the inconceivable as they appear in ‘English’ as a conventional form but challenge typical language use, plot and Indigenous characterisation to transform the relationship between reader and text.

**She used ‘magic’ to erect a home from scraps**

In Chapter 2, “Angel Day” readers learn that “wars” and “destruction” are a natural part of Indigenous people’s lives at present and in the ancient world. Marcia Langton argues that swearing and fighting among Indigenous people are by no means impulsive or “disorganised” but part of “ritualised codes” and certain rules: “The behaviour in question is not mass
deviancy and anarchy”, she observes, “but appropriate rule-governed behaviour adapted from earlier Indigenous patterns to enable meaningful existence in the new political, legal, and social situations imposed by the dominant Anglo-Australian regime.”

Similarly, Gelder argues that in a postmodern Australia, Indigenous people have responded to the colonisers by behaving and communicating in a way that “resists acquisition” and shows their culture is not always ready and available to non-Indigenous people. For example, while Angel Day is scouring the rubbish tip looking for materials, she notices people from the Pricklebush clan have made their home here, “under cardboard boxes, pieces of corrugated iron, inside forty-four gallon tar barrels, or broken parts of abandoned water tanks” (p.24). Conflict erupts over land and trespassing and civilians living at the tip take up sticks and stones as a way of “trying to defend the peace” (p.25). To resolve the feud, many try to influence the ancestors of the past: the “People who had been getting on well, living side by side for decades, started to recall tribal battles from the ancient past spirits would never let you forget the past” (p.26). Thus the cycle of destruction and renewal dictates the Pricklebush people’s relationships here as always. On the contrary, when particular political and legal conflict has erupted, many Indigenous people appear apathetic or unreactive. However, Gelder argues that Indigenous subjects deal with conflict with non-Indigenous subjects by maintaining “judicious silence” while perhaps letting more secret ways of resolving conflict (specific to culture) take place. He wonders:

Could it be the case that Aboriginal peoples have learnt to retain a judicious silence, only giving out a certain amount of carefully constructed discourse, making sure that we are aware that in their economy of discourses the first separation is between the “public” and the “secret” and that a great wealth of culture lies below the surface?  

If Indigenous people have come to learn a certain way of being with, yet not being with, their colonisers through a code of silence, then Ravenscroft is perhaps correct in saying that our relationship with Indigenous people is based on an “impossible dialectic” – silences cannot ever be filled and that this dialectic will never result in “full knowledge”. Therefore if reconciliation is concerned with knowing, understanding and loving the Other, then how do we come to terms with the social distances that have been deliberately created between us? How do we bear a relationship that may not ever be reconciled? While moving towards


304 ‘Private knowledges and the public gaze: Aboriginal writing as property in the late twentieth century’. op. cit. p.1

305 ibid. p.8

postcolonisation may mean that subjects get closer to one another, subjects will never be essentially ‘close’ – a necessary distance has perhaps been constructed by both the colonisers and the colonised – but this ‘distance’ is becoming better understood so that people can relate to one another as neighbours (if not friends).

In *Carpentaria*, conflict is seen as frightening for civilians but it eventually leads to social change and transformation. The feuding at the tip continues until Will Phantom (Angel’s ten-year-old son) takes a cigarette lighter and burns the grasses all along the periphery of the dump: “Very soon, people could be seen moving through the dense smoke, helping others through the burnt grass and back along the path with smouldering smoke on either side” (p.28). This chapter foreshadows the eruption of the much larger fight between the Pricklebush people and those working at the mine, suggesting that this later feud may also come to an abrupt ending. Such violence suggests that racial conflict is deeply embedded and that the cycle of destruction, hopelessness and anger among the characters may never end:

> In an era when people were crying for reconciliation, there was fat chance that day. The little delegation started walking back to town, heads bent like wet seagulls in the stormy rain, away from the troubles of the Pricklebush (p.42).

Even though reconciliation is very much desired, it is a salutary reminder that it must remain for the time being an unfulfilled possibility. Wright infers that Indigenous people could construct reconciliation if they wanted it and sing it into being, but the people of Uptown are not ready, walking away from the Pricklebush people instead of towards them.

The future appears bleak: traditional understandings of human relationships and Western ideas about politics and modernity collide. The modern world is depicted in the text as a place obsessed with profit and technology – represented by the tip – a place where ‘things’ outdated are thrown away to make way for the new. At the rubbish tip Angel Day comes across “official” papers thrown away by the council, which may have once told a story of Indigenous housing but to her are worthless: “They were using plenty of ink and paper recording what they had blabbered to each other” and she “knew what white persons had to say just by looking at them, particularly the ones who wrote official papers. She called them gammon” (p.21). Political processes or ‘officialdom’ are mocked here and considered “gammon” or laughable. The term ‘gammon’ is a word belonging to Aboriginal English that means ‘not real’ or something to be joked about. Through the bridging of Aboriginal English, Angel shows how relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of this town
have become a farce and that no amount of legal documentation could restore them. “Blurbs” or “front pages” (as Heaney notes) have no purpose in her world and mean nothing – words as they have been used are perhaps ‘polluted’ by the coloniser’s language and will be ineffective in creating change and the postcolonial transformation of this town.

The legal system has failed to bring about justice for the severely oppressed people of Desperance and Angel declares that she wants to press charges against the government for “attempted murder”, suing the “town as accomplices to a conspiracy to have my person killed and the persons of my family murdered before they were born, and for damages for the ones who were born” (p.40). However, her efforts appear in vain and the legal papers are thrown away to signify that a new way of speaking about relations of the past and present is required. Wright suggests at the very beginning of this chapter, for example, that a different story should be told in the face of the town’s hopelessness: “The ghosts in the memories of the old folk were listening, and said anyone can find hope in the stories: the big stories and the little ones in between” (p.12).

Just as the “old folk” describe the “big stories and little ones in between”, Carpentaria has been described by Ravenscroft as “one story folded between others as if in parenthesis.”307 Even though Wright’s characters appear hopeless, the “in between” stories deviate from the bigger story of blowing up the mind and instead reflect the possibility of cultural renewal and transformation through the workings of the sacred (as it appears as a cyclone). Wright represents what may be considered a natural disaster as something far more powerful and connected to human relationships and, as Devlin-Glass terms, “supervital”. By reading Wright’s “little story”, can we be informed about the much bigger story of renewed postcolonial relations?

The coming of Elias Smith, the generation of an era of self-analysis
Chapter 3 entitled ‘Elias Smith comes ... and goes’, starts with a fairytale: “Once upon a time, not even so long ago, while voyaging in the blackest of midnights, a strong sea man, who was a wizard of many oceans, had his memory stolen by thieving sea monsters hissing spindrift and spume as they sped away across the tops of stormy waves grown taller than the trees” (p.43). In this chapter, Elias Smith is introduced as a modern-day prophet who wandered in,

307 ibid. p.205
not from the desert, but from the sea (emphasising Indigenous land rights over the rivers and oceans?). He is a character of many dimensions – a White man believed to be of Spanish descent and who the White people believe is sent as a gift from God:

They regarded their luck as a late Christmas present, in spite of everything else, from the invisible one called Almighty, and claimed He must have listened to all the feverishly whispered prayers that were said across town the previous night (p.47).

Yet the Pricklebush people believed that Elias Smith belonged to their story: “You could tell this man might be equated with the Dreamtime world because when his memory was stolen, the mighty ancestral body of Black clouds and gale-force winds had spun away, over and done with, in a matter of a flash” (p.50). They believe the White people of Uptown are not ready for a Dreamtime prophet, accusing them of not even having a God or remembering their religion. At first the people of Uptown attribute to Elias Smith notions about Christmas and the myth of Santa Claus without even considering his importance to the Pricklebush people:

The old people worried about Uptown’s ability to cope with their uncertainty about new things coming into their lives. It was normal for their approach to fluctuate between confused joy and confused woe and on this day it was no different (p.62).

White ignorance coupled with the mystery of the Indigenous sacred makes for a point of conflict here and readers are not sure whether either groups will come to appreciate each other’s views of this sacred/religious being.

Uptown has a long history of denying Indigenous cultural beliefs and undermining their representations of the sacred:

Everything was hush-hush in the Pricklebush. No one ever told Uptown a single thing of what Elias was doing out on the claypan. You learn a good lesson when you get told, Oh! Yeah! And pigs have wings, huh? Invisible things in nature made no sense to Uptown because of their savoir faire [to know how to act] in being Australians. Once, a long time ago when they first heard Pricklebush talk like this they kept them out of town for a long, long time. Can’t come in here if you want to talk mumbo jumbo like mad people, Uptown said. The old people they had tactlessly taken to calling simple-minded retaliated with a hundred months of evil curses and sorcery. In the end, black and white were both crawling on the ground in reconciliation. Both saying they were plain jack of each other. So, the old people said, We have to keep it a secret.

What cannot be understood is therefore kept secret from the people of Uptown, and reconciliation can only be brought about by the practice of “evil curses” and “sorcery”, which leaves both groups crawling on the ground as if blind. Reconciliation may be destructive if brought into being at the wrong time and the people of Uptown are simply not ready to engage in a dialectics of the sacred at this moment in the narrative – to do so would be a fallacy.
In Chapter 5 we are introduced to Mozzie Fishman, another spiritual figure, but a character of human flesh. We first imagine him driving out of the desert, leading a long dusty convoy of one hundred men driving old Holden station wagons and secondhand Falcon sedans. These men following Fishman are “holy pilgrims of the Aboriginal world” whose “convoy continued an ancient religious crusade along the spiritual travelling road of the great ancestor, whose journey continues to span the entire continent and is older than time itself” (p.119). Wright portrays a place for the Indigenous sacred in the modern world of “motor cars” now used to follow the same song-lines that ancestors once travelled on foot. As conspicuous as their vehicles may be, these men avoid being seen by White people because they fear Others would only dispute the importance of their spiritual journey and think they were “freaks of nature” (p.121). This proves to be true when one day the convoy is seen on cattlemen’s country. They appear to the White cattlemen as a “blot of strange-looking blacks” and they start to wonder, “Why there were boongs squatting down on the riverbank?” (p.131). They do not understand that the convoy is simply doing culture and the cattlemen begin to shoot at them with their rifles:

This was why Mozzie Fishman knew he could not stay with the white people teaching them about reconciliation, and moved the convoy on. He never saw himself as a target and would never get used to the idea of being used as target practice either (ibid.).

Readers are not told what it is that Mozzie could teach them about reconciliation and a carefully constructed discourse of silence has been constructed here.

Nonetheless, Mozzie’s role as a “holy pilgrim” means that he is linked to the Indigenous spiritual world. He resists engaging in a dialogue about reconciliation that is characteristically violent, which the cattlemen’s gunfire represents as epistemic violence present in the Western world. Mozzie doubts the settlers’ have an ability to understand the nature of Indigenous cultural practices and instead sequesters his convoy out of harm’s way. Unlike the rubbish-tip war, peace could not be defended with sticks and stones – the use of guns since colonisation has ruined any hope of reconciliation in this setting – proving that violence (whether by gunshot or arson) will mean “an end” to people’s lives, not an end to the establishment or the current order of things. Wright makes equivocal references to “something else” that is much more awesome and divinely powerful than violent reprisal, making a syllogistic contribution to the reconciliation debates by introducing the concept of the Indigenous sacred in opposition to physical resistance or violent struggle.
In Chapter 10, ‘The giant in the cloak’, Mozzie’s “unsung” discourses of reconciliation are compared to that of the “already known” discourses spouted by Christian missionary and town clerk, Valance. When Gordie, a young Indigenous boy, is murdered in the town, Valance feels he should respond appropriately to his assembly and rings the church bell continuously: “calling on the Holy Trinity in the storm clouds above by ringing the bell, hoping his Gods would look down on those poor unfortunates and shower them with the strength to walk to town” (p.323). The Pricklebush people do not wish to interfere with Valance, so they just sit, watch and wait “until the law arrived” (p.322). Without knowing its effects, “the law” makes Valance’s exertions seem somewhat pointless to the Pricklebush people: “Praise men of ambition who strive for newfangled ideas like reconciliation in old Australia, for Valance with his pricked conscience used every opportunity as town clerk, to make town campers feel like they were a part of the broader community” (p.323). These ideas about Christianity and reconciliation resonate, but only partially with the Pricklebush people, whose cultural understandings are firmly embedded in the stories and the law of “old Australia”. They are waiting for something else to change their social position.

Armageddon begins here

Images of “the end” pervade *Carpentaria* from even the first page, appearing in various forms throughout the text as apocalyptic, chaotic, disruption to order and destruction in nature. Yet natural disasters should not be mistaken as random; they are controlled by ancestral spirits of the sacred world and implicate the daily lives of Wright’s characters. For instance, in Chapter 8 we read of “swarms of flying ants dizzy with the smell of rain” and how “dead birds flew past” while “Way out above the ocean, the pollution of dust and wind-ripped pieces of plastic gathered, then dropped with the salty humidity and sank in the waters far below, to become the unsightly decoration of a groper’s highway deep in the sea” (p.229). The sacred belongs to the groper dreaming in this area of the Gulf and the dramatic change in weather has particular meaning for the groper people of the sea. The sacred, as it is embodied in the sea and air, lights a meaningful path or “highway” for its people, calling them to their destiny in a new world out at sea:

In tiredness, even in dreams, he [Will] sensed a mysterious change of great magnitude was taking place in the wetted atmosphere he saw the water circulating in huge masses hundreds of kilometres wide and as many fathoms deep, become moving columns of water passing over and under each other he was breathless from the simplicity of all that he saw, and continued, finding his path through the machinery of water (p.460).
It is important, however, to distinguish references that pertain to natural indicators of “the end” and those images that represent the “pay-back” of Pricklebush people – for example, there are a number of images that foreshadow revenge for blowing up the mine, such as backyard fires and the burning of the Queen’s picture. These images of “pay-back” mobilised by the Pricklebush people are paralleled with the workings of the sacred and are concomitant with the destruction and renewal of the world. Wright shows how the transformation of Desperance/Uptown must be both willed and acted out by the Pricklebush people but cannot be realised without the mysterious workings of the sacred as well. Without the sacred, the Pricklebush people are only able to blow up the mine and potentially regain their traditional title of the land – revenge or “pay-back” alone does not change the systemic structures of Uptown/Desperance and could potentially worsen race relations. However, the sacred demands the transformation of both towns when the cyclone provides an opportunity to begin again.

There is reason to believe that the cyclone may also represent “pay-back”, as mining defiles the sacred and undoes the very creation of the land. However, it would be a falsehood and even an insult to suggest that Carpentaria advocates revenge and the death of non-Indigenous people. Even though the town was “wrecked to smithereens”, only one person died: “It was the Law breaker” (p.480). This text belongs to an era of Australian writers who have, over the last two decades, been responsible for the production of reconciliation as a literary archetype that has superseded archetypes of violent resistance familiar to published works of the 1960s and 70s. Wright engages in a dialogue about reconciliation, not war, and does this by introducing the concept of the ‘sacred’ to the workings of human relationships. Without acknowledging the place of the sacred and its significance to Indigenous beliefs about kinship, reconciliation becomes problematic and sees both cultural groups subject to a stalemate. On the contrary, Carpentaria illustrates how the actions of people alone cannot achieve the spiritual objectives of reconciliation because racial harmony depends on a “change of heart” in the recreation of the world, which is a psychological, emotional and spiritual transformation. Wright shows how land is sacred and has the power to intervene in our everyday lives if we are prepared to feel and receive its presence. Its presence may be

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308 Janette Turner Hospital’s novel Oyster also tells how the Murri people sought revenge on a large mining company through the act of arson. To Indigenous people fire is a source of life; they use it to cook, for warmth, light and to gather around and tell stories. However, in both Oyster and Carpentaria, fire is a destructive form of the sacred that can be mobilised for political reasons. Hospital, Janette Turner. Oyster. Random House, Toronto, 1996.
revealed in small ways or can interrupt characters’ lives to a much larger extent. For example, what first appeared as storms and unpredictable weather forecasts earlier in the novel manifests into the awe-inspiring cyclone obliterating the towns of Uptown and Desperance. Once the cyclone hits there are few people left in the towns and, by the end of the novel, the area exists only as an archipelago. The sacred, as it was there when the Gulf was created, re-emerges from its natural environment of darkness to recreate what has been destroyed. This time, however, the sacred is not in the guise of the serpent but instead reads in the stars:

The bright Southern Cross which had long ago abandoned Jerusalem, now sat low above the horizon to the west Elias must have been close by because Norm felt as though he was up in these heavens, travelling with them. He looked at Kudawedangire – Pleiades, or the Seven Sisters. Yes, Orion – the hunter was there, already starting to appear in the eastern horizon and he talked to the constellation about how pleased he had been with the mild flowing currents (pp.504 – 505).

Later we learn that it is sacred forces that have control over the currents and direct Norm to the whereabouts of his lost son, Will, and reunite their family. Norm feels the “sea dragging him towards home” (p.515) and the novel closes with Norm’s return to “the same piece of land where his old house had been, among the spirits in the remains of the ghost town, where the snake slept underneath” (p.519). He has returned home yet is greeted with new beginnings.

A few critics attribute *Carpentaria* with the familiar attributes of protest writing and interpret the text’s ending as resistance to the possibility of one nation. For instance, Ravenscroft describes Wright’s narrative as an “insistent story of resistance” characterised by tragedy, loss and violence.309 Similarly, Joseph reads the text’s ending as resistance to the modern nation because “the waste of the modern nation forms new islands that float away from the continent”.310 However, this thesis argues that *Carpentaria* advocates for the transformation of the modern world, not its end.311 Joseph’s interpretation focuses on the novel’s representation of realism and does not deal with the text’s vision of the future, mentioning briefly that *Carpentaria’s* “rearrangements of matter” may mean that “nightmares of the

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309 “Dreaming of others: *Carpentaria* and its critics” op. cit. p.209
310 “Dreaming phantoms and golems: elements of the place beyond nation in *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter*”. op. cit. p.6
311 It is difficult to put forward a reading of this text that focuses on “the end” when, throughout the narrative, the end of time has always been linked to the present, past and future. The sacred ties the past, present and future together and makes time continuous, rather than linear. Western ways of measuring time become obsolete (hence the “tickety tock” of clocks is found at the beginning of the novel at the rubbish tip – they are of no use to traditional understandings of time).
future may be overturned … away from the violent pasts of nations.” Reality is seen as a nightmare while Dreaming (or the Indigenous sacred) is not mentioned as having a place in the transformation of a new world, despite having a primary textual motif throughout the novel. If it is accepted that Wright’s imaginary world ends here and the nightmare is over, then readers must also accept that the remaining Pricklebush people are destined to live separately from non-Indigenous people forever. If we read it as “the end”, we read this text as a model of apartheid, and this clearly conflicts with the concept of reconciliation mentioned so many times throughout the text in the context of advocating meaningful coexistence. Wright’s dreams for the future do not imply that reconciliation is impossible, that our cultures are incommensurable, and that we should return to a time before colonisation; on the contrary, her writing expresses the desire for a transformed existence and the dream of one day living together differently. If colonisation was the result of exploration, it will take another major, if not catastrophic, event to change the order of things once more.

As already established, *Carpentaria* is not an easy text to read – its meanings are complex and demand textual analysis after analysis on a variety of little and bigger stories (including those Ravenscroft recognises as appearing in parenthesis). ‘Resistance’ as a common theme in Indigenous writing has come to repeat itself in literary criticism, but this text shows that racial conflict and a setting of “disorder” and “chaos” do not mean the impossibility of reconciliation but perhaps its awakening. Ashcroft’s theory of transformation suggests that the world can be “rewritten” and that literature (as one of the main forms of cultural production) has the power to construct the world in positive ways that advocate hope and the end to Indigenous oppression. Conventional ways of reading Indigenous texts must be challenged when discourses about ‘the end of a nation’ disparage reconciliation as an emerging discourse in postcolonial studies. Chaos, destruction and disorder are not always negative signs and can inform a positive blueprint for the transformation of the world (“no story became too big or too small, to give to the world” (p.413). According to Fiona Coyle, chaos and complexity theories can be used to “undermine and destabilise popular conceptions of so-called chaos and order.” She argues that typical Western representations of Indigenous space have been portrayed as being random, chaotic and disordered, and that

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312 ‘Dreaming phantoms and golems: elements of the place beyond nation in *Carpentaria* and *Dreamhunter*’. op. cit. p.9
these descriptions stem from colonial impressions of the Australian landscape as a void and terrifying wasteland.\textsuperscript{314}

Wright makes several attempts to associate the Indigenous sacred with the cycle of endings and new life – for example, when the Pricklebush people go about blowing up the mine, sacred forces intervene and change the course of the wind so the fire eventually reaches the mine and blows it up. After the “majestical” explosion, everything is silent for a long time, until we hear: “You think they heard it in Desperance?” some young lad whispered carefully through the settling dust, because he did not want to frighten anyone by making the first sound of this new beginning” (p.412). Wright portrays the sacred as something that may be feared because of its power to destroy, but new beginnings should be looked forward to. After the cyclone hits Desperance, Norm is left sailing with daughter-in-law, Hope, while the sacred speaks to him through the constellations of the stars, and observes that: “If she [Hope] was afraid of the evening star, she was afraid of the morning star as well” (p.505). Similarly, Jung’s vision of development after World War I also captured “the edge of the world” and an opportunity to leave behind “all that is discarded and outgrown” and replaced with “a void out of which all things may grow”.\textsuperscript{315}

Wright rejects politics as the key strategy to social transformation and by the end of the novel it is sacred realities, beyond human powers alone, that are in control of how the town will be spatially defined, where sea and land will meet and if its reconstruction is at all possible:

> History could be obliterated when the Gods move the country. He [Will] saw history rolled, reshaped, undone and mauled as the great creators of the natural world engineered the bounty of everything man had ever done in this part of the world in something more of their own making (pp.491 – 492).

So where are the non-Indigenous subjects located in this complex system of the Indigenous sacred? There is no mention of where those of Uptown now live; we only know that they evacuated Uptown (p.466). We do know, however, that those of Uptown eventually came to feel the presence of the Indigenous sacred and finally began to comprehend the “translation” made by the Bureau of Meteorology that they could receive “messages from the ancestral spirits” (p.466).\textsuperscript{316} These people do not yet know how to proceed, although the need to proceed is deeply felt. Journalists from all over Australia fly in to see the carnage from the explosion and as they fly above the devastation, they realise they are seeing “the Gulf through

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid, pp.112-13
\textsuperscript{315} Jung, Carl. Modern man in search of a soul. Harcourt Brace, New York, 1933, p.197
\textsuperscript{316} ‘A politics of the Dreamtime’. op. cit. p.397
The place is “re-pictured” through a different context or frame. The Pricklebush people have changed the dynamics of a place that “few Australians had been to” and initiated the recreation of a new world where “anything in this new world could be created, moulded, and placed on television like something to dream about, or a nightmare.” There is a choice: the creation of a new place to resemble a “dream” or a world to be experienced as the same nightmare that has existed since colonisation. Norm has regained his land and has returned home, but if non-Indigenous people return to the area, how will their interactions with Indigenous people be different? Can relationships essentially ‘start again’? In our everyday friendships we often use the cliché of ‘starting again’ after a relationship has broken down and there is cause to repair it. Relationships often shift between moments that are challenging to times that are well-disposed. Race relations belong to a cycle of destruction and renewal in Wright’s representation of relationships, continuously shifting between conflict and mediation, long represented in sacred Indigenous knowledge and stories about kinship and human relationships.

Once the cyclone has been and gone, all that remains is a society to be imagined. Socio-political problems that were manifested therein come to be resolved, as opposed to simply managed or contained by the local council. Reconciliation cannot be achieved by the prevention of violence and hostility alone, but needs to be based on genuine understanding and a willingness to learn (what is permitted) from Indigenous cultural beliefs about kinship systems and the sacred, if Australia is to shift the emphasis of reconciliation from being ‘managed’ to questioning the possibilities of cultural change and adaptation to a new world. There is no smooth progression towards better race relations and conflict is fundamental to great change.

This chapter has sought only to explain the significance of the Indigenous sacred as it is relevant to discourses of reconciliation, and admittedly perhaps only an approximation, a partial interpretation of the text’s meaning for White readers. Scholarship can explain the social reality of a world already lived in and known, but reconciliation involves at least attempting to enter the Other’s cultural realm and see the world through their frameworks. Textual analysis cannot be risk-averse if we want to discover new ways of speaking about the nation in a way that does not repeat itself – the nightmare. Critics work through multiple frameworks, or ‘islands’ of theory, when constructing a place for reconciliation in the polemics of Indigenous writing, understanding that “Our country is a very big story” (p.411).
Thus Wright’s novel informs readers of the significance of the Indigenous sacred in a world considered to be modern and postcolonial; her literary lyrics invoke the meaning of the sacred in our relationships with Others and cause us to wonder when we will ever be ready for reconciliation to be “sung into being”.
Not a conclusion: an exploration of what continues to be reconciled

This thesis has argued that there is a ‘place’ for reconciliation in postcolonial Australia, and that literature is one such ‘place’, with its ability to construct, incorporate and promote reconciliation. Writing is, and has always been, political, affecting individuals on both personal and collective levels. As is evident in Daryl Tonkin’s *Jackson’s Track*, literature can evoke alternate truths for problems that have escaped justice and the law. For example, Tonkin bears witness to what was the unreported demolition of Indigenous homelands and the removal of children in his town. Here, writing is a powerful and unique tool in the reconstruction of colonial into postcolonial society, proving that race relations are not necessarily only the result of random forces or natural evolution; race relations and reconciliation are the collaborative work of cultural producers who use their inordinate faith in the written word with purpose and control to deliberately shape society.

While Australia was once ‘written’ by colonisers, it is gradually being rewritten by literary authors, beginning with writers and activists such as David Unaipon and Kath Walker, who first questioned the construction of colonial, imperial society-building, and made possible Black identity in the written text. Their identities were not simply reclaimed but constructed with the power of language imbedded in social experience. 317 Bill Ashcroft’s theory of transformation has been an anchor to this study, and his arguments used to explore how language has changed over the last 20 years to talk about, not only a postcolonial world, but a reconciled, transformed one. Ashcroft argues, for example, that language is constantly changing to encompass the world and ‘in a metaphorical sense, [can] lead to changing the world itself’. 318 Arguably, the ideals of reconciliation are becoming reconfigured in modern and emerging languages, recognisable in the images, symbols and characterisations of particular texts published since 1990; and these ideals continue to change ideas about the Other and what it means to be White in postcolonial Australia. The texts discussed in this thesis belong to a growing genre of ‘reconciliatory literature’ and are part of a key mode of empowerment.

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318 op. cit. p.4
There are a range of tropes generated in the burgeoning area of reconciliatory literature and captured in this thesis’ analysis. These tropes include: Australian history as a constructed and conflictual field; agonistic conceptions of ‘place’ and land ownership; Black/White/Migrant identity and belonging; embodied reconciliation; the spirit of nation; and the sacred. Each has been examined in a large cross-selection of texts and together these texts reveal the complex field embedded in the reconciliation debates, since their inception in 1990. Alone, none of these texts ‘achieves’ reconciliation as a single monolithic paradigm, nor details what reconciliation should look like or how it should be culturally nurtured. But together, this reconciliatory literature addresses how particular areas of knowledge, feelings, thoughts, ideas and ways of being with each other can be exchanged, while moving towards a reconciled postcolonial world. This reconciled world, the thesis has argued, will necessarily continue to depart and arrive from its colonial roots as well as from new understandings about the Other and the nation. Thus reconciliation will never be ‘done’ (completed or negated as a need) but constantly written against the colonial beginnings, the origins of our relationships with each other. As Pascoe’s *Tired Sailor* and Carter’s story of William Dawes and Patye suggest, the potential for racial harmony has always existed, and continues to be realised.

What these texts posit, and what this thesis has argued, is that certain discourses are paramount to knowing, loving and understanding each other; it takes many subjects to contribute to a constant reinterpreting of language, symbols and signs in these suggested areas. This is what Kristeva calls the significance of signs, arguing that its processes are infinite.319 How one writes, (even) in English (the language of oppressors), is the key to transforming oppressive social structures. All writers analysed in this thesis use English in radical ways to undo colonial representations of history, place, bodies and the sacred, which were originally written (or omitted) by the colonisers. Such imperial language was damaging to relations, creating ideological, emotional and physical chasms between peoples, and between readers and texts.

Alexis Wright uses Indigenous words, symbols and representations of ancient creatures to allow non-Indigenous readers into her different narrative. Pascoe creates characters from the past to encounter those from the future; and Mahood dreams the place in which we live as

alive and, in turn, argues that it can enliven and heal us. Of course, encountering these texts is not sufficient to bring about reconciliation, but as McDonald’s allegory *Love like water* argues, encountering many texts over time will have an accruing effect on cultural production. How subjects think, feel and behave towards Others who are different to themselves (including family, friends and neighbours) will continue to be shaped as writing informs an approaching reality.

Although there are many art forms, literature is a unique mode of cultural expression that constructs and reconstructs the social world creatively. Hence, this thesis argues that reading and writing are not passive exercises but require us to ‘do something’ – to see the world and at the same time ‘be’ in it, feelingly, reflectively. Literature’s effects may not be quickly realised or named. After all, the concept of reconciliation has taken 20 years to be articulated beyond Shoemaker’s critical genre of ‘resistance writing’. However, branding these seminal texts over two decades ago created an urgency for repairing racial harmony which, without the likes of, for example, Mudrooroo, there would be no ‘place’ from which modern writers could develop by moving on and away from writing in hostile, purely oppositional terms, towards redesigning the struggle for reconciliation with serious commitment to social transformation in a dialogue of forgiveness and hope.

The five chapters in the body of this thesis have pursued three objectives: to explore how, through literary constructions, reconciliation is depicted in modern fiction (mostly by Indigenous authors); to identify how writing can ‘do’ reconciliation; and what this process may mean for Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects in contemporary Australia. Each chapter points to the possibility of what literature can ‘do’ if writing informs social transformation on two levels: psychologically (as Nandy explains, “a change of mind” about the Other); and emotionally (“a change of heart” about the Other (as described by Ahmed). Arguably, creative writers may change the hearts and minds of their readers by constructing literary worlds where characters live out ways of being themselves alongside Others and exploring ways of thinking about, speaking and behaving towards people and places in different fictional scenarios. At the same time, texts are ‘touching’ and ‘speaking’ to

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320 Nandy, Ashis. *At the edge of psychology: essays in politics and culture*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, p.2
readers about possibilities for social transformation beyond the written word, in the lived world.

More specifically, Chapter 1 explores how Pascoe’s texts re(member) Australia’s history of invasion, speaking to readers about early historical events from an Indigenous perspective. *Tired Sailor* and *Convincing ground* inform an approaching reality that allows the subaltern to speak about different versions of the past which, according to Ashcroft, is important to social transformation because the future is dependent on how the past is remembered; reflecting on the past and dreaming of the future simultaneously construct present reality. Similarly, Carter argues that history is never final and that because the records made by Cook, Mitchell, Leichardt and Bunce are only single memories of a multifaceted moment in time, their writings should not determine the nation’s destiny; rather language can continue to be used to change historical perspectives, present alternate truths and evoke new feelings towards Others, new ideas about the nation’s future.

Is it too ambitious a suggestion for this thesis to suggest that the nation is destined for racial harmony? As discussed in Chapter 1, *Jackson’s Track* points to the challenges of finding a racially inclusive account of history, one of mobile cultural hybridity. Even though Tonkin was identified as “a white blackfella” (p.183) in his community, he could not live equally in two worlds, nor share himself evenly between two families, cultures and legal systems. Nonetheless, his efforts to record memories of the Track candidly and bear witness to the prejudice against Indigenous people in his area are now captured in time and remain reconciliatory in motion. His vigilant “eye witnessing” is itself an act of reconciliation – succeeding by bearing witness to colonial wrongs, rather than living in two worlds as a hybrid subject. According to Pascoe and Tonkin’s work, history is fluid – altered under significant pressures and influences and continually settled and resettled as different versions of the past are written. Their writing shows that reconciliation can be ‘done’ in varying degrees, although not in the ultimate form of creating a finally-harmonious, hybrid culture or ‘melting pot’ community. For subjects racial harmony means accepting and respecting the fact that there are many approaches to the past, and bearing witness to alternate truths, one being that Australia was invaded and that Indigenous people have suffered cultural genocide – losing many languages and being displaced from their land.
Chapter 2 explores how social transformation and coming ‘home’ are dependent on new experiences with place and alternate descriptions of landscape captured by modern cultural producers. Despite importing many plants to build English gardens and using familiar names and descriptions to map and possess Australian ‘places’, an English ‘home’ was not successfully or straightforwardly created for and by settlers. An “uncanny” sense of place and belonging left an ontological lacuna in which later generations have needed to reconstruct a place in which to belong. Fundamentally, this chapter argues that because of Australia’s history of invasion, reconciliation depends on creating a ‘place’ where subjects can make peace. The way ‘place’ is constructed creatively can bring subjects closer together ideologically, complementing land-title agreements with evocations of landscape that embody racial harmony as a priority. For instance, how place is envisaged can affect relationships between those who share it. As Ghassan Hage suggests, a place depicted in dark, avenging colours represents a place of hopelessness, while “the constellations of feelings, discourses and practices articulated to hope permeate social life”. In *Craft for a dry lake*, Mahood depicts alternate descriptions of the Tanami Desert as alive with psychic influences that emotionally, spiritually and psychologically intervene in the lives of subjects, potentially organising relationships among those who share it. However, Mahood’s experience with place shows the difficulty in undoing imaginary feelings about belonging to land, as she records her encounter using and subverting colonial and patriarchal language structures. Like the small boat which emerges and reemerges as the recurrent motif of this text, Mahood’s journey of transformation is ongoing, backwards and forwards over time so as to include many encounters with, and departures from, place.

Chapter 3 of this thesis explores the diversity of experiences that many subjects, including Migrants, have of Australia’s history and psyche of place. Henry Reynolds first represented the history war debates between those who were either Black or White, while Chakrabarty’s work expanded on his view to include Migrants’ positions in Australian historical discourses. While Migrants relate to Australia’s history, land and sense of place differently to those of White or Indigenous subjects (and to each other), their literary portrayals of identity and nation have much to contribute to discussions about reconciliation by showing that in

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323 ibid. p.9
common with Indigenous subjects, they seek forgiveness, and the ability to forgive Others too.

Migrants are ‘doing’ reconciliation by contributing creatively to Australian literature and engaging with its various tropes and they have, as Peta Stephenson argues, even formed an alliance with Indigenous people in the arts, collaborating in the production of plays, fine-art exhibitions and photography workshops to display a long, shared history of friendship (dating back to Indigenous trading with the Makassans).324 As represented in Marie Munkara’s Every secret thing, settlers created social and legal structures to sever historical and geographical connections between these groups in order to gain control for Australia’s growing Caucasian population and protect dominant White society. However, these relationships are reconnected in Munkara’s literary world where characters are free to interact without constraints, suggesting their relationships were never truly severed.

While alliances certainly exist between Migrant and Indigenous groups, tension is found in discussions about multicultural representations of nation. For example, Larissa Behrendt’s Home illustrates that, while there are commonalities between Migrants and Indigenous people, the latter should not be seen as Migrants in their own country. Thus social transformation for Indigenous subjects should be based on constructing an identity as First Australians and not just citizens with equal rights. Discourses of reconciliation therefore must be approached from a “triangular view” – realising there are many seats at the table where racial harmony is being discussed and that these seats belong to men and women of various races, political affiliations and religious denominations, and ultimately to the ‘human family’ (as Arnold Zable reminds his readers). In the fig tree Zable suggests the possibilities enabled by visions etched in words. He argues that stories ultimately build relationships because authors show courage when sharing and comparing stories, leading to psychological and emotional understandings between subjects. However, these stories function as a double-edged sword – making memories of a traumatic past vivid and raw; yet also conveying an act of reconciliation by remembering genocide and land invasion, demonstrating willingness to move forward in a relationship with Others that is always evolving in the form of social renewal.

The chronological ordering of chapters in this thesis highlights the nature of reconciliation as a series of steps that involve (re)writing colonial understandings of history, place and people. Numerous Australian authors have embarked on the task of understanding conceptual spaces that once existed in these areas, by showing how they can be undone, rewritten, created again. As Ashcroft predicted, by using language effectively, minority peoples have the power to change their lives and the lives of Others. The ways in which bodies create – in paintings, drawings, sculptures, music and writing – new stories about the Other are, as Dianne Johnson describes in *Lighting the way: reconciliation stories*, performing “decisive acts” as powerful as legal or political protests in creating social change. The proliferation of Indigenous writing over the past 20 years is evidence that as readers get ‘closer’ to Indigenous texts there is a movement of bodies in a society; political achievements have been delivered alongside literary publications. For example, Lisa Bellear’s poetry both articulates the context of, and evokes emotions surrounding the Mabo decision, reflecting the close alignment between polities, polemics and poetry in her work. She suggests that legal transformation does not necessarily equate to social transformation, and thus should not be the end of interracial dialogue. In *Justice?* she writes:

and as I walk on Wirradjiri land
“discovered by” Lawson
I sense that I am angry
Treaty, Compact, Reconciliation
Mabo, 1788, Land Rights, Sovereignty…
There is
no justice

The sum of many institutional texts and social agreements does not equate to justice for Bellear, but summons up anger.

Chapter 4 of this thesis argues that emotions are intertextual. How one writes has the power to evoke memories, thoughts and emotions towards people and even social symbols, motifs, movements and trends, which, according to Nandy, are integral to social change. According to the arguments of Ahmed, reconciliation is textually possible because, when characters’ bodies “impress” on each other, they speak to the larger social and cultural body the work represents. Thus it is possible to know, love and understand the Other by textually feeling one’s way.

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325 Bellear, Lisa. ‘Justice?’ in *Dreaming in urban areas*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996, p.71
326 *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*. Op cit. p.2
What does it mean, however, when a reader cannot easily penetrate the meaning of a text, or its signs and symbols are kept deliberately secret or obscure? When the presence of something sacred may be felt but not necessarily seen? As argued in the final chapter of this thesis, a reading of Wright’s *Carpentaria* shows that there is much left untold about the Other when reading Indigenous writing. Although there are desires to know, love and understand the Other in the quest for racial harmony, this text demonstrates that loving the Other may not be informed by knowing and understanding aspects of Indigenous culture, particularly the sacred, and that mystery may mean coming to terms with loving a stranger in an “uncanny” place. As explored in Chapter 4, Derrida’s theory of friendship uncovers the ways in which relationships, for example between colonisers and colonised, will inevitably experience feelings of animosity and friendship *at the same time*. Australia’s history of invasion and colonisation encounters this doubleness and ambivalence. While a politics of friendship may never be finally realised, seeing the Other as a neighbour means social harmony is a goal and may be reached for.

The terms ‘neighbour’ and ‘friend’ belong to the English language. However, Chapter 5 details the ways that Indigenous subjects perceive, interpret and explain relationships through ancient kinship systems and traditional languages that name how people should (or should not) relate to and interact with one another. Reconciliation therefore depends on acknowledging cultural boundaries, and that Indigenous people have also found ways of interacting with non-Indigenous people too. Relations may appear elusive, muddled or even inactive at times, while new spiritual undertakings, rituals and ceremonies informing relationships are coming to birth over time. For example, Wright depicts an old man travelling the Gulf speaking of reconciliation, but indifference from various “mobs” in his country prompts him to continually “move the convoy on”, searching for a new reality. This notion of “moving the convoy on” alludes to the social, political and individual transformations that need to occur in order to ‘move the nation on’ – together, rather than as separate races – towards a postcolonial reality.

While the term ‘reconciliation’ stems from Judaeo-Christian doctrine, since the publication of specific literary texts it has come also to include concepts from Indigenous spirituality and
the sacred. Wright’s *Carpentaria* introduces “supervital” elements to her literary world as a force in her fictional town’s destiny. In this text, social transformation operates as a cycle of destruction and renewal and, although the secrets of the ‘supervital’ are not revealed by Wright, they are felt in the language and the images she conjures up to communicate the control the cyclone has over a town perceived in chaos and fear of Armageddon. Her narrative goes beyond reclaiming history and place to completely obliterating its structural foundations. The cyclone destroys almost everything and everyone in order for the town and its people to start again – a natural and controlled process that Wright implies was “sung into being” by the people themselves.

The idea of “singing” or willing change into being requires both psychological and emotional focus, but also spiritual belief. Wright does not reveal the secret rituals required to “sing” reconciliation into being but her rhythmic, poetic mode of writing, her earthy symbols and encrypted language suggest that this text may also have the power to “sing”. Critic Alison Ravenscroft recognizes this text’s ‘musicality’ and argues that ‘at times *Carpentaria* is a libretto, at others a requiem, at others it follows the lyrics and rhythms of country & western, and then again it refers to sounds that elude me: the country’s own song.’ Are there also spiritual implications of reading this textual work? As with creative writers, surely students and academics can write themselves into the imagination of a transformed and reconciled place by witnessing to literature and literary critique as blueprints for the future and by realising that material reality must be continually imagined and reimagined. Thus, one is left to question: what has this project done? What is this *becoming*

There is much to be awakened to in dreaming of a better world where people are in relationship with each other, enabled to share their country and national beliefs. Fictional narrative provides a vehicle for such dreaming to find rhythm and movement in a culture that has been continuously departing from and arriving at a place of reconciliation for so many years. The nature of this journey continues to be many things: spiritual, emotional, physical, geographical, intellectual, personal and communal. But the journey will endure in its many forms. It must. How this national story is written, read and re-read begins with the imaginations of modern Australian authors. It is the originality of their ideas, their evocations

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and portrayal of special places and generous offerings of culture and friendship that can transform our world. Reconciliation involves negotiations and articulations about history, place and people, so that subjects are drawn together to reflect on a nation in which resistance and reconciliation are in continual dialogue and motion. The way authors use language invites readers to a special place; a shared site that is sacred, as it informs our ideologies and understandings of each other, this land and our country.

Therefore, this thesis has argued that we cannot consider reconciliation as an end point, *fait accompli* or present reality, a reaching of perfection in time; it is only possible under different circumstances, a series of steps, methods and a continual effort towards repairing relationships and changing the realities that sustain them. What has been done in the past cannot be undone, but there is much to be gained in dreaming of a new world that has relations as a priority in its order of things. Thus literature plays a pivotal part in the discursive measures, functions and objectives of reconciliation as a place for this dreaming to occur. Writers give expression to human emotions – pleasurable or discomforting – and illuminate the human need to communicate and share intimate experiences. They provide us with unique ways of seeing the world and extending our mental horizons beyond the familiar, poetically opening up a future of new ideas and visions. Literature, just like politics or the law, is a tool for defining, constructing and measuring reconciliation by informing language and conjuring up better ways of existing together. In a different poem by Lisa Bellear she demonstrates a vision of reconciliation. She was a poet whose language has reached out to a large polity of readers and given life to the future:

I dream/I dream/I dream
of a world
a beautiful world
that exists
above the clouds

There is
love
there is hope
there is
peace/equality
and social justice

There is no need for signs proclaiming Land Rights

There is No need for anti-discrimination legislation

Let me fly above the clouds

Let me breathe ³²⁹

Bellear’s utopian vision exhibits an equal faith in literature and reconciliation, a life-giving and interrelated set of pursuits. She depicts racial harmony as an idealistic way of being together which should continue to be sought out, understood, reached for and in some way grasped – over and over again – like that of breathing itself.

³²⁹ Bellear, Lisa. ‘A peaceable existence’. op. cit. p.36
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